

Faculty Executive Committee (FEC)
Annual Report 2007-2008

1. ROUTINE BUSINESS

As part of its regular duties this year, the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) met 22 times in regular sessions during the academic year 2007/8. In addition, FEC convened two meetings of the Committee of Committees (COC) and one Faculty Caucus (i.e., faculty-only meeting). FEC ran elections and sought sabbatical replacements for standing faculty and all-College committees, and coordinated willingness-to-serve nominations for faculty to serve on various ad hoc groups. FEC continued to serve as Faculty Observers at the Board of Trustees meetings. FEC worked with other faculty committees and with members of the Administration on changes to the *Faculty Handbook*. Finally, FEC further refined its operating code.

Some remarks on routine business:

A. *Committee of Committees*. Both COC meetings indicated that interactions between committees and between committees and the Administration are by and large excellent. Despite the good work being done across the board, there are nevertheless some tensions within the governance system. First, the system has possibly reached the saturation point in terms of the number of committees, subcommittees, task forces, working groups, study groups, advisory boards, and other ad hoc entities that the Faculty can support. Second, there is a growing sense that the time of faculty members on committees and in meetings could be used more effectively and productively. Third, there have been questions about how service is valued in the careers of our faculty members.

FEC has wondered whether nothing less than radical reform of the governance system will address these tensions. If we have reached the point where new committees can only be added, and few-to-none subtracted, perhaps it is time to consider a system of compensation for service (see section 7, below). Or perhaps it is time for the Faculty to consider and implement new entities of governance, such as a Faculty Senate, which might serve as a broadly consultative body and reduce the need for ad hoc committees on any given issue. Naturally, any such reforms would require frank discussion among and across all the various constituencies of the College.

B. *Faculty Caucus*. The purpose of this year's Faculty Caucus (March 21, 2008) was to enable the Faculty to discuss the proposed closure of University Without Walls. On this occasion, FEC felt it prudent to invite two administrators, Interim Dean of Special Programs Jeff Segrave and Interim UWW Director Jim Kennelly, to listen and to speak. A straw poll at the end of the Caucus revealed an assembly (comprised mostly of tenured faculty members) divided on whether the UWW

proposal ought to come to the Faculty Floor — a harbinger of the close vote on the proposal at the May 14, 2008, Faculty Meeting.

C. *Committee Elections.* To the relief of all FEC members, this election year was much less fraught with difficulty. That said, finding robust rosters of faculty members willing to serve on our various committees remains challenging, especially in the wake of three new committees created this year: the Faculty Advisory Board (FAB), the Responsible Citizenship Task Force (RCTF), and the Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU). Places in the annual election cycle must be found for these groups, as well as for the standing subcommittees of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC), the staffing of which inadvertently dropped off of FEC's radar this year.

D. *Amendments to the Faculty Handbook.* The Athletic Council (AC), the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS), and CEPP sought FEC's advice in revising their descriptions and/or membership statements in the *Handbook*. Furthermore, FEC clarified the "fec-eligible" status of our colleagues on phased employment (they may run for committees and vote in elections) and brought the language on ad hoc committees into line with current practice. Perhaps the most notable change to the *Handbook* came with the newly-revised Part Six, which the Faculty adopted its February 29, 2008, meeting (for more on this process, and other, larger *Handbook* issues, see Section 5, below).

2. UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS

With regard to the proposal to close UWW, FEC met twice with Vice-President for Academic Affairs Susan Kress and Jeff Segrave, once with Jim Kennelly, and once with CEPP. At the meeting with CEPP (March 28, 2008), the two committees strategized about how the proposal might best come to the Faculty Floor in terms of both timeline and process. FEC advised CEPP to work with both DOSP and UWW staff to formulate clear alternatives, such that a "yes" and a "no" vote would have concrete objectives. In the course of doing its work, CEPP decided that the vote should register general support (or lack thereof) for UWW. FEC respected CEPP's decision, and our consensus that the process of moving to the vote, though rapid, was transparent and equitable remains unchanged. (For an issue pertaining to the UWW vote, see the end of section 6, below.)

