

DRAFT

Faculty Meeting Minutes
Williams College
May 8, 2019

President Mandel called the May faculty meeting to order at 4:04 pm. After welcoming her colleagues “on this beautiful sunny day” she called on Bud Wobus, Professor of Geology, to read a memorial minute for William Templeton Fox, the Edward Brust Professor of Geology and Mineralogy, Emeritus, who died in Williamstown in February at the age of 86 [the memorial minute is attached to the minutes of this meeting]. Following the reading of the tribute to Professor Fox, President Mandel asked her colleagues to stand for a moment of silence.

At this final faculty meeting of the 2018-2019 academic year, President Mandel said she would keep her opening remarks quite brief. She said that she had been in her office “thinking about how to sum up my first year at Williams.” It had been a difficult year and the slight irony in her voice drew some smiles and a little laughter from her listeners. In previous meetings, she said, she had come with “some inspirational, forward-looking thoughts.” But at this meeting, she added, she “thought it would be better to open up the floor for questions,” given that “we have been overtaken by events.” She said that she had very little to say about those events that she hasn’t already said. But she did refer to the latest of a series of difficult events in the past few months, the demand made by students for Katie Kent, Professor and Chair of English, to step down in the wake of yet another altercation about race, politics, and belonging at the College. In response to this demand, she said emphatically, “we have told students and the *Record* that we have no intention to allow this to happen.” She added that “the matter is closed; Katie has now apologized and this is it.” The “power to apologize” is important, she reflected, as is “the power of forgiveness.” She said that we “need to move forward as a community” and that her door would be open to individuals who wanted to talk about “restorative justice and healing.” While promising to give more thought to these issues over the summer, President Mandel said that she had no further comments but welcomed questions and reflections from the floor.

The first person to speak was Jana Sawicki, Professor and Chair of Philosophy and Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Inquiry and Inclusion. She said that while the forthcoming report of the committee would “not be earth shattering,” committee members had engaged in a great deal of outreach, heard from a lot of people, and undertaken a lot of reading. She said that Williams was not alone in confronting complex issues of inclusion and expression; “what is happening here at Williams,” she said, “is happening nationally.” In particular, she added, there is a great deal of problematic “targeting of faculty” – for things that are said in the classroom, for things that are not said, for conversations in hallways, and so forth. She insisted that this does not mean we all need “to walk around with our speech chilled.” Rather, she added, she wanted to support what President Mandel had called for, namely that “faculty need to come together around these questions and figure out how we can be accountable and respond to legitimate demands that are made” while calling out those demands that are not legitimate. She gave some examples of her committee’s findings, noting, for example, that there are white males on the staff who have said

they feel unsafe going into student dorm rooms and seeing coasters that say that all white men are racists. There “has to be limits and boundaries,” she said, adding that “we need to create these things together.” Echoing a sentiment shared widely by many listening to her comments, Professor Sawicki said that “it is not a good time on campus at the moment and I’m sad that our new president has had to be here amidst these tensions this year.” She concluded by saying that while concerns about inclusion are certainly legitimate, “we need to prevent ourselves from being polarized.”

President Mandel thanked Professor Sawicki for her reflections and observed that it was indeed the case that “we are not alone” and that what is happening here is happening elsewhere, even if “it is all playing out here in our own unique ways.” She noted that many of the issues we are dealing with she had also confronted at Brown University. She added that since 2014 there had been perhaps “one big issue” a year that had “ripped the Brown campus apart.” By contrast, she reflected, there had been a number of major issues tearing folks apart at Williams in just the last semester alone. The intensity of all of these events, she said, “feels like the uncorking of something that hasn’t had full expression here before.” She noted that her colleagues might “disagree fundamentally about what is going on” and that there was “no consensus in this room, which is not a surprise,” about what was taking place. But if part of the problem was that we disagree with each other, she said, this was also part of the solution as we can and do talk with each other. We can, she said, be “a model for our students as we feel and work our way through all of this.” Concluding her remarks, President Mandel noted that as she was heading to the meeting people were joking as she carried a suitcase with her. “I’m not walking away,” she added to much laughter. Rather, she said, she was leaving immediately after the meeting on a trip. But, she added, “I am coming back!”

