

Committee on Educational Policies and Planning 2003-04 Annual Report

Membership:

Faculty Representatives: Frank Gonzalez, David Peterson (Fall 2003), and Linda Simon (Spring 2004) [term ending Spring 2004], Hugh Foley and Paty Rubio [term ending Spring 2005], Michael Arnush and Gordon Thompson [term ending Spring 2006]. Gordon Thompson, Chair.

Administration Representatives: Charles Joseph and Thomas Patrick Oles.

Student Representatives: Nicholas Merrill and Meghan Fair.

Guest: Ray Rodriguez.

CEPP began its 2003-04 calendar with a retreat in May of 2003 to bring our 2002-03 discussions of academic vision to fruition in the form of a set of proposals. In those meetings, we developed a long list of aspirations both general and specific but found we could organize these ambitions to a few targeted goals. The discussion, description, and realization of these goals constituted the principal work of CEPP this year in its approximately thirty meetings, three forums, and miscellaneous meetings with different constituencies, although we also worked on more routine matters of educational policy and planning.

State of the Vision

Principles

We worked through a number of documents from internal proposals and reports (such as the original recommendations for the Liberal Studies program through the College's most recent mission statement) to external publications (such as the Greater Expectations series). We also perused what similar colleges were saying about themselves. After outlining what we had gleaned from these documents and what we imagined for Skidmore, we began a process of reconciling our different positions into a common set of beliefs. By the end of our first retreat, we established what we believed should be the qualities of a Skidmore liberal-arts education and that we thought should guide us in our decisions about the specifics: Critical Thinking (disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intercultural), Communication (oral, written, and other expressive modes), Citizenship (local and global responsibilities), and Collaboration (peer-to-peer and mentor-to-peer engagements). From these, we established a number of academic goals, both short and long-term. <http://www.skidmore.edu/%7Egthompsogrtdata/CEPP/campus-only/Vision04/Index.htm>

Works in Progress

1. A Student's First Years (Liberal Studies, Advising-Mentoring). In the spring of 2003, a subcommittee of CEPP (working in response to a query from FPPC) examined the question of whether we should increase the number of students at Skidmore. That subcommittee recommended that if we were to increase the number of students at Skidmore, we should look at ways of retaining more of the students we already have rather than admitting additional students from the bottom of the admissions pool. Given that we lose the majority of our students between the first and end of the second year, CEPP concluded that Skidmore should find ways to make a student's first days, months and years more meaningful. We discussed the possible ways by which faculty might better engage students in an intellectual life, such as by introducing students to the work that excites them most. CEPP constructed the beginning ideas of linking mentoring and instruction in a first-year seminar for consideration and discussion.

<http://www.skidmore.edu/~gthompsogrtdata/CEPP/campus-only/Vision04/Recommendations.htm>

a. In the fall of 2003, CEPP charged a subcommittee chaired by Hugh Foley to make recommendations to CEPP. The subcommittee included Phil Boshoff, Dan Curley, Terry Diggory, Kate Leavitt, Ruth Andrea Levinson, Bill Lewis, Pat Oles, and Ben Porter. Advisors to the subcommittee included Tina Levith, Michael Marx, Anita Steigerwald. Gordon Thompson also sat on this subcommittee ex officio.

- b. This group supported the linking of advising and instruction and the creation of individual small seminars on faculty-developed themes. The proposal also recommended student-developed education plans and teaching credit for advising. <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/CEPP/campus-only/FY.pdf>
- c. In January of 2004, CEPP discussed the Foley proposal and the chair asked Linda Simon and Michael Arnush to draft a legislation based on the Foley subcommittee's recommendations and incorporating CEPP's suggestions. CEPP's proposal confirms the faculty-determined, theme-oriented seminars in which the instructor is the student's advisor/mentor. <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/CEPP/campus-only/FYE.pdf>
- d. Implications: we will need significant participation on the part of the faculty. Given the constraints of reconfiguration, some departments and programs will be hard-pressed to provide the numbers of faculty this proposal requires. Moreover, frosh still need to find seats in classes at the introductory level. An obvious strategy addressing this potential problem would pursue adding faculty lines. We may also wish to re-examine the Foley subcommittee recommendation that advising in these sections should merit teaching credit, putting further pressure on Skidmore to add faculty lines.
- e. Benefits: These seminars will better engage students and faculty than does the current model and, combined with the advising component, we should be able to improve our retention rate, holding on to more of those frosh who leave. Departments and programs will also see this as an opportunity to introduce students to their faculty.
- f. CEPP postponed the deliberation and vote on the FYS proposal until F04, held retreats at the end of May on the FYS and EW, and will bring a revised proposal forward in the fall.

