

DRAFT

Faculty Meeting Minutes
Williams College
April 10, 2019

On a blustery April afternoon, at 4:05 pm, President Mandel called the penultimate faculty meeting of the 2019-2020 academic year to order. She welcomed her colleagues back after what she said was her first experience of our two-week Spring Break. “It was really long, in a good way,” she said; “it’s quite a hiatus, in productive and non-productive ways.”

Again President Mandel said she would like to begin the meeting with a few comments. She said that the College was currently “knee-deep in the admissions season” and that Previews were coming up soon, making her grateful that so many members of the faculty had expressed their willingness to open up their classes to potential students. She added that she was gratified that we “are currently doing pretty well in terms of yield,” a little ahead of where we normally are at this time. Furthermore, she said, she had been working with the admissions team to begin to increase the pool of potential transfer students and consider the various pathways from other institutions, especially two-year colleges, to Williams. She reflected that while expanding the number of such students will be one focus of the strategic plan, “we are already working a little bit on this now.” She added that there were currently sixteen transfer students on the “admit list,” which is six more than last year. Five of them are veterans, two of whom are women; eight are 25 or older, of whom four are in their later thirties or older; and several will be entering Williams from community colleges, including Southern Vermont College, something she was excited to share with her colleagues.

Turning to the strategic planning process, President Mandel noted that work had slowed down over the break but that the coordinating body was meeting tomorrow and she would soon be reaching out to those who had nominated themselves for the various working groups. She added that the “draft charges” for the various groups were also being finalized and that both the membership of the working groups and their responsibilities “will be made visible shortly.” There will be an opportunity for further feedback, she said, but “by the end of the semester we should be prepared to get going.” During the summer the College would be hiring a support person who would begin to gather some of the data that the working groups would require in the Fall and who, at the same time, would also begin to reach out to peer institutions to study some of their current best practices. We are “on target” at the moment, she continued, but “the hard part will be September to January when we will need to try to stay on target too.”

Meanwhile, President Mandel said that she had been reading the various suggestions she had received with respect to new academic initiatives. A number of those initiatives – twenty-three in all, ranging from the very broad to the quite specific – had come from small groups of faculty working together. Some, she said, would fall into the “teaching and learning bucket,” such as the suggestions both for a formal teaching and learning center and for the more adequate teaching of writing. Other academic initiatives, she said, focused on sustainability, development,

and global climate change, with proposals for a graduate program, such as that offered by the Center for Development Economics. Quite a number of suggestions, she added, revolved around the role of Williams in the larger world, such as the call for a center for international languages, a beefing up of opportunities for students to study abroad, and a heightened attentiveness to the College's larger global footprint. Furthermore, she said, there were a number of calls to expand interdisciplinary opportunities in the arts and music, as well as to consider an interdisciplinary program in science, technology, and society. A number of co-curricular spaces had also been proposed, including a community research-based initiative that would take students outside of the classroom, building on what we already do. Concluding her remarks about the proposals she had read thus far, President Mandel said that she and the members of the coordinating committee would "not simply pick two or three of these" on which to focus, but would instead be "more likely to feed most of these ideas into the relevant working groups as a fuel for their thinking." Feedback would be solicited over the next six to eight months and we would probably end up "doing many of the things suggested, even if not necessarily in the way submitted."

President Mandel asked if there were any questions with respect to her comments. There being none she said she would move on to the primary agenda for the day. She then reminded her listeners about the on-line elections for the Committee on Educational Affairs and for the Faculty Compensation Committee. Both on-line elections, she added, closed at 11:59 pm this evening.

President Mandel then turned to Justin Crowe, Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair of Leadership Studies, to conclude the outstanding business of the Calendar and Schedule Committee from the previous faculty meeting. [See the attached memorandum from the Calendar and Schedule Committee.] After wittily reminding his listeners of why we needed to revisit the academic calendar for 2021-2022 after the mistake noted at the previous meeting, Professor Crowe read the motion: *The Calendar and Schedule Committee moves to approve the 2021-2022 academic calendar.* The motion was immediately seconded. Professor Crowe said that the calendar for 2021-2022 had been corrected. There was no discussion and so he read the motion again. After an on-line practice vote the motion passed on a vote of 68 in favor and 3 opposed, with 3 abstentions.

