

Bulletin

"Fine, indeed."

—Thompson Bradley

Recent developments in staff politics at Swarthmore College

April 15, 1998

This bulletin is an informative effort of Swarthmore's Student Labor Action Group (SLAG) for the college community. We believe it is the responsibility of everyone in the community to keep informed about the ethical implications of all the college's decision making, including and especially the concerns of the staff. This bulletin is our own work and does not represent the official opinion of either the administration or the staff. Contact Janice Gallagher at 690-5207 or jgallag1 with questions or to get involved.

Layout and proofreading

Amy Dalton '98

David Reese '99

Options probed for new staff grievance procedure

Both the staff and the administration see the current procedure as inadequate

By Amy Dickson '99

What do staff people at Swat do when they have disagreements with supervisors, quarrels with co-workers, and miscommunications over pay, hours, and expectations? Some of these cases are interpersonal conflicts; others, however, stem from deeper problems. Institutions such as Swarthmore have policies called "grievance procedure" for dealing with the latter. These problems arise even at the best

of workplaces, and a trusted, efficient grievance procedure is essential in making staff and supervisors feel comfortable bringing up conflicts and in creating an atmosphere of fairness in which staff have agency within the workplace.

Many staff criticized the staff grievance procedure as inadequate for several reasons. The grievance procedure is not posted or published in the staff handbook, so many staff may not know how to file a grievance. Those who do know that a procedure exists may have heard that it's too much trouble. The procedure is complicated and confusing, and it has no set timetable, so the process may take months or years. Staff may also be deterred from filing a grievance because they distrust its confidentiality—in the past, supervisors have been notified early on in the process—or because there is no support or advocacy system in place outside of the Human Resources Department for employees who file a grievance.

At the March 5th open meeting of the subcommittee on Staffing of the Long Range Planning Committee (SLRPC), a group of about forty staff, faculty, and students met to discuss their concerns over the current grievance procedure. The general consensus at this meeting further confirmed the inaccessible, mistrusted, and often ineffective nature of the current system. The group specified four recommendations for improvement: 1) Protection of confidentiality for persons who bring forward grievances, 2) Availability of information about how to bring a grievance, 3) Support and advocacy for the person bringing a grievance, and 4) Training and accountability for supervisors. The group felt that a new grievance procedure incorporating these concerns was urgently needed. While the SLRPC will make recommendations to the Long Range Planning Committee about issues that should be addressed in the long range planning

Learning from Bryn Mawr

By Rob McGreevey '98

In the fall of 1996 the employees of Bryn Mawr College narrowly defeated a proposal for unionization, despite widespread organizing on the campus. The story of this failed effort amidst surprisingly high pro-union sentiment can offer insight to the current staff efforts at reform at Swarthmore.

Bryn Mawr employees organized for a union because they felt that the college was unable to address their concerns fairly. Among their complaints were: 1) the ineffective grievance procedure (workers have been concerned about how to better negotiate conflicts of interest with supervisors and granted no effective means to do so); and 2) the lack of staff input into policy decisions that effect them (such as compensation, benefits and working conditions). They demonstrated the strength of this feeling when they turned to an outside organization in an attempt to ensure that their needs were met.

In the end the movement fell short of success. According to Ann Ogle, an administrative assistant in the psychology department, a pivotal reason was the staff's

perception that President McPherson wanted to "keep negotiations within the community." Ogle explained that when McPherson teared at the sight of a pro-union banner, clearly hurt that her staff felt the need to resort to such measures, many staff felt hope for making the "family" ideal work.

Because of Bryn Mawr's small size, its workers and administration can be on familiar terms with one another. Most Bryn Mawr administrators would therefore ideally see no need for an outside union, preferring instead a "family" of staff and administrators. Many staff would also prefer to keep their concerns in-house but are skeptical as to how effective that could be. With Nancy Vickers' recent inauguration as president, the administration-staff relationship is given a new slate. How she will work with or against staff concerns is yet to be seen. Bryn Mawr staff have taken a "let's wait and see" approach in the wake of the failed union vote and new president.

Still, the need for improved work conditions persists. Currently being explored

See Bryn Mawr on page 2

See Grievance on page 3

Ad Hoc committee brings staff concerns to light

By Jessica McFarland '98

On January 30, 1998, a group of staff members known as the "Ad Hoc Staff Experience Committee" submitted an extensive list of questions and proposals concerning labor practices at Swarthmore to representatives of the Long Range Planning Committee's subgroup on staff issues (SLRPC). The Ad Hoc Committee was initiated by a group of administrative assistants, who subsequently worked to build coalitions with other staff, faculty, and students in order to articulate the experiences and concerns of employees at Swarthmore. What follows is a brief history of this Committee's efforts and the events that have helped to highlight the concerns of staff in the College's long range planning process.

