

THE TERMINATION OF THE UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS (UWW) PROGRAM

Faculty Executive Committee Report
March 23, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Faculty Executive Committee believes it is useful to chronicle the process by which the Skidmore College faculty came to recommend that the UWW Program be terminated at the February 27, 2009 faculty meeting. This overview provides a chronology of events, summarizes concerns about the process, and offers some conclusions about lessons for the future.

TIMELINE

Spring 2006

- x UWW Program Self-Study commissioned by Paula Neberg (Dean of Special Programs). Final report submitted: June 30, 2006

Spring 2007

- x Eduventures, a marketing consulting firm, was commissioned by Jeff Segrave (Interim Dean of Special Programs) to assess UWW marketing strategy. Reports Submitted: June/November, 2007
- x Special Programs Study Group. Susan Kress (Vice President of Academic Affairs) formed the group on January 25, 2007. Committee members: Jim Chansky (ODSP), Tom Denny (Music), Ginger Ertz (Tang), Jeff Segrave (ODSP, Chair), Linda Simon (English), Justin Sipher (IT), Mike Thomas (Financial Affairs), Sandy Welter (MALS), Joanna Zangrando (American Studies). Final Report submitted: October 27, 2007
- x External Review Led by Jeff Segrave (Interim Dean of Special Programs): April 5, 2007; Reviewers: Myra Bloom (Director of Continuing Education, Sarah Lawrence College) and James W. Hall (Chancellor and President Emeritus, Antioch University and SUNY/Empire State College). Final Report submitted: May, 2007

Spring 2008

- x Susan Kress proposes that the college close UWW Program March 7, 2008
- x Susan Kress makes the decision to stop accepting new UWW students.
- x Susan Kress consults EE and CEPP about the process for closing UWW. FEC and CEPP agree that Faculty Handbook language for the "Elimination of a Department" provided the best, albeit imperfect, guidance. March 28, 2008
- x CEPP introduces a motion to close UWW on April 25, 2008

- x CEPP holds a Community Meeting for faculty, staff, alums and other interested parties
- x CEPP holds a special faculty meeting, facilitated by FEC, March 21, 2008
- x Motion to close UWW defeated at the faculty meeting on May 14, 2008. The vote was 65 in favor, 68 opposed, abstention.
- x Susan Kress forms the UWW Working Group on June 1, 2008. Committee members: Barbara Beck (Human Resources), Grace Burton (Foreign Languages and Literatures), Sharon Clemmey (Registrar's Office and UWW Student), Winston Grady (American Studies), Dan Hurwitz (Mathematics and Computer Science), Jim Kennelly (Management and Business, Chair), Deborah Meyers (UWW), Dan Nathan (American Studies), Muriel Poston (Dean of Faculty), Jeff Segrave (ODS Chair), Justin Sipher (IT), Sheldon Solomon (Psychology), Michael Thomas (Financial Affairs)

Expressed Concerns

At different points throughout this process, various community members raised questions and complaints about the process. We will not specifically address or answer the specific concerns, but we record them here as part of the historical record.

Was the community given sufficient opportunity to study and discuss all the relevant matters?

Should the language in the Faculty Handbook be revised so as to require a “supermajority” (or 2/3) vote in the consideration of closing an academic program?

Was it appropriate for the VPAA to make the decision to not approve UWW students while the program’s future was under consideration?

Was it appropriate for the UWWWG Report to identify “a majority” of committee members as not supporting its own model when the group had not discussed the matter as a group?

Should language be added to the Faculty Handbook that can guide decision-making in other kinds of comparable circumstances?

Should the faculty express its view when the administration or Board is likely to make its own decision anyway?

COMMENTARY

Members of the Faculty Executive Committee believe that the process by which the UWW program was terminated was procedurally sound and conducted with integrity. The decision to close a program will always generate a high degree of disagreement, discord, and distrust. This is why it is important to have in place sound and transparent procedures that allow all community members the opportunity to deliberate on, challenge, and fully discuss such a decision. In consultation with relevant faculty committees, the administration decided to follow the procedures in the faculty handbook for the termination of a department (Part One, Section XVII). Although the UWW program was in many ways very different from an academic department, the FEC believes that these procedures worked well enough and that there is no reason to revise the Faculty Handbook in anticipation of other such scenarios.

Faculty committees were involved in the process every step of the way. CEPP, IPPC, and FEC were not only consulted but also played key roles in bringing the proposal to the faculty