

Final Report

Dean of Studies Study Group

December 15, 2004

Summary

We recommend that the current functions of the Dean of Studies Offices be formally divided into two offices, one of which is to be housed in Academic Affairs and one in Student Affairs. The relevant functions that will be situated in Academic Affairs are primarily those that involve the systematic use of faculty and related activities. In the context of the incipient First-Year Experience, this will include work related to academic advising/mentoring, academic standing and academic integrity. The relevant functions that will be situated in Student Affairs will primarily be those that involve special student services and opportunities, and related faculty resources. Thus, we recommend the formation of a Center for Teaching and Learning housed in Student Affairs, which will oversee tutoring, Student-Opportunity Funds and other student opportunities with potential links to both HEOP/AOP and Career Services. These two newly constituted offices will work closely with one another as well as others in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, most importantly the Director of the First-Year Experience. Additional details of this arrangement will necessarily need to be worked out by the particular individuals in these respective offices as well as the administrative leadership in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

Background

In June of 2004 our study group was established at the request of the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Student Affairs. We were initially directed to address three questions: What responsibilities and functions should the Dean of Studies office encompass? To whom should the Dean of Studies report? How should the office be staffed?

We initially established a provisional timeline that would allow us to submit our recommendations by late November 2004 so as to enable an appropriate search for and an appointment of a permanent DOS by the end of the spring semester. It became clear early on that the questions we needed to address transcended the position of the DOS and encompassed broader questions pertaining to administrative structure. A recurrent theme was how best to bridge the related activities associated with Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

We began our inquiry by reviewing the office's current functions and its relationships with other campus constituents. For this purpose, lists of DOS functions and relationship flow charts were produced by Grace and Tina. Additionally, the committee agreed to survey 3 groups in order to gain more information about the DOS: a sample of Skidmore students, a sample of Skidmore faculty and staff, and the Northeast Deans (see Appendix 1).

We also decided to gather more in-depth information from a select group of comparison schools through telephone interviews and email exchanges (see Appendix 2). A list of topics that we wanted to explore with colleagues from other colleges included:

- academic advising
- academic support services
- first-year experience
- service learning
- learning communities

Through this examination of the DOS functions, input from Skidmore students and staff about those functions, and lessons from other institutions, we learned a great deal. All of this information confirms that Academic Affairs and Student Affairs need to be more integrated in their efforts to focus on the learning of our students. Insofar as students' academic life and social life influence one another, insofar as students learn in the context of classrooms, labs, studios, and playing fields as well as residential halls, dining areas, and auditoria, educators in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs must coordinate their work. This lesson and the challenge of arranging administrative offices to address it, we have learned, demonstrate that the same issues described on the national scene are very much alive here at Skidmore. This agenda appears to be part of an emerging, broad trend in liberal arts education, which might be termed 'academic-student affairs'. As broad as the trend is, there appear few examples of institutions that have developed administrative structures that clearly serve both this agenda and the traditional administrative functions of colleges.

We must somehow figure out how to deliver the curriculum established by the faculty, allow for innovative teaching and learning processes beyond the classroom experience, offer support to those seeking special services and/or special opportunities, and do as much as possible to facilitate coherence among all these different activities in the service of our of students' learning. This includes faculty more fully engaging in student life outside the classroom. The connections among these different activities must involve both hierarchical clarity and horizontal collaboration among the relevant offices. That is, each function must be attached to a specific office that is responsible and accountable for said task. But most of the functions at issue will be attended to more effectively if they are pursued through real partnerships that span offices and divisions.

In considering such lessons over a period of weeks, we examined no fewer than 15 hypothetical administrative structures and argued the pros and cons of each. As we honed in on a few promising scenarios, consultation with the President informed us that several parameters relevant to our deliberations but shaped by exogenous factors had taken shape. These included the prospective decoupling of the Vice President from the Dean of the Faculty, the continuing commitment on the part of Student Affairs to the College's educational mission, the continuing reporting of the Dean of Student Affairs to the President, and the establishment of the First-Year Experience Program situated in Academic Affairs. We also discussed the importance of the emerging Strategic Plan. With these factors in mind, we continued to debate the best structure for fully realizing the educational goals we had established together that would allow us to answer the three questions in our charge.