Fall 1991. The Ad Hoc Salary Concerns Committee, comprised of nine administrative assistants from various college departments, is formed. It establishes as its goals: "...understanding current personnel policies and practices as they relate to

secretarial compensation, facilitating the communication of these policies and practices to secretarial support staff and their supervisors, and establishing a forum in which secretarial compensation issues may be raised and addressed." The Committee works on outreach with other administrative assistants and discusses its concerns with the College administration.

Fall 1996. Barbara Carroll is hired as the College's new Human Resources Director.

October 1996. A group of administrative assistants (AAs)—several of whom had been involved in the earlier Ad Hoc Salary Concerns Committee—work together to draft a list of concerns and proposals about salary and grievance procedures.

November 1996. A series of articles, letters and editorials about the faculty-only lounge in Kohlberg Hall appears in the Phoenix. Some students, staff, and faculty are concerned that the exclusivity of the lounge both indicates and encourages unjustified inequalities among the College's employees. Others defend the

need for a faculty-only space.

December 1996. The AAs, supported by other staff and faculty members, present their concerns and proposals to Provost Jennie Keith. The meeting ends without resolution of specific issues, but a follow-up meeting is scheduled for after the winter break.

February 1997. The AAs and supporters attend a follow-up meeting with Jennie Keith and Barbara Carroll. The administration agrees to publish salary schedules, resolving one of the four concerns presented by the AAs. The salary schedules now appear both in printed form and on the web.

Spring 1997. The representation structure of COSP (the staff issues advisory board to President Bloom) changes. Staff are now represented geographically (e.g., staff in the east wing of Parrish elect a representative), except for Dining Services and Environmental Services, which continue to elect their own representatives.

Fall 1997. The newly structured COSP begins meeting and, at the request of staff members, begin to publish minutes.

October 1997. Fall Fest, a former staff-only annual event, is eliminated. Some staff members were concerned that it was a token event that consumed too much of COSP's time and energy.

December 1997. At the request of some staff members, faculty are invited to the annual staff awards ceremony.

January 1998. The College's Long Range Planning Committee announces that its subcommittees—including SLRPC—will hold individual open meetings on January 30th. The administrative assistants' group, organized now into the "Ad Hoc Staff Experience Committee" decides to 1) advertise the open meeting on "staffing," and 2) submit written recommendations to the committee.

January 30, 1998. Hicks 101 fills to overflowing with staff, students, and faculty open meeting. Most of the meeting focuses on concerns with the structure of the staffing subcommittee itself; it is suggested that with only one non-exempt staff member the subcommittee can not effectively represent college employees' interests in the long-range planning process. SLRPC decides to hold a second

Bryn Mawr staff search for solutions

Bryn Mawr from page 1

is the possibility of an objective mediating body which would function *within* the institution. But how would an in-house, "family"-style approach actually work?

Recent brainstorming into alternative means of supporting staff concerns within the institution give us some idea. At the root of the problem is the lack of impartiality in negotiating grievances. The current policy allows for grievants to take complaints to the immediate supervisor. This is a problem because often the complaints are about that supervisor; many grievances are not even put forth out of fear of jeopardizing one's relationship with one's supervisor. When grievances are put forth, they are not negotiated by impartial players.

Bryn Mawr staff are exploring two possible solutions. One is for a "grievance committee", comprised of staff people and administrators, who would be trained in mediation. This could serve as a more impartial means for negotiation. A second solution is an ombudsman, an impartial negotiator employed by the college but deliberately set apart from any one interest group. This objective negotiator would draw on expertise in the

school's policies and equal opportunities legislation to negotiate grievances between staff and administrators. Five years ago there was a strong recommendation from staff across all departments for an ombudsman. Though recognizing the need for such a position, the Bryn Mawr administration has so far failed to commit to hiring such an individual, citing the high expense.

Bryn Mawr's story informs the staffing situation here at Swarthmore. Like Bryn Mawr staff, many Swarthmore staff are by in large confident that staff concerns can potentially be addressed in a fair and satisfying way by impartial bodies and thoughtfully designed structures within the institution. The recent organizing efforts surrounding the long term planning process attest to this: excepting the appearance of several pro-union signs at the March 5th meeting, concerned staff have directed their energies into voicing their concerns within the planning structure, and encouraging others to do so as well. The hope among staff at both schools is that the family ideal—keeping negotiations in-house—will motivate efforts towards fairness and equity in the workplace.

Staff voice their concerns, goals

History from page 2

collection (in a larger room!) to address the many issues raised in the meeting.

