

A CFG White Paper: Improving Participation in Faculty Governance

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Part One: *What is at Stake*

Currently Skidmore faculty governance is undergoing a crisis of participation. It seems that we are not alone in our dilemma. Many colleges and universities are now facing dissatisfaction with the system and confusion regarding the role of faculty in campus decision-making (Schuster et al., 1994). In their theoretical work on planning and governance Schuster and colleagues (1994) describe four imperatives for higher education decision-making. These include involvement, leadership, efficiency, and environment. In recent years two major factors have influenced faculty life. Faculty members are tolerating more administrative decisions because they are made more efficiently and academics are struggling to adapt in an environment that makes increasing demands on time. Although it has reigned supreme for many years, the push for participatory governance is diminishing on many campuses.

In keeping with the trends of the 1980s Skidmore convened a task force on faculty governance that addressed the issues of faculty meetings and the faculty committee structure. Our current system is based largely on the recommendations made by that task force (Ciancio report, 1988). Not even a decade later, however, the Committee on Faculty Governance (CFG) was experiencing problems with the committee system. Not enough faculty were willing to serve; some committee members were dissatisfied with their roles (e.g. FPPC and IPC); some faculty thought that their committee work was fruitless and their time was wasted; and others called for a more two-way communication between faculty and administration (Ginsberg report, 1996). CFG distributed surveys, conducted focus groups, held Committee of Committees meetings, made recommendations, and continued serious discussion of the issues. In 1997 we identified three key concerns. These included the structure of committees, recognition of committee service, and communication/trust (Azzarto report, 1997). In 2002, despite much work, we are still facing the same problems and they are becoming more serious. Our work, however, has proceeded on the assumption that the Skidmore faculty wants a participatory governance system. Perhaps it is time to question that assumption. CFG needs the answers to some basic questions from our community: How involved in governance should each faculty member be? How long is the administration willing to wait for the less efficient decision-making process that includes committee input? How much should individual faculty members struggle to resist environmental pressures that focus us exclusively on teaching and scholarship? Who are the leaders amongst us who have not stepped forward to serve?

If the time for strong participatory governance has past, we must critically consider the consequences of letting this principle die. Other campus communities have become complacent and left academically sacred curricular decisions to administration and trustees. (For a close-to-home example, recall the recent imposition of a core curriculum by the SUNY Albany Board of Trustees, following the failure of faculty governance to accomplish the mission.) If we agree that we want to remain a faculty that assumes leadership in its community and involves itself in the governance system, then CFG invites consideration of this report.

Part Two: *Some Supporting Data*

Anecdotal evidence of difficulties in the faculty governance system is plentiful and compelling, but statisticians are fond of saying that “data beat anecdotes.” To this end, CFG has attempted to gather some specific data about faculty participation in the governance process. The three areas investigated are, first, current service rates among tenured, untenured tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty; second, willingness to serve among tenured faculty; and, finally, voting participation.

CFG annually seeks willingness-to-serve on 22 committees, 18 elective and 4 appointive (Athletic Council, CAFR, CAS, CASA, CAPT, CEPP, CFG, Curriculum, EMAC, FDC, FPPC, Honors Council, IPC, Tenure Review Board, UWWC, Faculty Observers, ACC, Board of Appeals, Benefits, Honor Code Commission, IRC, & Integrity Board). The data below is based on those committees and hence does not include service on numerous subcommittees, departmental committees, curricular committees (such as the LS committee), and so on. CFG also recognizes that “service” can mean many things in numerous contexts, so we make no claims to be studying “service at Skidmore” under its widest definition. Nonetheless, service on faculty and college committees is a crucial part of the overall picture.

I. Service on Current Faculty and College Committees:

Number of CFG-eligible faculty (2001-2): 233
Number currently serving on at least one of the 22 committees: 78
% service rate for all eligible faculty: 33%

Number of slots (total) on the 22 committees: 84
27 slots are for tenured only and 3 are for untenured only.
Hence the number of unrestricted slots: 54

Number of **tenured** CFG-eligible faculty: 125
% of CFG-eligible faculty who are tenured: 53%
Number currently serving on at least one of the 22 committees: 42
% service rate for tenured faculty: 34%
% of unrestricted slots filled by tenured faculty: = 33%

Number of **untenured tenure-track** CFG-eligible faculty: 50
% of CFG-eligible faculty who are untenured tenure-track: 21%
Number currently serving on at least one of the 22 committees: 30
% service rate for untenured tenure-track faculty: 60%
% of unrestricted slots filled by untenured tenure-track faculty: 56%