Turning to the next item on the agenda, President Mandel called on Sara Dubow, Professor of History and Chair of the Faculty Steering Committee, to introduce and discuss a motion with respect to revising the *Faculty Handbook* around the issue of the timeline for establishing a review committee. [See the attached memorandum from the Faculty Steering Committee.] Professor Dubow said that this motion had been discussed at the February meeting of the faculty but there had not been enough time to vote on it then. She thus read the motion: *To add "Faculty Steering Committee" to the sentence in Section II:D of the Faculty Handbook that reads, "[s]hould the CAP or the Review Committee be unable to meet a given deadline, the petitioner will be formally notified of the reason for the delay," so that the sentence reads, "[s]hould the CAP, the Faculty Steering Committee, or the Review Committee be unable to meet a given deadline, the petitioner will be formally notified of the reason for the delay."* The motion was immediately seconded and President Mandel opened the floor for discussion. As there were

no comments, Professor Dubow called for a vote. The motion passed with 70 votes in its favor, 1 opposed, and 5 abstentions.

President Mandel then called on Lee Park, Chair and Professor of Chemistry, to resume the discussion of the move to an on-line course evaluation survey and to put forward a series of motions from the Ad Hoc Student Course Survey (SCS) Implementation Committee. [See the memorandum from the SCS Implementation Committee attached to these minutes.] There was some laughter when President Mandel speculated aloud that in the wake of the motion that had just been introduced by Professor Dubow “things are going to be just as easy with the next motion too!”

After the laughter had died down, Professor Park introduced the various matters which members of the faculty were now asked to consider. She first introduced the other members of the Ad Hoc SCS Implementation Committee and reminded her listeners that the charge of the committee was to focus on ways of implementing the new SCS forms for which the faculty had voted in May 2017. She also reminded her listeners that there had been “robust discussion” of the forms and their implementation at the previous two meetings of the faculty and that she and her colleagues had also received a good number of interesting suggestions outside of the context of these meetings. She added that the specific goal of today’s meeting would be to consider and vote on several motions with respect to the implementation of the new SCS forms. But she added that no matter what decisions were made today the discussion of teaching evaluation would not end here but would continue as part of the strategic review process.

Professor Park said she would like to begin the discussion by laying out the general flow of the motions that will shortly be brought forward, “talking through their logic.” She referred to the document her colleagues had received with the agenda for today’s meeting [see the attached memorandum from the Ad Hoc SCS Implementation Committee] and pointed to the screen on which was projected the flow chart of the various motions about to be discussed. She said that the issues to be addressed were “highly entangled” but that in the main they revolved around grade withholding, the timing of the window in which the SCS forms could be accessed, the variability of that window, and the wording of the preamble on the new SCS forms.

In an effort to explain the logic of the flow chart, Professor Park said she would first talk about the issue of grade withholding. She said that the idea of withholding students’ grades until they had completed the course evaluation forms was a “negative incentive” and that she and her colleagues “felt pretty strongly that this was a punitive measure and they were not in favor of it.” She reminded her listeners that during the trial run of the new, on-line forms, there was “a fairly decent response rate, although one that could be better,” and that grade withholding could act as an actual disincentive to students to complete the course evaluation forms in certain situations. Furthermore, she added, there would have to be a lot of exceptions made to grade withholding and that the burdens for managing this would fall on the office of the Dean of the College and the Registrar. She then pointed to the “decision tree” on the screen and said that if we voted to eliminate grade withholding (ie, by voting “yes” on Motion 1) – which the committee strongly

recommended – “then we’d move to the right side of our decision tree, to Motion 3, and choose between two options. In both options, she said, the window for the completion of the SCS forms would be fixed rather than variable and would remain open until the end of reading period. She explained the rationale for this by saying that she and her colleagues “felt it would be really important to have the window open beyond the end of classes.” The difference between the two options, she continued, could be explained as follows: under Option 1 the in-class administration of the online SCS forms would be the default (although students who did not complete the forms in class, or did not have a device on which to do so, would be allowed to complete the on-line forms outside of class within the allotted time frame, reminded by email to do so); under Option 2 there would be no mandated in-class completion of the SCS forms and instead students would fill out the forms when they chose to do so, again within the specified time frame and reminded to do so via email. Concluding her description of the “decision tree,” Professor Park said that if we voted “no” on Motion 1 (thereby choosing to retain grade withholding) we would then need to move to the left side of the “decision tree” and debate Motion 2, which would, once again, present us with two options. She added that if we did decide to retain grade withholding then we would need to give students as much time as possible to complete the new SCS forms and hence need to consider both fixing the exact time the window to complete the SCS forms would be open and extending it to the end of the final exam period.

