

**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
November 5, 2010**

PRESENT: Acting President Susan Kress, Chair; Hugh Foley, Vice Chair; Rochelle Calhoun, Michael Casey, Winston Grady-Willis, Ann Henderson, Mark Huibregtse, Bob Turner, Jeff Segrave, Justin Sipher, Michael West, Alexandra Stark, Jonathan Zeidan, Adrienne Zuerner, Anne Petruzzelli, Denise Smith, and Barbara Krause (Secretary).

ABSENT: Mary Lou Bates, Muriel Poston, and Gail Cummings-Danson.

1. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the October 22, 2010 meeting were approved as distributed.

2. NSSE Report

College Registrar and Director of Institutional Research Ann Henderson presented data from the 2010 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). She noted that she considers this report to be a preliminary draft and asks that further questions or requests for information be directed to her.

By way of background, Ms. Henderson reported that the NSSE survey has been administered three times: in 2003, 2007, and 2010. The 2007 survey occurred when the Class of 2010 students were in their first year; although it is not possible to tell whether the students who responded in 2010 also responded in 2007, the groups at least shared some common experiences. The 2010 response rate of Skidmore students was a very respectable 50%. Approximately 70% of the respondents were female; 74% of the first year and 71% of the senior year students in 2010 self-reported as white (non-Hispanic). Ms. Henderson has reviewed the survey data based on the constructs most consistent with our major institutional initiatives:

- Engagement
- Diversity
- High Impact Practices
- Civic engagement
- Preparing for life after Skidmore
- Student learning goals (a separate presentation)

Ms. Henderson then reviewed the quantitative survey results in each of these first five categories. In each case, she displayed the results for each year's administration (2003, 2007, and 2010) for the first-year respondents and the senior-year respondents. Her presentation also showed the difference between the 2003 and 2007 administration, and then the difference between the 2007 to 2010 administration. Finally, her presentation displayed the comparable results for our peers in 2010 and the differential between Skidmore and its peers for 2010. She identified items within each category that were particularly noteworthy.

Because these data are both preliminary and voluminous, these minutes will not attempt to summarize Ms. Henderson's presentation. In response to the data, however, IPPC members offered the following questions and comments:

- In response to a question asking Ms. Henderson whether there were aspects of the analysis that concerned her more than others, she noted that the College has made progress in certain areas that we have targeted (e.g., the FYE program for student engagement), but noted that we still have work to do across all the categories. The responses confirm a sentiment identified last year at on- and off-campus Town Hall Meetings – namely, that it will be important for the College to do better in preparing our students for their transitions to life after Skidmore.
- The Advancement Office, working with the Faculty Assessment Coordinator, is preparing to administer an alumni survey. That survey should consider whether any of the NSSE questions (or variations thereof) should be asked of alumni. It was noted, however, that alumni responding some number of years after graduation to certain questions (e.g., how well Skidmore prepared them for life after college) might answer very differently than they would in the spring of their senior years.
- The survey indicates that at best, only about 50% of students talk with a faculty member regarding career plans. This raised a question about how advisors can best assist their students in preparing for life after graduation.
- One member expressed the opinion that the NSSE data are not helpful, because they do not tell us anything in particular about what Skidmore is doing well or not well. In other words, we cannot map responses to any specific initiatives or outcomes with our students. He asked whether Skidmore should do its own version of NSSE. Ms. Henderson acknowledged that there are some limitations to the data, although in the future, NSSE will allow members to survey entire cohorts in subsequent administrations.
- Another member stated that the numbers tell us something, even though there are aspects of the responses that we cannot control (e.g., whether respondents are more likely to be satisfied students who wish to report good things or less satisfied students inclined to report negatively).
- A member expressed surprise at the low number of students reporting use of computing and technology – something that was quite different from our peers. He suggested that this is an area about which we might wish to learn more.
- A member indicated that NSSE has greater resonance for him now than in the past, in part because the NSSE results are consistent with responses to the Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) survey and with our own internal exit interviews with students of color.

- In response to a question, Ms. Henderson indicated that, using the data set provided by NSEE, IR would like to explore whether the data could be disaggregated by gender and ethnicity and what different perspectives are suggested.
- A member noted that in various areas including several aspects of diversity and “transitions,” our peers and Skidmore are doing poorly. To get better in those areas, she suggested, it might be important for us to look outside of our own “sector” to see what other types of organizations are doing to get the results to which we aspire. What programs do they offer and what habits do they cultivate?
- A member asked whether the NSSE questions really get at the information we most want to learn. Ms. Henderson responded that the NSSE questions map reasonably well to Skidmore’s Student Learning Goals; she also noted that we could ask different questions, but we would then lose the ability to see where we stand in comparison to our peers. She expressed the view that although some of the NSSE questions are problematic, they do generally ask about behaviors rather than simply about opinions.
- It was noted that the NSSE data could provide some insights that will be relevant to the Optimization work. For example, the results suggests that the College needs to offer more High Impact Experiences, what faculty resources (including time) will be required to offer that “program”?
- Ms. Henderson stated that one critique of colleges and universities is that they survey and collect the data but do nothing with it. At some point, it is important for us to look at the data we have and ask what we will do with it.

