

**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
October 12, 2007**

PRESENT: Professor Mark Huibregtse, Vice Chair; Mary Lou Bates, Michael Casey, Deb Hall, Ann Henderson, Susan Kress, Pat Oles, Muriel Poston, Jeff Segrave, Justin Sipher, Sue Van Hook, Michael West; Mehmet Odekon, Barbara McDonough; Mary Cogan, Sue Bender, Adam Cupples; Barbara Krause (Secretary).

ABSENT: Philip Glotzbach, Chair; Jonathan Brestoff.

1. Review of Minutes

The IPPC reviewed minutes from its meeting of September 28, 2007. The following corrections were made in the section on Retiree Health Care:

Paragraph one, final sentence was revised to read as follows: “Mr. West reviewed the financial challenges associated with these changes, including Skidmore’s difficult situation relative to our peer and aspirant colleges.”

Paragraph two, final sentence was revised to read as follows: “The subcommittee is continuing its discussion of these preliminary proposed changes and then will devote its attention to how to address the middle group. The subcommittee will spend considerable effort on this topic over the coming weeks.”

With these changes, the minutes were **approved** as revised.

2. Retiree Health Care

Mr. West reported that the IPPC’s Budget and Finance subcommittee met last week and continued its discussions on the topic of retiree health care. He summarized those conversations as follows:

- A concern was expressed that the cash outlays related to retiree health care expenses are significantly less than the accounting figure charged to the Operating Budget.
- A concern was expressed that the College would be shifting costs for health care to employees who would not be able to afford it.
- A concern was expressed that employers nationally are transferring the cost of health care to employees and that health care costs are rising exponentially.
- A concern was expressed that a two-tier benefit system at Skidmore would be unfair and could affect employee morale.

Other members of the subcommittee who were present agreed that Mr. West’s summary had captured the issues discussed at the last meeting. Mr. West indicated that the issues related to retiree health care were difficult and will challenge the group. Mr. West noted that a process issue had also

been raised – namely, that the administration (at the urging of Trustees) has already made a decision to curtail retiree health care benefits. Mr. West noted, in response, that the matter has been the subject of considerable discussion last year and this year at IPPC and within the IPPC Budget and Finance subcommittee. It was suggested that more be done to inform the community of these discussions and provide an opportunity for input. The Budget and Finance subcommittee will continue to discuss the matter, but at this point, Mr. West indicated that the subcommittee would appreciate hearing feedback from the larger IPPC parent committee.

Comments and questions at this point included the following:

- Regarding the rationale for preserving the benefit as it currently exists for those hired prior to 1999, Mr. West indicated that this was based upon written representations made by the College. From 1999 forward, the College's benefits materials indicate that benefits may be changed or modified at the sole discretion of the College.
- Regarding the possibility of a two- or three-tiered benefits situation, it was noted that other aspects of our benefits packages provide different tiers of benefits. It was also noted that unless benefits never changed, or unless a benefit previously provided was discontinued for all, the College will necessarily end up in a situation where different employees have different levels of benefits.
- Regarding the Trustee position on this benefit, it was suggested that some perceive the Trustees to be driving this issue. Members of the President's Cabinet emphasized that it is up to the College's administration to bring forward a reasonable proposal to the Board of Trustees. Ultimately, although this is a liability that is complicated to explain, the administration is responsible for determining how to reduce that liability and how to pay for it. Although some individual trustees have expressed significant concerns about the potential liability, Mr. West emphasized that the Trustees have not mandated any particular approach to this problem.
- A concern was expressed that a two-tier system would be problematic because of salary compression. Mr. West clarified that he did not intend to suggest (and was not proposing) that salaries would be increased in order to provide current employees with purchasing power to obtain private health care insurance in retirement. Rather, Mr. West indicated that because College salaries today are more competitive than in the past, employees have a better ability to save money for retirement than in prior years at the College, when salaries were comparatively lower. It was noted that even with this greater purchasing power, it would still be difficult for some employees to save for health care costs in retirement.
- A suggestion was made to provide, and perhaps display, Skidmore and peer faculty salaries in the information related to this topic. Mr. West agreed to re-distribute salary data that had been distributed last year. It also was noted that comparative compensation data for administrative and support staff is more difficult to provide than it is for faculty positions.
- In response to the concerns about tiering, it was suggested that eliminating the benefit altogether with, for example, a one-year notice, would likely drive a number of faculty and staff members to retire earlier than they might otherwise wish. The tiered approach, therefore, offers the advantage of smoothing retirement patterns. It was noted that savings from this adjustment

would go into the College's budget and would be available to support other budget priorities including new initiatives, academic programs, etc.

