

### **SAG Steering Committee Meeting Minutes 10/25/17**

In attendance: Lilly Routledge, Idalia Sepúlveda, Lisa Quimby, Amanda McEnery, Kathy Kinnin, Candace Hairston, Lori Dawson, Wendy Anthony, Erika Fujita, Jocie Sobieraj, Sharon Clemmy, Paula Brehm, Jackie Pierce, Jessical Kansas, Lucy Crotty, Cori Filson, Eliza Camire, John Chaplin, Kelli Johnson

The meeting began at 3:00 pm.

Kelli Johnson was invited to speak about the Opportunity Program (OP) at Skidmore. Amanda McEnery introduced Kelli. Kelli gave an overview of the OP, and she answered several questions from attendees. The following is a summary of the discussion.

1. Students are directed toward OP in a few ways. Representatives from the OP office will actively recruit high school students, speaking with school counselors, parents and the students themselves.
2. Students must have an academic need and financial need to qualify for the program. Financial need is determined based on a particular formula. Academic need is more flexible. Typically, Skidmore's OP students have grades that are slightly below that of what is generally accepted for admission into Skidmore. In many cases, the students accepted into OP are at the top of their high school class, but their school is not necessarily "preparing them for the rigors of Skidmore."
3. Funding for OP comes from the New York State's Higher Education Opportunity Program, as well as from Skidmore's Academic Opportunity Program. Donors to the College can also designate their gift for OP.
4. OP currently serves approximately 160 students. Many of these students enter the program right after high school graduate. However, students who have had non-traditional educational tracks, such as homeschooling or GED completion, as also accepted. Qualifying students may also transfer to Skidmore from other schools.
5. Accepted students begin in the summer before their first year. This 5-week "academic boot camp" helps them adjust to life at Skidmore. The students room together and take a variety of courses, some credit bearing and some S/U. This past summer, students took either Math 100 or Chem 115 for credit. They also completed a writing course, a critical reading course, and a study skills course S/U. Program Assistants (PAs) live with the students in the residence halls during the summer program. PAs are upper class students, some from OP and some not. They help the new students adjust to campus life. This assistance is not formally continued through the academic year, but the relationship does continue through the desire of the students.
6. OP students have a variety of resources for support.
  - a. Each student has an OP advisor in addition to their faculty advisor. OP advisors work with the student to encourage them to ask their professors, etc. for help when they need it. First-year students will check in frequently with their OP advisors. The

frequency of these check-ins decreases over the sophomore and junior years, and then pick up again with seniors as they prepare for life after college.

- b. RAs and peer mentors are also available to assist the students.
  - c. Tutors work with students every night. Some tutors even hold their office hours in the OP office.
7. Students also receive support to prepare them for life after graduation. OP staff train the students to write resumes and negotiate salaries. The staff also help students prepare for other adult responsibilities such as taxes and savings accounts. In addition, OP staff are currently forming a mentorship program between alums and seniors.
8. Many of our OP students continue onto higher education. Some institutions have OP support for graduate students (GTOP).
9. Kelli addressed several points to dispel some misconceptions that Skidmore employees tend to have about OP students.
- a. OP students are retained at a much higher rate than the college typically retains students. Retention for the last few years has been in the range of 90-100%.
  - b. OP students do perform well academically. Average GPAs in recent years have been in the 3.2-3.5 range.
  - c. OP students work very hard. They want to be here and be valuable members of the community. Many are athletes, involved in clubs on campus, and campus leaders. They participate in internships and summer research.
  - d. OP students deserve to be here. Acceptance in the program is highly competitive, and each accepted student has earned the right to be here.
  - e. It is not possible to distinguish OP students from other Skidmore students by looking at them. Not all students of color are OP, and not all OP students are people of color. OP is not an affirmative action program. The criteria are the financial and academic needs mentioned above.
10. There are several ways that staff can support the OP office.
- a. One simple way to offer support is to be open to listening to the students. Sometimes they just need to talk to someone. The students themselves sometimes feel that they don't deserve to be here, and a little encouragement can go a long way.
  - b. Kelli encouraged staff to let the OP office know if they see something of concern relating to an OP student.
  - c. Financial assistance is also welcome. The OP office can always use assistance with emergency funds for the students' medical, dental and vision needs.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 PM.