

**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**March 21, 2008**

PRESENT: President Philip Glotzbach, Chair; Professor Mark Huibregtse, Vice Chair; Mary Lou Bates, Deb Hall, Ann Henderson, Susan Kress, Pat Oles, Jeff Segrave, Justin Sipher, Michael West; Mehmet Odekon, Barbara McDonough; Mary Cogan, Sue Bender, Jonathan Brestoff; Rob Hill; Barbara Krause (Secretary).

ABSENT: Michael Casey, Muriel Poston, Sue VanHook.

**1. Approval of Minutes**

Minutes from the meeting of February 29, 2008 were approved as distributed.

**2. Introduction of new member**

President Glotzbach introduced Robert Hill '09 as the new student representative. Mr. Hill, who succeeds Adam Cupples '08, will serve through the 08-09 academic year.

**3. UWW Closure Recommendation**

President Glotzbach introduced the discussion of the administrative recommendation to close the University Without Walls (UWW) program, forwarded to the campus community by Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan Kress on March 7, 2008. Before turning to Vice President Kress, President Glotzbach acknowledged that IPPC member Mary Cogan, a long-time employee of the UWW program, was in a particularly sensitive position with regard to this topic. He expressed his appreciation for Ms. Cogan's efforts as a UWW staff member and her contributions to IPPC, and he encouraged her to contribute to the conversation as she felt appropriate.

Vice President Kress began her presentation by noting that UWW has engaged in excellent work for over 30 years and, therefore, that it had been extremely difficult to conclude that the recommendation should be to close the program. She then reviewed the timeline of the thirteen-month long process under which Special Programs, and UWW in particular, had been reviewed.

Vice President Kress noted that over the past year, while some of these reviews were taking place, Interim Director of UWW Jim Kennelly, with the support of Jeff Segrave, Interim Dean of Special programs, had attempted to address certain issues identified with respect to UWW. Among other things, various steps were taken to address academic quality, accounting concerns, and record keeping; in addition, a marketing consultant was retained at a cost of \$25,000.

Vice President Kress then noted a variety of concerns that emerged as the various steps of the review took place. These concerns included the number of Skidmore credits required to earn a Skidmore degree through UWW; the number of credits that could be earned through experiential programs; and the significant financial losses that UWW has experienced in recent years (six-figure deficits). Even under the proposed streamlined model, she noted, UWW would have no director,

administrative resources would need to be redirected from other, already very busy offices, the student enrollment population has already decreased to 120 students, and there is now significant external competition from other on-line education programs. Vice President Kress noted that UWW has been an integral part of the College's mission historically. As we move forward, however, we are facing very difficult questions about how to best direct the College's academic and financial resources. Finally, Vice President Kress reviewed the communications process that had been followed to announce the recommendation. The first and most critical element was to notify first those individuals most directly affected – namely, the staff of UWW. Among those consulted following notification of the UWW staff were the Faculty Executive Committee and the Committee on Educational Planning and Policy, both of whom were consulted because UWW is an academic program. At this point, Vice President Kress noted, this very difficult recommendation is before the faculty, the broader campus community, and IPPC for review.

Interim Dean of Special Programs Jeff Segrave spoke next and reviewed a number of issues related to current UWW students and their degree completion. Because UWW is highly individualized and students are dispersed geographically, it is taking some time to develop a grid of where all current students are in their degree-completion process. Special Programs is committed to working with all students, to the extent reasonably possible, who wish to complete their degree at Skidmore. We also are talking with other institutions with regard to students who may wish to transfer. A meeting has been set up for current students and alumni next week, and an on-line discussion board has been launched.

President Glotzbach then opened the floor for questions and discussion. Comments included the following:

- What role does the Board of Trustees have in this matter? *Response:* Trustees, especially the Special Programs Committee, has received information and updates throughout the review process. Trustees would need to approve a closure of the UWW program. The Board respects the process, understands that the recommendation is painful, and has allowed the administration the appropriate leeway to determine what recommendation should be brought forward.
- It was suggested that UWW has experienced certain management issues for some time.
- What are the plans for UWW employees? *Response:* The College has committed to staff UWW at least until June 2009. Dean Segrave acknowledged and recognized the work that many UWW employees have dedicated over their careers. His office is working closely with Human Resources to provide appropriate transitions, within applicable regulations and laws, to support the College employees who are affected by this difficult recommendation.
- It was noted that acting UWW Director Jim Kennelly does not support the closure recommendation. Vice President Susan Kress stated that she welcomes Professor Kennelly's advocacy for the UWW program. She noted that the College faces a difficult decision regarding UWW, and all aspects of this very important decision should be considered before any decision is made.