FEC is currently consulting with the VPAA and the DOSP on the next steps in the process. Although the Faculty have voted to keep UWW open, there is recognition from all quarters that the program must be reconfigured in order to be viable. Plans are afoot to assemble a summer working group with a focused charge and prompt timetable; as of this writing, the proposed group appears to be broadly representative and consultative. The VPAA and the DOSP will publish the charge and membership of the group in due course, advice on which has been duly sought from FEC.

3. DOS RESTRUCTURING REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair of FEC sat on a subcommittee of CEPP whose focus was the Office of Student Academic Services (SAS), which grew out of the restructuring of the Office of the Dean of Studies (DOS). The group interviewed a broad selection of faculty members, staff members, and administrators in the fall and spring and issued its report to CEPP on April 21, 2008. In response to its charge the committee determined that SAS is meeting genuine needs at the College, despite the opaque process that led to the Office's creation and that has given it a rather cloistered existence. From his perspective, the Chair of FEC hopes that all parties involved — administrators, staff, and faculty — have learned and will continue to learn from this episode of College governance, and that future episodes will showcase the transparency and trust that have since characterized our business.

4. RETIREE HEALTH CARE

FEC met twice with Vice-President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) Mike West to discuss the College's plans for changes to the Retiree Health Care Plan. Although focused somewhat on substance, both meetings were largely concerned with developing a transparent procedure — both in formulating the changes and communicating them to the Faculty. FEC endorsed the VPFA's plan to distribute via email a report outlining the changes and to host two open fora in late April. FEC in turn recommended that the VPFA, in lieu of presenting the report afresh at the April 25, 2008, Faculty Meeting, ask the Faculty to read the report and to come prepared with questions; Mike West was amenable to this recommendation.

5. FACULTY HANDBOOK ISSUES

After years of adopting only portions of the *Faculty Handbook* (and sometimes well after the September Faculty Meeting), the *Handbook* has at last returned to the point where it may be presented for adoption *in toto* at the beginning of the academic year. The piecemeal work of recent years was due partly to changes in the Administration (most notably the DOF/VPAA sundering and the DOS restructuring) that took time to capture on paper, but mostly to the lack of a viable Part Six, which until this past February was over four years out of date.

In summer 2007 the Chair of FEC joined the Chairs of CAPT and CAFR in meeting with the VPAA, the DOF, the Director of Human Resources, the Assistant Director for Equal Employment Opportunity and Workforce Diversity, and the Executive Director of the President's Office to begin work on revisions to Part Six. This "Part Six Working Group" (as it became known) met regularly throughout the fall and early spring semesters and slowly but steadily crafted a new version of Part Six. The discussions at these meetings were nuanced and sometimes difficult, but always collegial and respectful. Along the way, the Working Group consulted broadly with faculty committees — most notably FEC, CAPT, CAFR, and IPPC — and with the Faculty at

large, taking into account the comments received from these and other quarters, such as the College's attorney. Following a protracted discussion of the revisions at the February 29, 2008, Faculty Meeting, the Faculty adopted the new version of Part Six and further recommended that it be reviewed no later than two or three years out by a group constituted like the one that had created it. The Chair of FEC takes this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of VPAA Susan Kress in bringing the new Part Six to fruition.

Finally, FEC this year undertook the question, in consultation with the Campus Environment Committee, of whether or not the *Handbook* should continue to be mass-produced on paper — even going so far as to draft a motion limiting the number of paper copies in favor of web-based publication. Other pressing business prevented the motion from moving forward this year, but it is hoped that next year's FEC will revisit the question.

6. FACULTY MEETING ISSUES

With attendance at most Faculty Meetings noticeably ebbing, this year's Report provides an occasion to meditate on the future of the Meetings within our governance system, taking a cue from the discussions about use of the Faculty's time from the COC meetings and elsewhere.

This year the Chair of FEC conducted an informal experiment, timing the various parts of all nine Faculty Meetings and recording the times on a spreadsheet; the objective was to get a sense of how time is put to use at the Meetings, and in particular which parts of the Meetings receive the most time. The spreadsheet accompanies this report as an Appendix. With apologies to my colleagues with stronger quantitative reasoning skills, the approximate results for AY 2007/8 are as follows.¹

Nearly fourteen hours were devoted to Faculty Meetings this year; the average meeting length was 1:33, the shortest being 1:07 (November 2, 2007) and the longest 2:27 (May 14, 2008). In terms of the individual parts of the Meetings, about 8 minutes were devoted to the Minutes this year (average of 1 min.);² 1:14 to President's Reports

