

REPORT ON THE COMMITTEE OF COMMITTEES MEETINGS  
AY 2006-2007

Read at the Faculty Meeting, May 16, 2007

The Faculty Executive Committee is charged with convening the Committee of Committees (or CoC), which comprises faculty members of FEC; the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee; the Committee on Appointments, Promotion, and Tenure; the Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights; the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning; the Curriculum Committee; the Faculty Development Committee; the Athletic Council; and any current ad hoc committees whose presence FEC believes would be helpful. The Committee of Committees convened twice this academic year, once in early December and once in early May, to assess the operation of Skidmore's shared governance system from the perspective of our committee structure.

At both CoC meetings this year FEC heard many reports of effective and successful collaboration both among our standing committees and with members of the Administration. Curriculum Committee, for example, reported that interactions with the Dean of Studies, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, and the Registrar, were very efficient. Furthermore, the committee intends to discuss its concerns about the fourth credit hour of the Scribner Seminars directly with FYE personnel — and for its part FEC encourages this dialogue. Athletic Council has, in the wake of Athletics being placed under Student Affairs, worked with CEPP and FEC to develop a plan for evaluating both credit-bearing physical activity courses and the instructors of these courses. Furthermore, AC reported that both the Director of Athletics and the Dean of Studies are committed to the College's academic mission. CAPT this year was busy with many changes to the *Faculty Handbook*, namely reporting structures in tenure and promotion cases; tenure-track ID lines; and proportional and factional lines. On these changes CAPT worked with CEPP, FEC, and CAFR, and also with the Administration, which has also consulted with the committee frequently and voluntarily on other issues.

FDC also reported on a productive year, citing in particular a fruitful relationship with the Associate Dean of the Faculty. Another administrator, the newly-hired Director of Sponsored Research will likely sit on FDC next year in an *ex-officio* capacity. In addition to awarding 40 collaborative research grants under its new guidelines, this year FDC worked closely with the ADoF, the Dean of the Faculty, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs to implement a transparent process for funding sabbatical leaves, under which it was possible to support all sabbatical applications to some degree. Moreover, FDC has recently submitted a proposal for a continuing budget line for sabbatical support to the ADoF, the DoF, and the VPAA. Finally, FEC notes that FDC, even though that committee does not review individual proposals for faculty travel to read or represent, has agreed to consider undertaking a comparative study of travel funding at our peer institutions, and reporting its findings to the DoF, IPPC, or both.

CEPP has been extraordinarily busy this year, with seven successful motions brought to the faculty floor, among them the writing proposal, as well as proposals for tenure-track ID and proportional lines, on which the committee worked closely with CAPT and the Dean of the Faculty. The presence of the DoF and the Dean of Student Affairs on the committee has proven beneficial. CEPP has noted that the Vice President for Academic Affairs would like to be seated on the committee, but at this point in time CEPP finds the presence of the DoF more logical. FEC recognizes that this discussion has been ongoing and that it will likely continue; indeed, the VPAA herself, to judge from her written response to the December CoC minutes, is prepared to offer a rationale as to why both the VPAA and the DoF should be seated on CEPP.

CAFR reported improved communication with the Administration of late, after what it has described as “difficult moments.” Most recently CAFR was involved in a dispute with Human Resources over the release of a document that the committee had deemed necessary for one of its investigations. The dispute was subsequently resolved at a meeting between CAFR, the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Director of Human Resources; concerning this meeting CAFR reported that it has accepted the Administration’s rationale for keeping the document sealed. Nevertheless, FEC shares concerns raised at the spring CoC meeting about the effectiveness of CAFR should a similar dispute arise in the future, and should the committee once again be denied access to what it believes is crucial information. At the same time, we recognize that such disputes have not only implications for academic freedom, but legal implications as well, and we urge both the Administration and CAFR to work together to resolve future disputes not on the basis of precedent, but rather on the basis of principles that protect the rights of all parties involved.

Having just concluded the second semester of its second year, IPPC appears to be settling into a productive groove. The committee reported that its fall schedule was truncated, with some meetings cancelled to accommodate the VPAA search; nevertheless, important work on the Strategic Action Agenda, the Campus Master Plan, and the stewardship of the North Woods was carried out last term. FEC is particularly encouraged to learn that IPPC has written and refined its operating code, and has increased its efficiency through the advance distribution of agendas. We also note that the three FEC members who sit on IPPC have been both thorough and diligent in reporting the work of IPPC to the other six members of FEC, and in reporting those members’ questions and comments back to IPPC. In last year’s Committee of Committees report, FEC raised a concern that meetings of IPPC were “more informational than deliberative.” To judge from discussions at our CoC meetings this year, this concern is of significantly lesser magnitude; we speculate, though, that discussions of changes to retirees’ benefits might well prove to be a touchstone for this concern, and we sincerely hope that the primary entity for deliberations on any changes — including when and how such changes might be implemented, and even whether or not they should be implemented at all — will be IPPC.

Finally, FEC reported to the CoC that its relationship with the Administration and with other committees remains by and large congenial and cooperative. FEC has met

regularly with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and with the Dean of the Faculty; and the VPAA has been diligent in consulting with the chair of FEC about agenda for faculty meetings. In addition, the chair of FEC has twice met with the President and the Vice-chair of IPPC to discuss broader issues of governance. This year FEC worked with CAFR on its motion for *Handbook* Part One, Article X, offering comments on a draft, and arranging fora for discussion both at a Faculty Caucus and in a Committee of the Whole at a full faculty meeting. FEC solicited from both CAPT and CAFR comments on a motion regarding the status of faculty who hold administrative appointments with respect to running for committees, voting in faculty elections, and attending Faculty Caucuses. The comments from CAPT and CAFR indicate that the time is not yet ripe to bring the motion forward for consideration by the Faculty.

