

Office of Interdisciplinary Studies
Annual Report to the Dean of the College and to the President

June 15, 2007

It is my pleasure to offer this brief report on the activities and accomplishments connected with the Expanding Knowledge Initiative of Grinnell College's strategic plan, and to discuss the direction in which I think that we should proceed in the next one to two years. This past year, I have worked closely with the members of the Advisory Board of the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (Vince Eckhart, Lesley Delmenico, Elaine Marzluff, Wayne Moyer, Monty Roper, Kathleen Skerrett, Susan Strauber, and Jacob Schneider '07) and the Interdisciplinary Fellows (Jin Feng, Bob Grey, Clark Lindgren, plus student "fellow traveler" Laura Lienemann '08). All of us—the Advisory Board members, the Fellows, our student representatives, and I—fully appreciate that our work and accomplishments rest largely on the participation, accomplishments and ideas of many others among the faculty, student body, and Dean's office.

Looking over this past year, I find that we have made considerable progress toward realizing the goals of the Expanding Knowledge Initiative (EKI). We made our first two EKI faculty appointments, we offered the first Second Year Retreat and are well along in planning for the second, we have established much of the framework needed to achieve the goal of expanding our integrative and interdisciplinary offerings across all areas of the curriculum, we have devoted two years to stimulating faculty discussion about areas for curricular expansion and various forms of collaborative teaching, we have surveyed departments and concentrations regarding their expectations for participation in the EKI, and have identified the next key steps in bringing the EKI fully into the curricular fabric of the College. At the end of the second year of the EKI, we can see the expansion of interdisciplinary (or integrative) and collaboratively-taught courses and are aware of others in development. Next year's goals are clear.

In all of this, I express my profound appreciation for the faculty members who have served as Interdisciplinary Fellows and on the Advisory Board, and for the students who have shared in our discussions. In these past two years they have done the back-breaking work of laying the foundations for the implementation of the EKI, and have also kept their sights on the big picture: how Grinnell College might be better and different thanks to this exciting initiative. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with them this year.

“GEO” Appointments and Contract Expansion

The Advisory Board (AB) developed a proposal in 2006 for two “GEO” positions addressing issues of human beings' relationship to space and resources. Subsequent to endorsement by the Executive Council and presidential approval, Jim Swartz asked me to convene a search committee for an earth systems scientist and a geographer. A single search committee with representation from the three divisions (Jon Andelson, Jackie Brown, Kathy Jacobson, Elaine Marzluff, Jack Mutti, and Helen Scott) formed two subcommittees to pursue the separate searches. Aply led by Jackie Brown and Jack Mutti, the subcommittees' efforts resulted in the appointment of Lawrence Aspler (appointment in Department of Physics) - B.S., McGill University; Ph.D., Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), and Eric Carter (appointment in Department of Anthropology) – B.A., University of California – Berkeley; M.S., Ph.D.

The Executive Council also worked with the dean and president to expand a shared contract that will expand interdisciplinary as well as departmental offerings.

Second Year Retreat

The EKI proposal envisioned a Second Year Retreat that would commence in the fall of 2007 with a celebration of Martin Luther King's 1967 visit to Grinnell College. As it turned out, retreat planning was accelerated, with the first retreat taking place last fall. I submitted a longer report to the Dean in December of 2007, and will excerpt from it here:

The retreat took place at a YMCA camp in Boone, Iowa. . . . Forty-eight second year students participated in the retreat. They were joined by thirteen staff and faculty members and six third and fourth year student facilitators. The retreat was an entirely voluntary affair for both the second year participants and the facilitators. Sessions included a keynote address by Ira Strauber, an "ice-breaking" session and two group art project sessions led by Boone area artist David Williamson, an alumni panel, two self-reflection sessions led by Steve Langerud, a presentation of research on Grinnell's second year students by Ann Gansemer-Topf and Joyce Stern, and a session on making curricular choices. Participants were also given some free time to pursue various organized activities or to simply relax. . . . In evaluating the retreat, between 82% and 98% of the students "agreed" or "agreed strongly" to a series of statements regarding the goals of the retreat. Students expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their education and their life goals, and to spend time with staff and faculty members.

A summary of students' evaluation of the 2006 retreat can be found at <http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/eki/officeinterdiscstudies/includes/secondyretreatevalsummary.pdf>. Subsequent to hearing a report by the Fellows, the faculty voted to extend the trial phase of the retreat for a further three years.

