

Faculty Life Committee--St.Olaf College

Minutes of the meeting of April 21, 2009

Members present: Brian Borovsky, Beth Christensen, Eric Cole (Chair), Dona Freeman, Mary Griep, Anne Groton, James May, Arnie Ostebee, Xun Pomponio, Judy Stromayer, Corliss Swain, Irina Walter

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 p.m. in Dittmann Center 204.

1. Minutes for the meeting of April 14, 2009 were approved.
2. Announcement: nominees have agreed to serve as Mellby lecturers for 2009-2010. (To be announced at Faculty Meeting).
3. The rest of the meeting was dedicated to discussing the philosophy behind allocation of faculty development funds. Most of the discussion related to the portion of the funding dedicated to small grants, as opposed to that dedicated to released time awards, although the discussion was broad enough to inform all potential uses of the development funds.

The committee considered the question: What are the goals motivating our use of these funds?

- It was suggested that the committee consider how to use the funds strategically in order to gain the maximum benefit for the institution. Under this framework, the benefits to the institution would be considered more important than direct benefits to the individuals receiving funds. People applying for funding would be encouraged to “make the case” that the impact of their projects will extend beyond their own careers to benefit the college as a whole. It was suggested that there would be a wide variety of ways to “make the case”, and that this is a good thing. It was also pointed out that often there is a great deal of overlap between benefits to the individual and to the college – many projects are a strong win-win situation.
- Others voiced concern over whether the distinction between benefits to the individual versus benefits to the college is the best way to frame the discussion, and not everyone agreed that the faculty development funds are best understood simply as an investment by the college for the benefit of the college. It was decided that the committee would leave this point unresolved and focus instead on specific goals, such as fostering creativity and innovation that are widely shared across the committee.
- There was broad support for the idea of keeping the application criteria open and flexible, to avoid any artificial distinctions or boundaries that might limit innovation. The program should be structured to nurture creativity and originality, which are highly valued.
- The committee turned its attention to specific kinds of projects that might be funded with small grants. This was a brainstorming session, in order to generate ideas and broaden the committee’s view of what kinds of efforts could be supported. In addition to the traditional project areas, which have been support for scholarly and artistic activity as well as curriculum development, the following ideas were mentioned:

Suggested Activities:

- Seed money for bigger projects (preparing the way for writing larger grants, preparing the way for an ambitious sabbatical projects).
- Stipends or other support to encourage the seeking of outside funding (grant writing), or to help a faculty member take maximum advantage of a sabbatical.
- Building strong and cohesive departments, such as through retreats that include visiting experts and common readings.

The committee listed values to be supported by faculty development funds, rather than specific project ideas. The committee agreed on the notion of creating a very inclusive list, without trying to prioritize it.

Things Valued:

- Collaborative work among faculty members is valued, within and across departments
- Student-Faculty collaborations (controversial)
- Innovative curricular and pedagogical development
- Leadership
- Expertise
- National and international reputation
- Scholarship
- Diversity of projects
- Openness and flexibility
- Seeking outside funding
- Creativity
- Originality
- Interdisciplinary brainstorming

The committee discussed a proposal whereby the committee could decide how to allocate funds in a given year, between released time awards and small grants, based on the pool of applications received in the Fall. If the number of requests for small grants received in the Fall (say for interim and spring projects) was unexpectedly small, the committee could decide to fund two released time awards instead of just one.

Action item: Committee members will think of additional example projects to add to the list, to demonstrate the full range of activities that the Faculty Life Committee is prepared to fund. This list will perhaps be made available to all faculty on the committee's web site, to inspire applications. Furthermore, the website may also serve as a place to post the philosophical goals behind the Faculty Development Funds.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Borovsky