

INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
October 23, 2020

PRESENT: Cerri Banks; Mary Lou Bates; Joerg Bibow, Vice Chair; Rachael Borthwick '21; Marta Brunner; Marc C. Conner, Chair; Michelle Hubbs; Carolyn Lundy; Martin Mbugua; Donna Ng; Michael Orr; Joe Porter; Levi Rogers; Mark Rye; Casey Schofield; Kurt Smemo; Joseph Stankovich; Dwane Sterling; Amy Tweedy; Peter von Allmen; and Joshua C. Woodfork.

ABSENT: None.

GUESTS: IPPC Healthcare Working Group: Co-Chair Timothy Harper, Lisa Hobbs, Lisa Tuttle, Laura Goodwin; and Grace Burton.

The meeting was held via Zoom and called to order at 10:32 a.m. by Chair President Conner.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes from the September 18, 2020 meeting and the October 2, 2020 meeting.

A request for a clarifying word correction was made to the draft meeting minutes of October 2, 2020. With no other proposed changes, the **minutes from the September 18, 2020 meeting and the October 2, 2020 meeting were unanimously approved.**

2. President's Report

President Conner provided an update on our tremendous progress to date as we approach the final stretch of the fall semester. With approximately 2250 students on campus or in the vicinity, and performing over 26,000 COVID-19 tests, only seven positive cases have been reported with three of the seven being employee cases. Our key concerns continue to be the wellness and engagement of our community. The President shared that other New York schools have done comparably well, but none as well as Skidmore. He emphasized the amazing work that is being done in facilities, student affairs, academic affairs, and across our community to keep everyone safe. With regard to our financial status, the President commented that as of right now we continue to be cautiously optimistic both in the short and long term.

The President stated that he is hearing from students that they continue to be extremely busy, but, at the same time, they are missing the social interactions that would typically be happening during the fall semester. President Conner thanked members of the Student Affairs division for their incredible work to date with student programming and encouraged everyone to offer ideas on how we can continue to engage as a community.

He spoke to the status of the Racial Justice Initiative and stated that searches are underway for two key positions in diversity leadership—the director of the Office of Student Diversity Programs and the director of The Center/Deputy Chief Diversity Officer. These positions will strengthen our bandwidth with programming and student support. The work of the Board of Trustees' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEI) is fully underway, having recently met during the October Board meetings. The *In It 5* programming during the week of October 5 covered topics such as bias, antiracism, and Black Lives Matter, providing a laser focus on

current DEI concerns at Skidmore. The *In It 5* programming and other numerous speakers, readings, and events on campus have been extremely thoughtful and intentional. The President noted that we will continue ongoing conversations about bias and insensitivity matters so that we challenge ourselves to support each other and improve upon the work that we are doing.

The President provided an update regarding Skidmore's *Strategic Plan: Creating Pathways to Excellence: the Plan for Skidmore College 2015-2025*. We are at the midpoint of the ten-year plan. He expressed his gratitude for stepping into his role as President and having this robust plan in place. He stated that we do not need to depart from the plan—but that our focus this year needs to be a little more intense. He referenced several focused goals for the year:

- successful execution of the 2021 academic year with emphasize on the health and safety of the community, our robust liberal arts education, our fiscal strength;
- successful completion of all 12 goals of the Racial Justice Initiative;
- successful fundraising, including the hiring of a new Vice President of Advancement, completing the *Creating Our Future: The Campaign for Skidmore*, which has broken its fundraising goal, and ensuring that the Skidmore Fund is moving toward its goal for this fiscal year—it is tracking ahead of this time last year;
- and formulating and beginning achievement on the plan to reduce the size of the faculty and the staff by 10%.

President Conner hopes to share more insight on these points at the next IPPC meeting and then shortly thereafter with the wider community.

