

Faculty Executive Committee (FEC)
Framework for Studying Faculty Service at Skidmore College (version 1.1)
February 20, 2007

Introduction. Whether or not one would use the word “crisis” to describe the current state of faculty participation in the College’s shared governance system, the system nevertheless has clear and abiding problems. Among these problems are (1) the scarcity of faculty willing to serve on our standing committees; (2) the lesser importance of service as a criterion for tenure and promotion, including (a) service in general in relation to teaching and scholarship, and (b) committee service in particular in relation to other forms of service; (3) the continuing proliferation of *ad hoc* groups of one kind or another, of which many (if not all) serve valuable and useful functions, but which nevertheless detract from participation on the College’s standing committees.

FEC proposes to study these and other problems in the spring semester of 2007. As we undertake our study, we are mindful of the efforts of past governance committees at Skidmore that have pursued analogous lines of inquiry — most notably the 2002 CFG White Paper, *Improving Participation in Faculty Governance*. First and foremost, this document, which furnished data on the Faculty’s service and willingness to serve on committees, as well as its participation in elections to these committees, will provide a framework for the study FEC is proposing. In particular, we can apply the same statistical template in an effort to see whether the trends observed by CFG in 2002 have continued into 2007, especially in the wake of major revisions to the faculty governance system in 2004-2005. In general, however, we can look to the CFG White Paper for guidance as we proceed, for the questions it asks are strikingly similar those we will ask. Some examples:

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? (CFG White Paper 2002, p. 1)

At the same time, as the second problem (above) implies, FEC’s study must be broader in scope than the CFG White Paper, which recognized that “formal committee service is only one form of community service,” (p. 4), but which nevertheless focused solely on faculty committees. If it is true that the Faculty are serving the community in other ways apart from committee service, it behooves FEC to consider broader definitions of service and their potential impact on faculty governance. These considerations must include the *ad hoc* groups noted in the third problem (above), as well as other areas inside and outside the College to which Faculty devote their time. Furthermore, a broad study has the potential to be useful outside the bailiwick of faculty governance: recent discussions between members of FEC and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of the Faculty indicate that Skidmore’s administration is also concerned with these larger

questions of service; both the VPAA and the DOF have in fact encouraged FEC to move forward with its study.

Guiding Questions. FEC has posed several questions that we hope will generate data for our study of faculty service. Ranging from the specific to the more general, they are as follows:

- Which members of the Faculty have served on which committees since 2002? (“Committees” here means both standing committees and any kind of *ad hoc* committee, such as study, discussion, or focus groups, and perhaps even committees within large departments. Note also that this question is not intended to spark a so-called “witch-hunt,” but rather to furnish useful data pertaining to percentage of faculty who serve, whether they are tenured or untenured, and so forth.)
- Which members of the Faculty have declared themselves willing to serve?
- What percentage of the Faculty participate in elections?
- Why do some Faculty choose not to serve on committees?
- Which Faculty have served in administrative capacities?
- How do sabbaticals affect faculty service?
- Which forms of service are paid, and which are unpaid? Does paid service attract more participants?
- What is the place of service in evaluating Faculty for tenure or promotion?
- What constitutes service in the eyes of the Faculty?
- What constitutes service in the eyes of the College at large?

Gathering Data. FEC realizes that the answers to the preceding questions are likely to be complicated and varied, and proposes to answer them through various means in order to gather the appropriate data. These means include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A full inventory of the committees (in all senses of the word) active, inactive, or newly formed since 2002, and their membership;
- Continuation of the data presented in the CFG White Paper on the Faculty’s willingness to serve and elections;
- Discussions with the Administration regarding the appointments of Deans and Program Directors;
- Discussions with Chairs and Program Directors about service in their departments and programs;
- Discussions with CAPT on the place of service in its deliberations on tenure and promotion;
- Review of the Faculty’s Annual Reports since 2002;
- A survey, or series of surveys, of the Faculty on the topic of service; and
- Discussions on the Faculty Floor or other venues.

The guidelines for these methods of data-gathering have yet to be established.

Possible Outcomes. FEC recognizes that such a broad study will have different uses for different parties. In the short run, FEC hopes to achieve the following:

- A full roster of all formal and informal committees, and which faculty have served and are currently serving on them;
- Statistical data on committee service, analyzed in terms of committee type, as well as faculty cohort (from Lecturers to full Professors), status (tenured or untenured), and gender;
- A clearer understanding of the decisions Faculty make when considering or not considering committee service; and
- A clearer understanding of what the Faculty and the Administration define as service.

FEC also recognizes that the Administration might also share some or all of our *desiderata*. In addition, we acknowledge that our study might be useful to the Administration in ways distinct from the perspective of faculty or all-college governance. Such ways might include the following:

- A clearer understanding of how Faculty spend their time outside the classroom;
- A clearer understanding of which service issues are of particular interest to which Faculty; and
- Data that will guide the process of asking Faculty to serve on *ad hoc* committees.

Finally, FEC hopes that our study might benefit the Faculty and the Administration alike as both parties continue to deliberate on the place of service at the College. Some possible uses for the study in this regard (all of which are reflected, in one way or another, in the CFG White Paper):

- Helping to answer whether a shared governance system is best for Skidmore College;
- Helping to understand (or as CFG put it, to “rebalance”) service as an evaluative criterion for promotion; and
- Providing a first step toward a merit system whereby faculty receive credit for service. Such credits might be useful, for example, in considerations for support during sabbatical leaves.