February 1998. Largely due to concerns raised in the January 30th meeting, Paul Aslanian asks COSP to appoint four of its members to SLRPC. Two exempt and two non-exempt staff members are chosen.

February 13, 1998. At the follow-up open meeting, the Hicks Mural Room is filled to overflowing with staff, students, and faculty. Al Bloom and Jennie Keith are in attendance. The Phoenix publishes a front-page article. Another meeting is scheduled for March 5th.

February 26, 1998. About 80 people, mostly staff, attend a joint meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee and COSP to discuss their respective roles in developing communication between staff and the administration.

March 1998. Nearly two hundred staff, faculty, and students attend the third SLRPC open meeting on March 5th. Seven break-out groups are formed, with the following focuses: governance issues; training, professional development, and career path issues; compensation and job classification issues; grievance issues; job expectations, performance evaluation, and links to compensation; diversity issues; and benefits issues. The purpose of the meeting is to develop a list of recommendations and/or questions in each of these focus areas to circulate among participants and submit to SLRPC. Later in the month, staff receive reports prepared by the facilitators of each break-out group.

April 1998. SLRPC meets to begin putting together proposals for the College Planning Committee.

Future. By May 1, 1998, SLRPC's proposals will be finalized and a draft will be distributed to the college community. On May 2, SLRPC will meet with the Board of Managers, and by May 15, SLRPC's final proposals will be delivered to the College Planning Committee. In the fall, the entire long range planning process will move into a more pragmatic stage, in which the priorities articulated by the subgroups, including SLRPC, will be evaluated in terms of their financial feasibility.

Options probed for new procedure

Grievance from page 1

process, the grievance procedure is one of several staff issues that does not need funding or input from the Board of Managers and thus can and should receive immediate attention.

Barbara Carroll, Director of Human Resources and member of SLRPC, agrees that the "old grievance procedure," is inaccessible, ineffective, and needs immediate attention. She suggests that a good grievance procedure should be objective, have a structured time frame, and allow all parties to give their perspectives. She hopes to model the grievance procedure after others she has seen work well, in which Human Resources oversees the process but an independent committee hears the grievance. In addition, Carroll notes, a grievance procedure should be made virtually unnecessary if staff were provided with well-written job descriptions, clear expectations, and good feedback.

According to Carroll, the grievance procedure is on SLRPC's as well as Human Resources' agenda, and Carroll thinks that the Committee on Staff Procedures (COSP), an elected staff group advisory to the president, should be involved in creating a new procedure as well. She would like to use her past experience to help create a workable procedure, but get input from the whole community, including employees and supervisors. Carroll is, however, concerned about the best way to create a new grievance procedure in a timely fashion while getting input and feedback from all the people on campus who care about this issue.

Among the staff attending the March 5th meeting was Kae Kalwaic, Administrative Assistant in the Program in Education. Kalwaic has been concerned about the grievance procedure since she first began looking at it last year as a member of the Equal Opportunities Advisory Committee (EOAC). She and other members of the Grievance Procedures Subcommittee researched the concerns of the diverse Swarthmore staff pertaining to the grievance procedure, and began work on drafting a new procedure. Kalwaic hopes that Carroll and the other groups now examining the grievance procedure will take the EOAC research into account, and ask staff for feedback on drafts of the new procedure.

Kalwaic believes that the grievance procedure question touches on broader issues of equity on campus, such as the procedural and often hierarchical separation between faculty, staff, and students. The faculty procedure works well and already incorporates many of the things that the staff procedure needs; Kalwaic wonders why there cannot simply be one procedure. The issue of the grievance procedure is also closely intertwined with the related issue of hiring a new Equal Opportunities Officer for the college. Kalwaic, who is on the EOAC again this year, has researched similar positions at other colleges and found that many schools employ an "ombudsman" who is completely separate from the rest of the administration and deals with grievances and equal opportunities for all members of the community.

Swarthmore is now in the process of redefining the position of EO officer, which for the last two years has been filled by Maurice Eldridge. This year's EOAC, according to chair Peter Schmidt, feels that this new position could greatly influence the way staff grievances are handled at Swarthmore. Responsibilities will include dealing with EO concerns from students and faculty as well as staff, training supervisors on how to be accountable when a grievance is brought, and providing education about the distinction between an EO complaint and non-EO "grievance" issues. According to EOAC members, there is significant confusion among staff over what is EO and what is not.

The EOAC recently met with Al Bloom to discuss the option of making the position full-time and independent from the senior staff, so that the officer could more effectively function as a confidential and objective arbiter, and would have the jurisdiction to address grievances which are not technically EO, similar to an ombuds position. In a subsequent meeting, Bloom agreed to consider the option of an independent, half-time EO officer position, but decided that a full-time position would be inappropriate considering that jurisdiction over non-EO grievances is currently held by Human Resources. The EOAC plans to poll staff, offering a choice between an independent, half-time position or an in-house, less-than-half-time, position. The EOAC hope that the new officer will be hired by early summer.

