Haverford College Faculty Meeting Minutes

November 21, 2013
4:20 p.m.

Deborah Roberts, Clerk

Moment of silence.

Action I. Approval of the minutes of October 3, 2013, with the following correction: under Action II: “based on an OPT-OUT” assumption…”

I. Reports, Items for Action, and Items for discussion.

1. Philip Meneely for EPC: revised college Honors policy (att. doc.)

We are working on the College Requirements, and will have open meetings on this subject next week.

On the subject of cross-listing with Minors, etc.: we would like to hear your comments.

A Proposal for a revision of our Honors policy.

We note that there is not much difference (in GPA and in the nature of courses actually taken) between those who receive College “Latin” Honors (Summa and Magna cum laude) and those who don’t. We propose keeping the criteria and procedure for awarding Summa and Magna, but also adding a “cum laude” possibility for those others in the top 30% GPA who have not received Summa or Magna, which would bring us up to the practice of our peers in awarding College Honors to roughly 30% of the graduating class (rather than the current typical 12%).

COMMENT: As a former Chair of the Honors Committee, I agree that it is often hard to make distinctions; but the problem will also exist if we move further down the list. Moreover, let us not forget that we have a robust Departmental Honors system too, which awards Honors to about 33%; this Departmental Honors system makes Haverford different from our peers.

COMMENT: Speaking for FAPC (which is trying to streamline faculty chores): this revised system, with its automatic cum laude feature, would remove some of the time-costly faculty letter-writing effort in trying to make fine distinctions (an effort which is also unequally distributed among the faculty), an effort which could be better expended in helping students acquire graduate fellowships (see later FAPC report on service on the Honors/Fellowships Committee.)

COMMENT: We could save much faculty effort simply by using a mechanical GPA cut-off. Moreover, I agree that Departmental Honors are very important.
COMMENT: Graduate-schools admissions people understand very well what the “Honors”/by each College’s system means.

COMMENT: Why do we have to change to be “like” the others (the 30% argument)?

COMMENT: On the other hand: What is the value of staying the way we are (i.e., not making a change)?

QUESTION: Does this mean that we should be looking at our Departmental Honors system in a different way? RESPONSE: We did not look at Departmental Honors.

COMMENT: Everyone knows what Summa and Magna means; but what does Departmental “High Honors” and “Honors” mean to a prospective employer?

COMMENT: Nowadays, “cum laude” is not understood as a distinction; so why add it?

COMMENT (DEAN): Our Departmental honors system is very unusual. Latin Honors are often noted in the media.

QUESTION (TO DEAN): Is the lack of a “cum laude” category a disadvantage for our students? REPLY: Not clear, some anecdotal evidence.

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll on the EPC proposal: (37 votes), Yes 16, No 8, Undecided 13.

PROPOSAL: Could we have another straw-poll to see which is the problem for people: just straight GPA? Or adding “cum laude?”

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll: Do you favor adding “cum laude?” (35 votes), Yes 22, No 13.

EPC: We need to know WHY you voted as you did; and also, we need to hear from you about whether we should also look at the Departmental Honors system.

2. FAPC (Suzanne Amador Kane, Rob Manning) (att. docs.)

   a. Proposal to change the terms, or eliminate, the Faculty Admissions committee (att. doc.): we propose that service not be annual (perhaps every three years; or, that there be an ad hoc Task Force when there are pressing issues.)

QUESTION: Would there still be a mechanism for the faculty (or anyone else) to express concern? REPLY: Yes. (A mechanism to be developed…) 

COMMENT: How about a Faculty Admissions Liaison, an analog to the Faculty Athletics Liaison?
COMMENT: Having served on the Admissions Committee, I think I can say that the admissions task is so specialized that we faculty, with our very different kind of expertise, cannot be of much help.

COMMENT: We abolished the Admissions Committee once and then we re-created it; it might be useful to recollect why we felt that it was still necessary to have faculty input into the admissions process, and whether any of that reasoning is still relevant?
RESPONSE: We now have more transparency in what we get from Admissions.
ANOTHER RESPONSE: The present committee just does not seem to have enough work to do.

