Haverford College Faculty Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2014
Deborah Roberts, Clerk
4:20 p.m.

Moment of silence.

**Action I.** Approval of the minutes of February 20, 2014.

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

1. Phil Meneely, for EPC. Approval of new courses (att. doc.)

**Action II.** Approved.

2. Richard Freedman and Jill Stauffer, for FAPC. (att. doc.)

Proposal to retain for another two years 1) the use of non-binding straw polls (by wireless clickers) and 2) the other changes we have made in format and procedure (the order of the agenda, the advance circulation of electronic documents, the Open Question period at the end); but omitting the once-suggested extension of time to 6:15 p.m.

**COMMENT:** I, (speaking as a Chair of a standing committee that regularly makes proposals to the faculty meeting), do not like this straw-poll system. I don’t like the principle of “anonymous objections.” It allows for obstruction by non-activist voices. It is just bad form. We should be adults and speak up, and out, about our objections.

**RESPONDING COMMENT (Clerk):** I don’t think that, in fact, the use of the straw poll has actually led us to get less business done. They have, for one thing, made it easier to see when it makes sense to ask people if they are willing to stand outside consensus and let things move forward.

**COMMENT:** I think that the straw poll does show us where we are. I think that if people don’t speak up, they are standing with the consensus. A dissenting view is indicated by a straw poll, but if the dissenting voices are silent, they can be interpreted as standing with the consensus.

**COMMENT:** A consensus is not unanimity. People can be asked to record their dissent by standing outside the consensus; but we can also assume that if they do not share their dissent, they are not standing outside the consensus.

**QUESTION:** Do we think that the use of the clickers makes people less likely to speak up?
COMMENT: I think that the adoption of the straw poll did help us move from dysfunction in the faculty meeting, a dysfunction caused by the fact that people did not understand what “consensus” is. I think we should continue to use clickers for a while, it is a good experiment.

COMMENT: Clickers allow people to express themselves (their agreement as well as their dissent) without speaking verbally.

COMMENT: The problem with using straw polls to register divisions of opinion is that we don’t know The Content of the dissenting views. About what? and why? is there dissent? (Especially when there is a 35/15 poll result.) We try to encourage people to contact us and follow up on their non-verbal “click”: but often they don’t.

RESPONDING COMMENT: Sometimes when people do not voice their dissent verbally (either in faculty meeting OR in further follow-up to the presenting committee), it is not because they are “shy” but because of the fear of unequal power relationships between the those of the apparently dominant view and the dissenter; the clickers allow them to dissent anonymously while feeling protected by that anonymity. RESPONSE: I think that we have to be willing to speak about why we object, either in faculty meeting or in a private follow-up to the committee.

COMMENT: I don’t mind clickers, but they seem to have wrought a change in our practice of construing consensus. We do a poll, and then the Clerk notes that there are two or three people who said no, the Clerk asks if they are willing to stand outside the consensus, no one says anything, and then we move on to the next item on the agenda. None of this is bad, (indeed, it may be very good), but it seems that we have come to expect and accept that there will be a certain level of ambient dissent as part of “consensus.” I think that, without clickers we did not get such an accurate, fine-grained picture of faculty opinion, so it was easier to get an impression of unanimity; but with the clickers we can see that we aren’t actually unanimous, but we must be ready to move on anyway, entailing a subtle shift in what we expect consensus to mean. [Secretary’s note: as a previous speaker noted, “a consensus is not unanimity”; but this speaker seems to be suggesting that the clickers, by producing numbers, creates a explicit consciousness of that word and of its possible non-presence.]

COMMENT: The “click” is a non-voiced action; speaking up is a voiced one, which can be heard by others and by which others can be influenced or to which they can respond. A voice exists in a “discussion,” in the course of which opinions may change.

COMMENT: (Speaking as Chair of EPC), I can report that, after the discussion of the proposal about Honors and a straw poll, a request from EPC for “feedback from those opposed to the proposal as it stands but open to it with changes” was successful: 14 or 15 people contacted EPC, which has been very useful for our further discussions.

COMMENT (The Clerk): I have worked with the consensus method for a long time, and am very attached to it, But I came to realize over the years leading up to this change that
many people had lost confidence in the method, and that some people felt they could not express themselves. There may indeed be losses by using the clickers, but they seem outweighed by the gains; we should work with the clickers for another two years to see if this is so.

**SUGGESTION (FAPC):** I suggest the following addition to the proposal: The faculty minutes will come out earlier and with a **highlighted** notation next to the item under consideration after a straw-poll: **“Will people who are in dissent please contact the committee with their objections to the proposal?”** RESPONSE (Secretary): Yes, that would be easy to do. The minutes are ready within a week; they customarily come to the faculty right before the next meeting only so that the faculty **remembers** what they are being asked to approve. (And yes, they could come out to the faculty twice: once within the first week, and then three weeks later right before the next meeting.)

The Clerk asked for a straw-poll about using straw-polls; and also about the other parts of the revised procedure. Yes (42), No (0), Undecided (2).

**NOTE:** What follows is an experiment based on the above FAPC suggestion:

During the straw-poll concerning FAPC’s proposal for an extension of straw-polls and clickers, some Faculty noted that they were not yet ready to decide whether they supported the proposal. Further comment (or explanation of these reservations, including suggestions about how we might address them) should be directed to Richard Freedman or any member of FAPC as soon as possible.”

3. Fran Blase, for the Committee on Civic Engagement (“Communities as Classrooms”) of the **Strategic Planning Committee** (att. doc.)

