

Review and Planning Committee Minutes for December 18, 1997

Present: Jean Farmakes, Jim Hanson, Tammy Leja, Kris MacPherson, Alan Norton, Jim Pence, Matthew Rohn, Charles E. Umbanhowar (Chair), David Van Wylen.

We approved the minutes for the December 3rd meeting and then turned to our sole item of business, our first official consultation with the Dean's Council on faculty staff planning. The Dean and most of his associates were present. They had had their first day-long retreat the day before we met and told us about that. They had spent some of it discussing final aspects of next year's staffing and noted that their work on next year's staffing had consumed much of their time during the fall. At the retreat the associate deans for Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary and General Studies had given presentations that spoke to their academic domains and the future. The associate deans for the other domains will give presentations covering their areas at the next December retreat. These presentations varied quite substantially, we were told, and presented issues, insights, and approaches that each associate dean thought would be valuable. The intent of all the presentations is to create a collective vision of the college and its future in part through brainstorming about visions coming out of each domain that the associate deans have been developing based upon their knowledge of their areas and the consulting they have been doing with chairs of departments and others. They stressed that they want vision more than numbers to guide faculty staff planning.

Dean Pence provided a schema that the Dean's Council had created for setting initial priorities and guiding the process:

- *Vision: each associate dean of an academic domain will have given presentations by the end of the December retreats, and the Council as a whole will keep at this task of developing guiding visions.

- *Communication: needs to be plentiful and channels have been developed purposefully linked to a variety of groups.

- +The community as a whole will be informed by traditional means and the new "Inside St. Olaf" supplement to the Campus Memo.

- +Student leaders in SGA have met with the Dean; he and they have a system where he is available to meet with SGA as often as twice a month and update them if that is useful.

- +Faculty committees of major importance have all developed their means of communication with the Dean's Council, and the Chairs of some of those committees will meet with members of Dean's Council as a group to co-ordinate collective concerns and channels of communication.

- *Using data: involves 2 types of information.

+Internal statistics of a reliable nature covering departments, budgets, enrollments, etc. continue to be collected and put in order so that the final working set may be available for all to see and so that the numbers can be used comparatively.

+External statistics, those that provide useful comparisons between St. Olaf and other institutions, continue to be formulated, considered, etc. This was a task that the consultant Dennis Jones helped develop.

*Integration: with larger college concerns will remain important so that Dean's Council co-ordinates planning were appropriate with the SALT process and constantly thinks strategically (e.g., thinks about facility and equipment costs as it considers curricular matters that require special facilities and equipment).

Much of our discussion then centered on Dennis Jones's consultation and presentation. Some raised concerns that they and other faculty had about his methodology and manner. How valid were his group of comparative schools (what information do they provide us), and how value-free were his statistics (especially as they led to a sharp distinction with other institutions regarding our having a smaller administrative staff than other schools). Members of the Dean's Council, RPC members who attended several of Jones's presentations that day, and RPC members in general concurred on a number of key issues involving his work.

1. Comparisons with our traditional comparative group of schools (which he did not show in the public presentation) and other statistics that can be compiled tend to show the same things as the comparisons he made in his public presentation which include more elite liberal arts schools and some other schools than we have tended to include in the past). The general trends he has found do appear reliable, and it is important that people don't get bogged down in a counter-productive numbers debate. The statistics can be developed so that they shift some, but all indications are that his figures reliably point to benchmarks we can confirm in our own ways. We all need to communicate this to others. These numbers can be very useful and they should not be seen as self-serving for any group. RPC urged the Dean to make it known that the Associate Deans had copies of Jones's information open to all to read, and he agreed to make a copy available through the library reserve system.
2. Our discussion also helped remind people that numbers are just numbers. Planners will now want to consider why our numbers may be different than others in various areas; they will need to consider why we might want to retain or change any discrepancies or similarities. For example, some "administrative" tasks at other institutions serve the ethnic diversity of their populations or cover academic and programmatic services provided by faculty here. Do we want faculty doing less student and program support activity and more classroom teaching or scholarly research (as at some institutions); these are matters that the numbers should help us examine. We should not set the comparisons and numbers as the goal but use the numbers to help us refine our vision. Here, in particular, the associate deans stressed that vision over numbers needed to drive faculty staff planning. RPC members agreed but also voiced concern that the visions being developed

within the Dean's Council need to be shared to some extent and encompass a broad understanding so that the process did not encourage a singular vision not shared by the faculty and college community to gain undue momentum. We were reminded that the implementation of the faculty staff plan would take place over several years and that particulars would continue to be developed over that time.

The meeting drew to close, but before we left, we had a brief discussion about Sabbatical Leave Proposals. The Dean needs to inform the Sabbatical Leave Subcommittee about his views on the proposals, and the Subcommittee needs to make its report to RPC in a timely fashion. RPC decided to meet Wednesday, January 7 at 3:30 in Library 515 to consider the Subcommittee's report and make its recommendations to the President. We will also at that time do more consulting with Dean's Council about Faculty Staff Planning.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Matt Rohn