

Faculty-only Meeting Notes

11/15/2024

Opening remarks

FEC Chair welcomed everyone and thanked attendees for joining and acknowledged co-hosts, including FEC and representatives from IPPC, CC, and CEPP. Meeting objectives included sharing updates on operational efficiencies and addressing projected budget deficits, ranging from \$4.1M in FY 2026 to \$9.5M in FY 2029. The meeting will be divided into two parts: first, information-sharing; and, second, an open discussion.

1. Information Sharing

IPPC Vice Chair and B&F subcommittee member

- Enrollment Shortfall:
 - The college's target enrollment for the academic year was 705 students. However, actual enrollment fell short at 685 students.
 - The primary issue is a 20% decline in full-pay tuition students, which has significantly increased budgetary pressure.
- Increased Financial Aid Demand:
 - A higher proportion of students now require financial aid, particularly in the Northeast, where the majority of Skidmore's students are from.
 - Demographic challenges, rising living costs, and stagnant wages are contributing factors to this trend.
- Demographic Factors:
 - Long predicted decline in college-aged people has now materialized.
- Budget Adjustments Underway:
 - To address the shortfall, expenditure reductions are being implemented in the following areas:
 - Academic Affairs: Adjustments to department budgets.
 - Study Abroad Programs: Reevaluation of partnerships and cost structures.
 - Financial Affairs: Cuts to travel, professional development, supplies, contracted services, and subscriptions.
 - Campus-wide, departments have been asked to reduce their budgets, with the amount for each department reflecting their share of the total college budget.)

FEC Chair noted an 8% budget freeze and a reduction in the Helios payout rate, leading to annual savings of \$100K. Discussions around balancing department-specific needs with broader faculty collaboration to address resource constraints.

CEPP Chair and B&F subcommittee member reported OCSE has been working proactively to identify programs that offer similar curricular quality at a lower cost. There is a \$380K annual saving from provider changes in Florence, with an estimated \$500K

total savings by FY 2026. At the same time, increased student participation in study abroad since the pandemic is increasing our budget shortfall.

2. Faculty Discussion

FEC Chair opened the second part, focused on Faculty Discussion, with the goals of gathering input to help shared governance representatives advocate effectively and fostering a unified faculty voice for upcoming discussions.

- Faculty from Sociology questioned whether strategies beyond cost-cutting, like expanding endowment efforts, were being pursued.
- IPPC member acknowledged challenges in raising funds but stressed the need to explore untapped revenue opportunities.
- Faculty from Psychology suggested leveraging alumni contributions for specific departmental initiatives, although advancement offices have shown resistance in the past.
- Faculty from Anthropology emphasized the importance of transparency within Advancement, given recent turnover and instability. Greater collaboration between Advancement and faculty was encouraged to improve fundraising strategies.
- Faculty from Music raised questions about the representation of faculty in the consultant process. What is the role of these liaisons, and how were they selected? Is this arrangement the best way to ensure faculty have meaningful representation in this process?
- CEPP Chair noted that the meaning of liaison is not entirely clear, yet its defining contours are being worked out.
- Faculty from Econ noted that past consultant processes, like those for campus planning and healthcare, were transparent and included community feedback. The faculty member urged the college to maintain similar transparency to address current concerns.
- IPPC member remarked that working with the consultants is only in the initial stage of the process.
- Faculty from English and a member of the non-tenure-track negotiating committee highlighted excessive spending on external legal counsel for union negotiations, questioning its necessity amid budget constraints.
- Faculty from English stressed the importance of recruiting students from beyond the traditional areas, like the Northeast. The Midwest, namely Chicago, seem to be largely untapped.
- Faculty from Econ echoed the importance of tapping into new areas of the US. Faculty member mentioned current efforts to recruit students from Florida.
- Faculty from Arts Administration cautioned against significant cuts likely recommended by consultants and advocated for innovative revenue generation, such as using campus facilities for lifelong learning programs.