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll: (36 votes), Yes 30, No 1, Undecided 5.

b. A Proposal that new-course proposals be removed from the purview of EPC

COMMENT: We all do recognize that the system doesn’t seem to be working at present; but the system was created so that new-course proposals would be scrutinized by more sets of eyes than those of the Department proposing them; what would replace the current EPC-eyes scrutiny system? Would it be just the over-loaded Provost’s office?
RELATED COMMENT: Perhaps many other eyes, and well in advance to the acceptance of a proposal: an “open window” of scrutiny for new-course proposals?

RELATED COMMENT: Could EPC become involved only when problems are raised?

COMMENT: It seems to me that any proposal which makes it more possible for EPC to be an “educational policy”-discussing committee is a good thing.

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll: (35 votes), Yes 30, No 1, Undecided 4.

c. A Proposal on the tasks of the Honors/Fellowships committee (in light of proposed changes to the Honors system, discussed above): faculty would be asked for letters of support only in cases of students who are understood to be on the margins of a category of Honors. And as a consequence, faculty on the committee (partnering with the Deans office and other professional staff) could deal more directly with helping students who are likely to get graduate fellowships. This proposal suggests a re-allocation of faculty time, and hence a changed title for the committee: “The Committee on Fellowships and Honors.”

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll: (33 votes), Yes 28, No 0, Undecided 5.

d. A Proposal about the Center Steering Committees: we suggest that Centers limit the amount of faculty recommendation letters they request. Perhaps only letters for students on the margins? Perhaps
more reliance on the Steering Committees faculty members themselves?

**COMMENT:** This is in the interests of reducing the number of letters faculty write when the stakes are low and the money is either in hand or is not…

**QUESTION:** Why do all Centers have to follow the same policy? They are autonomous, and differently structured.

**COMMENT (CPGC):** When trying to train students to write good grant applications, we need good faculty letters.

**COMMENT (KINSC):** We have tried to create a form, using checks (rather than a letter); with a letter only for students on the margins of yes/no…

Since there was no specific proposal, there was no straw-poll.

3. Fac. Reps. to the Board (Suzanne Amador Kane, Richard Freedman) (att. doc.)

In reporting on the meeting of the Board, we draw your attention to the Faculty and Staff Policies Committee report and now ask Dick Wynn and Mike Casel to speak about it to us.

**Dick Wynn and Mike Casel:** In response to government scrutiny of 401k and 403b retirement plans (ours is 403b) and our mandated fiduciary responsibility to audit our plan and exercise “best practices,” our retirement plans will change a bit; we are looking at our options; our goal is to narrow the investment options but to provide more than one provider for every kind of option. We hope to have the plan ready to roll out in March 2014.

**QUESTION:** Do we have any choices about investments, or any input to this process of change? And must it take place all at once; can’t there be a more gradual roll-out?

**COMMENT:** I certainly want more information about what you are doing with my retirement funds. **RESPONSE:** There is a committee with one faculty member on it which is considering options, of which there will be plenty. There will be not much, or no, change for most of us.

4. AAC (Ingrid Arauco): Financial Aid and the No-Loan policy changes (att. screen presentation)

Our current discount policy is now over 40%; we are concerned about the financial health of the college (as well as, of course, concerned about the increasing debt burden on students.) I am calling on Jess Lord to present the issue (with visuals.)
Jess Lord:
A history: before the class of ‘12, our students had a loan burden of $14,250 and we assessed 100% home equity for determining “available” family assets. In December 2007 (before the global melt-down of 2008), we eliminated the expectation for students taking out loans, instead granting financial aid (the “no-loan” policy); also, in the calculations of family assets, we changed the home-equity assessment number from 100% to 1.2 times family income. Others of our peers were doing this, in some way or other, also.

Consequences by 2013: The cost of this change to Haverford, in fiscal year 2013, was $1,817,000 for the “no-loans” policy and $1,270,780 for the new home equity assessment.

