

Remarks to Faculty-Only Meeting – September 23, 2005 – c.m. joseph

Good afternoon,

I understand the seriousness of the issue before us, and I want to begin by saying again, as I did in my August 16 memo that I should have communicated earlier and more effectively about the bridging of Student and Academic Affairs. I should have consulted more broadly on a variety of issues that now have led to this entanglement. I have always found the shared governance model at Skidmore to be a powerful one, and be it CEPP, CAPT, and now IPPC and FEC –whatever committee—it is the job of those colleagues who offer their services in the cause of community to interrogate issues that fall under the purview of their committee's charge. Whatever conversations are going on beyond my earshot, FEC is charged with a serious mission, and it is taking that mission seriously. My own conversations with the Committee have been open, candid, useful, serious, non-antagonistic, and conducted in the spirit of reaching a resolution that will allow all of us to move forward.

I want to walk through the process that surrounds the Dean of Studies Study Group and my own involvement. The Study Group was established in June of 2004 and concluded its work last December. A report was presented to my office but it was not widely distributed. It should have been. John Brueggemann co-chaired the Study Group and apprised me fairly regularly on what apparently were animated discussions. Perhaps I should have co-chaired that Study Group, but it was a hectic year for reasons I probably need not rehearse. I am simply saying that in hindsight I should have been more directly engaged. Since the report was presented to me with what I thought was the Study Group's endorsement—although I did understand that some folks had serious questions--I read the report, discussed it with JB and others, and endorsed the restructuring model as one way to begin the bridging, formally, of Student and Academic Affairs. Let me also say, that for all the controversy that has now emerged, and to which I unintentionally added, I still deeply believe that Skidmore needs to build this bridge. We are far behind in a venture that is on virtually every national conference agenda these days. The last thing I wanted to create at this pivotal moment was a deflection away from a discussion of this issue's importance because of concerns of process. I still hope that we can—as CEPP is already doing—explore the fundamental questions of rigor and challenge that most every campus is dealing with in terms of a healthy and collaborative relationship between Student and Academic Affairs. I would welcome this topic for broader community discussions throughout this year.

The report's recommendations –as I read them—suggested that two offices be created -- one in Academic Affairs and one in Student Affairs. This would demand constant collaboration. The DOS office would continue to include work related to academic advising/mentoring, academic standing, academic integrity –and those in Student Affairs would address tutoring, student opportunities with potential links to HEOP/AOP and Career Services. Now, I am old enough to know that the devil is in the details, and those details, I also understand, are still very much under scrutiny.

I want to recall, as best I can, my own interaction with various folks, once I received the report. I discussed the report's recommendations with CAPT in January. I thought it was a good meeting and that it constituted what I believed was consultation—at least I came away thinking that certainly CAPT made its counsel clear. Without passing judgment on the potential value of such restructuring—for I don't think CAPT saw this as its charge—the Committee counseled me not to rush to a decision—Why did the restructuring need to move forward now, especially with so many other issues afoot. I appreciated CAPT's commenting that ultimately it felt that such restructuring issues were the Dean's to decide—not an uncommon position for CAPT to take when I have solicited its advice, but there was no question that CAPT made it clear that slowing down was its collective wisdom. For what it is worth at this point, I did hear that advice and I thought it was reasonable.