A lot of “civic engagement” activities currently goes on at Haverford, engagement with non-Haverford communities through curricular (using another learning component, such as laboratories), non-curricular, and co-curricular venues. Can we coordinate them? Bryn Mawr has a highly-respected Community Engagement Office, (in which our students currently participate.) Could we build on Bryn Mawr’s effort, not by duplicating it but by working with it? The goal is pedagogical: that students be able to have a place for reflection and discussion of these activities.

4. Joe Spadaro and Josh Schrier for the IT working group.

In the absence of an advance-circulated report (“which we forgot to send out, and will send out tomorrow”), this is a quick overview of what we are discussing about how Technology can contribute to our educational mission. Notable issues: Cooperation with peers (Bi-co, Tri-co, the Quaker consortium, Pennsylvania, the national level) and Investment in IT infrastructure and spaces for sharing expertise.

**COMMENT:** IT security is an important issue. (RESPONSE: Yes.)
[The IT report indeed came out on Friday March 21. We can discuss it at the next faculty meeting’s Open Question period.]

5. Jim Krippner, for the Committee on Ethical Education and Leadership (Strategic Planning Committee.) (att. doc.): summary of what we are discussing.

**COMMENT:** NSF grants now stipulate that students get ethical leadership training; could the college devote some of the money we receive from our NSF grants for “overhead” costs (A Voice: such as “heating and toilet paper”) to this ethical training?

II. Report of the President.

1. The Strategic Planning project is about 1) content (what new ideas we have for things we want to do), 2) about how much money we can raise for these ideas, and from whom?, and 3) about sustainability.

2. We have a new program by being part of a Liberal Arts Consortium for Online Learning, devoted to asking: how collaboration can help us?, what are “best practices?,” how can we pool resources?

**QUESTION:** How can we faculty use “Google-Hangout” for review sessions?

**RESPONSE (IT):** individuals can ask for access. Should it be made available as an application to the entire faculty at once? Yes, why not? Will do.

III. Report of the Provost (att. doc.)

1. I am pleased to announce that The Faculty Dining Room, as a venue for informal discussion, will be revived in a limited way: Tuesdays and Wednesdays 11:30-1:30 p.m. (when drinks and desserts will be provided), and Fridays 11:30-1:30 (when a full meal will be available.)

**RESPONSE:** APPLAUSE.

2. The Strategic Planning document sessions are important; I invite you all to participate in them. Please come to the third session. The first two sessions raised interesting concerns:

   the description of the new cluster of Environmental Studies, Health Studies, and Peace, Justice and Human Rights stresses policy issues, but the topic also includes Ethics, Cultural Analysis, and other approaches. So we need to find a more inclusive and expansive nomenclature for that cluster.

   some areas of the plan focus on existent or possible free-standing curricular programs; others (e.g., computational studies) point to broad areas that might comprise both programs and collateral curricular activity, but might or might not have a single unifying program structure.
it is unclear where, as new resources (especially positions) come on board, decisions about allocations should be made. Currently EPC makes recommendations to the Provost and President regarding position allocations; but is it well-structured to take on such allocations in the framework of strategic planning? Or do we need a new governance entity in which the faculty’s perspective on strategic planning can be developed?

there remain possibilities for threading new unifying thematic ideas through the plan; for example, it was suggested that “the evolution of the 21st century Haverford classroom” as it evolves to incorporate the lab, the studio, the archive, the community, and other spaces of inquiry and understanding helps draw together the constellations as new ways of developing the College as an innovative learning community.

COMMENT: I reinforce the Provost’s request: please, colleagues, come to the third meeting. I was distressed at how few people, besides the people involved in actually writing the documents, attended. It has been almost a year since we saw the last version: do people not come because they assume that “it is now a done deal?” The President said, in an email last summer, that he would meet with all departments as a way to get to know the faculty. That has yet to happen. I urge the President and Provost to pursue more diligently the opinions of those faculty who do not come to faculty meetings in general and to these Strategic Plan sessions in particular. Moreover, I myself did not see any passionate commitment to the Strategic Plan. I urge this pursuit of faculty opinion because I know that Campaigns have widespread and long term consequences for the College; their dimensions should come from the Faculty. (In contrast to this, for instance, I am concerned that all the Centers, while having impacts on the curriculum, are driven and supervised to an important extent mainly by the Administration and the Donors.)

RESPONSE (Provost): The Faculty can, and should, and has been involved in the Strategic Planning. This Strategic Plan is an affirmation of what the faculty has created; the Administration is trying to make it into a reality. You should tell your faculty neighbors to participate.

RESPONSE (President): The challenge is in finding people to engage. Haverford has Faculty Plan-Fatigue. It is now time to produce a plan and get on with it. It doesn’t have to be perfect, and it will doubtless change in the course of the next decade. We have to work with the community which we now have. RESPONSE: And we have to build a community too.

6. Rob Fairman, for the Working Group on Faculty Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (FRRC) (att. doc.)

We are working on updating the Faculty Handbook, and making clear the role it plays in the faculty taking responsibility for Governance. We are looking at: Academic Freedom; Intellectual Property Policy; Conflict Resolution (and perhaps establishing an
Ombudsman); Faculty Conduct: harassment and discrimination; and faculty interactions with students on alcohol issues and in consensual sexual relations.

**QUESTION:** Are you looking at Bullying? **RESPONSE:** Yes indeed, we are: bullying among faculty.

**The Open Question Period.**

Nothing was raised.

Adjourned at 5:37 p.m.  

Linda Gerstein, Secretary to the Faculty