

**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 17, 2023**

**Present:** K. Aurelia Ball, Mary Lou Bates, Adrian Bautista, Marc Conner, Jacqueline Conrad, Xiaoshuo Hou, Michelle Hubbs, Charles Ingram, Nathaniel Lowell '24, Michael T. Orr, Lori Parks, Beth Ann Post, Tarah Rowse, Kurt Smemo, Joseph Stankovich, Dwane Sterling, Smriti Tiwari, Amy Tweedy, Claire Wang '23, Leigh Wilton, Joshua Woodfork, Carey Anne Zucca.

**Absent:** Peter von Allmen.

**Guest:** Jennifer Donnelly from Segal Consulting via Zoom.

**The meeting was called to order at 10:32 by Chair President Conner.**

**1. Admissions Update**

VP and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Mary Lou Bates reported on the Class of 2027. She noted that we excited to bring the Discovery Tour back to campus, which has been virtual the last few years due to the pandemic. The Discovery Tour is a program when we invite all admitted underrepresented students to campus for a three-day Skidmore tour. Because of Covid-19 hosting remains complicated so students will stay in a local hotel with staff chaperoning.

Dean Bates reported that we face increased demand for financial aid. We remain committed to a need based financial aid model with merit aid limited to the Filene and Porter/Wachenheim Programs that constitute 1%-2% of the total aid budget. Our model requires us to have a significant cohort of full pay families (financial aid no = FAN). To date, we have been able to fill the classes with about 50% FAN. We have remained competitive despite less competitive schools using merit aid to meet enrollment. The demographic shifts in the country are very real, especially where the majority of our students are coming from in the Northeast. We are also watching the Supreme Court's cases on the use of race in admissions and considering impact.

Looking at the formula and how we admit students, we are seeking a class of 700 students with 665 on campus and 35 in London. We build in "summer melt," students who accept in May but do not join us in September. Some are students who want a gap year and others who choose to go elsewhere. The summer melt we built in last year was 90 students, the year before we lost 88, and the year before that during Covid-19 we lost 140. Our plan is to post decisions on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Students will receive an email altering them to check their portal for one of three decision letters: acceptance, wait list, or denial. We will be hosting three accepted candidate days: April 10, 14, and 17 with an average of 600 students visiting on those three days.

President Conner pointed out that the VP for Finance and Administration finalist candidates were very interested in learning about our enrollment numbers and budget. We remain in a small group of colleges that don't do merit aid, but are low on the endowment side of schools not doing merit aid. Our commitment to need based financial aid is recognized and valued. SGA Vice President for Financial Affairs Claire Wang '24 asked about the impact of the Supreme Court's decision and how it could impact Skidmore's future. Dean Bates answered by saying if we are no longer allowed to use race as a factor, we might seek information via

questions on family background and family history of attending college. We might also use the College Board's product Landscape, which gives all kinds of demographic information about high schools, so we can have a sense of the student's community. The court case will be determined by the end of June and we will know how to proceed at that time. VP Woodfork spoke about our need to affirm to all of our students that they were accepted to the College based on more than one cultural identity with the expectation that they are able to excel here.

## **2. Discussion of Budget Parameters FY '24; Tuition and Fee Potential Increase**

President Conner reminded the committee that the tuition and fee increase is one of the potential budget levers that we spoke of last meeting. Currently, the increase is budgeted at 3.5% for next year and all budgeted years. Most of us are personally aware of inflation and that impacts the College as well. For example, in conversations with our utilities for upcoming spring negotiations we are hearing upwards to 50% increase is possible. It is important to maintain quality and commitment to the mission. Since roughly 70% of our budget is funding from the comprehensive fee, we need to ensure we are able to deliver on the mission. If we were to increase tuition, we also increase the amount of financial aid, but still have a positive net tuition revenue. We are not actually passing along that increase cost to our students who receive financial aid. The net tuition revenue is a key lever in mitigating the projected budget deficits which are still out there. It is important to remain competitive with this increase and our peers.