The second of the Second Year Retreats is planned for Sept. 7-9, 2007. At the time that I write this report, we have slightly surpassed our goal of signing up 120 students. We also have met our goals for student, staff and faculty facilitators. Relying on what proved to be a highly successful program of activities, we will incorporate the theme of the 1967 symposium: "Remaining Awake during the Revolution." Kathleen Skerrett and Wayne Moyer are planning a Rosenfield symposium inspired by the 1967 symposium, which will complement the retreat's theme.

Framework for Accomplishing the EKI: campus discussion, guidelines for proceeding, and areas for expansion

Brief Review of 2005/06

Since so much has happened since the faculty endorsement of the EKI, I will briefly review last year's work in order to put our most recent efforts into perspective. In its first year (2005/06), the Advisory Board sought to stimulate discussion among the faculty regarding (1) ways to teach interdisciplinary and collaboratively-taught courses, (2) areas of shared interest among faculty members, and (3) areas of likely expansion through faculty appointment. With the generous support of the Instructional Support Committee, the AB sponsored Common Grounds Lunches in order to encourage discussion.

Concomitant with sponsoring the first set of the Common Grounds Lunches, the AB developed a set of guidelines for groups and individuals interested in developing curricular areas (<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/eki/facultyresources/includes/Guidelines%20for%20new%20areas%20of%20IDS.pdf>). These guidelines, in addition to the AB's provision of materials and lunches devoted to interdisciplinary teaching, set the stage for how we would proceed with the goal of new, interdisciplinary, and integrative courses at Grinnell College. The AB also developed a set of guidelines for developing EKI-related faculty position proposals. Last fall

(2006), the AB revised these guidelines and submitted them to the Executive Council for review and approval

(<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/eki/facultyresources/includes/Guidelines%20for%20Position%20Proposals.pdf>).

2006/07: Lunches, Guidelines, Position Proposal Reviews, Concentrations and Clusters, Faculty Opportunities and Development, and EKI Courses

Lunches. The Instructional Support Committee agreed to fund a second year of Common Ground Lunches. These were (as they were the previous year) extremely popular and bore considerable fruit. Twenty-six lunches were organized, with about 310 individuals attending (judging from sign-ups). Loosely structured, these lunches provided the venue for a wide range of discussions. Some gatherings went no further than a single exploratory lunch. Some focused on a single pedagogical issue (such as shared theme Tutorials). Some developed into full-fledged initiatives of various sorts, including the establishment of an early Modern Studies group that shares information and seeks to expand college resources in this area, the formation of groups of faculty members working with the library to identify electronic collections for acquisition, the development of a number of potential new concentrations, discussions of renewing existing concentrations, inter-departmental collaboration regarding the development of a new cluster of interdisciplinary courses, and the development of faculty position proposals (some of which were submitted to the Executive Council this past spring semester, and some of which are destined for submission next year).

While most of these lunches resulted from “grass roots” efforts, the Interdisciplinary Fellows sponsored or initiated three lunches devoted to collaborative teaching, shared theme tutorials, and a presentation by Trish Ferret (Carleton College) and Joan Stewart (Hope College) and follow-up lunch discussion regarding interdisciplinary and integrative teaching in the sciences this past year. Additionally, members of the AB and I worked to organize lunches on curricular areas that seemed to be good candidates for exploration.

Guidelines and Position Proposal Review. In addition to revising the guidelines for position proposals (mentioned above), the Advisory Board met with groups planning to submit faculty position proposals and with groups working on new concentrations. I also met separately with a group developing a position proposal. The AB then reviewed faculty position proposals related directly or indirectly to the EKI and submitted its remarks to the Executive Council.

As you know, President Osgood accepted the Executive Council’s recommendation to approve searches for a Film History and Studies position in the Art department, a Computer Science position, and a Neuro-philosophy position in the Philosophy department. Each of these position proposals resonated with a different emphasis of the EKI. The Computer Science position effectively leave-proofs a department (thereby reducing reliance on term faculty) and enables participation of its members in non-departmental, interdisciplinary and collaboratively-taught courses. Neuro-philosophy builds on the existing strength of our new neuroscience concentration by bringing together science and humanistic study. The Film History and Studies position is the product of broad divisional cooperation in envisioning and exploring the implementation of an interdisciplinary Humanities core and draws on existing resources at the College (its film collection, the Creative Computing lab, the interest of many of the humanities departments in the use of film in courses).

