Department of Residence Life and Orientation

Review Questions for Self-Assessment

January, 2013

Submitted by:
Andrea B. Conner, Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life and Orientation
Departmental Snapshot

Professional Staff:
- Andrea Conner, Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life and Orientation
- Laura Gogg, Technical Assistant II
- Dan Hirsch, Assistant Director of Residence Life and Residence Life Coordinator (RLC)
- Becca Don, Senior RLC
- Autumn Wilke, RLC
- Gabe Barela, RLC
- Latoya Johnson, RLC
- Kady Shea, RLC

Student Staff:
- Fifty-nine (59) Student Advisers (SAs) and six (6) Alternate SAs; uncompensated
- Eight (8) Hall Wellness Coordinators (HWCs); uncompensated
- Eight (8) House Coordinators; uncompensated and not selected by the department
- One (1) New Student Orientation (NSO) Intern; compensated
- Ten (10) NSO Assistants; uncompensated
- Two (2) [WEEKEND] Staff; compensation (Chair and Assistant Chair)

Residence Halls and Houses:
- Nineteen (19) residence halls that range from 35 to 116 residents.
- Eight (8) college houses that range from 6 to 12 residents.
- Two (2) residents in the Black Cultural Center and two (2) residents in the Grinnell House.
- Traditional halls, apartments, “mini-coops” (i.e. efficiency apartments), suites, quads, triples in multiple configurations, multi-room doubles, traditional doubles, and traditional singles.
- 1344 beds on campus, with a budgeted occupancy of 1320 residential students.
- Between 150-200 4th-year (and sometimes 3rd-year) students approved to live off-campus annually.
1. Giving due consideration to the educational directions of your program or service field, to the college’s stated educational goals, and to changes within the college, how would you currently define your department or program mission?

Below, you’ll find the published mission statement for the department:

The Department of Residence Life and Orientation provides intentional leadership for our residential community: our volunteer student staff engages in building community and commits to supporting students; student-centered educators support self-governance and exercise the best practices of the Student Affairs profession; and an orientation program integrates students and their families into the unique climate of the College. We focus our efforts on the residential environment, personal and community development, and student learning.

- Our department partners with colleagues to provide a safe, healthy, comfortable, and welcoming residential environment that fosters ownership, accommodates individual needs, and affords students the opportunity to achieve their goals.

- We advance personal development by helping students navigate transitions, prepare to succeed at the College, build life skills, explore identities, and become more socially conscious. We encourage responsible decision-making as students maneuver within this self-governing community and a broader world.

- We promote community development by encouraging students to create a respectful community that fosters relationships and values diverse perspectives. Community members resolve conflicts by assuming personal responsibility, developing strong interpersonal skills, and holding each other accountable.

- We enhance student learning in a challenging and supportive environment by valuing academic scholarship and creating opportunities for learning outside the classroom, thereby establishing a lifelong passion for learning.
2. Explain how the department or program provides the best possible educational experience for students who comprise the department’s or program’s clientele, giving particular attention to student learning outcomes.

Below, you’ll find the published learning outcomes for the department:

1. As a result of actively participating in a self-governing residential community, students will identify their own values and principles in personal decision-making, utilize conflict resolution strategies effectively and be able to appropriately confront unjust or uncivil behavior of other groups or individuals.

2. As a result of engaging with others in a diverse residential community, students will establish healthy relationships, develop their individual identities and value diverse perspectives.

3. First-year and transfer students who engage in New Student Orientation will discover and learn to navigate the resources available to them as well as gain institutional and personal support during their adjustment and transition to Grinnell College.

4. Students involved in Residence Life and Orientation programming will develop a sense of community and further their learning in the residential environment.

5. Through their positions, Student Staff will learn to employ leadership, mediation, and helping skills in their residential communities and beyond the College campus.

Additionally, the following learning outcomes were created and published specifically for New Student Orientation:

1. Students who engage in the New Student Orientation program will develop a strong academic foundation and begin to learn skills to be academically successful at Grinnell College.

2. As a result of partaking in the orientation program, incoming students will work cooperatively with others, develop relationships with other members of the campus community, and cultivate interpersonal competency.