Gail Newman, Professor of German and Chair of the Center for Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures, next contributed to the discussion. She said that she hoped that “our own sense of distress and embattledness” did not become foregrounded to such an extent that it prevented us from dealing with “the emotions and thoughts and ideas that are coming thick and fast now that have not been addressed.” Reiterating her point, she said that she hoped those “real concerns don’t get overshadowed by our sense of stuff happening to us.” She insisted that “we have to listen to the students” and while we certainly need to talk to each other as faculty and staff, “I don’t want it to seem that the students are doing something to us.” Professor Newman concluded her reflections by saying, “I do feel sick to my stomach at how broken Williams feels at the moment, but I don’t want the drama that has emerged to undermine the vision of how we can transform Williams in the most positive of ways.”

Gretchen Long, Professor of History, said that she did not make a habit of looking at ephblog but that she did today and that while “we have no power over what is written there” it was alarming that students who had complained about Black previews were named. While it has not been our policy to engage with those who post on ephblog, she added, “these students are members of our community; they are only nineteen and we need to be concerned about their safety.” President Mandel thanked Professor Long for her observations and concerns and added

that there are “videos out there that have also gone on to Breitbart” news and that while the College was looking into what it could do to protect students its powers were limited. More generally, she added, “we need to deal with how students live in a digital world.” One of the threats to free expression, she reflected, was social media. Students were often afraid of being attacked on digital platforms; there is “a lot of calling out” on these platforms, she said, which is why students are afraid and often prefer to remain silent. Perhaps, she reflected, “we might need somebody to teach media studies,” to focus on what is happening “from sociological, economic, and psychological perspectives.” President Mandel concluded her own thoughts about social media by saying that while we have little control over it we need more discussion about “the ethics of on-line behavior and an awareness of the pitfalls of using social media.”

At this point in the afternoon’s proceedings President Mandel said that she was going to end the discussion but hoped the issues raised would continue to be the focus of smaller group discussions. Over the summer, she said, she wants to continue such discussions amongst those with differing ideas; “we need smaller spaces,” she said, “in which people can say things that they won’t say in larger spaces like this.”

Moving on to the rest of the formal agenda, President Mandel reminded her colleagues about the on-line elections for the Standing Grievance Panel and the Committee on Educational Affairs. The deadlines for both elections, she said, was midnight today. She then added, “if there is a faculty meeting there must also be a discussion of the SCS forms!” And with that she turned the floor to Lee Park, Professor of Chemistry and Chair of the Ad Hoc Student Course Survey Implementation Committee, for a motion on the preamble language for the new, on-line student course survey. [See the memorandum from the committee attached to these minutes.]

Professor Park opened her remarks by saying “hello again,” after which there was a great deal of laughter. She reminded her listeners of the issues her committee had raised in previous faculty meetings this Spring and the motions that were brought forward and voted on in the April meeting. She also said that there had been much debate – as well as expressions of concern about the entire package of changes – and she hoped these conversations would continue in the future. She added that two years ago the faculty had decided to implement a broad set of changes in how students evaluated their courses and that those changes will indeed be implemented in the Fall of 2019 in the wake of the votes taken at the last faculty meeting. But, she added, there was not enough time at the last meeting to discuss the final motion the ad hoc committee had drafted, to change the preamble to the new SCS forms. Consequently, at this meeting, she said, she would introduce for debate the remaining motion.

Professor Park then read the motion: *To change the preamble to the form from: “The Student Course Survey serves two important functions at Williams College. The information you provide is used by instructors to improve their teaching, and it plays an important role in evaluating instructors for promotion. All data are reported in aggregate fashion, and individual student identities are not released. The instructor will receive numerical results and qualitative comments only after they submit the grades for this course.” To: “The Student Course Survey*

*serves two important functions at Williams College. The information you provide is used by instructors to improve their teaching, and it plays an important role in evaluating instructors for promotion. Your faculty will receive the results of student course surveys only after they have submitted their grades. Your numerical scores will be linked to your qualitative comments from the text boxes, but your identity will not be released except as set forth below. The company that distributes these surveys will send you automated reminders to fill them out. In order to do this, they will have information about your identity and will retain this information indefinitely. This survey is therefore confidential, but not strictly anonymous. Identifying information will **not** be released to faculty under normal circumstances. However, the college may identify, use, and disclose the source of student evaluations if it determines in good faith that it is necessary to comply with legal obligations, to protect the legal rights, safety, or security of the college or members of the Williams community."*

After reading the motion Professor Park called for a second and the motion was duly seconded. She then addressed the rationale for changing the preamble – namely that the original language “was not quite accurate.” The more she and her colleagues explored how to implement the new course surveys, she added, “the more we decided that we needed to be clearer about the language of disclosure.” College Counsel, she said, concurred, adding that the language of the original preamble was “not adequate and in legal compliance and would need to be changed.”