What advantage did we get from the policy?
Access and Affordability? We did get a higher yield in the middle-income group, and student surveys indicated a perception that lower cost raised the rate of student acceptance of Haverford’s offer of admissions.
Competitive Standing? Yield indeed was steadily upward over the last seven years, although it has not moved up substantially, nothing in relationship to peers.
Budget Sustainability? NO. It was always a very high cost to Haverford with its finite financial resources. We have experienced a 98% increase in financial aid outlays (2005-2009-2013), due in part to demographics and to the economy. ($11,940,967 to $23,597,729.) It is clear that we will HAVE TO CONTINUE TO INCREASE financial aid to students in ANY case. Our discount rate (grants as percentage of tuition revenue) went up too, from 27.9% in 2005 to 40.3% in 2013.

Hence, we are recommending to the Board a modification of the no-loan policy, (and we note that some of our peers have backed off from “no-loans” now also), including the following assumptions:

Keep “need-blind” admissions and meet full demonstrated need
The home-equity provision not be changed
No loans for the lowest-income students
The special scholarships (including no loans) be preserved (Padin, Questbridge, Ira Reid…)
Remain competitive with our peers
Be “mindful” for the middle-income families
Honor the 2008 commitments through the class of 2018

This change will provide $820,000 to the budget.

QUESTION: Has the % students on financial aid remained stable? ANSWER: No, it has been going up; it is now about 50%, although the rate of increase is slowing.

QUESTION: What do we think about charging students a future higher loan-burden because their parents are richer? What do your fellow peer Admissions-Deans think about this? RESPONSE (Jess Lord): The 2007 move was intended to unburden students...
from future loan-burden; indeed, this does not. The loan levels are at least in part based on assumptions we make about a student’s ability and comfort to take on debt, and that often does correlate to family financial background.

**QUESTION:** Is it your experience that parents took out loans to give assistance to their children/ students? **ANSWER:** There is anecdotal evidence that a lot of families have continued to take out loans, overall around 1/3 of our students.

II. **Report of the President.** (45 seconds.)

We are continuing to do what we said we would do: (Sharpless renovations, VCAM planning, information technology.)

III. **Report of the Provost.** (att. doc.) (5 seconds.)

“I’m done.”

**Open Question Period.**

**QUESTION:** (Clerk, to Faculty Reps. to the Board and V.P. for Finance): Could we have an open meeting about the proposed revisions to Faculty and Staff retirement plans? **RESPONSE:** (Vice-President for Finance): We are only now in the process of discussing changes; it is almost true that there will be very few changes to what you are already doing with your investment-choices anyway; we are trying to avoid paternalism but also to help you avoid mistakes.

**COMMENT:** About FAPC comments on the Center Steering Committees: although the three Centers differ in their needs, and the professional staffs can assume much of the operating burdens, all Steering Committees should certainly meet from time to time; the frequency of meetings should be discussed with the Provost.

**COMMENT:** About the FAPC proposal to modify the membership and structure of AAC [one of the Fac. Board Reps. to join AAC as “faculty at large,” instead of the current 2 faculty reps, and the Chair of AAC be the College Budget Director instead of a faculty member]:

**YES** to only one faculty member “at large” and that it be a Fac. Rep. to the Board, but **NO** that the Chair of the Administrative Advisory Committee be an Administrator.

**SUPPORTING COMMENT:** If the AAC gets bigger, then the faculty influence is smaller (diluted); if the Chair is not a Faculty Member, ditto. **RESPONSE:** the addition of the two Associate Provosts means that there are now more faculty on AAC.

**COMMENT:** It is hard to see how the faculty can have influence on the AAC.

**COMMENT:** I feel very strongly that this is moving in the wrong direction.
QUESTION: How is the Sharpless renovation being funded? REPLY (the President): This is emergency funding, we are proposing to use our own resources by borrowing from Endowment rather than issuing new debt; it is not an ideal measure, but necessary.

QUESTION: Has AAC seen this? REPLY (the President): No, we are still in the planning stage. RESPONSE (AAC): I found out about the details at the Board Finance Committee meeting, (which approved it at that meeting), and reported back to AAC that it was in the nature of about $11,000,000. COMMENT: AAC should be involved in these discussions. REPLY (the President): It will indeed come up in discussions of the operating budget.

Adjourned at 6:05 p.m. Linda Gerstein, Secretary to the Faculty