

## Minutes for CEPP Meeting of 4/23/03

Present: Catherine Bookhout, Pat Fehling (Chair), Hugh Foley, Chuck Joseph, Nick Merrill, Pat Oles, Amelia Rauser, Ray Rodrigues, Paty Rubio, Gordon Thompson.

### *I. Approval of minutes from Meeting #26*

- Postponed approval of minutes of the 4/16/03 meeting.

### *II. Academic Vision*

- PO brought to the attention of the committee a grant opportunity, with details to be found at: [http://www.aacu.org/civic\\_engagement/call\\_for\\_proposals.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/civic_engagement/call_for_proposals.cfm)

### *III. Enrollment Subcommittee*

- GT presented a report of the enrollment subcommittee (copy appended).
- PF noted that IPC has not yet discussed the possibility of increasing the size of the student body.
- After some discussion about procedure, the committee decided to forward the report to the Dean of Faculty to indicate CEPP's opposition to increasing the size of the student body.
- HF will assemble the supporting materials used by the subcommittee, in the event that anyone requires further documentation.

### *IV. Assessment*

- RR introduced the memo (4/8) from Sarah Goodwin and RR regarding assessment policies.
- The committee discussed two major issues raised by the memo:
  1. The committee was concerned about the role that assessment would play in the evaluation of departments and programs.
  2. The committee was concerned about the procedures involved in assessment (e.g., linkage of assessment to departmental reviews, frequency with which assessment plans would be revised and reviewed, the need for a separate committee to oversee assessment).
- The committee decided that oversight of assessment should reside in the Dean of Faculty's Office. CEPP's role would be further defined through future discussions, but would certainly deal with the curricular impact of assessment policies.

### *V. Office of International Programs Proposal*

- The committee began discussing the proposal from Cori Filson (4/4/03) to expand international programs. Some people expressed strong support for the proposal.
- CJ noted that the proposal represented a major change, and thus should be approached carefully.
- PF suggested that the proposal should be discussed in greater detail next year.

The last regular meeting of the year adjourned with everyone anticipating the retreat (5/19 – 5/21).

Respectfully submitted,  
Hugh J. Foley

To: Committee on Educational Policy and Planning  
From: Subcommittee on Enrollment: Michael Arnush, Pat Fehling, Hugh Foley, Ann Henderson,  
Pat Oles, and Gordon Thompson (chair)  
Subject: Report on Enrollment  
Date: 21 April 2003  
  
p.c.: Cori Filson, Jon Ramsey, Joe Stankovich, Anita Steigerwald

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CEPP constituted the Subcommittee on Enrollment (26 February) to discuss a request from the Financial Policy and Planning Committee to consider the impact of increasing Skidmore's target enrollment by 100 students. FPPC is considering revenue sources and wants to know what we think the educational consequences of adding 25 students per class would be. The minutes of that CEPP meeting also indicate that CEPP should consult the Institutional Planning Committee. Our subcommittee met four times and invited several informed sources to help us in our deliberations. We wish to thank Cori Filson, Jon Ramsey, Joe Stankovich, and Anita Steigerwald for their assistance and the materials they generated to support our discussions. We also benefited from the 2001 discussions of the so-called "Optimization Group" (chaired by then Associate Dean, Charles Joseph). We briefly summarize our findings below.

The subcommittee's deliberations considered the impact of increasing Skidmore's enrollment without significantly increasing the number of faculty or expanding our facilities. We focused on three approaches: (1) increasing the size of the admitted class, (2) enhancing our recruiting yield, and (3) retaining more students. In each of these discussions, we considered the potential consequences of these tactics both on our ability to deliver the curriculum and on the intellectual and co-curricular life of the College. We cannot say categorically that such an increase would be detrimental to the College, but we are of the general opinion that we would experience problems. Below, we explore the three above-mentioned approaches and offer recommendations should CEPP and FPPC wish to pursue this strategy.

**Approach 1: Increase Admitted Candidates.** Predictably, this was the least favorite strategy for two reasons. (1) The students we would admit in this manner would likely be the less qualified than the admitted students. We would simultaneously lower the average academic credentials of the admitted class and raise the admission accept rate, a measure of selectivity. (2) The added students would exacerbate the strain on the campus curricular and residential infrastructure. We have some experience in the consequences of such an increase in enrollment in the admission "bubbles" of the mid nineties. The Registrar's office recently completed findings on the retention of the class that entered in 1996 for which we admitted a record 703 students. The six-year graduation rate for this class was 74.8%, one of the lowest graduation rates in recent records. Anecdotal accounts (courtesy of Ann Henderson) suggest that students of this era complained about a paucity of available classes and degeneration in the intellectual climate of the residence halls. This instance by itself is not a convincing argument against adding new students, especially since this was an unplanned event; however, if the purpose of adding the extra students is to increase revenue, then the subcommittee observes that Skidmore would need to consider several operational issues. (1) We would need to add additional sections of core requirements (for example in LS1 where we note that about 40% of next year's instructors are adjuncts). (2) We would need to find classrooms and times to offer these classes. (3) We would probably have to rely more heavily upon Moore Hall for housing or allow more students to live off campus earlier.