- Faculty from Environmental Studies and Sciences echoed the importance of revenue generation, and stressed improving Skidmore's marketing and storytelling to attract diverse students and philanthropic support.
- Faculty from Political Science recommended a review of budget assumptions, including projections about the "demographic cliff" and deferred maintenance expenditures. Highlighted the importance of continuing to reach out to private schools in LA and NYC. Stressed that revenue generation is difficult.
- Faculty from Social Work expressed concerns about balancing Skidmore's high tuition costs with its stated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals.
- IPPC B&F Subcommittee member responded to the Faculty from Social Work, stating that it is not a zero-sum game and that the school has a history of maintaining a commitment to recruiting both full-pay and non-full-pay student. The faculty member noted that the previous Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid favored over-enrollment. If current assumptions do not hold, what alternative assumptions could be considered? (referring to the Faculty from Political Science comment).
- Faculty from Econ discussed the assumption of having students paying full tuition, questioning how this would impact the budget, and also noted that if enrollment returns to 350 full-pay students, it would significantly change the financial outlook and reduce the need for budget cuts. This will become clearer in the spring when the budget can be revisited.
 - ***Note:** Following up on the questions regarding admissions raised in this meeting, a discussion took place during the December 6th IPPC meeting, where VP Admissions addressed the questions and concerns brought up in the faculty meeting. Further details about this conversation can be found in the IPPC minutes.*
- FEC Chair inquired about the subcommittee's working timetable, asking if more accurate projections would be available by December.
- IPPC Vice Chair and B&F subcommittee member responded that the projections remain short.
- IPPC member stated that in times of uncertainty, providing quick estimates might cause unnecessary panic.
- B&F subcommittee member recommended reviewing the college's audited financial statements to understand trade-offs, highlighting the rising tuition discount rate's impact on revenue. He emphasized examining structural deficit assumptions to develop a sustainable, balanced financial model. MB department faculty are considering organizing a workshop to teach participants how to read and interpret financial statements.
- Faculty from Library suggested enhancing Skidmore's financial transparency by analyzing publicly available tax forms, like the 990 filings, to better understand revenue and expenditure trends.

- Faculty from Social Work expressed concern about how consultants will recommend budget cuts, questioning whether they will consider disparities among faculty, particularly non-tenure-track staff, as blanket cuts could worsen existing inequities.
- Chair of CEPP noted, in response, that consultants will provide data and analysis, not recommendations on the academic side.
- Faculty from Physics stated that his analysis of 20 years of Skidmore's tax forms revealed that financial aid costs have grown significantly faster than other expenses, highlighting a key issue for long-term planning.
- Faculty from English asked about the faculty's non-negotiables in this process and emphasized the need to assert collective rights if consultant recommendations conflict with faculty priorities.
- Faculty from History inquired about historical data on how Skidmore has responded to past consultant recommendations, suggesting that such information could help inform current decision-making.
- FEC Chair emphasized that faculty conduct the core business of the college and should assert their rights. She highlighted the importance of unifying as one voice around shared career priorities, noting that faculty hold significant power in decision-making.
- Faculty of Psychology encouraged faculty to actively respond once consultant recommendations are made, as the administration will decide on the next steps. She emphasized the importance of closely reviewing and monitoring the consultant reports.
- Faculty from Econ noted that funds from over-enrollment were allocated to specific needs, but significant over-enrollment is unlikely going forward. He emphasized rising financial aid costs as a growing challenge and highlighted information sessions as valuable learning opportunities. While reducing faculty over five years is not ideal, it may be considered if revenue generation falls short.
- Faculty from Political Science expressed less concern about the immediate \$4 million shortfall but greater worry about the \$9 million deficit projected for the future. Key non-negotiables identified should include maintaining the 2-3 teaching load, sabbaticals, and existing faculty resources.
- CC Chair noted that any changes to teaching loads or course caps would require a faculty vote. Even if consultants project potential savings, the broader implications for pedagogy and departmental viability must be considered. For instance, increasing course caps could disproportionately impact smaller departments, limiting the breadth of academic offerings.
 - *Note: Following the meeting, further research by the CC Chair indicates the need for a correction: Any changes to teaching loads of course caps would require not a faculty vote but rather a joint CEPP-CC recommendation that the DoF would then roll out. In the past, while CEPP, CC, and the DoF office have collaborated on creating changes to course caps, the recommendations have come from CEPP in consultation with CC, and the DoF's role has been to implement those recommendations.*

- Faculty from Anthropology emphasized that small class sizes are a key factor in attracting students and must be maintained.
- Faculty from ESS stressed the importance of understanding financial reports to identify priorities and questioned whether Skidmore can maintain its priorities in this context.
- Faculty from Art inquired about the types of schools the consultants have worked with in the past, and what their track record has been.
- IPPC B&F Subcommittee member noted that similar questions about the consultants' background were met with the response that the information is confidential.
- Faculty from Political Science raised concern about the potential impacts of increasing course caps or teaching loads on Skidmore's identity as a liberal arts institution.
- Faculty from Sociology raised concerns about a prior consultant report from two years ago, which presented positive projections that did not align with subsequent outcomes, and inquired about what has changed since then and questioned the reliability of consultant assessments.
- Faculty from English inquired about the consultant fees, and subcommittee members indicated that the cost is estimated to be in the six-figure range.
- Faculty from Library asked about the timeline for the consultancy.
- IPPC member shared that focus groups will begin in January during the break.
- Vice Chair of Strategic Planning noted challenges in obtaining clear processes and structures for decision-making, emphasizing the need for transparency.

3. Closing Remarks

FEC Chair thanked participants for their engagement and encouraged ongoing communication with governance representatives to ensure faculty priorities are addressed.