The focal point for our deliberations became three disparate but related aspects of the current work of the DOS office. First, the DOS office organizes and supports the work of faculty (e.g., advising). Second, it offers support to students presenting specific kinds of challenges (e.g., academic difficulties). Third, it serves students interested in particular academic opportunities

(e.g., internships, Student Opportunity Funds). The former requires organizing the work of the faculty, and given the myriad issues related to recognizing, evaluating, and rewarding faculty, we believe functions requiring extensive and systematic use of faculty resources are more properly assigned to Academic Affairs. An office that focuses on student learning, including special services, special opportunities, or innovative education, would build on existing strengths in Student Affairs (e.g., HEOP, internships). Moreover, linking special services and special opportunities reflects the understanding that learning occurs in lots of different kinds of circumstances. We therefore believe the second and third functions described above should both be in Student Affairs. It is important to recognize, however, that these two offices will need to pay attention to and shepherd a host of programs and tasks that will pertain to either area and which will involve shared responsibilities and partnerships.

In other words, given that Academic Affairs and Student Affairs serve the same general mission, a division of labor between the two divisions that identifies different priorities in the context of common ground must be articulated. Designing, delivering, and explaining the curriculum and possibilities extending from it are tasks that must be systematically organized and reviewed in the faculty's work in the context of Academic Affairs. Given the demands of that agenda, an administratively separate office that organizes resources devoted to special services and opportunities for students and engagement of faculty in those efforts must also be maintained, and is appropriately housed in Student Affairs.

Recommendations

The functions of the current Dean of Studies (DOS) office will be divided into newly designed offices (or incorporated into pre-existing offices) with at least one in Academic Affairs and one in Student Affairs. (One possible version of this model can be seen in the diagram below.) The current functions of the DOS office that will dwell in Academic Affairs will include educational processes that require systematic utilization of faculty work plus functions directly related to such efforts. The DOS will collaborate closely with the Director of the First Year Experience. The most important example of such systematic work by the faculty is advising/mentoring, which involves all faculty and all students. Examples of related functions include oversight of advising, academic integrity and academic standing. The current DOS functions that will be situated in Student Affairs will revolve around special services and opportunities for students, some of which will be housed in a newly developed Center for Teaching and Learning. For example, such services will include academic support, ESL instruction, targeted support for specific populations of students, and links to HEOP/AOP and Career Services; opportunities will include, for example, service learning, Collaborative Research, and Student Opportunity Funds. Senior staff in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will together develop a structural context for more regular and routine discussions among Academic and Student Affairs offices concerned with student achievement and retention.

The Dean of Studies Office

The DOS will report to the VPAA, but will be responsible for working with Student Affairs colleagues to articulate a vision for integrating the academic and the social, residential and co-curricular sides of our students' lives. As the Academic Affairs colleague responsible for implementing plans for achieving an integrated approach to student learning, the DOS will

function as a bridge to other offices at the College in order to develop programming as the need arises. The DOS will be in charge of coordinating all advising-related tasks (e.g., assignments, training, assessment) and will work in conjunction with the Director of the First-Year Experience to create and implement a faculty mentoring initiative, to coordinate efforts regarding student orientations, and to help develop programming in support of the FYE.

The DOS will have academic credentials, an established record of successfully working with different kinds of students, and some experience in management and leadership. The DOS staff will also serve as administrative advisors for students seeking advice on such things as prospective majors, plans for the future, and academic opportunities. The DOS in particular, however, will create and maintain communications and publications pertaining to advising and will serve as an academic policy maker and analyst. The DOS will work with the Director of the proposed Center for Teaching and Learning to develop and implement programming for special populations of students. The DOS will also be responsible for overseeing issues related to academic integrity and academic standing; s/he will engage in proactive work with faculty and students to try to prevent such problems, as well as facilitate resolution of individual student academic problems by supporting faculty, communicating with parents, counseling and problem-solving with students, and serving as a liaison to the judicial system.

