Sense of the Faculty Motion

COVID-19 has hit hard the financial standings of colleges across the country, and Middlebury is no exception. The College will fail to meet its budget this year by an estimated $17, and severe cuts are unavoidable. It is time to concede that the 15-year experiment in Monterey has drained resources from the core mission of undergraduate education at Middlebury College for long enough. MIIS has cost upward of $100 million dollars, all told, during this period, and continues to lose $5 to $7 million per year as of last report.

We, as the faculty of Middlebury College, resolve that before any further cuts in benefits, compensation, or staffing are made of faculty and staff, Middlebury should make clear plans to dissolve its campus in Monterey on some reasonable schedule, and to put a stop to additional investments in Monterey in the interim, as a sign of good faith. We find this necessary to state, given the College’s recent memorandum that wage continuity is promised—explicitly—only until June 2020. While the faculty understands the dire financial situation that Middlebury faces, a clear commitment to eliminating the significant financial burden posed by its campus in Monterey must be a top priority and a precondition on any further cuts at the College.

This motion does not demand a particular timeframe within which this dissolution must happen, but it should be effected in a timely manner, given the millions of dollars per year that are being lost. Nor does this say that every program currently housed in Monterey needs to be discontinued; but any programs that are continued should be moved out of Monterey and to Middlebury, Vermont. This would reduce the cost of operating such programs, reduce the carbon emissions of air travel between the campuses, and—perhaps most significantly—bring millions of dollars (gross expenditures, not just the shortfall) back to Middlebury, strengthening the Town’s tax base and its services, rather than funneling money out to California.

Rationale

A Sense of the Faculty vote in 2005 came out advising overwhelmingly against Middlebury’s acquisition of the Monterey Institute (now MIIS). In the years since Middlebury nonetheless acquired Monterey, it has cost Middlebury on the order of five to seven million dollars per year in terms of debt service, salaries, maintenance, administrative overhead, etc., which has added up to somewhere from seventy million up to over one hundred million dollars (and still counting), not including the $20 million of the Monterey Institute’s debt that Middlebury took on at the outset. Cuts here at the College in health benefits and staff, loss of coordinator positions, etc. have been undertaken in an effort to balance Middlebury’s budget—and thus, in effect, to subsidize these costs. Indeed, a balanced budget was recently declared, which in actuality meant a multimillion dollar surplus at the remainder of Middlebury, offset by significant losses at MIIS. The declaration of our balanced budget has since been rescinded, and we have been informed that we run a deficit upwards of $13 million this year alone.

Before any further cuts in compensation, benefits, and/or positions are made at the College—and this includes both faculty and staff—it is incumbent on Middlebury to show that it is acting in good faith by committing to eliminate its campus in Monterey, so that we do not continue to attempt remain solvent with a multi-million dollar millstone around our neck each year. This experiment has gone on long enough, and Middlebury can no longer afford it; long-term goals for MIIS do not represent it turning a profit any time soon—merely a smaller multi-million dollar loss, which we simply cannot afford. Whatever programs Middlebury believes are necessary to continue can be continued in Middlebury with
their existing academic staff. Not only the budget shortfall, but nearly all gross expenditures on such programs, will then come to Vermont, strengthening the Town’s economy and tax base, rather than funneling money away to California. This is not to say that all programs at MIIS must be continued—but those that are should be moved. What better way to have synergy and “One Middlebury” than for its faculties to be physically proximate? And how does necessitating air travel between campuses fit with our position as an institution concerned about the environment?

We acknowledge that the decision to undertake this acquisition was largely not made by the current Administration at Middlebury or its current Board of Trustees; but the decision to rectify it lies in their hands, along with the benefit of upwards of a decade of hindsight on the matter.