

CFG Report on Focus Groups on Faculty Governance

To: Facultylist
From: Jackie Azzarto (Chair CFG)
Subject: Report on CFG Focus Groups
Date: February 26, 1997

CFG is circulating this report so that we can get feedback from the faculty before making recommendations for changes in the faculty governance system. We hope to have some time to discuss this at our next faculty meeting and will also be holding information meetings during March to get your input. Please note that the recommendations cited in the text of the report are those put forth by the focus group participants. CFG is still in the process of discussing our recommendations and would like to hear from you.

Three focus groups were held late in the Fall '96 for the purpose of collecting data on the current committee system and eliciting concerns of faculty that were or were not being addressed by the faculty governance system. CFG had been experiencing difficulty in recruiting faculty for committee service and was becoming increasingly aware of low morale and complaints of lack of communication between administration and faculty. In addition, the committee was examining reports from Pew Roundtable, Middle States study, and the 1988 Task Force report on Faculty Governance, all of which alluded to problems in the system.

The nineteen faculty participants in the focus groups were obtained by random sampling of eligible faculty. A separate focus group was also conducted for nine administrators who serve on various committees. Although the body of this report will discuss complaints and problems, we must preface the discussion with sentiments expressed by many that these are neither the worst nor the best of times at Skidmore. Some senior faculty participants reminded us of the days when administration and faculty had a strongly adversarial relationship. At the same time they described the strong sense of community and the faculty's trust of one another that was felt in the past. We recognize the strengths of our system that allow faculty voices to be heard in so many meetings around campus. What we will now address are the concerns that were expressed by our participants and recommendations for improving the clarity and strength of those voices.

Concerns:

Structure of Committees:

- x Current committee system is bloated and cumbersome. Too much faculty time is spent for insufficient outcome.
- x On some committees faculty function is that of "watch dog" or "rubber stamper." Role is confusing for faculty.
- x
- x Some faculty are concerned about the composition of committees and the balance between administrative and faculty representation. What is the role of students? Should faculty have more control of agendas?
- x Most administrators would like more autonomy in decision making in areas that overlap with committee responsibilities.

Communication and Trust:

- x On some committees hard work and long deliberations result in recommendations that are never implemented. There is a perception that faculty do not trust the decisions made by some of their

colleagues on committees. Some faculty seem to represent more of the administrative viewpoint. Do they speak for the faculty?

- x Communication between faculty and their committee representatives is weak. It's unclear to many faculty that those on committees represent more than themselves; they represent the faculty.
- x Morale is suffering lately as a result of personnel decisions, outsourcing, and salaries. Faculty would like more openness about the motives behind these decisions. In addition some faculty feel that curriculum changes were driven by administrative concerns. Some wish that administration was more forthright on these matters.
- x Administrators think that the committee system is not promoting trust between administration and faculty and between faculty and faculty.
- x Many faculty and administrators feel that we have lost our sense of community. Junior faculty report that they feel the lack. Given our size, can we recapture that spirit in our current functioning?

Recognition for Committee Service:

- x Junior faculty are confused about role of community service in the tenure process. They still feel pressure to serve on elected committees.
- x Senior faculty feel lack of incentive to serve. They would like compensation and more positive reinforcement.

General Recommendations Made by Participants in the Focus Groups:

Structure of Committees:

- x Streamline committee structure by combining some committee functions or alleviating those which are merely rubber stamping prior administrative decisions.
- x Develop an understanding of the different roles of faculty on different committees and communicate them more clearly.
- x Some faculty suggested changing the committee composition to put faculty in the clear majority and decrease the role of administrators. An administrator suggested changing the level of administrator participation in a committee, for example, an administrator might attend only two meetings a semester rather than every meeting.
- x Committees that are most rewarding to faculty are ones tied tightly to academic mission. These are the committees that faculty should control.
- x Task forces should be folded into the committee structure and report back to those committees. All task forces should be elected.

Communication and Trust:

- x Committees need to set policies within which implementation occurs. Committees need to report back to faculty about their work (current reports are beginning that process).
- x Either acknowledge that we are a pseudo-democracy or get a more democratic system.
- x More communication from administration on power structure and decision making process (open meetings with President beginning that process).
- x Change the structure of faculty meetings; do away with announcements; time for faculty to meet alone without administration.
- x Develop a faculty council or faculty executive committee to address concerns not handled through committee structure; possibly this could be a role for the Committee of Committees.
- x Develop a method to resocialize faculty towards trust.

Recognition of Committee Service:

- x CFG should conduct orientation of new faculty as to roles and functions of faculty governance explaining to junior faculty the broader definition of community service that is currently accepted.
- x Develop a compensation system for committee service.