The office of the DOS will engage in outreach programming to provide ongoing information to students and faculty about various matters of policy. This will include collaboration with the Honors Forum and oversight of academic honors and prizes. The DOS will serve on the Committee for Academic Standing and will be responsible for handling all additional and specific issues related to academic standing: waivers, leaves, probation, and readmission. The DOS will work with CAS to generate appropriate policy regarding students in academic and/or personal distress, students with disabilities, will advise individual students about their options regarding their academic standing and will work with the Director of the Center to arrange for specific academic support services for individual students in academic jeopardy or those diagnosed with a disability and in need of accommodation. The DOS will also serve as a liaison to Admissions to assess various issues related to student success, achievement and retention. As issues of disability increasingly involve broad questions of policy, this office will also be charged with responsibility for this area.

The First Year Experience Program

We embrace the recent development of the First Year Experience and the appointment of its first director. The Director of FYE (DFYE) will report to the Dean of the Faculty, and will work collaboratively with the DOS as well as with offices under the DSA that are charged with student success. Primary functions will include the delivery of the FYE (including faculty development and training for teaching in this program), first year student mentoring and advising, creating and delivering co-curricular offerings related to the FYE, and continual assessment of the strengths and weakness of FYE.

The DFYE will have both academic credentials and an established record of successfully working with different kinds of students. As noted under the DOS rubric, the DFYE will work in collaboration with the DOS to organize new student orientation. The Director of FYE also will serve as a liaison to Residential Life to coordinate efforts pertaining to the integration of academics and "life" issues.

The Center for Teaching and Learning

A new office will be created and situated in Student Affairs devoted primarily to student success. The final title and organization of this center will need to be determined by senior staff in Student Affairs in consultation with President' Staff. One possible name is the Center for Teaching and Learning. This Center, which is shown in one hypothetical version of this model in the diagram below, will serve as an important academic facilitation and support service, and will serve as one of the "bridges" between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The primary focus of this office is to provide programs and resources designed to foster student learning and improve instruction. More generally, establishing connections between divisions, drawing faculty in to student learning beyond the classroom, and strengthening the educational component of Student Affairs will constitute the Center's core mission. One of the keys in this respect will be enabling faculty development resources associated with the charge of this office.

Functions of the Center may include coordination and implementation of tutoring support, including serving as a liaison to department tutors and FYE tutors, and overseeing special academic opportunities. Such activities may involve internships, service learning, Student Opportunity Funds, and Student-Faculty Summer Collaborative Research Grants, as well as creating and providing graduate fellowship preparatory sessions and assistance. In the case of Collaborative Research Grants, the Faculty Development Committee would continue to make decisions about who is awarded the grants, but staff in the Center would oversee the projects during the summer. Student learning initiatives that tie in to broader College agendas such as those of citizenship and diversity will also be led in the Center.

The Director of this Center will create and deploy skills workshops as well as provide services to targeted populations such as international students and students with disabilities. In addition, the Center will provide a link to HEOP/AOP and will work to support non-HEOP minority student support initiatives. ESL support will be provided by the Center, and the Director will serve as a link to information literacy and technology training services. Links to athletics will be provided when appropriate as well.

The Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning will have both academic credentials and a record of successfully working with different kinds of students, especially in terms of support services. The DCTL will report to the DSA, but will work closely with the DOS and DFYE to bridge the academic and advising responsibilities in their offices with the support and opportunities offered in the new CTL. The DCTL will also serve as a liaison to Admissions to assess various issues related to student success.

Additional Factors

One of the key aspects of each of the offices of the Dean of Studies, Director of the First-Year Experience, and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning is coordination with one another. Designated responsibility and oversight must be attached to all the key priorities of the College. Because an emerging cluster of activities involves the personnel and expertise traditionally found in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, there are functions that must be met through shared responsibility. While each of these offices will have defined parameters

and while primary responsibility for specific functions will be designated for one office, working to bridge across those boundaries in the service of shared priorities will be one of the primary charges of each office. Such coordination will be necessary, for example, in terms of linking curricular and co-curricular learning, and in terms of determining appropriate academic standing and academic support.