Collaborative Teaching, Concentrations and Clusters. During the first year of the EKI, and during a summer workshop led by AB members Wayne Moyer and Monty Roper, discussions of

what “new knowledge” and “interdisciplinary knowledge” meant for Grinnell focused increasingly on the mode of delivery. Campus discussions and national scholarship point to the importance of strong *disciplinary* foundations for rigorous, high quality *interdisciplinary and integrative* scholarship. While a few individuals’ training truly brings together more than one discipline, most interdisciplinary research and teaching is best pursued as a collaborative effort. In its work this past year, the AB has emphasized the role of collaborative teaching in expanding our interdisciplinary and integrative offerings. This is an exciting prospect, and I believe one that could be highly attractive to in-coming students. Collaborative teaching can take many forms: team teaching, faculty consultation in course planning, courses sharing one or more theme and meeting together more or less frequently, courses coming together infrequently to address common themes and readings in a mega-class, and clusters. To that purpose, in its first year (2005/06), the Advisory Board produced materials regarding these forms of interdisciplinary and collaborative teaching, including short descriptions of different kinds of collaborative teaching. (Please see http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/eki/facultyresources/includes/Team_teaching_for_web.pdf.)

This year, the Advisory Board also began one of the next big tasks called for in the EKI: re-envisioning the concentrations. Todd Armstrong and I had organized a preliminary meeting with the chairs of all of the concentrations in the spring of 2006, and the AB followed this up in December 2006 with a survey of the concentrations. The Advisory Board is aware that concentrations at Grinnell College are fairly rigid curricular structures that have long-term staffing implications. A key element in the re-envisioning of concentrations as a mechanism for promoting interdisciplinary learning is inviting faculty members to consider less rigid organizations of courses. The AB is working on a fuller description of some of the teaching models described in the 2005/06 document mentioned above, to share with discuss with the faculty next year.

Faculty Opportunities and Faculty Development. In 2006/07 the Advisory Board submitted a proposal to the Dean and Executive Council regarding the implementation of the EKI that should have significant implications for the College. As you may remember, from fairly early on, faculty members were excited by the prospect of the EKI and desired to participate in it. This past fall the AB explored how to make possible broad faculty participation and how to ensure that the EKI would not become a one-time opportunity benefiting only those currently employed at the college. Briefly summarized, the AB’s proposal to address these issues included the following elements:

- That the college commit to each faculty member having the opportunity to teach an EKI course (interdisciplinary/integrative, collaboratively-taught) on a regular and fairly frequent basis
- That departments work with the Dean’s office to establish their level of contribution to EKI, Tutorials, and general education courses
- That freeing up faculty members to participate in the EKI should be considered in awarding new faculty positions
- That funds in the form of summer stipend and travel expenses should support faculty members in developing EKI courses

These elements were quickly put into operation, although at present only departments participating in an EKI appointment have been expected to find ways to free up a small number of existing faculty members to teach collaboratively-taught and/or interdisciplinary courses.

Courses and the EKI

I am extremely pleased to note that next year’s course schedule includes fifty-two courses that contribute to the curricular goals of the EKI. Courses are identified as contributing to the EKI if they are to be collaboratively taught, are cross-listed or are otherwise non-departmentally listed, if the instructor identifies them as drawing upon the methodologies and data of at least two disciplines, or if they are new courses offered by our two new EKI appointments. Tutorials offer a particularly promising area for exploring the possibilities for collaborative teaching. As Trish Ferrett and Joanne Stewart explained in their presentation on assessing interdisciplinary learning, students in introductory courses rarely have the disciplinary grounding to pursue interdisciplinary learning, but courses focusing on *integration* of different approaches and information work well at this level. At present, three pairs of faculty members plan to collaborate in teaching their Tutorials. Review of the recently-issued list of Tutorials shows that there are additional candidates for some level of collaborative teaching. We are contacting those Tutorial instructors regarding what they might like to do in this regard.

Collaboratively taught courses	11 (includes 3 pairs of Tutorials; also counts team-taught cross listed course as a single course)
New interdisciplinary, integrative, concentration specific, cross or divisionally-listed courses, or offered by new EKI appointments	14 (includes 7 courses taught by new EKI appointments, 2 sections of a newly revised concentration-specific course)
On-going interdisciplinary, integrative, concentration specific, cross or divisionally-listed courses	27

Just over half of these are courses that have been offered previously. The AB is not unanimous regarding whether previously-offered courses should be included as “EKI-type” courses, but I strongly feel that we should recognize our long-standing commitment to offering such courses and understand the EKI as a reaffirmation and re-envisioning of that commitment.