3. First year and transfer students will gain a familiarity and basic knowledge of the institutional resources, services, and programs available to them as a result of actively participating in orientation.

4. Students will seek involvement and relationships with people different from themselves, celebrate difference and diversity, and build on a commitment to social justice.

5. Incoming first year and transfer students will possess the ability to transition to college, the campus community, and the city of Grinnell after completing the New Student Orientation program.
I consider the following departmental initiatives to be among our best practices toward the Grinnell College students’ educational experience:

- Provide on-campus residence for 90% of the student body
- Residential learning and programming (via RLCs and Student Staff)
- Selection, training, supervision, and evaluation of almost 100 volunteer Student Staff
- Selection, training, supervision, and evaluation of RLC staff
- Conduct the annual Room Draw and first-year placement processes
- Efficiently open and close the residence halls
- Provide Winter Break and Summer Housing, and coordinate early arrival/late departure systems
- Liaise with Facilities Management, Campus Safety and Security, and C&K Storage regarding all student facility and safety needs
- Administer the billing process for damages and fines
- Coordinate substance-free weekend programming
- Offer a regular shuttle to local shopping destinations
- Plan two large all-campus events each semester (Pancake Study Break and Pre-Waltz Dessert Reception)
- Advise student leadership opportunities such as SGA, Bob’s Underground Café, Lyle’s Pub, and SPARC
- Oversee the lounge contract and alcohol contract/event approval process, including the facilitation of regular training sessions for event hosts and servers
- Organize, implement, and assess all aspects of New Student Orientation
- Serve as on-call emergency response for students and assist in crisis management
- Help build and foster a self-governing community
- Advise students in need of educational, emotional, and social support
- Mediate roommate and community conflict
- Contribute to various campus committees
3. Explain how you evaluate student achievement of learning outcomes and how the results of this assessment are integrated into department or program planning processes.

Every survey instrument used by our department has been overhauled to be “outcomes-based” in order to more directly measure student perception of how well we’re meeting our learning outcomes. Literally speaking, survey questions are a reformulation of the outcomes with a Likert scale for response possibilities. These instruments, and their integration, are detailed below:

- **Cluster Feedback Survey.** Each November, Grinnell students are e-mailed a link (via Survey Monkey) to the Cluster Feedback Survey. Their opinions on their Student Adviser, Hall Wellness Coordinator, Residence Life Coordinator, and community at large are gathered. Incentives for floor participation are utilized to inspire the Student Staff to urge their residents to complete the survey. Even with those incentives, however, our response rate ranges between only 20-40% of the residential community.
  - Comments on the Student Staff (SA/HC and HWC) are distributed to the applicable RLC. That information, paired with the Student Staff Self-Evaluation, and the RLC’s own impressions, guide a Mid-Year Evaluation conversation for each Student Staff member.
  - Comments on the RLC and community, paired with the RLC Mid-Year Report, and the Director’s own impressions, guide a Mid-Year Evaluation conversation for each RLC. Full 360-degree evaluations are completed per the timeline outlined by Human Resources, at the end of each academic year.
  - Please see the appendices for the Cluster Feedback Survey, and results, from Fall 2012.
- **New Student Orientation Survey.** Within a month of the end of New Student Orientation, first-year and transfer students are e-mailed a link (via Survey Monkey) to the NSO Survey. These data are reviewed by the NSO staff before re-convening the NSO Advisory Group in semester in order to guide any recommendations for changes.
  - An opportunity to provide feedback about NSO in person has historically been offered via a student “open forum”. As that session has – in the past four years – drawn between zero-to-two attendees, it will likely be discontinued.
  - Please see the appendices for the NSO Survey, and results, from Fall 2012.
- **Post-Training Surveys.** Within a two weeks of the end of Fall and Winter Student Staff Training(s), the staff are e-mailed a link (via Survey Monkey) to the training survey. Learning outcomes are published for each training week and those are measured via the survey instrument. The results are reviewed by the RLCs and Director in preparation for future training sessions, and they also inform future Student Staff in-service offerings.
  - Please see the appendices for the survey, and results, from Student Staff Training in Fall 2012.
4. In what ways does the work of your department or program reflect and foster understanding of the diversity of our society and on campus?