After describing the motions that would shortly be introduced and discussed, spelling out the rationale for each of them, Professor Park reminded her listeners that a “no” vote on Motions 1 and 2 would mean that we would retain a variable window in which the SCS forms could be completed, that window would close on the last day of classes, and grades would not be withheld for those students who failed to complete the forms – in short, “we would keep exactly what was voted in two years ago.” Before soliciting comments from her colleagues on these three motions, Professor Park concluded her opening remarks by briefly mentioning the fourth motion being put forward, the motion to change the wording of the preamble on the new SCS forms, the better to reflect issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Pointing to some of the other issues that remain to be addressed “no matter where we end up today” (enumerated in the memorandum of the ad hoc committee), Professor Park said “I’ll leave it at that” and called for discussion. Professor Dubow reminded her that the first motion needed to be introduced before discussion could commence and so Professor Park read Motion 1: *“To eliminate the portion of the Procedures Regarding the SCS Form and its Administration that currently reads: ‘If a student does not complete the SCS forms for all of the courses in which they are enrolled that semester, they will not be able to access their grades until well after the end of that semester.’”* The motion was seconded and discussion commenced.

Christopher Nugent, Professor of Chinese and Chair of the Comparative Literature Program immediately offered his thoughts on the motion. After acknowledging the hard work that both this year’s and last year’s implementation committees had done, and stressing just how important the evaluation of teaching was, he suggested strongly that his colleagues should vote “no” on this first motion. He said that his objection had to do primarily with process, suggesting that the process of getting to where we are today had left us with a policy that is not what the

faculty had voted for. Offering a brief history, he detailed the serious work that was undertaken over two years in the lead-up to the report of the committee chaired by Professor Eiko Maruko Siniawer, with its suggestion of a new, multifaceted evaluation process. A key aspect of the new process for which we voted was grade withholding, he said, the need for which was stressed at the time “because the experience of other institutions suggested that it was likely necessary to guarantee a high response rate.” Moreover, Professor Nugent continued, our own pilot study at Williams, which did not include grade withholding, resulted “in a meaningfully lower response rate than what we currently enjoy.” This, he insisted, “is not what we voted for,” adding that a low response rate would be especially unfair for junior faculty members. While the concerns that have been raised about grade withholding have been “thoughtful and sincere,” he reflected, they are not new and were brought up in the discussions leading to our original vote and dealt with effectively then. Consequently, he said, he felt that the motion on the floor “goes well beyond the implementation with which this year’s committee was charged.” That committee, he added, “was created to implement, not to undertake a substantial review and revision of the original policy,” which is ultimately what Motion 1 is doing. Professor Nugent added that “this is not how faculty governance is supposed to work and would set a very unfortunate precedent for how we make and remake policy.”

Jana Sawicki, Professor and Chair of Philosophy, said she had a “friendly question” for Professor Nugent, asking whether or not it might be the case that some members of the faculty who voted one way two years ago could now have second thoughts about the issues currently on the table. Professor Nugent conceded that “some of the objections now being made might be reasonable,” but added that they have been raised before and that it was “troubling to return to what has already been discussed and decided.” Again, he emphasized that what bothered him was that we have procedures in place for making decisions and we have betrayed them.

Laura Martin, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, raised an issue that was to dominate much of the discussion that followed, namely that any change in the response rate of students in completing the SCS forms could have a unique impact on junior faculty. Professor Park said that obviously the response rate would be monitored closely and considered by the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (CAP). Related to the issue of evaluation, Colin Adams, Professor of Mathematics, wondered who would be making the decision about whether written comments on the new forms would be going solely to the members of the faculty being evaluated or to their department chairs as well. Denise Buell, Dean of the Faculty and Professor of Religion, said that she would not want the CAP alone to be making a decision about this or more generally about the SCS forms and junior faculty evaluation; rather, she said, “this needs to be discussed by the entire faculty.”