Number of **non-tenure-track** CFG-eligible faculty: 58
% of CFG-eligible faculty who are non-tenure-track: 26%
Number currently serving on at least one of the 22 committees: 6
% service rate for non-tenure-track faculty: 10%
% of unrestricted slots filled by non-tenure-track faculty: 11%

The data above would seem to have no dramatic messages, but they do contain some useful information. Perhaps most clear is a dispelling of the myth that *untenured tenure-track faculty do not participate in the system sufficiently*, probably because of worries about the other two areas (teaching and scholarship). On the contrary, currently 60% of this group actually serves, well above the 34% of tenured faculty and the 10% of non-tenure-track faculty. Moreover, this group constitutes only 21% of the eligible pool, yet it fills 56% of the unrestricted slots. CFG concludes that, at least currently, *untenured tenure-track faculty more than “pull their weight” in the governance system*.

The situation with non-tenure-track faculty is difficult to assess because this group is so diverse. A 10% service rate may seem low, but many individuals in the group have specialized roles in the community that may not be compatible with college-wide committee service.

CFG is concerned about the participation levels of the *tenured* faculty. Currently only a third of the tenured faculty are serving on the faculty and college committees and only a third of the unrestricted slots are filled by tenured faculty even though that group constitutes 53% of the pool. Of course there are many complicating factors – tenured faculty members have many responsibilities in the college that come with seniority. Nonetheless, CFG does feel on the basis of these data that the tenured faculty may not be contributing quite what they should to the system.

Of course, an individual cannot *serve* on an elected committee if he or she is not *elected* to that committee. Hence CFG felt it important to look at the rate of *willingness to serve* among the group about which we are concerned, tenured faculty. This leads to our second, much simpler, item of data:

II. *Willingness to Serve on the part of Tenured Faculty*

Over the period from September 1998 through October 2001 (3+ years), 68 out of 125, or 54%, of the tenured faculty submitted at least one willingness-to-serve for the faculty governance system.

This rate, 54%, even given the disclaimers about the wide variety of activities that can constitute service, seems disturbingly low to CFG. (By contrast, 43, or 91%, of the 47 continuing faculty members who were untenured tenure-track as of Fall 2001 expressed willingness to serve at least once during the same period.) Obviously, one could never expect that all or even almost all tenured faculty would offer themselves for committee service at least once over a three year period, but surely that rate could be closer to 70-75%, say. This perhaps then is our challenge: How can we increase the number of tenured faculty who would be willing to serve from about half of the total to closer to three-quarters? Such a shift would go a long way toward relieving the current difficulties.

Our next measure of participation in the governance system is even simpler and more basic. Observers of the United States political system regularly bemoan the lack of participation of citizens in the electoral process. Presidential elections attract about 50% of the eligible voters, and almost all other elections get lower participation than that. How does the performance of the Skidmore faculty in our own governance system compare?

III. *Voting Participation in 2000-01 and the beginning of 2001-02*

2000-01

Special Round - 176 = 76%

Round I – 119 = 51%

Round II – 91 = 39%

Round III – 111 = 48%

Round IV – 100 = 43%

2001-02

Special Round - 90 = 39%

Round I – 122 = 52%

Overall = 50%

CFG finds an overall voting participation rate of 50% to be disappointing. A college faculty presumably consists of enlightened individuals who honor the democratic ideal and see clearly the value of participation through the simple act of casting a vote (from the comfort of one's office!), yet only half of us do. Why?

Part Three: Improving Participation in Faculty Governance

In order to improve the participation of faculty members in the governance system, CFG believes that we must consider offering a number of incentives. Further, we must establish a monitoring policy that will enable the Dean of Faculty and department chairs to assist faculty in making choices about college and departmental service. These ends can be achieved in a variety of ways; CFG offers the following suggestions as a spur to discussion, not as formal recommendations.

Merit

It would seem that the most effective tool for insuring widespread participation in community service would be the re-establishment of the merit system in some form or another. Indeed, no one is quite certain when or why merit disappeared from our system of compensation. With an effective merit system each department chair would be in an excellent position to assist faculty members in planning their community service. Faculty evaluations made by the chair and recommendations for merit increases would be based, in part, on each department member's service profile. We must, of course, recognize that formal committee service is only one form of community service. One choice might be to establish a three-tier model that would allow for minimal, standard or meritorious additional compensation (beyond the GSA) based upon service to the department and/or college.

Revisiting and Rebalancing the Evaluative Criteria for Promotion

It has been suggested that we may have discounted the relative value of community service in evaluating faculty members in tenure and promotion decisions. We might consider returning to a more balanced profile stressing a teacher/scholar/citizen model. Since it is the senior faculty that seems to be underrepresented in committee service, it is the criteria for promotion to full professor that might be most affected by any proposed changes.