As a residential liberal arts college, Grinnell holds the residential experience of every student in highest regard. Living, sleeping, studying, eating, and socializing with one’s peers allows students the fullest opportunity to engage in academic topics outside of the classroom and to grow exponentially while learning any number of life’s lessons.

At the heart of this residential experience is self-governance, a concept which affords students the privilege of being treated like the adults they are and are becoming, while also asking them to be responsible and hold themselves (and their peers) accountable to community standards on which we have agreed. Our Student Staff has a significant role in modeling self-governance and supporting students who may not yet have the skills or confidence to hold their peers accountable. Student interaction with each other and the governance of the college is high, due to the institution size, the rural campus, and many other things. But self-governance, above all else, encourages interaction among residents that exposes them to difference and diversity of many varieties.

Since my arrival at Grinnell in 2009, we have operated under a belief that – by creating more socially just communities in our residence halls – students will learn how to create more socially just communities after they leave college. This value is interwoven in the work we do, but often feels intangible. The best examples of the direct education we do around diversity and social justice include:

- Student Staff training sessions on diversity, social justice, and identity discovery (more hours devoted to this work than any other topic)
- Student Staff in-services
- RLC programs for residents
- Occasional Student Staff programs* for residents
  - *One year we specifically required that one (of four) programs per semester conducted by Student Staff needed to be a facilitated discussion on difference. Despite a four-hour training on facilitation skills, Student Staff failed to implement these programs in any substantial way, and felt under-prepared or otherwise incapable of doing this. It’s a shame that we couldn’t make this initiative work, and I’d like to revisit it someday.
- Hosting the Iowa Social Justice Meet-up three times in four years (a local event grown from the Commission for Social Justice Education (CSJE) of ACPA; for Iowa student affairs professionals, grad students, and graduate prep program faculty doing social justice work in higher education).
- Coordinating Title IX Training for the Division of Student Affairs and the Student Staff in January 2013.
- Creating a Collaborative Enrichment Position (CEP) for an RLC in Fall 2012 called “Social Justice Education” – a collaboration between Residence Life, International Student Affairs, and Intercultural Engagement and Leadership.
- Intentionally recruiting a diverse pool of candidates for RLC and Student Staff positions.
- NSO programs about self-governance and difference/diversity.
- Partnering with the academic language departments to support our five Language Houses and guest Language Assistants.
- Repeatedly approving Project House themes related to sustainability and the local foods movement (Eco House, Food House).
- Pioneering growth in our gender neutral living opportunities. In the last five years, we’ve grown
our program – which is distinctly supportive of trans*, gender-non-conforming, lesbian/gay/bisexual, and allied students – from nonexistent to nearly 18% of our residence hall beds. Students can find gender neutral options in all areas of campus, in all types of housing, and can even take advantage of this their first year. This initiative is a good example of student-driven ideas and a progressive campus climate working together. Please see the appendices for a more extensive history of gender neutral housing at Grinnell.
5. What is the extent of departmental staff involvement in college courses, non-departmental programs, interprogram or interdisciplinary collaborations, or college governance? Assess how such commitments have enhanced or limited the department or program.

Residence Life Coordinators (RLCs) are assigned a CEP (Collaborative Enrichment Position). This quarter-time (.25 FTE) appointment in a related Student Affairs office or program provides this entry-level staff the opportunity to branch out and explore other areas of our field, or to stay fresh on an area of interest outside of Residence Life. For the most part, the CEP is an incredibly tangible and positive opportunity for our department to collaborate and work closely together with another department in the DSA. However, I have some concerns about the fact that three of the current CEPs report or co-report to me (Harm Reduction, NSO/Student Activities, and Social Justice Education) and thus the RLC does not always have the opportunity to learn via a different supervisor. This relates to another concern that Residence Life and Orientation (as a staff and department) takes on a significant number of duties that would typically fall under Student Activities, which will be mentioned other times in this report. Please see the appendices for details related to the 2012-2013 CEP program, along with the Assistant Director and Senior RLC responsibilities.

