

To: Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, and the Skidmore Community From:
Optimization Subcommittee of IPPC
Date: January 31, 2006
Re: Optimization Subcommittee Preliminary Report

On November 11, 2005, President Glotzbach charged a newly formed Optimization Task Force (actually functioning as a subcommittee of IPPC) to address "a series of strategic questions regarding the size of the population of residential students." This study was intended to "build upon the work of previous studies, especially the Optimization Report of November 2001." The subcommittee was asked to report back to IPPC in early February. We do so through this preliminary report, sent jointly to IPPC and the community. We shall discuss this report further on Friday, February 3 with IPPC and later in the day at the February Faculty Meeting, with time for an open discussion. Moreover, we are pledged to sponsoring one or two open forums for community members over the coming weeks so that there is clarity on this pivotal issue at this pivotal moment.

Membership of the current IPPC subcommittee includes: John Chaplin (Advancement); Cheryl Jacobs (Student Government Association); Ann Henderson (Registrar and Director of Institutional Research); Chuck Joseph (Vice President for Academic Affairs and co-chair of the subcommittee); Jim Kennelly (Management and Business); Barbara McDonough (Government); Paula Newberg (Dean of Special Programs); Muriel Poston (Dean of the Faculty); Denise Smith (Exercise Science and co-chair of IPPC); and Mike West (Vice President for Finance and Administration and co-chair of the subcommittee). Joe Stankovich (Registrar and Institutional Research Office) also joined the group regularly. While not a member of IPPC, Professor Kennelly was asked to join the optimization group as an additional and experienced faculty voice (Jim served on the original optimization group in 2001).

The subcommittee met twelve times between mid-November and late January. Several invited guests provided useful information and counsel on relevant issues. These colleagues included Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Mary Lou Bates (who visited us several times); Director of Student Aid and Family Finance, Bob Shorb; Dean of Student Affairs, Pat Oles; Director of the Office of International Programs, Cori Filson; Director of the First-Year Experience, Michael Arnush; Chair of the Faculty Executive Committee, Tim Bums; Chair of the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning, Matthew Hockenos; and Molly Appel, Student Government Association. The subcommittee also gained greatly from commentary offered at an open forum on December 15, and has taken this into consideration during its deliberations.

We suggest that you consult the Optimization Task Force web site posted on the College's Institutional Research page at:
http://www.skidmore.edu/registrar/ir/campus-only/dept_assistance/dept_assistance.htm where various data and reports are posted that should prove useful in understanding the compass of the subcommittee's discussions. With the help of Joe Stankovich, Mike Hall,

and Mike West, we have compiled a Frequently Asked Questions list that offers answers to many of the fundamental questions folks have been asking. This too may be accessed through the web site mentioned above. We have also circulated an e-mail address, ippcopt-list@skidmore.edu, to which several community members have sent questions and suggestions. You are encouraged to continue sending comments to this list.

The President recommended that the subcommittee address several questions relating to enrollment. Our group focused on three specific targets:

- (1) Reduce our current residential student population to our originally budgeted target of 2,150 students, recognizing that we have been over-enrolled for several years now relative to enrollment expectations.
- (2) Maintain our current student population at 2,280.
- (3) Increase our student population over the current enrollment by 100, bringing us to approximately 2,380 students.

In exploring these three models, the subcommittee considered several factors, including our enrollment history and the resulting challenges of accepting more students than targeted without providing the commensurate services required to serve our community. More specifically, these factors include: access and financial aid, gender balance, diversity, the expanding growth of our largest majors, and the changing demographics over the next several years; the cultivation of our rising academic quality and expectations of excellence as they relate to instructional issues, mentoring, infrastructure and the academic support needed to provide a contemporary, robust educational experience in accord with the goals of the *Strategic Plan*; selectivity, and what we must continue to do in remaining competitive with our peer institutions; the emerging need to globalize the Skidmore experience for our students and how study abroad, as one example, will factor into enrollment in the coming years (and how we must be vigilant in balancing on-campus enrollment over the fall and spring terms); issues of student life including the quality of residential life, adequate counseling, health and fitness opportunities, and more generally, adequate services and facilities