Regularizing the Granting of Course Releases

It would be helpful if there existed an established set of guidelines indicating which committee positions would result in a course release. It is important to realize that the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty would need to be able to offer additional course releases as the need arises. For instance, in a year when there are more than ten candidates for tenure, every member of CAPT might be given a release. Another example would be the granting of additional course releases to CEPP members during an extensive curriculum review.

Additional Perquisites

We might explore a menu of other “carrots” to be made available to faculty members serving on committees. These would be administered by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty and might include:

- Increased budgets for travel
- Increased equipment funds
- Stipends for particularly burdensome committee service when course releases are not practical

“Banking” Credits

Committee service could carry the equivalent of semester-hour credits. By serving on committees faculty members could earn semester-hours that might enable them to have a reduced teaching load in a future semester. (Possible guidelines for such a system are attached as Appendix A.)

Monitoring

Each faculty member could have an ongoing service profile subject to review by both the department chair and the Dean. The profile would indicate past and present service and would be annotated appropriately to indicate unusual circumstances (regular teaching overloads, a particularly busy committee agenda, etc.). This would enable the chair and Dean to better advise faculty members about their service relative to tenure, promotion and salary considerations.

References

Azzarto, J. (1997). Report on CFG focus groups.

Ciancio, R. (1988). Revised Report on the Committee System and Faculty Meetings.

Ginsberg, R. (1996). CFG action plan for review of faculty governance.

Shuster, J., Smith, D., Corak, K., & Yamada, M. (1994). Strategic governance: How to make big decisions better. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education/Onyx Press.

Appendix A

A Possible Plan for Teaching-Service Unit Guidelines at Skidmore

In an effort to create a somewhat more coherent view of teaching and service by the Skidmore faculty, or at least to promote discussion, CFG proposes a concept of “Teaching-Service Units.” In order to establish appropriate guidelines for the desired numbers of such units, we start with the needs of the college as estimated by Ann Henderson and by CFG.

In an average academic year, the College needs, approximately:

Regular teaching	3700 semester hours
Independent studies & theses	470 units (“headcount”)
Advising about 10 students	220 units
Regular committees	80 slots
Other committees (departmental, etc.)	80 slots
Chairs, Directors, etc. (30 times 3)	90 units
Total	4640 units

To fill this need, the College employs approximately 208 FTE. This means then that on average, an FTE must perform about $4640 / 208 = \mathbf{22.3 \text{ units each year}}$.

We know, of course, that not everyone does this level of teaching-service. Professor A may teach 16 semester hours, oversee 5 theses, advise 20 students, direct a program, and serve on 3 committees, for a total of 29 units; whereas Professor B may teach 18 semester hours and advise 10 students, but do no other teaching or service, for a total of 19 units. In terms of compensation, however, the College likely treats Professors A and B as equals. *CFG wonders if Professor A might be rewarded for his/her level of contribution and if Professor B might be encouraged by his/her chair to contribute a bit more.*

More specifically, perhaps some kind of **teaching-service unit guidelines** could be employed to help department chairs as they consult each year with members of their departments about their levels of contributions to the College and to reward faculty for meritorious teaching-service contributions. Here is a possible set of guidelines:

On average, a full-time faculty member is expected to accomplish 22 teaching-service units (TSU) for an academic year. These can be accomplished via:

1. Credit hours of teaching – maximum 20 TSU
2. Independent studies and theses – 1 TSU for each, to a max of 3
3. All-college and/or departmental service – 1 TSU each position, to a max of 3
4. Chairing a department, program, or major committee – 2 or 3 TSU
5. Advising – 1 TSU for 5 to 15 advisees, 2 TSU for more

Notes:

- a. The TSU obligation can be averaged over two or even three years in consultation with the department chair/program director.
- b. TSU over the 22 per year average can be “banked” over a period of at most six years. The banking of 12 or more units during this period would enable faculty, as a reward for meritorious and consistent service to the College, for example:
 - i. To take a full-year sabbatical at full (or near full?) pay in the 7th year, or
 - ii. To receive additional equipment support, travel allowance, or other similar reward.
- c. Committee and departmental service would normally count as 1 TSU per assignment, but chairs of major committees would receive 2 or 3 units, and the DOF could designate, as he/she deems appropriate, other such units (e.g., all members of CAPT in 2002-3 and 2003-4 shall receive 3 TSU due to the anticipated extraordinary workload).