Each RLC is also assigned to a number of College-wide committees such as the Committee on Student Life, Harm Reduction Committee, and Dining Services Committee (among others). Our staff is also frequently tapped to join temporary committees and task forces, and also search committees for other open positions. These involvements reference both our commitment to contribute to the College’s governance and to other departments’ genuine desires to have our staff represented in these discussions. Please see the appendices for the 2012-2013 assignments of RLCs on committees.

RLCs (and other central office staff) have not always felt they had the time to enroll in College courses, but it has happened two or three times in the last four years. Our staff tends to be intellectually curious and also viewed as “relatable” to the students; both concepts contribute to class enrollment being generally positive, but rare.

Other significant collaborations and involvement include:

- Serving on the College Strategic Planning Committee in 2011-2012 as the sole Student Affairs staff member on the central steering group (Andrea). This was a significant commitment but the opportunity to represent the Division’s interests cannot be overstated. I also served on the Post-Graduate Success Working Group for the Strategic Plan.
- Our close working relationship with the Student Government Association (SGA) to discuss and influence the governance of the College. I – along with the Dean of Students – meet weekly with the SGA Vice President for Student Affairs, and our Assistant Director co-advises the SGA, which results in a handful of weekly meetings.
- Co-supervision of the Hall Wellness Coordinators with Jen Jacobsen, Wellness Coordinator.
- Outside leadership positions in the Iowa Student Personnel Association (ISPA), ACPA – College Student Educators International, and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). More details of our current and former staff involvement:
  - ACPA Standing Committee on Disability directorate body
  - ACPA Commission for Social Justice Educators directorate body
  - ACPA Commission for Spirituality, Faith, Religion, and Meaning founding directorate
body
  o ISPA conference planning team
  o NASPA Knowledge Community for Graduate Students and New Professionals regional and national co-chair
6. In what ways is the mission of your department or program supported by other departments/programs? What factors have contributed to good collaboration across departments/programs? In what ways does your department/program mission support the DSA mission/values/vision and the mission of the College?

Our mission is supported fully by many other departments and programs, primarily in the DSA (Student Conduct, Campus Safety and Security, Student Health and Counseling Services, Academic Advising, International Student Affairs, the Center for Religion, Spirituality and Social Justice, and Campus Center Operations/Student Activities.) However, we work closely with other campus departments and programs, including Facilities Management, Wellness, Athletics, Accounting and the Cashier, Dining Services, Conference Operations and Events, Information Technology Services, Intercultural Engagement and Leadership, Admission, Human Resources, Career Development, the Registrar, Student Government Association, other student groups, some faculty, and the academic deans. The factors that have contributed to good collaboration across these departments/programs include:

- Excellent communication
- Participatory, group-based decision-making whenever possible
- Thoughtful working relationships
- Attentive staff who are motivated to do well in their positions
- Support given to our colleagues’ initiatives
- Working as a team even when our positions or opinions diverge

Collaboration among the core Division of Student Affairs staff has recently grown due to the addition of the RLCs to the weekly meetings where the staff discusses students of concern. Their ability to follow up quickly and fully with these students has improved by participating in this meeting directly instead of hearing second-hand. It took three years of advocacy for this change, but I think it’s an important improvement.

The Residence Life and Orientation department strives to fulfill the DSA mission and values by providing student-centered and intentional learning experiences that encourage personal growth and reflection. This is done through community building, student staff training, residence hall programs, informal social interactions, staff support and resources, and an orientation program to assist new students in their transition to Grinnell College.
7. If the department or program is adding new activities, programs, or services, please explain how they will be staffed within the existing complement of staff. If the department or program is retaining activities or programs with consistently low involvement, explain any reasons for their retention.

A goal for the 2012-2013 academic year reflected our intention to add orientation programs into the fall semester, after the five-day NSO program had ended. This was a major innovation that we’ve been discussing for years and we are all passionate about, but haven’t found the time to implement among the day-to-day fires that we are putting out in residence life. The question (#7) asked here has highlighted for me that this goal was created with essentially zero thought to how, who, and when we would implement these programs. Our first attempt (fall 2012) was too cumbersome and thus took the whole fall semester to organize with no results to show for it: we tried to connect these programs to our Student Staff in-services program. Essentially, we would first train the Student Staff more deeply on a topic and then they would facilitate a discussion on their floors. Student Staff generated and then narrowed topic ideas, and then Student Staff ranked and were assigned to sub-committees. Our process for organizing this overtook the concept itself, and that was a good learning experience for us. But it has shown us how difficult it is to implement even the most important initiatives on top of a full plate.