Staff concerns at Swarthmore: A primer

By Janice Gallagher '99
and Yonathan Dessalegn '98

The concerns of the staff are new to many people here at Swarthmore, especially students. We hope these Frequently Asked Questions will be helpful in understanding the current procedures and structures, deciphering the acronyms, and filling in the gaps. If you have further questions, please call me at 690-5207, or email me at jgallag1@swarthmore.edu.

What staff concerns have been articulated recently? Where are they being discussed?

In meetings held this semester, many staff have voiced concerns about the weak, confusing grievance procedure, the lack of a staff governance structure, and insufficient compensation, particularly in regards to Swarthmore's support of staff education. The subcommittee on staffing arranged these meetings to provide a forum for the expression of staff concerns on campus, and over 300 staff members have attended these meetings so far.

The subcommittee is part of the Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC) process which began this year. The decisions made in the LRPC process will guide Swarthmore's decisions about its priorities and how to allocate resources for the next twenty years. The Ad Hoc Staff Experience Committee has been particularly vocal in urging the LRPC to include change and clarification of the grievance procedure and improving compensation policies as part of its agenda.

How are staff concerns currently addressed at Swarthmore?

The college has established committees which advise the president on various issues. COSP (Committee on Staff Procedures), composed of elected staff members, currently deals with staff issues, but its role has been historically limited to planning staff social events, not addressing substantive issues. Partially as a result of recent staff criticism, efforts are just underway to reform COSP's structure in hopes of increasing its effectiveness.

Human Resources, headed by Barbara Carroll, is the administrative arm which is delegated to handle staff issues. Additionally, there are various other advisory committees with staff representatives, such as Equal Opportunities and Benefits Committee, which address certain issues.

How do Swarthmore's wages, benefits, and staff procedures compare to similar institutions?

Measuring this is difficult because who we should compare ourselves to is unclear. Currently, according to Human Resources, we base our wages and benefits on the concept that we should be competitive with the "relevant market." This means that we set our faculty wages and benefits, for example, by looking at what similar colleges and universities (which would also be recruiting these professors) are offering. We set our lower-level, non-exempt staff wages and benefits, for example food service positions, by looking at what other Philadelphia-area in-house food service workers (like hospital food service) receive. Budget Committee has recently recognized that some of Swarthmore's lower-level workers are underpaid, and recommended an increase in wages.

Staff procedures at similar institutions vary greatly, but almost all do have a clear grievance procedure. Many, such as Princeton, have an ombudsman who is independent of the administration, to mediate staff grievances, and an advocate system to support staff bringing grievances.

Who is the "staff"? How are they classified on campus?

"Staff" encompasses all non-faculty employees on campus, from the administrative assistants, to the president, to environmental service workers. They are divided into exempt and non-exempt staff. Exempt staff is salaried and do not use a time card when they come and go. Essentially, they are paid for the work they do, not the time they do it in. Non-exempt staff may be salaried or waged, but they do have to use a time card. Exempt staff includes senior staff, administrators,

professional staff and deans. Non-exempt staff includes administrative assistants, administrative support, dining services, environmental services, and buildings and grounds. Concerns have been voiced over the fact that there is only one non-exempt staff member on the staffing subcommittee (SLRPC). The term "senior staff" includes: Jennie Keith (Provost), Al Bloom (President), Paul Aslainian and Maurice Eldridge (Vice-Presidents), Bob Gross (Acting Dean), Robin Mamlet (Dean of Admissions) and Larry Schall (Associate Vice-President).

What is SLAG? What does it do?

SLAG, the Student Labor Action Group, was formed in early fall of 1997 by a group of students concerned about the social and professional relations between the students, faculty, and staff of Swarthmore College. Our purpose is to encourage dialogue between these groups, support the interests of staff, and support staff-initiated efforts to improve working conditions.

Is there, or has there ever been, a union at Swarthmore?

No. No staff, neither exempt nor non-exempt, are unionized. There was an unsuccessful union drive in the mid-1970s.

Is there a trade-off between staff and student interests?

As long as students think about our time here as predominantly about *taking as much as we deserve*, there is little room to think of this question outside of a simple question of capital and resource allocation. If we think about our time here as an important stage in our life-long effort to build a more just community and society, we believe that this question leads us to recognize that it is in the interest of all to create a community which is responsive to the concerns of every group within it. In short, if allocating resources to increase educational opportunities for staff creates a more respectful, just community than installing cable in our dorms, then this is a trade-off from which we all benefit.