- It was noted that the “grandparenting” of employees hired prior to 1999 actually grandparents six different systems, because the level of the College's contribution currently depends on how long an employee has been with the College.
- Regarding the fact that the AAUP salary survey does not recognize the dollars committed by the College for retiree health care, it was suggested that this is not a persuasive rationale for curtailing the benefit. Mr. West suggested that the primary reason for this change is that the College has a liability that is very large and is growing; it is also a liability that our peers (many of whom have significantly larger endowments) do not have, either because they never offered this benefit, or it has been eliminated or reduced significantly. The current situation, therefore, puts Skidmore financially at a considerable disadvantage relative to its peers, and means, ultimately, that Skidmore has fewer resources to fund academic and other strategic initiatives.
- It was noted that while the benefit may not have been a recruiting point for some faculty or staff, that for at least some individuals, the benefit has been a reason that they have remained at Skidmore. A suggestion was made, in this regard, that the College consider expanding its “wellness allowance.”

Mr. West thanked IPPC members for their feedback. The Budget and Finance subcommittee will continue to digest the feedback and continue its discussion of this matter.

3. Faculty Handbook Part Six

Vice President Susan Kress reminded the group that a drafting committee has been working on a draft revision to Part Six of the *Faculty Handbook*. That drafting group includes Susan Kress, Muriel Poston, Dan Curley, Richard Hihn, Mary Lynn, Barbara Beck, Herb Crossman, and Barbara Krause. A draft including Articles I through VI of Part Six was distributed in advance of the meeting. Vice President Kress noted that the working group continues to work on Article VII (Procedures for Resolving Complaints of Harassment or Discrimination) and Article VIII (Additional Expectations).

While the draft is not complete, the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) encouraged the working group to begin circulating Articles I through VI. With that introduction, Vice President Kress invited comments from members of IPPC. Comments included the following:

- Part Six should make clear that filing false allegations also is regarded as a serious offense and would be a basis for sanctions. Vice President Kress noted that such language does appear in Article VII.
- A comment was made that the list of examples is not sufficiently nuanced: “There is winking and there is winking.” It was noted that sexual harassment policies typically include illustrative lists of offending behavior; however, the working group will consider adding language to emphasize that deciding whether misconduct constitutes harassment depends on context. It also was noted that the examples in the list appear in the current handbook.

- A question was raised about the Intercultural and Global Understanding Task Force, which is due to expire at the end of the current academic year. Vice President Kress noted that the reference is a place holder. The group is of the opinion that the Task Force will be succeeded by another group in one form or another. The drafting group may signal, in the draft document, that the IGUTF reference would be amended if and when the group is succeeded. Professor Huibregtse noted that the future of the IFUTF would be the subject of discussion at a future IPPC meeting.
- Regarding the consensual sexual relationship policy, it was noted that the power differential between students and faculty members could continue after graduation. In that regard, it was suggested that the College must draw a line at some point regarding what behavior it will regulate, and graduation seems to be an appropriate point.
- The question was raised as to who must finally approve Part Six. Vice President Kress acknowledged that there is some lack of clarity as to whether the faculty actually “approve” the policies and procedures set forth in Part Six. President Glotzbach, however, has urged that faculty be involved in discussions of faculty obligations.
- Related to the question of approval, it was noted that Part Six is different from other parts of the *Faculty Handbook* in that certain policies (e.g., discrimination, harassment, and disability) are required to be in place as a matter of law. Others (e.g., consensual sexual relationships, gender identity and expression, diversity in hiring, and complaint resolution procedures) are not required by law.
- A question was raised as to whom Part Six covers. Vice President Kress clarified that these procedures cover complaints made against faculty members. Complaints made against students would be referred to Student Affairs, and complaints made against staff members would be referred to Human Resources. The policies would appear in the faculty, staff, and student handbooks.

4. Other Reports and Updates

Adam Cupples reported that the SGA is discussing potential amendments to its constitution. Dean Oles noted that Mr. Cupples has been working very hard and with great integrity on these issues and thanked him for his work.

Sue Van Hook reported that the Focus the Nation Walk to Work effort has generated a great deal of interest – particularly, a good photo opportunity on the first day and significant interest in carpooling. The “Buying Local” initiative is gaining momentum. Mr. West also noted that he also expects an announcement of expanded bus routes in the near future.

Minutes prepared by Barbara Krause, Secretary. Please notify of any changes.