



UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE RECORD

Minutes of the Special Faculty Meeting on Merit Aid

October 14, 2002

The meeting was called to order at 5PM by Prof. Michael Payne. He reminded the group that we are unlikely to be able to return to this issue before the Board of Trustees meeting in November. He also reminded us that after presentation of the report, faculty can either receive the report or can endorse, amend, or not support it by appropriate motions.

President Rogers gave some background to the merit aid issue. Both the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Patriot League have recently begun programs of merit aid and we need to consider how to respond to these. He reported conversations with parents whose children were being offered inducements in the form of merit aid to attend other schools. We are in competition with colleges using merit aid, and are falling behind in enrolling highly qualified diversity students, and skilled students outside of athletics. Within athletics, it is difficult to recruit basketball players (the “marquee sport” for the League and the only sport for which the Patriot League allows merit aid). Trustees are supportive of a limited merit aid program.

Prof. Arthur Shapiro, chair of the Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid, noted that the current report follows from discussions begun in the fall of 2000. A faculty forum was held in February 2002 to elicit feedback on a preliminary report. The Board of Trustees has approved a merit aid program within the limits of that report, and CAFA has met weekly to discuss the draft plan drafted by VP Kurt Thiede.

VP Thiede said that in times past, admissions decisions were followed by the financial aid allocation process. All schools used to analyze financial need in the same way, but now different campuses assess need differently and families will “bargain” with colleges on tuition. Admissions and Financial Aid Offices now need to do their tasks simultaneously and interactively.

VP Charlie Pollock continued by noting that the Trustees approved merit aid in principle in April 2002, pending submission of successful program by this November. Underlying all the objectives is an enhancement of academic quality. The Trustees requested (following the CAFA recommendation): a feasible fundraising plan (new gifts for this must be beyond other already anticipated gifts), that there be no impact on percentage of low-income students and that the 3 (nonathletic) : 1 (athletic) ratio that already applies to the preferential aid program be retained.

VP Thiede next turned to some details of the program (see Agenda for this meeting for the report). He emphasized that the program is limited in scope, with at most 10 students per class to be on no-need aid. Most financial aid will still go to students with need. He hoped

the program would increase the currently low yield of students with desired academic records, skills, or diversity qualities, who have low financial need. There will be an ongoing review of the program.

A number of questioners focused on the basketball awards. The amount of money to be spent on basketball players was large; do we want to be seen as “buying students”? Will the awards really increase academic quality of basketball players? Should fully 1/4 of athletic aid money be spent on basketball? What about players who are injured and cannot play? VP Thiede responded that many basketball players are already high-need individuals, and that spreading merit aid money thinly reduces its impact. He said that basketball should be an emphasis of the program, partly because the teams are relatively small (12 on each of the men’s and women’s squads) so costs can be controlled. Gender equity is supported by this measure, as well. Merit awards would be contingent on continuing participation in the sport. Although there is not yet a detailed set of guidelines for the disposition of injured players, he expects we will do something similar to current practice: If a player on preferential aid ceases playing, and cannot be involved with the sport in some way, a portion of the package reverts from grant to self-help. He and President Rogers also were firm in their denial that full-ride scholarships would ever be applied to football. He also assured us that although athletes might receive merit aid by virtue of being eligible in other categories (such as academic merit), athletic skill would not be considered a criterion for choosing to make an offer to one candidate vs. another.

Another set of questions involved the ROTC scholarships providing room and board (the Army provides tuition for these students). Questioners wanted to know why ROTC was included as a category of supported students, how that decision was made, and whether there are students already here receiving that money. President Rogers said that he made the decision to offer this award as a way to keep Bucknell as an ROTC host institution. He had to make the decision on short notice and did not publicly announce it, although the Board did endorse the decision. This could be revisited, although we would have to honor commitments to students already here under that arrangement. VP Pollock added that ROTC students can add some diversity to the student body, although one of the questioners, Prof. Dee Casteel, thought that other diversity categories seemed clearer. VP Thiede emphasized that although the Army selects scholarship winners, our Admissions staff decides who is eligible to enroll at Bucknell.

Prof. Ben Marsh thought that the unease with the ROTC scholarship might be assuaged if the room and board award could be folded into financial aid instead of merit aid budgets, which VP Thiede thought was feasible.

Prof. Helen Morris-Keitel brought up the question of why international students are not targeted for beyond-need and no-need money. VP Thiede said need assessment for international students was tricky. In fact, this process may undergo revision, and some students receiving money might in the future be considered to be in no-need or beyond-need categories.

Prof. Glyne Griffith initiated a discussion on whether giving aid might lower the intrinsic value of the institution to the outside world. Prof. Gary Sojka agreed that sometimes raising costs can give a positive halo to an institution, but that in liberal arts colleges, the perceived quality of the student body may have a larger impact on a school’s reputation. VP Thiede added that Bucknell has a solid reputation already among national liberal arts colleges and that adding some additional highly qualified students can only enhance that.

Several faculty raised issues of how the merit aid system would be assessed. Will we have enough data to review in three years? Prof. George Exner, chair of Committee on Instruction, noted that COI had sent to faculty a list of questions and concerns. A special concern was the committee's uncertainty about criteria for renewing academic awards. Also, to whom exactly will the academic awards be going? VP Thiede and Prof. Shapiro agreed that more participation by faculty in these decisions would be welcome. In particular, CAFA and COI should continue discussing these matters.

Prof. Marsh, noting the late hour, asked if there was an opportunity to reject the plan. However, with no motion on the floor, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM, with no action taken to either endorse or reject the plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Halpern
Secretary of the Faculty