Returning to the comments made by Professor Nugent, Dick De Veaux, Professor and Chair of Statistics, said that new data from the Fall trial run of the new on-line SCS forms were available that suggested a good response rate and were not something that we should be unduly worried about. Peter Just, Professor of Anthropology, said that Professor Nugent’s anxieties about procedure were warranted but that he would like to suggest, arguing against Professor

Nugent, that “grade withholding is a bad idea.” He noted that this was the third occasion on which we had discussed the issue and discussions always revolved around the extent to which the purpose of grade withholding was to increase the student response rate on the SCS forms. But, he added, “a high response is not necessarily a good response” and a low response rate was itself evidence that there was not a strong opinion about a faculty member’s teaching, one way or the other. Forcing students to respond when they didn’t want to, he said, creates an antagonistic relationship with students and doesn’t yield responses of much value. As a result, he concluded, he would “urge a yes vote” on the motion on the floor. Returning to the comments about student response rates on the trial run made by Professor De Veaux, Luana Maroja, Associate Professor of Biology and Chair of the Biochemistry Program, said that she did not think the response rate in the pilot study was fine, adding that we really didn’t have much data to go on and needed more evidence before we could make a decision. Echoing some of Professor Nugent’s comments, she said that “if you don’t force students to complete the SCS forms the response rate will be low and this will harm professors because you will only see the extremes.” She added that compelling students to complete the SCS forms should not be seen as a punishment. Moreover, she reflected, if students needed desperately to see their grades they could request this in writing, but because few would want to have to do this it would encourage students to complete the course surveys in a timely manner. Echoing some of the anxieties that had been expressed about a low response rate that might result from not requiring students to complete the on-line SCS forms, Michelle Apotsos, Assistant Professor of Art, warned her listeners that a low response rate in a small class would skew the results; we needed a serious check to prevent this from happening, she said.

At this point in the discussion Professor Dubow stepped in and reflected on the important point Professor Nugent had made about procedure. She said that it was not at all typical for us to have votes taking place over a two-year period and that, consequently, the issues around the on-line SCS forms and their implementation were rather unique. While, she added, she shared some of Professor Nugent’s concerns, she has “overcome her qualms,” largely because the very core of what we had earlier voted for has not changed; it is, she said, “still in place” and the motions on the floor today don’t really change the substance of our earlier decisions. Karen Merrill, member of the ad hoc committee and Professor of History, also reflected on the process. Speaking solely for herself and not for the entire committee, she said that she had personally “agonized about grade withholding.” She said the philosophy around it is complex and that the ad hoc committee only decided to make some changes to the original proposal after studying other institutions which did not have grade withholding but had much longer windows available in which students could complete their course evaluations. She added that she saw this very much as an “implementation question” rather than an issue of radically changing an earlier policy.

To withhold grades or not to withhold grades: these questions continued to be the focus of much debate, despite the qualified support for the motion on the floor that had been expressed by several speakers, albeit certainly not all. Alice Bradley, Assistant Professor of Geosciences, said that as a new member of the faculty she wanted clarification about how the new system would work and how it came about. Echoing Professor Merrill’s comments, Professor Park said

that details about how best to implement the new, on-line course evaluations had not been explored in the original discussions about moving to an on-line system and that she and her colleagues therefore studied other institutions before deciding what would work best at Williams. Returning to the question of response rates in a non-mandatory system, Lisa Melendy, Assistant Professor of Physical Education and Director of Athletics, said that Physical Education initiated on-line evaluation of its faculty last Fall and that it seemed to work. She said that if students didn't have devices with them they could complete the evaluations later, which most did. She prophesized that "if you do this in the last class you'll get a good response rate." Professor Crowe, then responded to Professor Melendy's reflections on the in-class completion of on-line course evaluations. He said that part of the virtue of moving to an on-line system was purported to be the recuperation of class time that would no longer have to be devoted to the completion of the SCS forms. Now, however, it seems that we are being urged to ask students to use their devices in class to complete the new on-line forms. "We were told we were doing one thing," he said, "but now these changes may undermine what we had originally decided to do." Consequently, he said, he "would urge us to keep grade withholding in place."