The discussion of the motion began with some minor points and corrections. Christopher Nugent, Professor of Chinese and Chair of Comparative Literature, pointed out a typographical error and an extra space and wondered about the capitalization of “College.” It was also noted that the language of “your faculty” sounded confusing and might sound better if it were to be replaced with “your instructor,” a minor change that was accepted with no opposition.

Peter Just, Professor of Anthropology, then aptly observed that “the preamble is almost as long as the form itself” and that the language was “highly legalistic.” He said that if he were a student he would be far less likely to respond if he had to read all of this. Perhaps, he added, we could put this language in the College *Bulletin* and students could read it there if they so desired. Professor Park said that her committee had felt uncomfortable about doing this.

In terms of some of the implications of the new legal jargon being proposed, Sam Crane, Professor of Political Science and Chair of Asian Studies, wondered whether or not it would be made explicit that the information on the completed course surveys could be shared with others “under some circumstances.” Sara Dubow, Professor of History and Chair of the Faculty Steering Committee, said that this could be put in the student *Handbook*. To some laughter Professor Crane said that he was a student of the politics of the People’s Republic of China and he was “afraid of vague rants of those in power.” Professor Dubow responded that she was a historian of the US constitution and was aware of such things too!

Comments then followed from untenured professors who identified themselves as such. Nicole Brown, Assistant Professor of Classics, questioned the implied links between

“promotion” and “tenure” in the current wording of the form and sought clarification as to the form’s specific uses in terms of the evaluation of faculty and whether or not the current language was appropriate. Yana Skorobogatov, Assistant Professor of History, commented on the “potentially disincentivizing nature” of the new SCS form. She said that she might not fill out the form if she saw it and wondered if there would be a decrease in the percentage of students who completed the forms and what the implications of this would be for untenured members of the faculty. Professor Park said that she and her colleagues had discussed this but they felt they had no choice but to include the new preamble.

Concerns about the legal jargon in the preamble on the new forms were also expressed by Kerry Christensen, Professor of Classics. It might help, she said, if we foregrounded the legal obligations the College was under at the outset on the forms. President Mandel said that minor changes might well be possible but would need to be run by College Counsel. Dukes Love, Provost and Professor of Economics, wondered if there was the possibility of creating a hyperlink to the confidentiality paragraph in the student *Handbook*.

There appeared to be no further comments and so Professor Park re-read the motion, albeit with the small revisions that had been agreed: *“The Student Course Survey serves two important functions at Williams College. The information you provide is used by instructors to improve their teaching, and it plays an important role in evaluating instructors for promotion. Your instructor will receive the results of student course surveys only after they have submitted their grades. Your numerical scores will be linked to your qualitative comments from the text boxes, but your identity will not be released except as set forth below. The company that distributes these surveys will send you automated reminders to fill them out. In order to do this, they will have information about your identity and will retain this information indefinitely. This survey is therefore confidential, but not strictly anonymous. Identifying information will **not** be released to faculty under normal circumstances. However, the College may, in extraordinary circumstances, identify, use, and disclose the source of student evaluations if it determines in good faith that it is necessary to comply with legal obligations, to protect the legal rights, safety, or security of the college or members of the Williams community.”*

After a test vote the motion was voted on. There were 59 votes in favor of the motion, 21 opposed, and 11 abstentions.

Professor Park said that while there was “only a little time remaining” this afternoon she wanted to point her colleagues to the various “other related issues” that were raised in the ad hoc committee’s memorandum that her colleagues had received with the agenda for today’s meeting. She called for a discussion of those issues. Dick De Veaux, Professor and Chair of Statistics, said that he understood why the ad hoc implementation committee felt that it needed to withdraw its recommendation that the text box comments only went to the faculty being evaluated (point six in the attached memorandum). Nevertheless, he added, he had talked to many colleagues “and nobody was happy with this.” Professor Park said that this issue was beyond the scope of the work of her committee and that the Steering Committee might need to review this and take up

some of the other issues that still needed to be addressed. Professor Brown echoed some of the remarks just made by Professor De Veaux. She said that it “seemed a little disingenuous” to say that a decision about point six “exceeded the jurisdiction of the ad hoc committee.” She added that while she did not think we should “redecide this point,” it did seem that some points were open for reconsideration and others were not and that it was unclear which was which. As an untenured faculty member, she said, “I’m not sure how these decisions are made.” Furthermore, she added, referring to point five in the memorandum (which specifies that the Committee on Appointments and Promotions will decide how the transition period between the two SCS forms would be handled for assistant professors), “it just seems that there are a lot of unanswered implementation issues” and that these issues “have not been at all addressed in this forum.”