What is so exciting about this next year’s courses is that some of these are taking place in departments not receiving an EKI-appointment next year. Also exciting is the level of rigor at which we can expect these courses to operate. The upper level collaboratively-taught courses promise to bring with them a level of disciplinary expertise that is essential to excellent integrative and interdisciplinary work. Two pairs of courses exist as separate, departmental courses: Shuchi Kapila and Tim Dobe are teaching courses on the shared theme of Gandhi, and John Rommereim’s and Ralph Savarese’s courses deal with the complementary themes of music and lyrics. Both pairs of courses will meet jointly from time to time. These upper-level collaborative courses support departmental curricula, helping achieve the goals of the AB proposal without necessarily needing replacement of existing courses. Most significantly, they are indications of the degree to which the EKI is starting to reach the next level of our teaching and learning; teaching collaboratively and across disciplines is understood as not simply linked to additional positions or competing with departmental curricular needs, but as part of our normal teaching contributions.

Centers, Rosenfield, the Gallery and the Library

The Advisory Board met with the directors of the centers, the Rosenfield Program, Gallery, and the Librarian of the College for an initial discussion this past spring regarding coordination among these interdisciplinary entities and ways to ensure that faculty can get sufficient advance notice to incorporate events into their courses.

The Agenda for Next Year and Outstanding Issues

Interdisciplinary Fellows—leadership and replacement

Looking forward to next year, I expect that the Interdisciplinary Fellows will continue to develop their role as leaders in developing and modeling interdisciplinary teaching. Jin Feng ended a successful term as Interdisciplinary Fellow. The search for her replacement concluded happily with the selection of Kathleen Skerrett. Since then, however, Kathleen has accepted the position of Associate Dean. It will be difficult to replace her at this late date, since the course schedule is already fixed for next year, but it is important to do so. While we can look forward to Kathleen's continued involvement in the retreat and other curricular issues, an Associate Dean cannot and should not replace this important faculty leadership position.

Concentrations and Course Identification

The Advisory Board has identified the re-envisioning of the concentrations as a central task for the upcoming academic year. Related to this anticipated work on concentrations and "softer" alternative curricular structures is a consideration of how integrative, interdisciplinary and collaboratively-taught courses are identified in the schedule of courses and course catalog.

Faculty and departmental participation in the EKI

While excited by the new faculty proposals, the Advisory Board was concerned that in most cases these proposals did not provide many opportunities for existing faculty members to teach interdisciplinary or collaboratively-taught courses. In most cases, new courses were department specific. There are any number of reasons why departments are lagging behind in participation in the EKI. Greater departmental involvement was one of the main goals of the EKI's proposal to the Dean and Executive Council this past year. The AB strongly believes that unless departments are made partners in the EKI effort, the goal of broad faculty participation will be very difficult to achieve. This element of the proposal was not discussed in the Council's presentation of the proposal to the faculty. Departmental involvement will need discussion before we as an institution begin to adopt the principles informing the EKI. And, importantly, we must have these conversations with all departments, not simply those making EKI faculty position proposals.

Setting a path for the EKI: additions to the faculty

Toward the end of its first year (2005/06), the Advisory Board worked to develop a vision for how the College might strategically develop its curriculum and make faculty appointments under the EKI. Sensitive to the importance of stimulating discussion and ideas in the early phases of the implementation of the EKI, the AB was reluctant to narrowly prescribe areas of appointment. Instead, it drew on a survey of faculty interests, lunch discussions, a review of other institutions' programs, and the AB members' own insights to identify two broad areas of emphasis (originally called "hubs") to frame the discussion of curricular development. These were Peace, Sustainability, and Social Justice, and the Studio for Creative Inquiry (later shorted to "Creative Inquiry"). The AB hoped that these two areas of emphasis, or "hubs," would stimulate the development of new courses as well as EKI faculty position proposals. However, these two hubs failed to register broadly among the faculty. Grinnell College will be approaching the mid-point of the EKI in this next year, and I believe that the AB is ready to define more narrowly the directions that the College should take in identifying remaining EKI faculty appointments. The AB recognizes the importance of providing new leadership for position proposals. The faculty may be more ready, too, to accept this guidance at this stage.

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