¹ Without the benefit of a stopwatch, all numerical values were recorded in hours:minutes. Although it was a simple matter to measure the length of each Meeting from start to finish, it was difficult to measure the individual parts of each Meeting due to (a) the vagaries of how business was ordered from Meeting to Meeting; (b) the fact that one part of a Meeting frequently ended and another part began during the same minute; or (c) the fact that approval of the Minutes, which almost always took less than sixty seconds, technically ended and began on different minutes (see following note). The sum of the lengths of individual Meeting parts, therefore, sometimes differs from the total lengths of the Meetings themselves.

² The Minutes illustrate the difficulty of precise timing. Although, empirically speaking, it usually took less than 60 seconds to approve the Minutes, the process of approving them *always* straddled the line between one minute the next. EXAMPLE: if the call to approve the Minutes begins at 3:38:49 and the Faculty approves the Minutes at 3:39:09, what actually takes 20 seconds will be recorded as one minute on the spreadsheet.

(average of 10 min.); 2:11 to VPAA's Reports (average of 16 min.); 3:48 to Old Business (average of 38 min.); 2:25 to New Business (average of 24 min.); 2:38 to other Reports (average of 16 min.); and 1:26 to Other Business/Announcements (average of 9 min.).³ By these measurements the Meetings appear to be both expeditious and proportionately appropriate. Indeed, last year FEC and the Administration made a joint commitment to limit the Meetings to 90 minutes, and on average this effort has been successful. Moreover, the total and average amount of time spent on Old Business and New Business combined is significantly greater than the time spent on any other category.

However, there is something of a disproportion between the broader categories of business (Minutes, Old Business, New Business) and reports (President's Report, VPAA's Report, other Reports, Other Business,⁴ Announcements). Of the total times given above, about 6:21 were devoted to all kinds of business and 7:19 to reports of one kind or another; the average times for business and reports, 1:03 and 0:52, respectively, reflect the fact that overall there were fewer instances of business at the Meetings than instances of reports.⁵

The disproportion between business and reports grows when one accounts for the fact that there were two heavier-than-normal items of business on the Faculty Floor this academic year: the adoption of *Handbook* Part Six (February 29, 2008) and the vote on the proposal to close UWW (May 14, 2008). The weight of these issues in the overall calculations is significant. If, say, the discussion of Part Six alone were excluded from Old Business on the grounds that it does not represent usual faculty business, the total business time decreases to 4:49 (versus 7:19 for reports), and the average business time decreases to 0:52 (versus 0:52 for reports). If only the discussion of UWW is excluded on similar grounds, the total business time decreases to 4:32, and the average business time to 0:45. If both discussions are excluded, the total business time becomes 3:00, and the average becomes 0:30.

³ For calculation purposes, Other Business was grouped with Announcements. The averages reflect the fact the agenda of each Meeting was unique in terms of its constituent parts: there was, for example, no President's Report when the President was away from campus. Thus the average length of VPAA Reports and other Reports — both 16 min. — reflects 2:11 averaged over eight Meetings versus 2:38 averaged over nine, respectively.

⁴ Other Business is here included under the broad rubric of reports on the basis of content: the only use of this category in AY 2007/8 was the presentation and discussion of the WS 375 video "Words on Fire" (December 7, 2007). To judge from the comments received by FEC from many faculty members following this Meeting, the broad classification of the presentation/discussion as a report is probably valid.

⁵ On the business side: Minutes at eight (of nine) Meetings; Old Business, six; New Business, six. On the reports side: President's Report at seven Meetings; VPAA Report, eight; Reports, nine; Other Business/Announcements, nine. The average length of time for business is therefore greater, since the time spent is averaged over fewer instances of business, while the average length for reports is lesser, with time spent being averaged over more instances of reports.

To sum up, on the basis of sheer quantity, the total amount of time spent on reports exceeds the total time spent on all business by about an hour if no adjustments are made; by about two-and-a-half hours if either the Part Six or UWW discussion is discounted; and by about four hours if both discussions are discounted. The average time for reports likewise exceeds the average time for business if the discussions are discounted in the same fashion.

