

Faculty Executive Committee (FEC)
Notes on the Faculty Caucus
March 23, 2007, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.
Somers Room, Tang Museum

What follow are general notes on the Faculty Caucus of Friday, March 23, 2007. The Caucus was a faculty-only meeting in which the Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR) discussed with a representative group of faculty its proposal to modify Part I, Article X of the *Faculty Handbook*. These notes represent the official consensus of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) as to what transpired at the Caucus; CAFR was also consulted in the preparation of these notes.

Any questions, including those concerning the publication of these notes, should be addressed to Dan Curley, the chair of FEC (dcurley@skidmore.edu).

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Caucus began at 3:45 due to late arrivals. Approximate attendance was 25-30 faculty members, with good gender and disciplinary distribution and with some representation from junior faculty.

The faculty member who first brought the issue of Article X to CAFR's attention gave a five-minute summary of why it is important that Skidmore's *Faculty Handbook* have language outlining a process both transparent and protective of the Faculty's rights in cases of dismissal.

The chair of CAFR gave a twenty-minute presentation recounting the process by which the current proposal was drafted, and noting that earnest work on the proposal had been ongoing for only the past academic year.

The remainder of the meeting was given over to questions and answers. The chair of FEC served as moderator, while the chair of CAFR served as the primary respondent to questions and comments. The VPAA's email to the chair of FEC (see Appendix, below) was read aloud in its entirety approximately fifty minutes into the meeting.

Much of the discussion among the attendees was devoted to specific questions and comments about the language of the proposal: why CAFR had chosen a word or a sentence, or had chosen the procedure outlined in the document. FEC hopes that CAFR will find this feedback valuable and worthy of consideration.

CAFR's interaction with the Administration in drafting the proposal was a smaller but significant component of the discussion. On this topic FEC took note of the following:

- CAFR asserted, citing conversations with the VPAA, that the President would refuse to take the proposal in its present form to the Trustees. A faculty member asked whether it was possible for the faculty to adopt CAFR's proposal, and for

the President to bring it to the Trustees with a negative recommendation. FEC responded that this scenario was possible in accordance with the *Faculty Handbook*.

- CAFR felt some resistance to their proposal coming from the Administration, but maintained that the committee did not understand the reason(s) for the resistance. CAFR also suggested that the Administration did not respond in a timely fashion to their draft of the proposal.
- When a faculty member asked whether or not the VPAA would be willing to address the issues surrounding CAFR's document in a public forum, FEC responded that, based on discussions that the chair of FEC had had with Susan, yes, she would be willing to do so.
- A faculty member stated that, given the complexities of the proposal and its long (3-year) gestation, the Administration had really not had it under consideration for very long at all. The same faculty member also noted that situations in which the Faculty and the Administration appear at odds in front of the Trustees are never a good idea.
- A former chair of CAFR indicated that the proposal had not been a high priority for CAFR during the first year or two of its consideration.
- On the topic of Faculty-Administration interaction in general, a faculty member declared frustration with our regular Faculty Meetings, calling them administratively top-heavy, and overly laden with reports.

In conclusion, FEC observes that, at the end of the meeting, there seemed to be universal approval of CAFR's purpose, but also little support for bringing the proposal to a vote in the near future, given that it does not have administrative endorsement in its current form. Furthermore, there was support in the room for a discussion of the proposal at a regular Faculty Meeting, not only to introduce the issue to all faculty members, but also to hear and to respond to the Administration's concerns; the mechanism for such a discussion that garnered the most support was the committee of the whole.

Caucus adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Curley,
Chair, Faculty Executive Committee

Appendix: Email from VPAA Susan Kress
Read aloud at the Faculty Caucus
March 23, 2007

[From: "Susan Kress" <skress@skidmore.edu>
To: "Daniel Curley" <dcurley@skidmore.edu>
Cc: "Susan Kress" <skress@skidmore.edu>,
"Muriel Poston" <mposton@skidmore.edu>]

Dear Dan,

I do appreciate your sending along the CAFR proposal to be presented today at the Faculty Caucus and your invitation as well to contribute a statement.

Since Muriel and I may not attend any part of the meeting, we would want the faculty to understand that we are in strong support of CAFR's intention to revise article X and that we would wish to continue to partner with FEC and CAFR to work through the issues that are raised by the language CAFR proposes. I would also want to respectfully note that while CAFR has been working on this section for 3 years — we (Muriel and I) have been working on it for less than 3 months during a period when many other projects are also on our radar. We also firmly believe that revisions to the *Handbook* should be a collaborative enterprise.

Language in the rationale to be presented to the faculty today ("Proposed language was developed by CAFR...in consultation with...DOF, VPAA...") implies that Muriel and I support this proposal as it stands. That is not the case. As you know, we still have many questions. I have elaborated on those concerns at length with both you and Mary Stange — and I will simply enumerate four of them here:

1. We believe that Article X should also include intermediate sanctions. In other words, we should retain the heading "Discipline of Tenured Faculty" and spell out procedures for sanctions as well as dismissal.
2. We believe that it is insufficient to refer to the *Redbook* in a footnote. The particular procedures to be followed need to be identified in our Handbook.
3. We are concerned by the use of the "advocate." Could this be an attorney? If so, we have moved an internal procedure to an external one in which the College's attorney would presumably also be present. We do not believe this is what CAFR intends.
4. Part 6 of the Handbook will include language about possible dismissal; we would like to partner with the faculty in making sure that Part 6 and Article X are in alignment.

For these reasons and others, we believe we need more time to work on Article X.

Muriel and I respectfully request that you read this statement at an appropriate moment at the Faculty Caucus.

Best regards,

Susan