Unfinished Visions

- 2. Global Skidmore (Study Abroad, Global Studies Coordination, Global-local Integration, Diversity): CEPP recommended that Skidmore expand the role that off-campus study plays in our students' educations. Many of the best students who leave us complain (among other things) that the campus is too insular and lacking in diversity. CEPP recommended re-imagining the campus as a portal, not a destination, and developing our cultural and intellectual diversity.
 - a. In the fall of 2003, CEPP charged a subcommittee chaired by Michael Arnush to examine these inter-related issues. The subcommittee included John Anzalone, Lisa Aronson, Susan Bender, Michael Ennis-McMillan, Meghan Fair, Cori Filson, Roy Ginsberg, Kate Graney, Jack Ling, Nick Merrill, Mary-Beth O'Brien, Mehmet Odekon, Paty Rubio, Jon Ramsey, and Gordon Thompson.
 - b. The Arnush subcommittee recommended that we encourage students to study both internationally and domestically and to bring that experience back to Skidmore. Moreover, the subcommittee advocated the selection of directors to coordinate both our international programs and our inter-cultural activities. <http://www.skidmore.edu/classics/cepp-sads.html>
 - c. CEPP discussed the findings of this report in January 2004, but has postponed further discussion in consideration of our attempts to expound a successful first-year proposal.
- 3. Core Requirements (Breadth Requirement, Expository Writing Requirement, [Oral Presentation,] Quantitative Reasoning Requirement, Cultural Difference Requirement): CEPP recommended exploring ways to strengthen the current requirements, particularly in regard to the potentially contradictory goals of broadening a student's educational experience while at the same time developing specific disciplines of the mind.
 - a. If we see critical thinking as fundamentally important to a Skidmore education and a breadth of educational experience as characteristic of a liberal-arts education, then the breadth requirement should introduce students to different disciplines of thinking in addition to the subjects of those disciplines. Cultural difference embodies both qualities, confronting students with different cultural constructs of human experience.
 - b. The skills of quantitative reasoning (particularly as an aspect of scientific reasoning) and oral-written communication are the ways in which we engage the ideas of different disciplines.
 - c. A 2003 summer study group led by Ray Rodriguez (and including both some current and past CEPP

members) began an examination of how we might best assess the core curriculum.

d. In the fall of 2003, CEPP began conversations about "Critical Thinking and Content" and about "Assessment," but had to put these discussions on hold until we could treat them properly. In the winter months, CEPP proposed two subcommittees to examine these topics, but withdrew the proposals after faculty failed to volunteer in significant numbers for participation. Administration-sponsored assessment conversations continue and both assessment and critical thinking/content will need to be on CEPP's agenda.

e. Implications. The College will be engaging in another Middle-States review and assessment will be on the agenda again.

4. Excellence, Faculty and Student Development: CEPP projected that to facilitate the development of strong teacher-scholars and the inculcation of engaged student-scholars, we need to find ways to develop our community. In particular, collaborative research offers opportunities for faculty to inspire students through the model of their intellectual lives. Moreover, the professional development of faculty and students must be part of any successful educational institution.

a. CEPP has not begun to study this part of the academic vision.

Other Activities

" Approval of the disaffiliation from the Biosphere project: Columbia University has decided to remove its financial and academic support for the Biosphere 2 and the project concluded at the end of the fall semester. Skidmore faculty involved with the project and the Dean of Studies recommended terminating our relationship.

" Approval of the Hartnett Prize in Neuroscience.

" Approval of the Skidmore College-Schenectady County Community College Articulation Agreement: 3 full scholarships to students who meet strong expectations, have completed the two-year program, and whose academic interests we can accommodate (focused on honors level math and science students).

" Approval of articulation agreement with Sage Graduate School Programs for Physical Therapy (DPT) and Occupational Therapy (MS) giving Skidmore graduates acceptance into the graduate program.

Also Discussed

" Mathematics requested that CEPP consider changing the completion time for the QR1 requirement. After some deliberation, CEPP wanted to revisit the nature of the QR1 requirement, especially in light of assessment.

" The Dean of Studies requested that CEPP consider changing the structure of the various college academic honors and awards. CEPP accepted a number of these recommendations in principle and will continue their discussions in the 2004-05 academic year.

" The Dean of the Faculty's office asked CEPP for its opinions on Skidmore's faculty evaluation forms and in particular electronic submissions.