Faculty Executive Committee
2010-2011 Annual Report
Addendum

It has been pointed out to me that the FEC Annual Report might have been clearer on two important matters. In the spirit of 'maximum transparency' I offer the following Addendum to the FEC Annual Report.

First: I omitted to mention in my report that, at the end of the academic year, the FEC and the CEPP had a special meeting in addition to the Committee of Committees meeting to discuss collaboration between the two committees, and that those discussions were very fruitful and set the stage for a productive and collaborative year in 2011-2012.

Second. The end of page 3 of the report reads: "The manner in which these initiatives were pursued clearly violated the procedures set out in 'Part Two, Section II, subsection 16' of the *Faculty Handbook* for the establishment of such groups. … Although the 'Transition and Transformation' initiative was relatively far advanced by the time the FEC learned of it – an extensive and detailed presentation was given to the Board of Trustees in February -- and clearly linked to other initiatives even further advanced (such as the AVD grant), the Administration …" The report fails to mention that there was a communication between the Administration and the FEC bearing on transitions and transformations prior to FEC's observation of the presentation to the Board of Trustees titled "Transition and Transformation: Using Liberal Arts to Shape a Life." This may have given the incorrect impression that no gesture was made by the Administration to consult the FEC. There was a communication; the question is whether that communication may reasonably be construed as having adequately engaged the FEC and faculty governance regarding the substance of "Transition and Transformation." If it in any sense could be, the assertion should be retracted, if not it should stand.

In October, 2010, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs emailed the Chair of the FEC. The email and its reply are reproduced here in the form presently being circulated by the Office of the President:

Hi Corey,

Thanks for the heads up, and good luck with your project. I can't think of how this could be of concern to FEC, but I'll run it by the other members.

Thanks,

Reg

From: Corey Freeman-Gallant

Sent: Sat 10/9/2010 10:10 AM

To: Reginald Lilly

Subject: faculty participation in post-bacc group

Reg, As you may know, a group of administrators from across the college has been meeting regularly under Rochelle's leadership to address the broad issue of "transitions and transformations" across the arc of our students' undergraduate career with a particular focus on how we prepare students to identify and achieve post-baccalaureate goals. Much of our recent work has considered a variety of "high impact experiences"--such as student-faculty research, internships, service learning, and volunteer activities--that are already embedded in our curricular and co-curricular offerings (and that are often critical to post-bacc success) but that are not always visible to students and advisors. As the group seeks ways to leverage, organize, and expand upon these and other programs, we would like to include several faculty in our group who have shown leadership in this area. I have suggested Kim Marsella and David Howson because together they bring expertise across very different sectors of the curriculum and have pursued very different models of student engagement and advising. The group has reached out to others (for example: Charlene Grant, Karen Arciero, Crystal Moore, Bob Turner) and will continue to do so, but the regular participation of Kim and David would be welcomed. Both are interested in joining. If you or the FEC have any concerns, please let me know. Thanks, Corey NB: Our ad hoc group currently includes: Rochelle Calhoun, Muriel Poston, Paty Rubio, Mike Profita, Mike Sposili, Michael Casey, Dan Forbush, and me.

Corey R. Freeman-Gallant Associate Dean of the Faculty for Academic Advising

Professor of Biology

Skidmore College

Saratoga Springs, New York 12866 (518) 580-5720

[None of the members of the FEC felt that, at the time, further considerations were called for.]

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The *Faculty Handbook* states: “Members of the Administration may appoint, in consultation with the FEC, ad hoc committees as the need arises. A **written statement of the purpose, scope, and expected timetable** of an ad hoc committee will be presented to FEC, and reports will be distributed to FEC and to any appropriate faculty committees at the conclusion of the ad hoc committee's work.” (Emphasis added)

The President has concurred with the FEC's judgment that this email does not satisfy the requirements stipulated in the *Faculty Handbook*. However, the question remains whether this email could be construed as having substantively complied in bringing the matter of "Transition and Transformation" to the FEC. At the time, the FEC did not recognize this email as signaling an initiative of broad and substantive consequence for our curriculum.

This email, whose subject line is "faculty participation in post-bacc group," was understood at the time by the FEC to be a friendly 'FYI' from an administrator occupied with student advising, hoping to highlight what is "already embedded in our curricular and co-curricular offerings . . . but that are not always visible to our students and advisors." "High impact experience" and "transitions and transformations" seemed to be bits of unremarkable jargon. The group bore no title, and primarily composed of administrators, most non-academic, it seemed decidedly informal, and focused primarily on co- or post-curricular matters that properly fell under the Dean of Student Affairs, who was organizing this group. An advising pamphlet outlining internship opportunities seemed the sort of thing that likely might result from these conversations. The FEC had no interest in intruding on these conversations and indicated it saw no possible relevance for faculty governance.