Having examined these key issues in some depth, the subcommittee is planning to recommend that IPPC and the community focus its energy on addressing and maintaining our current enrollment of 2,280 students. We would anticipate recommending this adoption as a targeted enrollment for the foreseeable future for many reasons. Since we now have sufficient experience in recognizing the needs of a population this size, we are hardly working in the dark. It is therefore a matter of planning and budgeting sufficiently to meet the needs we know exist. We have, historically, been unable to plan as effectively as we would like in projecting and meeting the operating budget needs in our community. Indeed, it would have been fiscally irresponsible to annualize a large chunk of incoming revenue that could not be depended upon from year to year. Stabilizing our student population at this level (recognizing that enrollment management is as much of an art as a science) presents us with an opportunity currently unavailable—that is, we can move the tuition generated by the 130 students above our current budgeted net fiscal enrollment of 2150 directly and immediately into our annual operating budget. Financial models

suggest that as much as an additional \$2.8 million would become available to the operating budget. This strikes us as beneficial to our students in meeting their needs; advantageous to our support staff and faculty as well, since more dollars will be available to address these needs without further stretching such precious human resources as our time; and by creating the opportunity to advance the goals of our strategic plan more expeditiously than would otherwise be possible (remembering that Campaign dollars are out there, but often only available at some point in the future). Finally, the ambitious goals of the *Strategic Plan* include as one priority, not only sufficient time for all of us to do our best work in offering the experiences we want for our students, but also by providing a competitive compensation package to which the College is pledged.

A little background on how we have reached our current enrollment and what the budgetary consequences are may be useful as a context. Over the past 5 years (from FY2001 to 2005) our actual net fiscal enrollment (NFE) has grown from 2101 to 2219 students, with an additional increment projected for FY 2006 to 2280. The recent increase in student enrollment has occurred for several reasons: we have been more successful in retaining students, we have experienced an increased yield in the past two years, and we have experienced a decrease in summer melt. Further, the institution of the First Year London program was an early attempt (2001-02) to manage increased enrollment opportunities. Improved retention, a higher yield rate, and lower summer melt are all positive factors for Skidmore and in fact reflect institutional goals that have been pursued vigorously in the past few years. Although we hoped to make gains in these areas, we did not have an adequate plan in place to accommodate and support (academically and otherwise) an increase in our enrollments as these goals were realized much sooner than projected (and we did not change the budgeted NFE in anticipation of achieving these goals).

Over the past 5 years our budgeted NFE (the NFE we plan to achieve and budget to accommodate) grew from 2087 to 2150. However, during the last two years there has been virtually no change in the number of budgeted students (2149 in '04, 2149 in '05, and 2150 in '06) despite the increase in actual NFE enrollment (2101 in '01 to 2219 in '05). Given that approximately 80% of our operating budget is derived from tuition and student fees, this disparity between the number of students enrolled and number of students recognized in the budget means that a substantial amount of tuition-revenue cannot be used in the operating budget (this is frequently referred to as the money from over enrollment that is below the line in the budget).

From 2001 to 2005 the average fall class size increased from 15.8 students to 17.1 students while in the spring of each year the average enrollments ranged from 15.1 to 16.5 students per class. While these increases in enrollments are quite modest it is important to keep in mind that the burden of additional students in a given class varies considerably. While we know that the percentage of seats occupied in the 100 to 200 level sections has been relatively constant (78%-80%), this high level of seats occupied presents a challenge in terms of students being able to build a schedule. Further, we also know that in some heavily enrolled departments students have had particular trouble registering for required or desired courses. During the same time period, the faculty to

student ratio has remained approximately the same at 11 to 1. Changes in academic program and student expectations have placed increased responsibility on faculty and staff, e.g. FYE, mentoring, engagement in collaborative research, scholarly productivity, and other aspects of the strategic plan. All of these have and will increase the academic quality of our programs and should be supported by the operating budget.

As we undertook our work, the optimization task force has been guided by a few underlying questions: how do we make sure that we are providing a quality educational experience for our students; how can we maintain or improve our selectivity for incoming students; what resources are needed to support the students we currently have, and how would these resources need to be adjusted if we had fewer or more students; how do we appropriately plan our enrollments and project our budget in ways that are aligned with the mission of the college and our strategic plan?

