

FEC's Report of the 2005-06 meetings of the Committee of Committees

May 17, 2006

The Committee of Committees met in early December and early May to assess interactions among member committees and between them and the administration, and to discuss ongoing issues and problems in committee operations. With a new governance structure, a new administrative structure, and the creation of FYE all happening at once this year, strains and problems were inevitable, many of which were noted by committee chairs at the December meeting. We are pleased to report that in almost all cases, the problems are being ironed out through the diligent work of faculty and administrators. We wish to stress that by year's end, individual committees reported good to excellent interactions with members of the administration in a number of respects. There was consensus about the willingness of the administration to consult with the faculty.

For example, CAPT reported that the transition to the new administrative structure, and the introduction of the new DOF, has been seamless, and has led to excellent relations between the Administration and CAPT. Similarly, ad hoc committee lists are now being submitted regularly to FEC, so that their reports can be directed to the appropriate faculty committees. One such ad hoc committee, IPPC's optimization subcommittee, chaired by the VPAA and VP for Finance, worked in consultation with CEPP and FEC in a model fashion. And one administrative decision made last year without sufficient faculty consultation has now been satisfactorily resolved. The Athletics Program had been moved out of an academic department, and out of Academic Affairs to Student Affairs, leaving unclear the interface between Athletics and Academic Affairs—that is, how new courses would be approved, how and by whom will the people who are teaching credit-bearing courses in Athletics would be reviewed and assessed. We are pleased to report that the Athletics Committee, working with the Athletics Director, has been able to resolve the question; the Council will be acting as would an academic department in oversight of courses and in personnel reviews. So have other difficulties been ironed out, as a reading of the minutes of the two committee meetings will attest.

With so much to praise, we hesitate to point out a few ongoing difficulties, of process and of substance. We do so with the hope that the administration will continue the fine work it has done this year in cooperating with faculty committees to resolve such difficulties.

First, with rollback in faculty benefits, faculty had been told that Faculty Development Grants—major project completion grants, PDF grants, and increased sabbatical support—is where faculty would find some funding compensation. But sufficient funding has not been made available. The FDC gratefully acknowledges the hard work of the Dean of the Faculty in finding extra funds for Collaborative Research projects this year. But the Committee of Committees notes that collaborative research appears to assist faculty in neither the humanities nor the sciences to the extent that is sometimes portrayed, and may actually be impeding it. The value of collaborative research is largely pedagogical, i.e., it is of profit to the students, not to the faculty. More research funding, rather than collaborative research funding, should be made available.

A second difficulty is in the ongoing disagreement between the administrators of the HEOP program, on one hand, and the Dean of the Faculty and the Director of the FYE, on the other. HEOP is delivering a program now that had depended for its success on a summer preparation course for LS1. The replacement of the LS curriculum with the FYE meant that HEOP would be facing a need to adapt to the new program; FYE cannot sustain a cluster of "Human Dilemmas" sections of First Year Seminars in the long term. We urge the VPAA to resolve this persistent difficulty as soon as possible.

Third, the office of Special Programs is now under Academic Affairs, but the relation between Special Programs and the Office of International Programs, as well as the general question of what the role of Special Programs is in academic affairs, including its relations with faculty committees like CEPP and Curriculum Committee, need to be worked out. We recognize that the new Dean of Special Programs has had to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses before determining its future direction. But we hope that the Dean of Special Programs will work closely with relevant faculty committees in the coming year. We note that the recently advertised director-level position in the Office of Special Programs was not vetted by CAPT, nor by IPPC prior to recent deliberations on the budget.

Fourth, while IPPC members gratefully noted a vast improvement in the timely delivery of materials to its members, difficulties remain. The late distribution of documents still hinders substantive discussion by faculty. In addition, IPPC is a large, somewhat unwieldy committee, whose meetings—with the recent notable exception of the budget deliberations—have consequently been more informational than deliberative. Members of the President's cabinet, moreover, come to meetings already familiar with, and knowledgeable about, the items on the agenda. Finally, the committee needs to clarify in its operating code the level(s) of confidentiality of the committee's business, and ensure that the levels are not so restrictive as to impede effective faculty representation on the committee.

Finally, FEC has enjoyed excellent relations with the Deans and the VPAA, and has formalized the vetting of Board of Trustee Observer notes by the President and agreed to providing an advance copy of this very C of C report to the President. But FEC has noted persistent problems of communication between IPPC and FEC, which it attributes in part to FEC, and in part to the President's doubt of the authority and discounting of the consensus findings of FEC. The recent dismissal of FEC's opinion concerning the method of selection of the IPPC co-chair, the doubt of FEC's authority to find in the question of holding committee meetings during study days, the initial ignoring of FEC's findings on the denial of SGA's request to be added to the IPPC agenda for discussion rather than for a simple report, and the failure to approach FEC with his concerns about committee operating codes, are recent examples of the problem, which has not been ameliorated but in some cases exacerbated by a tendency to seek alternative guidance on governance issues from IPPC members. FEC hopes to work with the President over the summer in sorting out the new governance system and its procedures in a manner that maintains a collaborative spirit and a strong, unified faculty voice.