Dukes Love, Provost and Professor of Economics, offered a way out of the dilemma of having to choose definitively whether or not to opt for grade withholding, suggesting a trial period of two years in order to determine if the proposed motion was viable. But, echoing a number of earlier comments that had been made, Steve Fein, Professor of Psychology, said that response rates were "of the utmost importance" and that consequently we needed to "incentivize students" to complete their evaluations. He added that he thought a shorter delay in posting final grades – of, say, 48 or 72 hours, rather than two weeks – might be appropriate if we maintained grade withholding. Professor Park said that she and her colleagues did talk about this but wanted to honor as close as possible the various pieces put into place by the committee that drafted the proposals we were now implementing. The original committee, she said, had talked about a 45 day window, but this was reduced to two weeks. She also said that, with respect to Professor Crowe's earlier remarks, the so-called "blue sheets" would continue to be administered in class, meaning that even under the new system class time would be required for the completion of the various aspects of the evaluation process. Finally, reflecting on Provost's Love's notion of a trial run, she said that we do know that at other institutions that withhold grades until students have completed their evaluations the response rate is very good, but, she added, to her knowledge there has been no institution that has done a trial run, comparing the effects of the withholding and non-withholding of grades on response rates.

The discussion turned to the amount of time the window would be open in which students could complete the new on-line evaluations. Laurie Heatherington, Professor of Psychology, said that she often gave difficult final examinations and did not want to see the window open during the examination period given that how students felt about the final might well influence how they evaluated the course overall. By contrast Gage McWeeny, Professor of English, said that he often assigned a substantive capstone paper at the end of his courses and currently regrets that he has to ask students to complete the SCS forms before they have completed their work.

Returning to the question of grade withholding and student response rates, Greg Mitchell, Associate Professor and Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, said that he was one of the few faculty members who participated in the pilot study and he had anecdotal evidence from some fifty students in that study. What emerged from discussions with them, he said, was that students who had not completed the forms were those who had some difficulty with them, and that many were low income students and students of color – students whose voices also needed to be heard and who might be most affected if the new system doesn't work well.

Raising an issue that had not been addressed previously, Noah Sandstrom, Professor and Chair of Psychology, said that he wondered what the purpose was of the "response boxes" on the new, on-line SCS forms, given that the old blue sheets would also be maintained. Professor Park said that many faculty members were concerned that their blue sheets and SCS results sometimes might not appear to be in sync with each other and that the boxes on the new forms would allow instructors immediately to see the connection between the numbers and the comments. Professor Sandstrom said he also wondered about the implications of students inadvertently revealing their identity in the comments they wrote in the boxes on the new forms. President Mandel said that this might pertain more to questions of anonymity related to motion four and perhaps we should come back to this later.

As the discussion had veered in a number of directions not entirely related to the motion on the floor, President Mandel asked Professor Park to re-read the motion after which the vote was called. The motion passed, with 40 in favor, 32 opposed, and 6 abstentions.

Professor Park then reminded her listeners that if Motion 1 had failed we would have moved on to Motion 2, but that as Motion 1 had passed, eliminating grade withholding, we would now move on to Motion 3. She then read the motion: *"To amend the portion of the Procedures Regarding the SCS Form and its Administration that currently reads: "The default window for online administration of SCS would extend from the Monday of the penultimate week of classes to the last day of classes. Individual instructors can narrow that window, so long as the window meets a minimum requirement. An instructor can choose to administer the SCS in class, though must then ensure that all students have devices on which to complete the form and must still leave open the minimum window." To one of the two following options: **Option 1:** "The default mode for administration of the new online SCS would be in-class. The forms would be available from the Monday of the penultimate week of classes to the end of reading period. The instructor should make every effort to ensure that all students have devices on which to complete the form. Any student who cannot or chooses not to fill out the form in class will receive reminders to fill them out after class online." **Or Option 2:** "The window for online administration of SCS would extend from the Monday of the penultimate week of classes to the end of reading period. An instructor can choose to administer the SCS in class, and should then make every effort to ensure that all students have devices on which to complete the form. Any student who cannot or chooses not to fill out the form in class will receive reminders to fill them out after class online."*

The motion was seconded from the floor after which discussion of its relative merits commenced, building on the comments that had already been made about the length of time the window would be open in which students could complete the new on-line SCS forms. Matt Carter, Associate Professor of Biology, said that he had a hard time figuring out what the difference was between the two options in the motion. Professor Park noted that “we don’t have a mechanism for enforcing anything,” but added that stressing the in-class completion of the new forms as the default (Option 1) might yield a higher response rate than would the case with the other option (Option 2), in which no such default was proposed. Under Option 1, she stated, students would only get email reminders to complete their course evaluations after classes had formally ended, whereas without in-class evaluation completion being the default reminders would need to be sent constantly.