In closing, I would like to offer some remarks on three larger governance issues that were often implicit, but sometimes explicit, in the discussions at the CoC meetings. These issues are (1) the future of the *Faculty Handbook*; (2) faculty service on both standing and ad hoc committees; and (3) faculty-only meetings and their role in shared governance.

First, the *Faculty Handbook*. CAFR has informally proposed changes to Part One, Article X, regarding the dismissal of tenured faculty; the Administration has expressed a desire to augment these changes with detailed procedures about the discipline of tenured faculty. There is also the Administration's ongoing work on Part Six, which in their opinion, and in the opinion of FEC, dovetails with changes to Part One, Article X. This important work by itself would constitute a substantial revision of the *Faculty Handbook* as we know it. Add to it what the Administration as well as committees such as FEC and CAPT have noted to be pervasive inconsistencies in the *Handbook*, which are largely due to the piecemeal manner in which the document written and revised. It seems likely, then, that in the near future it will be necessary to revise the *Faculty Handbook* on a large scale, not only to spell out what has previously been vague, but also to bring the document in line with itself. FEC would like to state publicly that our committee, which like CFG before it has traditionally kept the *Handbook*, intends to continue to serve as the primary conduit through which changes to the document are channeled. At the same time, FEC also recognizes that the *Handbook* is ultimately the work of many different constituencies, from the faculty, to members of the Administration, to the Student Government Association, and even (in some cases) to the Trustees. FEC has not yet had a formal discussion among itself, let alone with any other group, about what the specific procedures should be for a large-scale revision of the *Handbook*. One possible scenario, which we suggest informally, might be to form a special subcommittee of FEC, augmented by representatives (if not the chairs) of other important committees and by members of the Administration, and joined, where appropriate, by members of SGA. In any event, FEC believes that substantial faculty input on this enterprise will be crucial to its success, and we hope that the faculty would agree.

Second, faculty service. FEC remains concerned about the proliferation of ad hoc committees, whether they be full-fledged committees, working groups, study groups, or bodies assembled for the purpose of providing faculty counsel on a particular issue. We

are concerned because significant efforts were made two years ago to streamline our governance system; and yet the number of venues in which the faculty might serve has increased. But we are particularly concerned, since the faculty are entitled to cite work on ad hoc groups as examples of service to the College, about what we perceive to be a tension between service on these committees and service on our standing committees. This is not to say that work on ad hoc groups should not constitute service; of course it should. Nor is it to say that the work is neither necessary nor worthwhile; of course it is. But FEC notes that this has been a frustrating year in terms of finding faculty willing to serve on our standing committees. A case in point is the Curriculum Committee, which starting in the fall will be short a faculty representative, because we had two slots available but in the end only one faculty member willing to serve. We find this particular development disturbing, since if there is one area of the College over which the Faculty has definitive ownership, it is the curriculum. This term FEC laid the foundation for what we are currently calling our "Service Project," which we hope will shed light on the vagaries of faculty service at Skidmore. In our project we hope to work closely with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of the Faculty; indeed, we have already begun to do so. More information on the Project will be forthcoming in the fall.

One point more on faculty service. In general, FEC approves of the measures taken to streamline our governance system. We note, however, that there is a pressing need for a new standing committee, which we advertised several months ago — namely the so-called "Space Allocation Committee." In late January FEC reviewed a proposal for this committee, on which we suggested three faculty members should serve; we forwarded our recommendations to the Associate Dean of the Faculty, who (we believe) forwarded them on to the President's Cabinet. Since that time we have heard nothing about whether or not the committee will be constituted. We would like to take this opportunity to urge both the Cabinet and IPPC to move forward with the Space Allocation Committee with all possible speed, and to constitute it with substantial faculty representation. Our recommendation is not only a matter of good governance in general; it also comes at a time when FEC has learned that a study was conducted on the Art Building at considerable expense, and that the report from this study has yet to be released to the Studio Art faculty. We exhort the Administration to partner with the Faculty in making key decisions about the College's spatial resources. The inclusion of a faculty representative on the recently-formed Scribner Village Study Group is an example of such a partnership. FEC would like to see this kind of work continuing on a larger institutional scale.

Finally, faculty-only meetings and shared governance. FEC notes that the Vice-President for Academic Affairs had asked that she and the Dean of the Faculty be invited to the Faculty Caucus in March; and the attendance of administrators is something we provide for in the FEC operating code. In this instance, however, our committee ultimately decided that the interests of CAFR were better served at that moment by a faculty-only meeting; and we add that our decision was not made easily or capriciously. The Committee of Committees, too, is a faculty-only gathering, except without provisions for attendance by administrators. In her response to the December CoC minutes, the VPAA also proposed an additional meeting between administrators and appropriate committee

chairs to discuss and assess mutual work and make recommendations for improvement. FEC is certainly open to considering such a structure, and we can see that it would be in many ways more expedient than Faculty Caucuses and CoC meetings, at least in terms of allowing for direct contact between committees and the Administration, versus the rather indirect system of reporting we currently have. Nevertheless, FEC believes that we the Faculty should retain our provisions for meeting to speak candidly among ourselves in whatever ways we deem appropriate. Toward this end, it seems likely that the practice of convening Faculty Caucuses and the Committee of Committees will continue, at least for the foreseeable future, even as we find new ways of reaching out to our administrative colleagues.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Curley  
Chair, Faculty Executive Committee