


TO: Adam Ryburn, Chair, College Senate
Members of the Steering Committee of the College Senate

FROM: Alan B. Donovan 

DATE: April 22, 2008

RE: Senate Resolution Regarding the Voluntary System of Accountability

I am writing in response to your recommendation to me presented in a resolution passed at the Senate Meeting of March 31, 2008. At that same meeting the Senate passed a motion which would substitute the administration of the CLA (College Learning Assessment) for the process of applying the imbedded rubrics for assessing Critical Thinking, which rubrics assessment was presented to the SUNY GEAR Committee about two years ago.

I certainly do recognize the policy of the SUNY Board of Trustees that faculty should have a significant role in the "initiation, development and implementation of the education program" of the College. Indeed, during my two decades of service I not only have been most sensitive to this role of the faculty and have, as my calendar permitted, been in attendance at as many Senate meetings as possible. I should go on to say that the substantive discussions at Senate meetings have improved markedly of late--much to the benefit of and prognosis for a vital campus governance system.

As I have discussed with you, I have taken several items into consideration in this response to your recommendation.

- ▶ Clearly the timing of the sign up for the VSA process did not allow for sufficient faculty consultation when it occurred in August, 2007.
- ▶ An important consideration in my coming to a decision is because the way you construe the Trustees' Policy about faculty having participation in the "educational program" is overly broad. Participation in the VSA is not in my opinion part of the academic program as you indicate, any more than forwarding similar data to be included in the rankings of U.S. News and World Report. It reports data about our college which is not the same. We did not supply any data directly to the Kiplinger Magazine Top 100 Values in Public Higher Education because, as I pointed out, such data is readily available through a variety of other sources. And some of these are reports about college data which we make available on our web.
- ▶ With the passage of the CLA as the instrument of choice to determine Critical Thinking abilities of our students--the CLA test is one which is recommended to be used for the VSA profile--the Senate has approved the process of a standardized test for assessing student learning outcomes. As such, there really are now no negative implications for our academic programs other than to demonstrate their strength and accomplishment through available data. The time is long past when Oneonta can be compared invidiously with similar SUNY institutions. Note our recent success in the national reports mentioned above.

Therefore I do not accept your recommendation that we cease our participation in the VSA program. It also remains my judgement that participation in the VSA may yet prove to be a correct one since federal and/or state and/or SUNY Administration may eventually mandate this kind of public accountability. Witness the recent requirement of all Ohio Public Universities to participate in the VSA process.

What I do recommend is that either members of the Senate, or of a Senate committee such as the Committee on Instruction, become involved with the further development of the VSA as part of the campus working group, as well as become more aware of just what kinds of data about Oneonta are currently available.