Interim VP of Finance and Administration Charles Ingram stated that major levers we have looked at include the discount rate, enrollment, capital transfers, and compensation and benefits. Looking at the history of rate increases and our peers over the last four years, in 2020 we were at 12, and this last year we are at 9. If we did a sensitivity analysis to show if Skidmore increased its tuition 3.5% and our peers increased it to 3.0-4.5% would our ranking change? Even if we change it to 4.0% or 4.5% percent, we still stay at that ranking of 9. The message is that it doesn't move the needle too much by raising it a percentage. What does this do to our operating forecast budgets? Two weeks ago, we presented 3.5% with a break-even budget, but at 4.0% (including net of financial aid), the additional revenue lowers our long-term deficit. With the budget right now, the deficit includes the 5-year staffing plan embedded in those numbers.

Dean of the Faculty Michael Orr asked when we will publicly announce what the tuition increase is and what is the potential impact of our projections for the enrollment for the first-year class if it goes up to 4.0%? Dean Bates answered that new students receiving or applying for financial aid have seen information with 3.5%. We would go through a process that verifies data and after May 1, we resolve any changes between our estimates and actual costs. The Bursar's office will wait until after the May Board of Trustees meeting to update their documentation for all students. If we do 4.0% instead of 3.5% that is a difference of about \$400 per student.

## **3. Potential New VP Discussion**

President Conner welcomed Jennifer Donnelly from Segal Consulting who joined the meeting via Zoom to answer any questions about support for Human Resources (HR) and the idea of creating a new vice president who would oversee HR and also offer a general counsel role. Last year, the VP for Finance and Administration worked to reorganize HR with a consideration of what it means to "take care of our people." During this process Segal Consulting assisted with consideration of realignment and redefining of some positions, which culminated in the hiring of

Julie Delay as our new Director of Human Resources and Sarah Delaney Vero as Strategic Advisor to HR. In August we learned of the transition of the VP for Finance and Administration, which gave us an opportunity to think about that portfolio. We reached out to Segal to consider some best practices in terms of where HR is housed and how it can best serve our employees. Segal provided some comparative data showing that other peer and aspirant institutions had moved HR out of the financial domain. The suggestion is to elevate HR to a Cabinet-level position, which brings employees' voices to the Cabinet-level on every discussion. A potential vice president for human resources and employee support and general counsel, might assist with legal and risk management, Title IX, ADA and accessibility, and DEI efforts. Additionally, this position could address employee culture, employee engagement, workplace issues, recruitment, hiring and retention, training and infrastructure, increasing the capacity of our current HR team and elevating the institution's support for that crucial work.

After President Conner's remarks, IPPC Vice Chair Kurt Smemo asked a few questions, including: why have other colleges maintained the structure we have? How does it affect the VP of Finance position when moved? Why would we maintain a Director of HR and a VP of HR position creating more vertical layers? Consultant Donnelly responded that generally over the last 10 years small, private institutions and large public institutions have moved away from having HR embedded in finance for all the reasons outlined by President Conner. Interim VP Ingram spoke about the cost of legal services and how incorporating this aspect into a new HR position may save resources. This new role would be covering the strategic level across campus while the Director managed the operations. Consultant Donnelly shared that many institutions have this structure with variations that can be utilized that report to different Cabinet members. Faculty Executive Committee Chair Xiaoshuo Hou suggested it might make more sense to have a holistic review of all the Cabinet positions instead of just focusing on the VP position in relation to HR, asking do we need to add another VP position? President Conner commented that many of our peers have larger Cabinets. Additionally, President Conner pointed out that all of our Cabinet members with the exception of VP Woodfork will be new or relatively new by this summer, and he has been assessing the portfolios and functions of each cabinet position as we've gone along; furthermore, we can't wait to fill these crucial cabinet roles whose function is essential to the College. Dean Orr spoke about the rise in his use of this legal counsel, with which Dean Bautista agreed. Member Rowse asked if we needed two positions, both the legal and HR, and President Conner pointed out the need for both and the efficiency of combining them in a single VP role, as a number of other schools have done. Member Stankovich asked if it were hard to find such a leader, and Consultant Donnelly pointed out the examples of schools that have done so. Members Tiwari and Ball suggested that we consider various kinds of forums to share this idea with faculty. President Conner expressed hope that we might hire all new Cabinet members at the same time, allowing them to learn the College together. He thanked the committee and asked for continued thinking and feedback on this new VP idea.

#### **4. Other Business**

No other business was brought forth.

The meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

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