In formulating our recommendation, the subcommittee examined a number of issues as we attempted to project the consequences of recommending to IPPC for its consideration one of the three enrollment models outlined earlier. The subcommittee does not recommend returning to our previous target of 2,150 students since this would lead to several years of retrenchment at a moment where the College is doing well and moving forward on many fronts, including quantity of applications, admissions, gains in retention, and improving quality of student academic accomplishment. Moreover, the loss of revenue accruing from such a cut back would not only preclude us from meeting our critical needs but would also drastically stall the implementation of a strategic plan that has been enthusiastically endorsed by our community. The subcommittee also briefly considered the possibility of adding 100 students beyond our current enrollment of 2,275. And while the increased revenue from such an addition would surely help us to make even greater strides in realizing the goals we have outlined as a community, it would come with other costs-as yet undetermined costs that we believe must be interrogated more deliberately with greater input from the community. The subcommittee does agree that the possibility of eventually increasing our enrollment warrants careful study in the coming years and with significant consultation throughout the community. We intend to discuss with IPPC how such a study might be structured; but for now at least, we do not recommend growth beyond our current enrollment. . Moreover, the subcommittee recommends reserving dollars as a contingency fund to help contain unintended enrollment growth while allowing programs and services to continue moving forward even if student enrollment drops in one year or another. We could thus avert compromising selectivity by needing to accept less than qualified students or make midyear cuts to balance the budget for enrollment shortfalls simply to meet an annual budgeted target.

Please bear in mind that the Optimization Subcommittee is charged with presenting its report and recommendations to IPPC, which represents the various constituencies of our community. That said, if we were to adopt the current enrollment as our targeted enrollment, thus making available considerable additional revenue, choices would then need to be made as to where and how those dollars would be invested. Needless to say,

there are many competing needs. Providing the academic support needed to deliver programs to our students is surely a priority, and has already been discussed in a very preliminary way.

The subcommittee deliberated a number of important questions:

(1) What staffing needs are currently going unmet in providing academic services for our 2280 students? But such needs must be measured against other pressing costs. For example, what amount of financial aid might be needed to insure access to a Skidmore education among those students wishing to attend the College from the more than 6,000 applications we have been receiving over the last few years?

(2) We also recognize that we have a large constituency of non-residential students and learners whose participation in our academic programs throughout the entire calendar year forms an integral part of our curricular and co-curricular commitments. Accordingly, how can we identify the wherewithal to allow members of the faculty and staff to contribute fully to these academic opportunities as we rethink the overall scope of academic affairs on this campus? How can we provide the time for faculty and staff to take on more independent study supervision, and engage more regularly in collaborative projects with our students? And similarly, how should we provide the time needed for faculty and staff to make informed choices about participating in the shared governance structure so basic to our culture?

(3) What are the needs for student life in making sure that our students can grow and thrive in and beyond the classroom? Do we have adequate staffing in counseling services; SGA sponsored clubs, recreational programs, and performance spaces? What about information technology needs, the addition of sufficient academic classrooms and social spaces, and our increasing recognition that more time is needed to foster mentoring in a serious and dedicated way? And finally, as mentioned earlier, what monies might be available, immediately, to improve compensation for the entire community?

This seemingly inexhaustible list of needs is a daunting one. Even with the influx of significantly more dollars generated by tuition revenue into our annual operating budget, it is clear that we cannot do everything. But to do nothing would, we believe, be a mistake. We need to make informed choices as to how the funds would be distributed. The subcommittee fully recognizes that a tension exists between current unmet needs and the important priorities of the *Strategic Plan*. By allowing this revenue (remembering that we currently have access to these dollars without adding more students but cannot tap the revenue in projecting our planning cycle) to be inserted into the operating budget, we believe we can make considerable progress in accomplishing the many goals we wish to attain.

Let us reiterate that we do not recommend an increase in our residential student population above the number currently being accommodated. But by establishing the current enrollment of 2,280 as a target, we can depend upon the tuition revenue generated as a steady stream, thus releasing those dollars to better serve our students and the

Skidmore community. In so doing, we believe that Goal. IV of the *Strategic Plan - Independence and Resources* ("We will preserve Skidmore's independence by developing the resources required to realize our aspirations") is well served.

The Optimization Subcommittee is confident that we as a community have the resources required to provide our students with an even better experience than we can currently offer. We are also confident that IPPC will represent the College wisely in working through the challenging choices that are ahead. Finally, we look forward to our discussion with IPPC Friday morning, and later in the day at the February Faculty Meeting.

Thank you.