- It was noted that it may be easier for the administration to advocate its position than it is for UWW students and staff to advocate for continuation of the program.
- There was discussion about how to frame the question regarding UWW. Is the question whether the program should close, or whether the program should be closed or restructured? Several people acknowledged that the decision makers must understand all costs (in terms of time, financial resources, and attention) of all options. These costs include the costs of choosing one option as well as the cost of not being able to do other things.
- It was noted by a faculty member that academic staff had a significant discussion of what restructuring would look like. What would a full restructuring look like? What would a streamlined restructuring look like? UWW has worked to streamline its operations. How will we know if that works if we don't allow an opportunity to see?
- Dean Segrave noted that the streamlined restructuring maintains the same footprint as the current program and involves reduction of expenses (personnel and number of students) as well as increased revenues (through marketing (which would also have a cost), increased fees for students, grants, and fundraising). Even with that streamlined model, there is no guarantee that faculty would participate as needed to ensure the program's excellence, and no guarantee that students would enroll. The cost of this streamlined version would be some portion of the current \$300,000 per year deficit (measured in direct costs).
- It was noted that no other academic departments are charged costs and that other departments do not make a profit. Another person noted, however, that distance education degree granting programs typically do produce a profit.
- It was acknowledged that there has been significant progress made by UWW staff on many issues this year. A question was asked, then, what the meaning of this progress is, and how we might measure it.
- It was suggested that Skidmore consider the possibility of a partnership – e.g., a public-private partnership with, say, Empire State. *Response:* The significance of Skidmore's UWW program is that it is highly individualized. Many other on-line learning programs are not organized in that way.
- If the decision is to reject closure and to continue UWW, we must be sure that the faculty commitment is sufficient to maintain academic excellence.
- It is important for IPPC, in particular, to look at this matter institutionally. It was noted that in prior budget discussions at IPPC this spring, the College faced a shortfall in the amount of financial aid we would ideally have provided in the 08-09 budget. The UWW deficit is approximately the amount of the financial aid deficit. Both UWW and financial aid contribute to the College's diversity. This is one example of the type of strategic choices the College must make with respect to institutional resources.

- It is important not only that IPPC consider this question of institutional resources, but also that the faculty consider where they wish the College to commit the resources of time, money and faculty lines to required to sustain UWW at the desired level of excellence.
- The UWW product may be superior to other distance learning programs, but is there a market for that level of excellence, and will people pay the premium?

IPPC member Mary Cogan, who serves as Assistant to the Director and Coordinator of Academic Records at UWW, made the following comments:

- It is important to provide opportunities for people to learn about and consider the possible options related to UWW. Indications that the Board of Trustees could consider the closure recommendation at its May meeting feel rushed to some people, especially those most directly affected.
- It was suggested that certain data released in connection with the proposed closure is “soft” or perhaps even inaccurate. For example, the statement that enrollment has dropped from 250 to 120 is a result of work done by UWW staff to clean up their enrollment figures, not an actual decrease in the number of students.
- The restructuring in the VPAA area and turnover in the Office of the Dean of Special Programs and UWW’s leadership has made it difficult for UWW to sustain any forward momentum. UWW also has been challenged by senior faculty members who discourage junior faculty members from participating in UWW.
- Although UWW requires only twelve Skidmore credits, the average number of Skidmore credits over the past several years has been in the range of twenty-five credits.
- UWW staff have many ideas for improving the program and, most of all, a passion for their work. Could we take some additional time to consider all of the options and allow a broader participation in the discussions?
- On-line learning is the way of the future. Shouldn’t Skidmore require all students to participate in UWW type courses?

President Glotzbach thanked Mary Cogan for her remarks, particularly in light of her personal status as a UWW staff member.

One person expressed surprise at the closure recommendation and said she had not made the connection that this sort of recommendation might come out of the Special Program Study Group. Vice President Kress responded that she did not think anyone knew in advance that we would end up with a closure recommendation. She noted, however, that the hard questions were on the table from the beginning and that UWW became a focus of people’s comments as the Special Programs Study Group did its work. She fully expected to hear strong advocacy for UWW, but she did not. Most importantly, Vice President Kress assured IPPC that even if people were not aware previously

that closure was on the table, the recommendation is now before the community and will be deliberated with great care.

President Glotzbach then asked where these future conversations should occur and what role IPPC should have in the deliberations. He noted that, in his opinion, it was indeed the administration's responsibility (not the responsibility of the Special Programs Study Group) to make the recommendation regarding UWW. It is, ultimately, a question of strategic priorities – not choices between good and bad, but choices between many exciting possibilities.

A question was raised as to whether UWW students pay the Student Activity Fee and therefore belong to the Student Government Association. It was reported that UWW students do not pay the Student Activity Fee.

Vice President Kress reported that FEC is now considering what process should be followed to consider the recommendation. If a process is followed that is analogous to elimination of a department, the *Faculty Handbook* indicates that the process could take as long as a year and that CEPP would make a proposal to the faculty. It was noted that a lengthy deliberation process already has taken place, which might reduce the amount of time that CEPP would need to consider the matter. Having said that, it was recognized that the matter should be deliberated with great care.

President Glotzbach asked if the group had any recommendations to be passed along to FEC. FEC is holding a faculty caucus later in the day to consider the process. The group consensus was to ask IPPC members who are also members of FEC to communicate IPPC's willingness to hold an open meeting if no one else hosts such a forum.

### **3. Other Business**

SGA President Jon Brestoff announced that a working group has produced a draft *Student Employee Handbook* which will be voted on in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Brestoff indicated that a draft will be circulated to IPPC.

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