**Summary Minutes: Library Committee Meeting**

Monday, February 4, 2013

Attending: Julie Cassiday (chair), David Pilachowski, Patrick Spero, Dinny Taylor, David Michael, Nana Taylor, Angela Liu, Connor Dempsey, Erica Wu (from the Honor and Discipline Committee). Absent: Chris Winters and Larry Kaplan.

Minutes:

The committee began its work at 4:05 pm. Following the agenda, Professor Cassiday introduced our main topic for discussion, namely, the recent upsurge in violations of the College’s Honor Code. She introduced Erica Wu, who joined the meeting on behalf of Professor Cheryl Shanks, chair of the Honor and Discipline Committee, who was unable to join the meeting as planned due to a disciplinary appeal.

Erica spoke briefly about the unusual position of the Honor and Discipline Committee this year, whose mandate is to judge violations of the Honor Code but which finds itself wondering about the need for students to receive instruction about the Honor Code due to the sharp riser in cases it has heard this year. Erica stated that her committee’s caseload has quadrupled this year and then briefly summarized a document containing the Honor and Discipline Committee’s brainstorming about the types of violations it has seen the recent past, as well as possible ways of educating students about the Honor Code. She referred to the fact that the web page “The Eph Survival Guide” provides the only instruction on campus about the Honor Code and how it functions. Due to this fact, Erica hypothesized that “The Eph Survival Guide” runs the risk of misrepresenting the Honor Code due to its emphasis on plagiarism and the need to cite sources correctly.

Lori DuBois then offered to explain the origin of “The Eph Survival Guide,” since she worked on its development back in the summer of 2007. She stated that “The Eph Survival Guide” is an adaptation of a similar web page at UCLA and was developed in 2007 by a group of students working under the auspices of WIT. Due to the time limitations of WIT projects, “The Eph Survival Guide” was never completed to Lori’s satisfaction. In addition, Lori noted that while “The Eph Survival Guide” was originally kept on the library’s web site, it is now housed in Academic Resources, which never participated in its development and does not update it. As a result, “The Eph Survival Guide” is arguably out-of-date and underused. Students on the committee commented that they did not know about “The Eph Survival Guide” until this committee meeting and had never used it to learn about the Honor Code.

At this point in the meeting, the discussion opened up, and committee members asked Erica several questions about the types of violations the Honor Committee has heard this year, and well as her committee’s understanding of the reasons for the upsurge in violations and for the specific types of violations they’ve heard. David Michael pointed to a number of grey areas in the Honor Code, such as the use of illicit substances to enhance studying or talking about whether an exam was difficult or not, and the committee arrived at the sense that students need greater education not only about what the Honor Code means, but more importantly about how the Honor Code applies to specific instances in students’ daily lives. Nana Taylor mentioned that she was unaware that many of the issues described in the document given to our committee by Honor and Discipline were, in fact, violations of the Honor Code.

Dave Pilachowski then briefly discussed his findings about the use of anti-plagiarism software among the Oberlin Group Libraries, which had been circulated to the committee ahead of time. By and large, these colleges do not use such software as Turnitin since it would violate the principle of trust on which their institutions’ honor codes are based. Dinny Taylor then commented on the fact that the Dean’s Office had considered the use of similar software at Williams about 5-6 years ago and determined that it would be inappropriate at Williams.

In the course of the discussion, the committee reached the agreement that some form of coordinated discussion needs to take place on campus about how best to educate students about the Honor Code in general, as well as the specific ways that students can and do violate it. The librarians at the meeting (Lori and Dave) expressed their willingness to change “The Eph Survival Guide” so that it more accurately reflects the problems that the Honor and Discipline Committee has recently seen, and they said that they will gladly participate in whatever conversation takes shape about the Honor Code. When the committee considered who should take part in such a conversation, members agreed that in addition to instructional librarians, the Dean’s Office, Academic Resources, OIT, and key student groups such as College Council should be involved. We also considered but arrived at no clear answer to the question of how best to reach incoming students with substantive information about the Honor Code. While everyone said that First Days would, in theory, make sense since this is when students are first acculturated to community standards, the experience of the group made us realize that in practice incoming students are overwhelmed during First Days and would probably not benefit from an educational initiative related to the Honor Code during First Days.

After the committee’s discussion of the Honor Code drew to an end, both Lori and Erica left and Dave then briefed the committee on the state of the new library. He shared a number of recent photographs of the construction site (available on the library’s web site) with the committee and discussed recent issues, such as the need for more compact shelving and set-backs due to the severe cold weather we experienced in January. He ended by stated that the new library is still slated to open in spring 2014.

Julie then mentioned that she would circulate an agenda for the committee’s next meeting towards the end of the month, and the meeting drew to a close at 5:20 pm.

Submitted by Julie Cassiday.