Other speakers also expressed some confusion about the motion on the floor. Professor Just asked whether or not it was the case that under both options faculty members would be able to choose whether or not to administer the new forms in class. Professor Park answered in the affirmative. Professor Fein sought clarification with respect to Option 2. He said that he always administered the course surveys on the last day of class given that it “is really important to sum up the class” before students evaluate it. He added that he therefore “did not love the idea” of students being able to complete the forms two weeks before classes ended. Professor De Veaux responded to this, noting that “we can do anything we want” and faculty members can say that they prefer that students refrain from completing the evaluations until the end of class. Gretchen Long, Professor of History, contributed to this particular debate by asking if there was any way that “we could turn it on during the last week of classes,” thereby exercising control through GLOW over the initial timing of the window in which students could complete their evaluations. Courtney Wade, Director of Institutional Research, responded, stating that if we were to have a variable window faculty would need to contact her office to say when they would like that window to be open for the completion of the evaluations. But then, she added, students might log on to complete their evaluations and only see the forms for those classes in which the window was open, not seeing the forms for those in which the window was not yet open. This, she said, is why there had been some concern about a variable window. Professor Park echoed these comments saying “this is why we have a fixed window.”

The confusion continued. Amal Equeiq, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, observed that if we found it confusing what would students feel, a point echoed by Nicole Brown, Assistant Professor of Classics, who said that the language of Option 1 was “particularly vague and confusing.” Kate Jensen, Assistant Professor of Physics, wondered whether or not students would have the opportunity to change their answers once they had completed an evaluation if the window was still open. Ms Wade said that once an evaluation had been completed and submitted it could not be changed.

At this point in the discussion Professor Crowe piped up with a degree of exasperation. “We are having a discussion which is largely moot,” he said. “We actually voted to end grade withholding and this entails that we have a fixed window.” Much of the confusion, he added, has

to do with what has already been decided. So, he asked rhetorically, “what are we actually voting on?” Professor Park responded: “That’s right! We have a fixed window, we voted to have no grade withholding, and so we are voting on the options on the right-hand side of the chart [on the screen].”

This point did not end the discussion. Professor Just noted that there was some unease at the idea of the window opening during the penultimate week of the semester. He added that we were not actually talking about a variable window (which elicited much laughter). Instead, he said, we were talking “about when we would actually open the window.” Before, he noted, “with the old forms,” instructors could decide when to administer the course evaluations. But now, he said, “this has all changed” and he wondered if it was reasonable for us now to decide when the window would actually be opened. Professor Park said the decision to open the window in the penultimate week of classes was made by the committee that drafted the original report on the new system and that what we have before us now is not a change to that policy. She added that most instructors administered the forms in the last week of classes and still could. Not deterred, nor placated, nor convinced, Professor Just said he would like to introduce an amendment to the motion on the floor – to apply to both of the options under consideration – to open the window in which students could evaluate their courses at the beginning of the final week of classes, not at the start of the penultimate week of classes as is currently proposed.

President Mandel said that comments from the floor should now pertain to Professor Just’s proposed, and seconded, amendment. Professor Nugent said that he found it troubling. Previously, he noted, we had agreed that students are far too busy during the final week of classes and “now we want to narrow the window further; now we are saying that we only have one week to do it in a really busy period that would make things more difficult for students.” Ngoni Munemo, Associate Dean for Institutional Diversity and Equity and Associate Professor of Political Science, echoed these comments. He said that “if we are concerned with response rates, then limiting the process to one week is a bad idea.” He reiterated this point emphasizing that “narrowing the time the window is open seems like going backwards.” Marlene Sandstrom, Dean of the College and Professor of Psychology, said that instructors could always say to their students that “there are things happening in the course worth waiting for” and urge their students to hold off on completing the course evaluation. “They will wait,” she said, adding that she was not worried that “students will race to do things ahead of time.”