Many processes have recently been overhauled, especially related to harm reduction/wellness initiatives:

- Creating the Hall Wellness Coordinator (HWC) position.
- Implementing AlcoholEdu for incoming new students.
- Evolving our weekend, late-night, sub-free programming to its current model as [Weekend] with paid student coordinators.
- Revising alcohol contracts and the training for hosts, servers, and other event staff.

The department is not retaining activities or programs with consistently low involvement. As mentioned before, we intend to phase out the NSO “open forum”, and we have recently phased out Room Draw activities (info sessions and roommate matching events) that have historically drawn less than five people. Two years ago, the paper “bathroom readers” that were created weekly by RLCs were discontinued due to sustainability in favor of e-mail newsletters.
8. Explain how you evaluate the department or program’s achievement of management goals and objectives. What means are used for short-term and long-term planning? How is assessment of the operation of the department or program integrated into planning?

At the end of each academic year, I ask RLCs to submit an *End of Year Report* to me, which I combine with my own work into a broader report for Houston. This extensive document outlines our departmental progress in multiple areas. This exercise is an important way to summarize the work that we have done and clarify our departmental goals for the upcoming year. Please see the appendices for copies of the Residence Life/NSO End-of-Year Reports for recent years.

Additionally, at the close of the academic year, Human Resources asks each employee to write a *Self-Evaluation* and then the supervisor initiates a *360-Degree Evaluation* synthesizing feedback from the staff member, close colleagues and students, and the supervisor’s own opinion.

During the *Self-Evaluation* in May, but expanded upon in August, each employee writes a set of *personal/professional goals* (influenced by the ACPA/NASPA competencies, the departmental goals, and areas where personal/professional growth is warranted). These goals are discussed occasionally with our supervisors throughout the year, although we could do a better job of being sure that these are “dusted off” more regularly.

RLCs are asked to write a brief *Mid-Year Report* which influences a short report that I provide to Houston for sharing with the Board of Trustees. Relatedly, I conduct a constructive *mid-year conversation* in January with the RLCs to share thoughts from their residents via the *Cluster Feedback Survey*, revisit their personal/professional goals, review their *Mid-Year Report* and discuss their introductory thoughts about whether they intend to return for the following academic year. This conversation is informal and also provides the RLC an opportunity to share feedback with me.

Additionally, departmental planning occurs in great detail during the six weeks of Residence Life Coordinator Training (July 1 to mid-August), our weekly two-hour staff meetings, and a day-long Winter Retreat. Please see the appendices for a copy of RLC Training for Summer 2012.

Lastly, I am proud that our departmental staff coordinates an in-house, bi-weekly *professional development session* for the other members of the Residence Life and Orientation team. These (free) sessions have been found to be good growth opportunities for the staff and presenter alike.
9. What are the ethical principles, professional standards, statements, or codes that guide the department or program and its staff members? What are the crucial legal issues, if any, faced by the department or program? How does the department or program ensure non-discriminatory, fair, and equitable treatment to all constituents?

The Council for the Advancement of Standards publishes both ‘General Standards’ and standards specific to ‘Housing and Residential Life Programs’ and ‘Orientation Programs’. (See http://www.cas.edu/index.php/cas-general-standards/)

Like all staff in Student Affairs, we are also guided by the joint ACPA/NASPA publication “Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners”. (See http://www2.myacpa.org/img/Professional_Competencies.pdf)

The ethical principles that guide our department include:

- College Student Educators, International (ACPA)
  (See http://www2.myacpa.org/ethics/statement.php)

- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)
  (See http://www.naspa.org/about/standards.cfm)

- Association of College and University Housing Officers, International (ACUHO-I)
  (See http://www.acuho-i.org/Portals/0/pdf/documents/acuhoi_standards_2010.pdf)

- National Orientation Directors Association (NODA)
  (See http://noda.orgsync.com/about_ethical_standards)

The primary legal issues faced by the Residence Life and Orientation center around knowing and abiding by Federal laws include:

- FERPA
- Student Right-to-Know
- Campus Security Act / Clery Act
- Title IX

Please see the appendices for our Medical Accommodations website and Service Animal Policy.

