

Minutes
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Tuesday, November 11, 2008, 3:30 p.m.
Millington 150

Dean Joel Schwartz called the meeting to order at 3:35 pm.

I. Minutes of the last meeting, October 7, 2008

Bill Hutton (Classical Studies) reported some minor changes that needed to be made in the previous meeting's minutes in regard to the report of the Retention, Promotion and Tenure Committee. These changes were approved.

II. Report of Administrative Officers

Provost Geoffrey Feiss discussed the continuing difficulties and uncertainties caused by the budget situation. Raises due to go into effect this month are postponed until next July at the earliest. More will be known about this and other issues by December 17. The outlook may be bleaker than we have imagined.

In questions to the provost, Barbara Watkinson (Art & Art History) raised the issue of the burdens being placed on students in this dire financial climate, including "facilities fees" (largely debt service on new/recent buildings) and fees for intercollegiate athletics. The provost responded that all possible sources of savings were on the table.

III. Discussion of Strategic Plan and Proposed Resolution

Dean Schwartz presented the following resolution of the Faculty Affairs Committee, the text of which had been distributed with the agenda for the meeting:

Be it resolved that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences endorse the following vision for William and Mary:

We aim to fully realize our aspiration to become a research university of international note while retaining our core commitment to excellence in teaching. We are a university of teacher-scholars where the creative activities of the faculty are valued equally with the teaching mission and we aspire for our faculty to become even more visible as contributors on the national and international stage.

Be it resolved also that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences advocate the following strategies aimed to realize this vision:

1. Invigorate faculty governance to ensure faculty control- especially of the academic enterprise of the university.

2. In order to strengthen the balance between teaching and research, establish a Center for Teaching Excellence and selectively expand centers for research that are built around faculty strengths.

3. Break down long-standing departmental boundaries to encourage interdisciplinary interaction and collaboration.

4. Re-examine the undergraduate curriculum and revise it to reflect current and anticipated faculty and student strengths, interests and needs.

5. Selectively expand and substantially strengthen graduate programs.

6. Undertake a vigorous campaign to obtain the required financial resources to implement these strategies.

The preamble to the resolution and the six “strategies” were discussed and voted on separately. Here follows a report on the discussion and the actions taken on each of the several parts:

Preamble:

Discussion:

Several members expressed the opinion that the first sentence of the preamble was too defensive, while others felt that the prominence given to “research” implied more of a commitment to develop new graduate programs than we might be willing to undertake. The discussion then expanded into the issue of what it meant to be a research institution, whether we really wanted to be a research institution rather than one that focuses on education and the liberal arts, whether there was necessarily a dichotomy between the two types of institution, and whether emphasizing the research side of our mission would exacerbate the tension between graduate and non-graduate programs at the college.

Action:

Jack Martin (English) proposed a new wording for the first sentence of the preamble designed to address some of these concerns: *“We aim to fully realize our aspiration to become a university of international note with a core commitment to excellence in teaching, scholarship and research.”*

A motion was made to substitute this wording for the original wording of the preamble. After some further discussion this motion was **passed**.

Subsequently Berhanu Abegaz (Economics) offered alternative wording for the entire preamble in order to address what he viewed to be desiderata in the original, namely an emphasis on the centrality of Arts & Sciences to the mission of the College, and reference to our commitments to diversity and community service. The text of his proposal follows:

We envision William & Mary as a public university-college whose identity is anchored in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. As a diverse community of teacher-scholars, we value equally the creative activities of the faculty with its teaching mission. We aim to fully realize our aspiration to become a research university of international renown while maintaining our national reputation for excellence in teaching as well as our longstanding commitment to public service.

John Oakley (Classical Studies) moved that the preamble be referred back to the FAC so that they can consider whether and how to incorporate elements of Prof. Abegaz's proposed language. This motion was **passed**.

Before proceeding to a consideration of the individual "strategies", Kate Slevin (Sociology) speaking as a member of FAC, pleaded for guidance from the faculty on how to craft the statement. Discussion of issues raised by the preamble, particularly that of the balance between graduate and undergraduate programs and between teaching and research in our aspirational mission continued for several minutes.

Strategy #1:

Discussion:

Questions were raised about the intended target of the statement: was the faculty exhorting itself to become more involved in self-governance or asserting to external entities its right to self-governance? Some wondered whether there was really a problem with the current state of faculty governance, others expressed the belief that pursuit of increased faculty governance was quixotic. Some questioned whether this strategy warranted top billing. Gene Tracy (Physics), speaking as a member of FAC, stated that the committee's motive in proposing this statement was in part to provoke discussion.

Action:

Suzanne Hagedorn (English) moved that the question be split to allow separate discussion and voting on the individual strategies. This motion was **passed**.

Item #1 itself was then put to a vote and **approved**.

Strategy #2:

Discussion:

Some spoke out against the strategy because it seemed to call for resources and time to be devoted to remedial teacher-training, which William & Mary faculty by definition shouldn't need. Barbette Spaeth (Classical Studies), speaking as a member of FAC, responded that the idea of the Center for Teaching Excellence was not to offer basic or remedial teaching instruction, but to facilitate the exchange of teaching ideas between faculty and to advocate for the importance of teaching as part of the College's mission. Concern was also raised that this strategy was out of line with the others in that it proposed a specific tactical procedure rather than a strategic goal.

Action:

The item was voted on and **rejected**.

Strategy #3:

Discussion:

Some wondered whether the strategy was worth emphasizing since interdisciplinarity has long been pursued at the College with little change over the years, others countered that there had been an increase in interdisciplinarity, but that more could be envisioned. Concern was raised that the language of the statement might seem to denigrate departments and intra-disciplinary work.

Action:

The item was put to a vote and **approved**.

Strategy #4:

Discussion:

All who commented seemed in general agreement that reform of the curriculum was needed, although concern was raised as to whether effective reform could be introduced without expanding the faculty. Various ideas were put forward for the shape that curricular reform might take (area studies requirements in place of GER's, reducing students' required courseloads, etc.)

Action:

The item was put to a vote and **approved**.

Strategy #5:

Discussion:

Bob Scholnick (English) spoke out in favor of the statement, stating that expansion of graduate offerings has long been a goal of the College. His was the only comment.

Action:

The item was put to a vote **approved**.

Strategy #6:

Discussion:

There were no formal comments on this statement; though the sense of the faculty seemed highly affirmative.

Action:

The item was put to a vote and **approved**.

Dean Schwartz adjourned the meeting at 5:21 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
William Hutton, Secretary
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