As a member of the implementation committee that had debated these issues, Professor Merrill said that she “didn’t have a strong opinion about this” but that one of the things she had learned being on this committee is that the way we get the highest response rates from students is by involving them from the beginning in thinking about feedback and checking in with them periodically about the course. She added that she and her colleagues learned a lot from the pilot study – especially that most students do complete the on-line forms in the last week of classes. Consequently, she added, “even if we do open up the process in the penultimate week of classes most students will fill out the forms later.” What was most important was constantly to engage them in the process of evaluating their education in their courses.

Professor Merrill's comments seemed to end the discussion of Professor Just's proposed amendment, which would have changed the opening of the window from 2.5 to 1.5 weeks. There were 24 votes for the amendment and 38 opposed, with 6 abstentions.

It was now time to return to the discussion of the original motion on the floor. But the weariness in the room was palpable (not least that of this faculty secretary, already reflecting on the sadness of our collective descent into the trivial and arcane). It was simply time to end this. It was 5:36 pm and people were leaving. And so Professor Park was asked to read Motion 3 again, including both options, before a vote on the motion was held. She duly complied after which those remaining voted on the motion. There were 35 votes in favor of Option 1, 26 in favor of Option 2, and 5 abstentions – a total of 12 fewer votes than on the previous motion.

President Mandel said that we would now move on to consider the fourth motion, which, she added, we might be able to address in the time remaining today given that during the last meeting, when it was introduced, it elicited very little comment. Professor Park 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. The company that distributes the surveys will send you automated reminders to fill them out. In order to do this, they will have information about your identity. This survey, therefore, is not strictly anonymous, but it is confidential, and identifying information will never be released to individual faculty. Faculty will receive the results of student course surveys, without any information that would identify individual students, only after they have submitted their grades.”*

The motion was seconded. Charlie Doret, Assistant Professor of Physics, said that he understood that identifying information on the new forms would not be released to members of the faculty but he wondered if it would be released to others. Ms Wade said that she would have access to it but that it would not be used. Safa Zaki, Professor of Psychology, said that she “leans towards the change” but wondered “whether we are saying enough” in the new preamble. She speculated about the consequences of a student writing something inflammatory that we might need to do something about. Ms Wade said that if data included things like accusations of sexual assault it would have to be released.

Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Professor of History, said that the members of the committee that had designed the new course evaluations did secure the approval of the college attorney for the original wording to which a change was now being suggested. Professor Nicole Brown said that although the first version was approved by the lawyer, she wondered whether this one also been

vetted? Professor Park said that it had not, in part because of the limited amount of time between the rewriting of the preamble in March and the current meeting of the faculty.

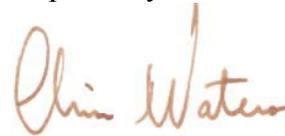
Suggesting a helpful way forward, Professor Dubow said that some of the concerns that had been raised might perhaps be alleviated if an email was sent to students, along with the course evaluation form(s), elaborating the confidentiality policy. But Lois Banta, Professor of Biology, noted that if the evaluations were completed in class students might not see a separate email sent by the College. Professor Nugent also expressed his concerns. He noted that, while identifying information will theoretically never be released to individual faculty members, there are occasions, according to what has just been said, on which it could well be released. “We need to rethink all of this,” he said.

In the wake of these comments President Mandel said that “we need to go back to the drawing board on this one” and Professor Park withdrew the motion on the floor. President Mandel then turned to the final item on the agenda for today’s meeting, opening the floor for questions and announcements.

Kashia Pieprzak, Associate Dean of the Faculty and Professor of French, reminded her listeners that “Teach Week” will take place between May 23rd and 31st and that the workshops taking place at that time had been announced. She invited her colleagues to be in touch with her if there were specific things they wished to address.

As there were no other announcements and no further business, President Mandel brought the gavel down on the meeting at 5:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Waters
Secretary

Attachments:

- Faculty Meeting Agenda
- Calendar and Schedule Committee, Academic Calendar for 2021-2022
- Faculty Steering Committee, Motion on Extension to Timeline for Establishing a Review Committee
- SCS Implementation Committee, Memorandum
- Faculty Steering Committee, Faculty Bulletin
- Faculty Motion Chart and Voting Procedures