As the boundaries between the primary agendas of the Dean of Studies Office and the Center for Teaching and Learning are established, several functions we have identified could arguably be situated in either setting (e.g., disability, graduate fellowships). Given how substantive the responsibilities are for each of the three offices outlined here, and given the genuine tradeoffs of situating these additional functions in one area versus another, we believe the final distribution of these functions requires more clarification of specific details related to how the offices would be set up.

One of the challenges here is that key elements of the current operations in the DOS office are being divided in to an office more focused on policy (the proposed Dean of Studies Office) and one more focused on practice (the proposed Center for Teaching and Learning). The possibility of uncertain authority in the context of gray areas that represent shared space must be thought through carefully. To fully realize the possibilities of collaborative synergy, three factors in particular must be addressed in this regard: leadership, staffing, credentials, and implementation.

First, in light of the administrative complexity of bridging the various agenda described here, senior leadership in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs must share a commitment to collaboration and consultation. Second, given that both of the offices will require academic expertise and sensibility, administrative knowledge and experience, and engaged support, the capacity for carrying the various functions and working cooperatively will be dependent on sufficient staffing in both offices. Third, given the importance of collaborating across offices and divisions, and the risks of uncertain authority, the staff in both offices must have appropriate credentials and sensibilities that ensure a shared sense of purpose and cooperation. Fourth, since we are recommending two newly constituted offices (in addition to that of the FYE), which are complementary, implementation must be carried out very carefully, perhaps in stages. This must also involve attention to the physical space and proximity of these offices. Recruitment processes to fill positions in the DOS office or the Center should involve participation of staff from both areas.

Making it Happen

All of these contingencies are related to broader questions of resources and administrative structure at the College in general. We therefore recommend that after reviewing this report, the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Students have discussions with the Interim Dean of Studies and the Registrar to address the main recommendations made above as well as the questions associated with these additional factors, and then develop a plan of action. Once a complete plan is developed, it should be shared with President's Staff, CAPT and IPC and revised appropriately.

If the basic recommendations we have posed are accepted, that plan will likely entail search processes for two specific positions, the Dean of Studies and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. The former search should be led by a senior staff member in Academic

Affairs, working in consultation with the Director of the FYE, representation from current staff of the Dean of Studies office and representation from Student Affairs. The latter search should be led by a senior staff member in Student Affairs, working in consultation with the Director of the FYE, representation from current staff from the Dean of Studies office, and representation from Academic Affairs.

Members

John Brueggemann, Associate Dean of the Faculty (Chair)
Pat Oles, Dean of Student Affairs and member of CEPP
Ruth Andrea Levinson, Professor, Education and member of CEPP
Beth Gershuny, Assistant Professor, Psychology
Susan Layden, Director, HEOP
Grace Burton, Interim Dean of Studies
Ann Henderson, Registrar
Tina Levith, Associate Director, Dean of Studies
Karen Ernst, Senior Administrative Assistant (record keeper for group)

Appendix 1: Research Questions

The survey questions to on-campus constituents included inquiries about:

- how familiar the respondent was with the office (and do we need to “advertise” the DOS better)
- whether the respondent thought the DOS contributes to the positive overall functioning of the College (and how)
- what improvements could be made to the office
- what, if any, functions should be added to the office.

Questions to Northeast Deans included:

- what types of academic support services their colleges offer
- what services they offer to increase student success and graduation
- how their institutions “bridge” the gap between student and academic affairs
- how their institution communicates with admissions about enrollment decisions and related issues

Appendix 2: Comparison Colleges who provided useful information

- Connecticut College
- St. Lawrence University
- Lafayette College
- Middlebury College
- Trinity College
- Vassar College
- Haverford College
- Colgate
- Gettysburg College

Possible Model for New Administrative Structure