**Approach 2: Enhance Recruiting Yield.** If Skidmore were to look to increasing the number of admitted students, a better approach would be to attract more of our first-choice students. This could mean both a better educated and culturally more diverse student population with the obvious benefits. Unfortunately, enhancing recruitment yield would be a long-term strategy as a revenue-enhancement tool with few short-term financial gains. Skidmore would probably have to increase student aid and, while the presence of these students would eventually make us a more attractive institution, we would have to weigh the immediate financial consequences. Given that the reason we are considering this approach is that we wish to increase our net income, the strategy of granting more student aid may be moot. Moreover, an unplanned enhanced recruitment, such as the bubble we experienced in 1996, could lead to the same problems.

**Approach 3: Improve Retention Rate.** The subcommittee's preferred method of increasing Skidmore's enrollment would be to retain more of our admitted students. (1) Given our concerns about the number of available sections for students to fulfill basic requirements, if we were able to shift the population of classes from introductory to intermediate and advanced, we would more efficiently exploit the resources at our disposal. That is, if the increase in student population happened in 200- and 300-level classes where we have seat availability, rather than in the 100-level classes where we do not, perhaps both students and faculty would be happier. (2) By shifting the average age of the Skidmore student from 18 towards 21, we expect a more mature and serious student population. The positive consequences for our classes and for residential life could be significant. (3) The more students we keep because they are happier as students potentially means a stronger community. If students look forward to being on campus, we believe they will identify more strongly with us. (4) By retaining more of our best students, we will have to dip less often and deeply into the pool of applicants.

**Recommendations.** Raising enrollment in order to increase revenues seems to this subcommittee to be the wrong issue, especially if achieved through a larger admitted pool of candidates. Raising enrollment by retaining more of the students we admit strikes us as a better strategy. Indeed, we believe that improving the education we offer rather than simply admitting more students is both the educationally and fiscally sound approach. In the short term, this may mean allotting additional resources to introductory-level classes; however, we see the long-term benefits to be worth the cost.

If we are going to retain the students we admit and hope to admit increasingly better prepared classes in the future, we recommend CEPP make retention an important future issue, particularly in reference to the first- and second-year classes. However, we believe we can do better retaining our students by paying attention to what they are saying. Students who withdraw from Skidmore and who respond to the Withdrawn Student Survey (70% female with an average cum GPA of 3.29) cite "issues with on-campus social life, not fitting in at Skidmore, feeling Saratoga Springs is isolated, lack of diversity in the students, and preference for a larger university." Academic issues include a "limited variety of course offerings, a feeling of greater academic motivation than peers, and courses that were not sufficiently stimulating." [See the Registrar's [Withdrawn Student Survey Report](#).] Because we lose most of these students as freshmen and sophomores, focus should be on ways to engage these younger students. Since CEPP's purview is curriculum, we address academic issues specifically.

1. **First- and Second-year Experience.** While 91.2% of the freshman class returned as sophomores in 2001-02, our six-year graduation rate stays in the 75-80% range. [See the Registrar's data on [Graduation Rate](#).] The Registrar predicts that these graduation rates may climb in the next two years (to 79.7% and 84.7% for the classes that entered in 1997 and 1998 respectively). Since one of the principal academic reasons why freshmen and sophomores leave is the "limited variety of course offerings," we suggest CEPP consider how we allocate our faculty resources. Notably, LS1 occupies 36+ sections of faculty time. Is this the best use of our faculty's abilities? Are these the classes which transferring students believe are "not sufficiently stimulating"? Notably, the students we are now admitting to Skidmore are significantly better than the students we admitted fifteen years ago. Are we doing anything different? In short, can we improve (a) the student-advisor relationship, (b) the academic (student-faculty) experience, and (c) the residential (student-student) experience?
2. **Study Abroad.** If students who are leaving complain that Skidmore and Saratoga Springs are too parochial, then one way to address this perception would be to reshape our institutional role from that of a retreat from the world to a portal to the world. By encouraging more students to study abroad, we would (a) open classroom and residential space on campus, (b) address student concerns about cultural isolation, and (c) potentially enhance revenue by enrolling these students in Skidmore programs (Beijing, India, London, Madrid, and Paris). The potential consequences of encouraging more students to study abroad include the imbalance between the fall and spring semesters. Students more commonly travel abroad during the spring semester, in part because of the calendars of host institutions, but also because students may want to continue traveling at the end of the semester. Returning seniors sometimes face problems related to their theses after taking part of their junior year abroad, often having missed an important period of preparation.