Faculty Conversation—Future of Colby—Summary of Themes
October 17, 2012

Macro and Micro perspectives: Faculty understand our micro climate (how we do our work at Colby) but are less familiar with the macro climate (the external, competitive landscape of higher education). Faculty would like to be better educated about the macro climate (competitive challenges, educational/pedagogical trends, etc.) and how Colby needs to position itself in this external environment. Then, faculty would like to think and work to connect our micro efforts to the macro climate—in ways that are consistent with our values.

Student profile: Faculty expressed a desire to think carefully about our student profile in substantial ways. Faculty expressed interest in attracting talented and intellectually curious students. Faculty further were interested in a fundamental conversation about what our students need to gain while at Colby in order to be able to have meaningful and successful lives following Colby. Many skills (communication, global awareness, writing, research, etc.) and dispositions (courage, curiosity, interior life, resiliency, groundedness, etc.) were identified. There was also an interest in coming to know our students’ experience more fully.

Faculty profile: Expressed desire to highlight the faculty profile, to aid recruiting and retention.

Colby profile: What are the goals and objectives that highlight the particulars of our setting (small size, residential, liberal arts orientation, small classes, student-faculty research engagement)? Are we fully exploiting these characteristics in the ways we teach and learn?

Pedagogy and curriculum: Faculty expressed an interest in a thorough exploration of the work that we currently do (curriculum, research) and how we do it (pedagogy, apprenticeship). We may need to consider different curricular expectations, different “forms” (class sizes/ configurations), different ways of teaching (“flipped” classes using technology to “free up” enhanced contact), and enhanced forms of personal contact (mentorship, apprenticeship). We should reconsider the Precepts in order to think about whether this is the model of education that we should provide to our students at this point. There was a desire to analyze alternatives while being mindful of the strengths of what we are doing now. Some concern was expressed that new pedagogies are time-consuming and that “something must give.”

Understanding the full institution (in its environment): Faculty expressed a desire for better understanding about the whole institution (different departments, administrative units, etc.) and how it works together to support the full student experience. There was a further interest in better connections with the Trustees both to understand their perspective on the institution and to be able to connect the external goals/constraints/forces to internal structures/operations. Since this is a “whole community” issue, we should have a “whole community” conversation in order then to identify and implement “whole community” efforts. Ultimately, we want to cultivate a collective capacity for achievement and want to transcend the separations between groups.

Global perspective: Faculty expressed an interest in a continuing and deepening engagement with international study. In the same way that Colby made the intentional decision to move from a regional school to a national school, we can make a similar extension to being a global school.
We should consider our support mechanisms, our proximity to Canada, and the reintegration of students into the Colby environment after they have studied abroad.

Connection to the local community: There were expressions of interest in maintaining and expanding our connection to the local Waterville community. We have an array of talents and resources that could be very helpful to the community, and we have a history of connection with Waterville as a foundation for such efforts. As we come better to understand the educational needs for the next decade (and beyond), we need both a commitment to sharing with the community and enhanced pathways to facilitate that sharing.

Moving Forward:

Faculty expressed an interest in having substantive, focused conversations leading to a retreat (in May/June). These conversations could each focus on a particular theme and include readings, materials, and perhaps presentations to help educate faculty about the external climate and pedagogical possibilities. Using those materials, faculty could then engage in more focused discussions about those particular topics—identifying opportunities and challenges. These conversations would lay the groundwork for a broader faculty retreat in which we attempt to move toward a more comprehensive, shared vision about the future of Colby both internally and externally.