President Conner sought feedback on any concerns that are being heard on campus regarding the upcoming election. Student Government Association (SGA) President Rachael Borthwick '21 replied that many students have already voted by absentee ballot. SGA Vice President for Financial Affairs Melanie Nolan '23 added that a lot of effort by various student groups have been to simply encourage students to get out and vote and have conversations regarding the difference between free speech and hate speech. President Conner stated that they are working to help communicate and clarify those differences to the Skidmore community and have set up an [Election Preparation website](#). IPPC member and Subcommittee on Responsible Citizenship (SRC) Co-Chair Michelle Hubbs indicated that there are specific rules regarding polling stations located on college campuses in New York State, as well as health safety protocols. President Conner expressed hope for robust and civic participation with the election and explained that the College has been in communication with Campus Safety, the Saratoga Springs Police Department, and election officials to prepare for all eventualities.

3. IPPC Healthcare Working Group Members to Receive Amended Charge

Members of the IPPC Healthcare Working Group (HWC) joined IPPC to review and reaffirm the IPPC Healthcare Working Group Charge, which was first approved by IPPC on March 8, 2019 and amended by IPPC on October 2, 2020—during IPPC's last meeting. President Conner stated that he is looking forward to engaging with the group as we move forward to do this important and sensitive work. He thanked the group for all of the hard work completed thus far, including offering insightful analysis as well as a high-level of dedication and commitment to the healthcare review process. Due to COVID-19, the work of the group was paused in March 2020. The HWG recently met and is now moving forward with a plan for community engagement.

IPPC members inquired if the HWG would be issuing new recommendations in light of healthcare costs being affected by the pandemic. Co-Chair Donna Ng responded that for now the initial recommendations will stand. She added that Skidmore's costs are currently considered an "outlier," meaning our growth in costs is outside of the norm because of many factors. HWG member Grace Burton reminded IPPC that there are various sets of administrative constraints in which the group must work within and abide by including the size of our population and how many employees utilize this benefit. Co-Chair Ng commented that the HWG plans to gather input from the community over the Spring semester and will then come back and present the data and a set of recommendations to IPPC and the President's Cabinet by April 2021. Co-Chair Harper added that the group will provide updates to IPPC as the work progresses. IPPC Vice Chair Bibow thanked the HWG for all of their significant work.

4. Debt Update

Vice President for Finance and Administration and Treasurer Donna Ng provided an update on the College's debt. Beginning in February 2020, VP Ng brought to IPPC a proposed debt plan for review. The plan sought to take on additional debt in order to maximize our financial flexibility and to refinance existing debt at current lower interest rates. The plan was approved by Board of Trustees at its May 2020 meeting. Subsequently, the administration received authorization from the Board to take on additional debt. With tax-exempt interest rates at all-time historic ten-year lows, it was proposed that the \$30M in unrestricted cash approved in February 2019 for the Center for Integrated Sciences (CIS) be maintained in cash and new debt be issued in this amount to fund CIS. The proposal would also allow the College to refinance \$26.3M in Series 2011A bonds that were issued in 2011 at an interest rate of 5% at current historic low rates. The plan updates were reviewed at a recent IPPC Subcommittee on Budget and Finance meeting. Bonds were issued at 2.47% increasing our total debt from \$84M to \$104M. The bonds closed on October 1. We will be evaluating our cash amounts as we move forward. Our debt service is flat in terms of the operating budget. VP Ng commented that the College currently has an A1 stable outlook rating from Moody's and it was unchanged with this debt issuance. IPPC Vice Chair Bibow thanked VP Ng for the update and work that was been done. An IPPC member stated that they are grateful that the College's credit rating remains very strong despite the taking on of additional debt and the financial uncertainties brought on by the pandemic. VP Ng commented that she would be happy to share the full report from Moody's with any interested IPPC members.

5. Winter/Spring/Summer Planning

Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs Cerri Banks stated that the student move out date for the end of the fall semester is Friday, November 20 as the final weeks of the semester will involve remote learning. There have been approximately 70 requests for move out extensions. The goal is to have students vacated from on campus housing by the Thanksgiving holiday. There will be some students on campus over the winter break. Approval to stay over the winter break is by application only. The staff has received approximately 74 applications. The Student Affairs staff is reviewing and vetting each application. Dean Banks asked to please refer any students with housing questions to Residential Life Office.

