

## Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding

Who we are:

CIGU is a subcommittee of the IPPC (Institutional Policy and Planning Committee). We are charged with advising the President and other college offices and bodies regarding issues related to intercultural and global understanding. We are guided by Goal II of the College's *Strategic Plan*, which states:

We will challenge every Skidmore student to develop the intercultural understanding and global awareness necessary to thrive in the complex and increasingly interconnected world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The current members of CIGU include: Co-chairs, Cori Filson and Winston Grady-Willis; Rochelle Calhoun, Ginger Ertz, Meg Hegener, Herb Crossman, Peter McCarthy, Julia Routbort, Mariel Martin, Dean Mendes, Barbara Krause, Barry Pritzker, and Sulin Ngo.

CIGU sees our role as one of continuing to be involved in discussions regarding new institutional initiatives and offering support and guidance as appropriate. For example, CIGU understands that the College's Human Resources team has been working on a comprehensive campus-wide employee educational program on diversity-related issues, and we fully support that effort.

What we do:

CIGU meets monthly to discuss agenda items related to diversity issues on campus. We invite members of the community (including faculty, staff, and students) to meetings to help us better understand current issues, including: hiring, staffing, funding, curriculum requirements, and recruitment and retention data. For the last several years, we have conducted confidential exit interviews with graduating students of color. CIGU advises college officials on policy issues, practices, and procedures related to diversity, intercultural and global understanding, intercultural literacy, issues of campus climate, and other related matters. CIGU serves as a resource to the College officials charged with coordinating and implementing Skidmore's strategic efforts in those areas; CIGU also is authorized to introduce appropriate campus initiatives in these areas on its own accord, creating working groups or involving other offices as appropriate.

What we see:

CIGU understands that Goal II is an integral part of Skidmore's *Strategic Plan*, and we believe that the College has worked vigorously and with integrity in the last several years to implement that goal in a systematic and sustained way.

However, we have been particularly struck and troubled by the dialogue and actions related to diversity this academic year. In particular, after the community meeting which occurred on February 18, 2011, CIGU met as a group and we collectively decided to issue this statement.

We believe that Skidmore is currently at a crucial moment in our efforts to become a diverse, inclusive, and interculturally literate campus -- a moment of considerable frustration, misunderstanding, and differences. Such moments of impasse occur when the stakes are high, when the College as a whole can either move away from the challenges that implementing Goal II involves or when we can acknowledge the real impediments that exist on campus and make changes in our daily practices—institutionally, professionally, and personally—in the interest of making Skidmore a truly diverse and welcoming place for all.

We are deeply troubled and particularly frustrated by the following three institutional dynamics that we believe impede real dialogue and hinder our collective progress in advancing Goal II. CIGU highlights them in this statement because we believe that unless we are willing to actually name these impediments, they will not change. These impediments are:

1. As a community, we do not hear or believe the stories that we do not want to hear or believe.

Over and over again, CIGU members and some other members of our community have been at open meetings and forums where students of color and/or LGBTQ students tell us in specific, detailed, and emotionally painful ways how they are marginalized on campus, in the classroom, and in the community of Saratoga Springs. In the last several years, we have also read multiple reports from the Bias Response Group about acts of violence that have targeted members of our community because of their sexual orientation and about verbal intimidation and harassment based on race, gender, sexual orientation and religion. During exit interviews with graduating students of color, CIGU and other community members have repeatedly heard themes of alienation, frustration, and

disempowerment. We thank those students who have been passionate and courageous in speaking up about deeply painful experiences in public forums. In being honest and clear about their experiences, these students are right to demand the same honesty and clarity from their College.

Unfortunately, these troubling accounts are often heard again and again by a relatively small group of people who attend these meetings. And even more fundamentally troubling, we have been part of numerous conversations on campus where students' stories of alienation, frustration, and disempowerment are discounted or dismissed. We have heard "it's not so bad" or "it is getting better" or "that is just one person's version of reality." These types of comments come from a status of privilege that is neither acknowledged nor understood, let alone questioned. As a historically White institution of relative wealth, Skidmore needs to acknowledge more fully and honestly our historical context of privilege and the continuing effects of institutionalized racism, as well as the current campus realities of bias and marginalization. Without this acknowledgement, change cannot occur.

2. As a community, we need a clearer understanding of the urgency of diversity-related initiatives and a clearer path for decision-making.

We understand that educational institutions typically run by committee processes that can be slow, cumbersome and inefficient. CIGU is no different, and we have noted that we have been slower in bringing crucial issues to the fore than most of us would have wished, especially during this incredibly challenging semester. Of course, CIGU is part of a relatively new structure charged with leading the implementation of Goal II; that structure intentionally reflects the conviction that responsibility for advancing diversity-related initiatives must be located throughout the College. Moreover, although the charge from IPPC to CIGU clearly states that "CIGU may introduce appropriate campus initiatives on its own accord" (after consulting as appropriate), several of us are concerned that this authority is not recognized broadly across campus.

CIGU believes that the strategic importance of Goal II must be reflected more deeply in the work of the College's shared governance structure. We further believe that student voices reflecting their lived experiences on campus must be heard in that shared governance work.

3. As a community, we must ensure that we create real institutional capacity to sustain the changes needed to support diversity and inclusion on our campus.

At Skidmore, we tend to highlight initiatives and programs that represent real change and that do move us forward in terms of meeting Goal II of the *Strategic Plan*. But, we often fail to acknowledge that these initiatives and programs frequently lack permanent funding, institutional infrastructure, or dedicated staffing. These programs, which can be both curricular and co-curricular, are not institutionally incorporated in ways that will ensure they can survive past the presence of those committed and skilled individuals who have founded them.

This process—where we collectively point to programs and personnel who do represent progress towards meeting Goal II, without mentioning or addressing that their existence is often temporary—is deeply concerning and results in frustration and mistrust among many students, staff, and faculty who support the objectives of intercultural and global understanding. Also of great concern is that we seem content with this temporary structure and have not made progress toward significant permanent support of these initiatives.

In keeping with its charge, earlier this week CIGU tendered specific recommendations to President Glotzbach, President's Cabinet, and the IPPC in an effort to secure the permanence that we see as essential to the successful realization of Goal II of the *Strategic Plan*.