While there was no specific charge to take the matter to CEPP, in fact CEPP was aware that the Study Group had been working throughout the summer and fall. The restructuring was shared with CEPP in February but my memory is that the issue itself was not pursued beyond a few questions. There could be many reasons CEPP chose not to explore this further. My own take—and it really is only that—is that CEPP, as usual, was dealing with a hundred other issues, and this one did not rise to a level of interrogation at that moment. But I could be wrong about that, and I am willing to take responsibility in saying that I should probably have pushed CEPP to engage even more. And for the record, let me say that one of the Study Group's members, Ruth Andrea Levinson, was serving on CEPP and was quite willing to answer questions and walk through the complexities of the Report at any point. At the time, however, --and I really don't mean to use the hectic pace of the semester as an excuse (but obviously I am)—the issue was not on CEPP's agenda, what with the FYE, the Strategic Plan, and the always full plate that CEPP has. I just don't remember CEPP asking for more information on this, and we moved on. And while I don't want to exacerbate matters, I do think FEC's conclusion that CEPP knew nothing about the Study Group whatsoever, and that the Study Group's work was never once called to CEPP's attention, is not quite right—and indeed the minutes of CEPP confirm that the matter was presented to CEPP. Now I do think it is fair for FEC to question whether there was genuine consultation. To say that CEPP might have played a larger role is an entirely fair assertion, and I am very glad to know that it now will.

Neither was there a charge to take the matter to CFG. But I did visit with the Committee in April, I think. CFG was placed in the awkward position of not being able to respond to faculty members who were, apparently, asking what this Study Group was and more broadly—what the heck was going on. Let me take the responsibility for that one too. Had the report been distributed—even as a courtesy rather than as a charge—at least to CFG, questions might have been answered. CFG expressed concern about the lack of faculty consultation. I also heard that advice and thought it too made good sense. I have been reminded that I said things were not yet settled, and that was and is true. I think the miscommunication here, for which I take responsibility, is that what remained increasingly unsettled for me was the specific ways the various offices involved in the restructuring would function, and which responsibilities each would have. By then it had

become increasingly apparent that there were educational policy issues at stake here and the division of labor would need to be contemplated carefully. I knew that it would be wise to slow this process down so that those offices involved could eventually reach consensus as to which person would be doing what, and Pat and I agreed that this was the tact that we should take. Those discussions continue and my understanding is that in fact responsibilities of each office remain to be settled.

Spring turned into summer – CFG turned into FEC --There were various meetings over the summer with CFG/FEC, drafts of memoranda to be sent to the community which were revised, rejected, rewritten, and finally the memo of August 15 you received. That short memo was sent with the anticipation that the questions arising –on both process and content --were large enough that they could not be adequately answered in a missive, but would need open discussion this year. I had hoped to discuss the concept of consultation, decision-making, shared governance at Academic Staff, but it became apparent that attention needed to be focused on the Study Group since folks were still in the dark. Early in September, FEC met with Phil and me, and Pat –and we agreed to turn the matter over to CEPP. CEPP did discuss the issue and reported at the first faculty meeting. The confusion at that meeting resulted from FEC’s expectation that Phil or I would recap some of what we are presenting to you today at that meeting, and that FEC’s report would be in response to that presentation. The faculty was left, I am guessing, hearing FEC and CEPP’s report without the anticipated framing of the issue. I’ll shoulder the responsibility for that one too. I think I had assumed—always dangerous—that since CEPP had, earlier that week, decided what it decided –basically to review the current structure over the course of the next two years – that the explanation of the structure itself was not necessary at that particular faculty meeting –which has typically been devoted to more celebratory matters. I can see that FEC was placed in an awkward position –and of course it is that confusion that has led to this meeting today.

In all of these matters, I personally should have monitored all of this more closely from the moment the Study Group was formed. I should have been quicker to realize that a better understanding of the proposal would have averted placing folks in various offices involved –especially Sue Layden and Grace Burton—in a position of inheriting considerable turmoil that could have been avoided. Their charge is hard enough as it stands, and as administrators they need to be able to collaborate on some very tough issues. I hope you understand that none of this confusion was meant to challenge the importance of the Faculty Handbook or our shared governance structure, or to place the community in a position of expending energy that could have been directed elsewhere.

All of that said, I do think that it is essential that the offices involved find ways to work with one another towards both supporting and challenging our students. We are behind other institutions on this one, folks. Student and Academic Affairs must find ways to work together. Please do not allow the clumsiness of what has happened, and for which I take a great deal of the responsibility, to prevent us from building bridges that I think will benefit all of our students in very important ways. I hope we can soon redirect our energy in that direction.