As disconcerting as these numbers might be — and it should be remembered that they represent only one year's worth of data — one cannot push them too far without considering the Meetings, and in particular the reports, from a qualitative perspective. For example, among the reports delivered on the Faculty Floor this year was Mike West's preliminary report on the state of Retiree Health Care at Skidmore (November 2, 2007). In FEC's view, this report was a necessary checkpoint in the process leading to the changes to Retiree Health Care, especially given the complexities and difficulties in our national health care system. Certainly, or at least hopefully, the same might be said of other reports given this year, whether from the President, the VPAA, or others.

Nevertheless, throughout this year and last FEC has received comments from the Faculty at large, calling for the committee to change the atmosphere of the Meetings, which have been characterized as venues for being (in the words of one faculty member) "reported at" instead of venues for discussion, dialogue or even debate. In fact, some have suggested that the reason the discussions of Part Six and UWW were so robust was that the Meeting agendas often leave too little room for frank exchange among the Faculty. Whatever the case, it seems clear that attention must be paid to the kind, number, and quality of reports (including Announcements) given at the Faculty Meetings. But what is the yardstick by which to measure a report's worthiness? If one could be invented, it would be easy to distinguish between the reports that should be delivered on the Faculty Floor, and those that should be disseminated via email first, with an opportunity to ask questions at a subsequent Meeting (as was the case with Mike West's presentation on April 25). Note, though, that the latter scenario assumes faculty members will read the report carefully and come prepared to ask questions. Frankly, given how much time and energy the Faculty devotes to teaching and scholarship, this assumption might be hopelessly naïve, particularly at certain times of the year. Indeed, the Faculty have sometimes given the impression of not having done its collective governance homework. From this perspective, the desire to "report at" the Faculty to ensure that information is getting through is understandable.

Lest the preceding be taken as an indictment of the Administration, it should be duly noted that the VPAA has been willing for some time to meet with FEC to discuss the nature of the Faculty Meetings; and for its part FEC has been willing to meet with the VPAA. However, the volume of governance business this year precluded FEC from undertaking any meaningful discussions about how the business itself gets done. If there is to be real change to the Faculty Meetings, FEC must make this issue a priority next year. That said, it is ultimately incumbent upon the Faculty as a whole to take ownership of what remains, at least in name, its own Meeting.

Finally, this section closes with one aspect of the Faculty Meetings that warrants immediate attention, namely the practice of voting on motions with paper ballots. It is customary for FEC to distribute, collect, and tally paper ballots whenever called for (unless the motion on the Floor comes from FEC, in which case the duty of handling the ballots falls to another committee, such as CEPP or CAPT). In anticipating such measures, FEC reviews the list of those eligible to vote at Faculty Meetings (as established in Article I, Section C of the Meeting By-laws in Part Two of the *Faculty Handbook*) and usually publishes this information by email in advance as a reminder to the community. With the By-laws in mind, FEC members do their best to distribute one ballot, and only one ballot, to the voting members of the assembly.

From time to time FEC has wondered whether this long-standing system is sufficiently protective of the democratic process. Specifically, we have wondered whether ballots have sometimes found their way into the hands of those not eligible to vote and whether those individuals have indeed voted. On the one hand, FEC is inclined to presume that all members of the assembly conduct themselves in accordance with the Skidmore College Honor Code, and our presumption of good will tends to preclude further speculation to the contrary. On the other hand, when anecdotes reach the Chair of FEC that the recent vote on UWW did in fact contain ineligible ballots, as did last year's vote on the writing requirement, it would seem that FEC's presumptions need to be adjusted. Barring hard evidence, however, or a full-fledged investigation there is little to be done but to accept both outcomes and to move forward as if the votes were legitimate.

Before the UWW motion came to the Floor, FEC considered such protective measures as clearing the auditorium of all non-voting attendees or requiring voters to come to the front of the room, be cross-checked against a list of those eligible, and to deposit ballots in a designated box. Ultimately FEC decided against these measures since they are not in keeping with our traditions. With a new year of Meetings approaching, though, next year's FEC in consultation with the Administration should seek to implement new methods of paper balloting that are responsible, expedient, and reliable.