That there were so many unanswered questions around the new SCS forms in general gave rise to a considerable amount of discontent. Professors De Veaux and Brown were followed by others who shared similar concerns. Laura Martin, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, said that she wanted to add her voice to the concerns that had been raised about point six. “It is distressing,” she said, “not to know what evaluation will actually look like going forward.” Material in text boxes, she added, can be biased against faculty of color and female faculty, according to many outside reports, “and we therefore need to think about who gets to see this material.” Professor Skorobogatov echoed these points and called for the issues raised in point six to be discussed further. On a different note, James McAllister, Professor of Political Science and Chair of Leadership Studies, said that he wanted it on the record that SCS forms are “meant for the benefit of the College rather than any particular group of faculty.”

The discussion petered out at this point and President Mandel next turned to Denise Buell, Dean of the Faculty and Professor of Religion, and Leticia Haynes, Vice President for Institutional Diversity and Equity, for their report on the follow-up to the HERI Survey and on recent conversations about the climate on campus. Dean Buell and Vice President Haynes took turns presenting the material, illustrated by slides on a PowerPoint presentation.

Dean Buell began the presentation, noting that in October she and Vice President Haynes had discussed what their respective offices had been doing in terms of hiring, as well as issues of faculty retention and the climate for faculty on campus. She noted that they had concluded their October presentation with some “troubling data” from the HERI survey which had led to many further conversations on campus, leading to their return to the meeting today in order to discuss their subsequent findings and reflect on some of the ongoing issues faced by the College. She noted that back in the Fall they had decided that it was important to acquire “more qualitative information in order to build on what we already had” and, consequently, over eight weeks this semester, they had organized eleven different “listening sessions.” Dean Buell, along with Vice President Haynes and Ngoni Munemo, Associate Dean for Institutional Diversity and Equity and Associate Professor of Political Science, had attended most of the sessions together, interviewing members of groups that had experienced high levels of stress as well as individuals representing various ranks and divisions. She said that today they wanted to offer a “rudimentary snapshot” of their findings rather than go into “super detail.”

Vice President Haynes picked up the discussion at this point, emphasizing that they both appreciated the willingness of those who had engaged in the conversations to do so. Turning to the information on the screen, she noted that faculty of color talked about the lack of community and sense of isolation on campus, about “who owned space in department meetings” and how departments functioned, about whether or not the work of faculty of color was always adequately recognized, and about the extent to which campus rhetoric was, or was not, reflected in actions taken. Turning to the experience of female faculty members, Dean Buell said that the main issues raised concerned overwork and disparities in workload, recognition for various tasks undertaken on campus, a sense of a lack of support and respect, and issues of gender bias in assessment and evaluation. With respect to LGBTQ+ faculty and staff, Dean Buell said the turnout at the session was low and apologized for the late announcement of the meeting. But she added that in addition to the actual LGBTQ+ session she had received some email feedback and the issues that had been raised were largely structural in nature: the heteronormativity of benefits the College made available, access to (and quality of) health care, housing issues (especially for commuters), and concerns about community. Dean Buell then turned to the responses of tenured members of the faculty, stressing the concerns that had variously been raised about the administration, about being “overworked and overstretched” (a concern especially of chairs and those with heavy committee workloads), and about growing levels of “distrust and division” on campus, related to expressions of fear, especially by white faculty. With respect to the athletics faculty, Dean Buell said that the main points they heard concerned “feelings of marginalization – of not belonging and not being well-integrated” with the rest of the campus community, the possible lack of equitable compensation, and the need for many improvements in the athletic facilities. “Where does this leave us?” asked Dean Buell rhetorically at the end of her presentation. She said that there were many good ideas put forward and that some things – like how the housing benefit could be altered, or how commuter benefits could be tweaked – could “easily be addressed.” But she added that “there are deeper issues we need to address as well,” including racial and gender bias, homophobia, invisibility versus hypervisibility, and the current climate of fear and distrust on campus. “We are polarized,” she added; “there is disrespect and there is fear of offending. These are challenges for us to grapple with.” Dean Buell concluded her remarks by saying “this is not necessarily a happy note to end on.” But, more optimistically, she did say that the advent of strategic planning “gave us the opportunity to work on many of these issues” and can help us “be our best as an institution.”

