

TO: Houston Dougharty, VP Student Affairs
FROM: Joyce Stern, Dean for Student Success and Academic Advising
DATE: March 2013
RE: **Academic Advising/Disability Services Review: *Response to Dec 7, 2012 Final Report***

The Academic Advising Office and Disability Services staff appreciate the opportunity to undertake this review of our department and key programs. In particular, we are very grateful for the careful work done by the Review Team in fall 2012. The team's report thoughtfully presents many observations, strengths, and important areas of growth for four aspects of our work: disability services, work with students on probation, the academic difficulty report, and peer tutoring/mentoring. In this document I will reflect on the team's suggestions across these four areas.

1. Disability Services

On page 5 and again in the conclusion of the report, *the Review Team strongly recommends that the College hire a specialist in disability services*. We agree that this is our highest priority, and I know you have resubmitted the position proposal again this year.

The review team emphasized specific areas of work that the coordinator should do such as bring a legal lens; provide central coordination of technology support; and regular education for faculty and staff. However, we don't have to wait until a new person is hired to tackle some of these needs, and, in fact, some efforts are already in place, and will continue, as possible, with current staffing.

- a. I will lead a team this spring to review and likely significantly revise the disability grievance policies and procedures.
- b. ITS has already shifted Karen McRitchie's responsibilities to be nearly full-time with assistive technology needs;
- c. While professional development for faculty and staff does not have on-going support, this spring there was session as part of the Inclusive Teaching and Advising series on access and universal design for learning.

2. The Academic Difficulty Report (ADR)

The review team made suggestions on page 7. Each has merit and deserves comment.

1. *Academic Advising staff should make regular (annual or bi-annual) presentations to the faculty at faculty meeting regarding use of the ADR* so that what happens to these reports about students is more transparent. I will approach Paula Smith, Dean of the College, for access to the Faculty meeting calendar each fall and/or other opportunities to address the faculty on the importance of the ADR.

The next two items go together, related to software used for tracking information:

2. The review teams suggests that we *upgrade the existing ADR software or purchase commercial software for ADR reporting by faculty so that it has greater functionality.* This has been a stated need/goal for many years, and I have continued to work through the fall semester, in concert with Information Technology Assessment and Planning Committee (ITAP), to bring this project forward as a need. It now has senior-level approval and is moving forward.
3. *When considering academic difficulties and how to help students, develop a wider view of students than currently exists with the ADR system.* “Bringing in other data, as is appropriate, specifically from student employers regarding work habits and schedules and the health center regarding health concerns would help build a more holistic picture of the student.” As part of the proposal to ITAP, I have worked with Travis Greene, dean of students. The software system we seek would merge behavioral information, which is now considered by the “Students of Concern” group, with academic information so that a more complete picture of the student can be identified and addressed. Again, we were notified that the President and Senior Staff have now endorsed this project.

3. Students on Probation

On page 10 of the report, the team made two recommendations.

1. *“We encourage a reconsideration of the policy that states that students returning from suspension must take a full course load.”* They suggest that a lighter course load would allow study skills to be honed and instilled. Making this change is not in the purview of the Academic Advising Office, although I sit on the Committee on Academic Standing from where this policy is implemented. I will take the suggestion to the committee.
2. *“Based on our conversation with the faculty, we encourage the Academic Advising Staff, in collaboration with the CAS and the Registrar, to educate/re-educate the faculty on the processes surrounding probation, strict probation and suspension.”* It was noted that we could help advisers know how to support a student returning from suspension and clarify how the Academic Improvement Plan and Academic Performance Agreement are used with students and what role the adviser plays. I will take this up with CAS and will work with the Academic Advising staff to continually educate and involve advisers about this vulnerable group of students.

4. Peer Tutoring/Mentoring

On page 13 of the report, the review team made four substantive recommendations.

1. *Explore online matching programs that help students see available tutors and those tutors’ schedules.* While we agree that this could be a helpful way to connect students with tutors, it may not be the highest priority. As time allows we can look at existing packages, explore whether or not some software could be developed in-

house, and, to whether or not this can be done with limited/no funding given budget constraints.

The next three items go together, related to physical structure, supervision and collaborative expansion of the program:

2. *Identify a centralized space that tutors can occupy for training and holding their appointments.*
3. *Identify an alternative form of tutor accountability and increased supervision.*
4. *Expand mentorship to more courses and departments.*

Because these three recommendations require significant changes in the physical structure, adjusted staffing responsibilities, a significant influx of funding, and/or forming new partnerships with academic departments, they cannot be implemented immediately. We are strongly interested in moving forward with these things, however. Currently the College is seeking a substantial grant from a foundation, and, if granted, we could use funds to help move forward with these initiatives. Administrative staff in charge of pursuing the grant is well aware of our desire to use some of this funding for these purposes.

Again, the staff in Academic Advising is grateful to the members of the Review Team for their tremendous effort on our behalf. We also thank you, Houston, for this opportunity to critically examine the work we do and ways to operate more effectively and efficiently. We'll continue to use the feedback from the Review Team as a guide moving forward, and I am confident that those of us here at Grinnell will see some positive changes down the road as a result of this thoughtful, collective process.