7. SERVICE PROJECT AND SERVICE SURVEY

Concerned about the proliferation of *ad hoc* committees, and about the challenges in running robust elections for our standing committees, FEC last year laid the foundation for its so-called "Service Project," whose goal was to shed light on the vagaries of faculty service at Skidmore. This year the goal was further refined to consider the question of whether service should be valued in ways other than it currently is. Toward that end, FEC crafted a survey with questions that asked respondents to reflect on the value of their service to the College. The Service Survey officially closed on May 30, 2008. Although it is too soon to publish the full results, preliminary review suggests that the Faculty are prepared to consider some form of compensation for service beyond consideration for tenure or promotion.

For instance, in response to Question 14 (“Do you believe there should be incentives to motivate faculty to serve on major committees?”), 65 of 89 respondents answered either “Neutral” (23 responses), “Agree” (27) or “Strongly Agree” (15). Of these 65 respondents, 40 were tenured faculty members, 10 were tenure-track faculty in their second three-year contract, and 9 were tenure-track faculty in their first three-year contract. In response to the follow-up Question 15 (“Which of the following incentives would encourage you to join an elected committee?”), 33 of 62 respondents answered “Added financial compensation toward next sabbatical,” while 15 answered “Added financial compensation toward travel to read or faculty development.”

The Survey itself garnered only 92 responses, about 37% of the roughly 250 “fec-eligible” faculty members invited to complete it. Nevertheless, the Survey will provide FEC with more information than it has ever had in the past — especially in the qualitative responses — about ways in which the Skidmore Faculty view service. FEC has drafted a proposal for augmenting individual sabbatical/travel funding in proportion to committee service; pending further review of the Service Survey, FEC will forward the proposal to the VPAA and the DOF for their consideration.

8. BUSINESS FOR AY 2008-2009

This section enumerates items of business, small and large, for next year’s FEC. This is not a binding list, as the new committee naturally has the latitude to craft its own agenda, but it is hoped that the items herein will be taken up.

- Placing FAB, RCTF, CIGU, and IPPC sub-committees within the cycle of elections.
- Devising new practices for paper balloting at Faculty Meetings.
- Considering the voting rights of Teaching and Research Associates, among others, at Faculty Meetings. NOTE: This is not an item discussed in this report, but one raised in response to the new Part Six of the *Faculty Handbook*. Since the policies and procedures therein apply to all faculty members, should not all categories of Faculty have the right to discuss and vote on them?
- Working with the VPAA, DOF, and others on new practices for Faculty Meetings overall.
- Revisiting the question of limiting paper copies of the *Faculty Handbook*.
- Continued involvement with the process of reconfiguring University Without Walls.
- Reviewing the Service Survey and publishing the results.

- Proposing to the VPAA and DOF a system for service compensation.
- Re-evaluation of Skidmore's committee system now that three have elapsed since the last major reorganization (AY 2004/5).

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The outgoing Chair thanks this year's FEC members, particularly John Brueggeman, the incoming Chair, for their frank and helpful deliberations on important and sometimes thorny governance issues. Thanks also to Sue Blair, Colleen Kelly, and Mary Ellen Kokoletsos for efficient and friendly administrative assistance.

Respectfully submitted,



Dan Curley
June 2, 2008

FEC 2007-2008 MEMBERSHIP

Lisa Aronson, Art and Art History (on leave fall 2007)
 Sue Bender, Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work, IPPC representative
 Una Bray, Mathematics and Computer Science (replacement for Aronson, Rubio)
 John Brueggemann, Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work
 Dan Curley, Classics, Chair
 Jennifer Delton, History (on leave 2007-2008)
 Mark Huibregtse, Mathematics and Computer Science, IPPC Vice-chair
 Mehmet Odekon, Economics, IPPC representative
 Viviana Rangil, Foreign Languages and Literatures (replacement for Delton)
 Paty Rubio, Foreign Languages and Literatures (fall 2007 only)
 Mason Stokes, English

FEC 2008-2009 MEMBERSHIP

Lisa Aronson, Art and Art History
 Sue Bender, Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work, IPPC representative
 John Brueggemann, Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work, Chair
 Jennifer Delton, History
 Pat Hilleren, Biology (replacement for Stokes)
 Dan Hurwitz, Mathematics and Computer Science
 Mehmet Odekon, Economics, IPPC representative
 Roy Rotheim, Economics, IPPC Vice-chair

Mason Stokes, English (on leave 2008-2009)
Natalie Taylor, Government