Dean Buell ended her remarks with these thoughts on the strategic planning process, prompting President Mandel to say that she wanted to circle back to things with which she had opened the meeting. “Ever an optimist,” she exclaimed, she said that the coordinating committee for the strategic review had met earlier in the day and that even though its work had been delayed given recent events on campus, work was “moving forward.” And she emphasized that the work of the strategic review was “not at all separate” from the issues Dean Buell and Vice President Haynes had been addressing: “it is about what we want Williams to be and how we get there,” she said. Certainly, she reflected, many of the issues now being raised will require both time and “careful consideration” to be addressed. But, she emphasized, “we will not be ignoring all of

this” because “thinking about how we make ourselves an inclusive community runs through the entire review process.” Echoing this point, Dean Buell reminded her listeners that on May 21st there would be an all-faculty retreat at Mount Hope where there would be a chance to begin to discuss the draft charges of the various strategic review subcommittees.

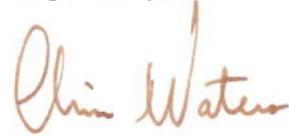
Dean Buell asked if there were any questions with respect to her co-presentation with Vice President Haynes. Professor Sawicki said she wasn't sure if this was the appropriate time and place for her question, but that she had been pondering the discussion that took place at the last chairs' meeting about a zero-sum faculty growth. She wondered aloud whether or not there had been enough transparency in committee discussions about the shape of the faculty and the curriculum. She said that a lot of faculty were retiring and we now had an opportunity “to think about the shape of the College moving forward.” But she was concerned that “we haven't talked about the distribution of resources” and observed that the “debate about resources divides us.” Elaborating her remarks, she said that there may be decisions about hiring that will have an impact on particular units down the line and that there were a number of concerns about this. “We don't know how decisions about replacements [of retiring faculty] will be made” and we need to think about “the best way to move forward as we make these decisions.” She emphasized that “this was a very important question right now for some people.” President Mandel thanked Professor Sawicki for her reflections and said that “we will address these issues,” adding that “we might think not about fighting for limited resources but how to work collectively in new ways, around forms of interdisciplinarity for example.”

President Mandel then asked non-voting faculty to leave and turned to Provost Love for the annual Report on Faculty Compensation. At this point the faculty meeting entered Executive Session, which, according to custom, is not recorded in the minutes of the faculty meeting. And so your trusted faculty secretary could finally relax, sit back and listen to the presentation with his colleagues, wondering what posterity would make of the missing moments in the May 2019 faculty meeting minutes.

Some eighteen minutes after introducing him, President Mandel thanked Provost Love for his presentation and concluded the meeting by calling on various individuals for closing announcements. Jay Thoman, College Marshall and Professor of Chemistry said that the current forecast for commencement was “74 and sunny” and that he hoped it would not be too windy so we could “put up the sun screen.” He said he hoped all of his colleagues could be there “to honor our students.” Speaking on behalf of the Athletics Committee, Guy Hedreen, Professor of Art and chair of the committee, again noted the events that bring athletic and academic faculty together and mentioned the reception that would take place on Thursday May 16th at the Clark, near the outside pool, which had now been filled with water for the summer. Speaking about receptions, President Mandel concluded the meeting by noting that in the Fall, at the start of the year, there had been a faculty reception and that she planned on continuing this tradition next year, holding a reception at her house after the first faculty meeting of the year. She said she would be changing some of the “start-of-the-year traditions” and she begged her listeners “patience as we try out different things and see how they feel in the community.”

There were no other announcements and no further business and so after making these concluding remarks President Mandel brought the gavel down on the final meeting of an eventful year at 5:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Waters
Secretary

Attachments:

- Faculty Meeting Agenda
- SCS Implementation Committee, Memorandum
- Faculty Steering Committee, Faculty Bulletin
- Faculty Motion Chart and Voting Procedures
- Memorial Minute for William Templeton Fox