

RPC Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 4, 2005

PRESENT: Wheaton, Sukhatme, Harris, Heyman, Pollock, Robson, Balik, Joslin, Thordson, Gunderson (chair), Bonner, Lindeman, Merryman

Meeting was called to order at 12:05 pm.

1. Approve Minutes

Minutes from the Friday, October 21 RPC meeting were approved with one correction: the name of the Institute for Global Citizenship was corrected.

2. Revised Committee Agenda

The committee chair laid out the revised long term agenda for the committee. Committee will focus discussions on two issues related to Macalester's emphasis on internationalism over the next several weeks - the number of international students accepted and the number of students who should study away each year - with a planned report on our discussions and recommendations being submitted to the administration by February. Beginning in February, the committee will return to discussions related to indicators of academic excellence at Macalester.

3. Committee Reports

TFOF:

Nothing to report

TFOB:

TFOB has been discussing the unexpectedly high number of students applying to study away and the related budget implications this creates. About 200 applications for study away received for 139 budgeted slots. Unlike recent years where surpluses had more easily allowed for increasing of the number of slots for study away, this year a small deficit due to empty beds and high fuel costs prevents such flexibility. To help accommodate the unexpectedly high number of applications this year, TFOB has recommended adding 25 spots to the originally budgeted number. TFOB also decided to freeze some spending for 90 days – this will be revisited by TFOB by February 15th when College typically has a better idea of where it stands financially.

4. International Student Enrollment/Study Away Discussion

TFOB committee report led into discussion of study away topic. Several questions were raised: Should the number of students allowed to study away be increased given the high interest level among students? How high a priority should study away be on campus? And how will the decision on who is allowed to study away be made? It was pointed out that International Center does set criteria for study away. Also, it was pointed out, that historically if a student turned in a complete and accurate application, a good essay, had a reasonable GPA, and made a connection to their major, the College found a way to allow them to go abroad.

The question was raised about expectations created for prospective students in Macalester's recruitment materials regarding the possibility of a study away opportunity being available for them. Student members of the committee stated that they didn't think students felt that it was guaranteed that they'd be able to study away but that emphasis was placed on the possibility when visiting Macalester.

Several members argued that study away was not an “entitlement” and other issues should have priority. They pointed out the impact to the social and academic environment on campus of having large numbers of students being away from campus all at the same time (1/2 of the junior class?). Committee was reminded of Macalester being promoted as the “world in St. Paul” – given high international student population, large number of international faculty, international programs, etc – and that students wouldn’t necessarily need to go abroad to have an “international experience.”

Ideas on how to better control timing of study away were discussed - fall semester vs. spring semester? There would be advantages to the College to have bias toward fall semester to balance out early graduations and other factors in the spring. Suggestion was also raised to require students to apply early (a year in advance?) allowing for better planning. Some colleges do this – Grinnell, for example. Spending a semester abroad is also impacted by when students can be away from campus given on-campus commitments and requirements within their major.

Limiting the number of study away programs being offered (140 different programs have been available over the last several years) another possibility brought up during discussion. Also, the idea of re-defining what it means to study away – a faculty-led trip abroad over January or in the summer may be good substitute for a full semester abroad. While this wouldn’t be the same experience as “living” in another country for a semester, it may meet the needs of many students.

Data on international student enrollment at Macalester and other comparison colleges was distributed to committee members by Balik and Gunderson. The 2004 Peer College Data Book report showed that Macalester ranks second nationally among peer colleges in percentage of international student enrollment (14.2%) with only Mt Holyoke (15.7%) ranking higher. The next highest institution was Grinnell with 10.8%. Numbers from Institutional Research shows that since 1990 international enrollment has increased from 171 students from 62 countries to 262 students from 80 countries in 2004.

Wheaton shared data showing international student enrollment and net tuition data - 95% of international students admitted receive financial aid (average 85% discount) compared to 70% of U.S. students receiving aid (average 38% discount). Briefly discussed the impact of raising/decreasing the number of international students and the impact this would have on the College’s discount rate. Reallocating dollars away from international student enrollment would free up money for study away or other factors which contribute to Macalester’s emphasis on internationalism. He posed the question: What should the number of international students on campus be?

The committee discussed what impact lowering our international enrollment rate (even temporarily) would have on our reputation as an “international” campus. It was pointed out that we have already begun a dial back on the number of international students dropping from 14% in 2004 to 12% in 2005. Some members felt that there was not a lot of “play in the numbers” if we want to maintain international student quality and diversity. Lindeman pointed out that international student enrollment becoming much more competitive. Several members stated that a smaller number of international students of higher quality would be preference over larger numbers.

The point was made that a lot of College activity occurring right now – the start of the Institute for the Global Citizenship, new promotional materials being developed for the college, the promotion of Macalester as a “world class college” all contradicted the conversation that this committee was having.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:10pm.

NEXT MEETING: Friday, November 11th, 12:00pm-1:00pm

Submitted by Ron Joslin