In conclusion, Acting President Kress suggested that NSSE provides broad-stroke views in certain areas but that some data are not truly useful without probing more deeply with appropriate follow-up questions. The data may suggest, however, areas in which we could explore “best practices of our peers.

Members joined Acting President Kress in expressing appreciation to Ms. Henderson and her staff for their work on administering the survey and analyzing the responses. A special thanks is extended to Lisa Christenson who helped prepare the presentation.

3. Political Rally Requests and Political Expression/Campus Use Policies

Acting President Kress asked Barbara Krause, Executive Director for the Office of the President, to update IPPC on a request that had been made to hold a political rally on campus the day before the November national election. Ms. Krause reported that representatives from Congressman Scott Murphy’s campaign had contacted the President’s Office to request that the College host a political rally at which former President Bill Clinton would endorse Mr. Murphy. After consultation with the President and several Cabinet members, and based on existing College policies as communicated in 2008 and 2010, Ms. Krause had advised the Murphy campaign that the College was not able to accommodate the request.

Shortly after that response was communicated, a number of students approached various administrators. They reported that the Murphy campaign had contacted them urging the students to sponsor the rally, and the students asked if student-sponsorship of the rally would alter the College's answer. At about this time, the College received a separate request from the Andrew Cuomo campaign asking if they could hold a "get out the vote" rally on campus on the Saturday before the election. At this point, the entire Cabinet met to consider these requests.

Acting President Kress explained that after considerable discussion, the President and Cabinet concluded that existing College policies do not permit political rallies to be held on campus, even if sponsored by students. In addition to College policies, questions also were raised about whether hosting two rallies for Democratic candidates so close to the election might be perceived as the College's endorsing certain candidates, which could jeopardize Skidmore's non-for-profit status.

While the Cabinet declined the request to hold the political rally, the College did communicate to the Congressman's campaign that we would be happy to host former President Clinton and Mr. Murphy if the event were educational in nature, focused on responsible citizenship, the importance of voting, and similar non-partisan themes. After considering this opportunity, the Murphy campaign decided that it could not accept that framework and, accordingly, they sought another venue in Saratoga Springs for their rally.

Acting President Kress reported that in addition to these questions, concerns were raised in the days preceding the election about various postings to the College's "everyone" e-mail list. Inquiries included whether the content of certain messages constituted "political expression" and whether such use was permitted as "College-related business."

In light of all of these questions, Cabinet has decided that it would be appropriate to review current College policies and to consider whether any revisions should be recommended. Acting President Kress indicated that a proposal to conduct such a review will be brought to IPPC at the next meeting.

Comments by IPPC members included the following:

- If IPPC is to consider this matter, it will be important for members to review the current policies and to understand the legal parameters related to those policies.
- Another member indicated that he wished to know the provenance and authorship of the current policies. Ms. Krause explained that the policies were communicated by e-mail messages to all faculty (by the Dean of the Faculty) and staff (by the Director of Human Resources) in 2008 and 2010, and that the messages sent in 2008 were prepared on the advice of attorneys who were advising the College with respect to its lobbyist-registration obligations.
- A member asked what obligation the College might have, if it agreed to host political rallies, to host them across the spectrum of political affiliations; and whether the College could face backlash from a candidate who was not allowed to speak. Vice President for Finance and Administration Mike West noted that elected representatives vote on matters

of importance to the College, including student financial aid (state and federal) and even things such as building permits (local level). Vice President for Advancement Michael Casey agreed that there is a political dimension to these matters but emphasized that Cabinet's decision was based on the College's current policies and the requirement that the College remain impartial with regard to political candidates.

- A member expressed support for reviewing the policies and urged that the educational experience of students be at the forefront in those deliberations.
- Acting President Kress expressed appreciation for the respectful and responsible way in which students had responded to the administration's decision. SGA President Alexandra Start '11 stated that while students ultimately understood the decision, they are eager to participate in the proposed review. She also expressed disappointment that students had not been notified of the Murphy campaign's request and given an opportunity to engage earlier in the discussion of whether the event request could be accommodated.

4. Standards of Business Conduct Policy Update

Ms. Krause provided an update on from the Standards of Business Conduct Policy Working Group. (See IPPC Minutes from April 23, 2010 for discussion and charge to group.) The group is pleased with its progress on this policy, but the work is taking longer than the timeframe suggested last spring. The group is working toward having a draft to IPPC in December or January.

Vice Chair Foley reported that he has advised the Faculty Executive Committee of the status of this work.

5. Other

Dean of Student Affairs Rochelle Calhoun provided the following updates:

- The Student Affairs Subcommittee will be forwarding a proposal from the Pride Alliance regarding gender-neutral bathrooms.
- The new Sexual Misconduct Policy has been distributed and is in effect.
- The Bias Response Group (BRG) has received reports of bias incidents with increasing frequency and targeting of specific offices and groups. The BRG is planning educational outreach and programming to address these incidents.

Minutes prepared by Barbara Krause. Please notify of any changes.