The FEC perceives a disparity between the apparent nature, scope and import of the work indicated in this email – rather modest, focused on advising and student affairs – and that of the "Transition and Transformation" document that claimed to be advancing a major section of the Strategic Plan and that proposed, for example, the institutional goal that the College "Place special attention early in students' education to engage 100% of all students in one or more high-impact educational practices before their senior year," "high Impact experiences" being defined by this group. This and other broad, categorical statements about the liberal arts academic program Skidmore presently offers as being insufficient, in need of transformation, etc., are of such a dramatically larger scope and import that the FEC believes no reasonable person should be expected to infer from the ADAA's email the initiative that actually was undertaken.

Because the FEC holds that "Transition and Transformation" is not logically, existentially, or functionally implied by or adumbrated in the October email from the ADAA, the FEC finds that the latter was not and could not have been construed as proper collaboration with the FEC regarding the former.

To be clear: the FEC holds that the TTWG not only failed to fulfill the specific requirements laid out in the *Faculty Handbook* for establishing an *ad hoc* committee, but the Administration failed to convey even informally the substantive nature of the "Transition and Transformation" initiative in its scope and import. This judgment is expressed summarily in the FEC Annual Report as quoted above, albeit without the supporting documentation provided here. The Chair of FEC may have erred by not including a reference to this communication in reporting its judgment. The FEC nevertheless stands by its judgment regarding the failure of the Administration to properly conduct business in this instance.

More disturbing than this failure is the suggestion by the Administration 1) that this email exchange does, in fact, constitute sufficient engagement with faculty governance, and 2) if it did not, it was the FEC that erred in not making inquiries into the nature and scope of the activities of the group assembled

by the Dean of Student Affairs – that the FEC 'had a chance to know' what the TTWG was doing and failed to find out.

1) Successful collaborative governance as well as intellectual rigor requires, when one makes a proposal to some entity, a *commitment to inform,* a commitment to clearly and unambiguously state what one is proposing and, inasmuch as a proposal is in fact also an instrument of instruction, to anticipate important possible misunderstandings on the part of the addressee. If the Dean of Student Affairs, who is not an academic officer, assembles a working group almost exclusively of administrators, mostly non-academic administrators, a group ostensibly focused on post-baccalaureate student experience and advising, then it behooves the Administration to anticipate that the Faculty – in this case the FEC -- would expect that group *not* to substantively address or change educational or curricular policy. If the proposed group anticipated doing this, it behooved the Administration to disabuse the Faculty of its reasonably held impression. This did not happen.

If a *commitment to inform* is not held high, but instead is reduced to a minimum, then collaborative governance is endangered, for engagement with the Faculty will tend towards perfunctory communication. In a collaborative context, consultation is not mere notification, but a reciprocal 'working together' where each is given their due. Insofar as the Administration continues to hold that the October email constituted adequate collaborative consultation with the FEC for "Transition and Transformation," it presumes a standard of perfunctory notification rather than the substantive commitment-to-inform indispensable to collaborative governance.

2) In a similar vein and equally troubling is the suggestion by the Administration that, even if the October email did not in itself constitute consultation sufficient to duly constitute the TTWG, it did give the FEC a chance to make inquiries and to learn what this group was doing. Failure to have inquired and discovered, so the reasoning goes, is the fault of the FEC.

The FEC assumed at the time that the ADAA was seeking, all in good will, to fulfill his commitment to inform, and in retrospect the FEC continues to believe so, but the FEC nevertheless asserts that he failed to do an adequate job. That can happen. The commitment to inform and its fulfillment is something that successful collaborative government must be able to rely upon because faculty committees, and the FEC in particular, are not equipped to investigate whether the reports, proposals, communications, etc., that transpire in the course of College governance adequately represent the matters they address. The FEC saw nothing in the October email of relevance to faculty governance, it stated this perception, and the author of the email gave no indication therein that there might be some issue of possible concern to faculty governance that the FEC might consider. It seemed to the FEC an un-portentive, even anodyne, memo.

The Faculty's reliance on the Administration's commitment to inform must assume the good will of all parties. The Administration's suggestion that it did not substantively err and that the FEC erred in not making inquiries into what seemed routine administrative workings is apropos of an adversarial relationship between the Faculty and the Administration, but not of a collaborative system that presupposes good will and the commitment to inform. An insistence that the FEC should have

investigated the possible inadequacies of the October email, and that it should do likewise in the future, is tantamount to changing the premise of Skidmore's governance from a collaborative system to an adversarial system. The FEC is committed to the spirit and reality of a collaborative system of governance.

The FEC reaffirms its judgment about the TTWG and its "Transition and Transformation" initiative as stated in its Annual Report, and emphasizes again its concern about the vagueness into which "consult the Faculty" and "substantive policy" have been allowed to fall, and what this means for the College community and its governance.

Respectfully,

Reg Lilly, Chair
Faculty Executive Committee, 2010-2011