Dean Banks reported that the Covid-19 testing plan for the winter break is being determined. Testing will continue over the break, but most likely at a lesser rate. The Broad Institute will

provide the testing for the winter break and spring semester. She stated that supervisors should be planning for any essential workers in their respective departments who need to be on campus over the winter break. Human Resources will be sending out an email to supervisors shortly requesting this information. These employees will then be scheduled for testing. IPPC members asked what the testing will look like in the spring. Dean Banks replied that most likely we will follow the same testing protocols that were used in the fall semester, meaning that we will test once per week, with the possibility of an increase to the testing rate at the start of the spring semester. She stated that testing protocols for the spring semester have not yet been finalized.

Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs Michael Orr stated that the spring 2021 academic calendar has been set and that we are starting classes a week later than originally planned with no scheduled spring break. The first day of classes is Tuesday, February 2, 2021. The percentage of online, hybrid, and in-person instruction is estimated to remain the same as the fall semester with a 50/50 split. We will not have the classroom tents for the spring semester. However, with the grateful assistance of College Librarian Marta Brunner in securing additional library classroom space, Dean Orr reported that it is projected that we will have all the available classroom space that is needed. Dean Orr stated that the governance for academic policies for the spring semester is being reviewed, including the attendance policy and academic standing policy among others. He stated that some off-campus study policies have recently been approved for the spring semester. We are currently engaged in compliance with accrediting agencies. Our application to the Middle States Commission is presently being finalized. This application is vital to the continuation of our array of online courses. He commented that feedback from academic departments on how the fall semester has progressed is being sought. SGA President Borthwick asked that conversations regarding course loads for students occur. Dean Orr stated that there has not been a college-wide discussion regarding course loads, but that he will add this topic to the discussion to the upcoming Department Chairs and Program Directors meeting. He added that they are aware of the challenges that some students are facing with online learning.

An IPPC member asked at what point we can begin to make commitments for next year to non-tenure track faculty. Dean Orr replied that Cabinet is currently working on this issue. He anticipates this will happen at the end of this calendar year or at the beginning of next semester.

VP Ng provided a budget update. She stated that we are close to the end of the planning process for the spring semester. Net tuition revenue is a key driver as well as the housing numbers in terms of how many students are staying on campus. These figures are still waiting to be determined. We also have to estimate incremental expenses. There are two large expenses that we need the detail on—the testing costs and student hotel housing figures. VP Ng commented that the \$2.5M contingency fund will be used to offset any losses incurred in any lost net tuition revenue and any increases in incremental expenses. She stated that study abroad numbers also still need to be determined for the spring. All numbers are being tracked very closely. When the preliminary figures are determined, they will be shared with IPPC along with the resulting budget impact.

VP Ng noted that they are beginning the budget process for FY '22. These projections are based on assumptions of class size, financial aid amounts, and testing among many other variables. Financial modeling for the short term, long term and the five-year plan is also being worked on. Vice Chair Bibow asked the student committee members if they had any ideas or thoughts on the Winter and Spring planning. SGA President Borthwick reported that the SGA Executive Committee is debating continuing student fundraising that started in March 2020 in response to students struggling with the complexities brought about by the pandemic. SGA VP Nolan noted appreciation that students who have been granted permission to remain on campus during remote learning and over winter break will have resources to do so. SGA VP Nolan also expressed concern over the emotional labor involved with fundraising and the distribution of funds related to the pandemic and student support. Dean Banks noted that students had wanted to operate autonomously in this regard during the spring and welcomed conversation with Student Affairs on this front. She added that efforts surrounding any food insecurities for those students staying on campus over the break need to be continued.

6. Call for Agenda Items

No new agenda items were raised.

7. Other Business

Dean Banks reminded IPPC of the upcoming programming for this year's Skidmore Speaks entitled, *Social Media at Skidmore and Beyond: What You Need to Know Before You Post*. She presented an overview of the events which are open to the entire Skidmore community and that will take place October 26-30. She encouraged everyone to [visit the Skidmore Speaks webpage](#) and to participate. IPPC Vice Chair Bibow thanked Dean Banks for the presentation and encouraged IPPC members to attend this timely and important programming.

Meeting adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Please inform the President's Office of any changes to these minutes.