We ensure non-discriminatory, fair, and equitable treatment to all constituents very carefully and thoroughly, and with close consultation from our colleagues in Accessibility, Academic Advising/Disability Resources, and Facilities Management. Whether our recent advocacy for the renovation of a residence hall to include an accessible apartment, or the meticulous adherence to “Room Draw Order” when placing students into their assignments, or anything in between… we take this very seriously. Offering gender neutral options, as well as medical singles and rooms equipped with strobe lights or automated door openers, reflect our commitment to ensure access to our residence halls. The College’s non-discrimination policy is clearly stated in student, faculty, and staff handbooks and other publications: http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/diversityinclusion/nondiscriminationpolicy
10. As you look ahead to the next five year period, what if any resource needs (personnel, equipment, space, operational funding) demand attention? What goals or objectives for the next five years could be met within existing resources? What goals or objectives would require additional resources?

Our department has evolved significantly in recent years. Five years ago, it was not uncommon to lose RLCs mid-year or have Student Staff routinely provide alcohol or other drugs to their residents. Students mistrusted our staff and our RLCs were not career professionals in Student Affairs. Under new leadership in the Division of Student Affairs, this department has professionalized and has grown to be well-respected. This review experience has provided our staff with the opportunity to think boldly in creating a wish-list/to-do-list for the next five years.

The following goals and objectives could be met within existing resources:

- Address the campus culture around “study breaks”, the term used to describe any programming offered by Student Staff or RLCs. Address the continued usage of “dorm” to describe College residence halls.
- Clarify the mission of the Residence Life & New Student Orientation department. Many of our initiatives that employ human resource hours and budget monies typically fall under Student Activities at another college. Consider whether a Campus Life model would be a better fit for Grinnell College, and then adjust the CEP program accordingly.
- Study the national debate in residence life around service animal policies (following ADA by permitting only service animals, or additionally allowing emotional support animals due to the Fair Housing Act).
- Consider hosting graduate students from Iowa State University and University of Iowa in practicum experiences.
- Explore leadership opportunities within the Student Staff; we convene a Student Staff Council but there is room for a Senior SA or Assistant RLC program.
- Address the sub-par summer storage rooms for students on campus.
- Pilot a “Friday arrival” for New Student Orientation, extending the program by a half-day.

The following goals and objectives would require additional resources:

- Increase operational funds for both department lines to do the kind of work we want to do. Currently each RLC manages a budget of under $1500 for 8 programs, 3 staff meals, continual staff development, and general supplies for a year. We operate our Student Staff program (training, in-services, selection, and appreciation) for under $6,500 annually.
- Compensate Student Staff in order to improve the student experience and honor the time commitment these student leaders offer the College. We could increase accountability for all position responsibilities and also attract a larger, more socio-economically diverse candidate pool.
- Absorb the programming monies for Student Staff in the operating budget for our department. Currently Student Staff are reimbursed through a pot of funds from the Student Activity Fee that the SGA administers. If Student Staff used our RLC credit cards or were reimbursed from our cost centers, it would increase accountability.
- Create a residential curriculum and extend NSO programming into the academic year.
- Continue Alcohol Edu or other online education for harm reduction; additionally, invest funds into creating video content or online courses related to NSO, consent, etc.
- Invest in technologies that would improve our efficiency and bring us current with our peers:
- purchase College cell phones for the RLCs (phone cost plus data plans)
- purchase tablets for the RLCs to manage fines, damages, and Room Inventory Reports
- purchase a laser color printer (to share with the Division of Student Affairs) to improve our marketing and publicity

- Consider hosting a graduate student in a summer internship again if funding for compensation can be secured.
- Explore residence hall software that would provide more reliable, efficient results for our occupancy and vacancy reports.

Other considerations in the next five years:
- The College recently hired Stegman & Associates to draft a comprehensive Master Plan to update the residence halls to increase accessibility and functionality, reclaim common spaces, and to slightly increase campus occupancy. It was tabled by the Board of Trustees in Summer 2012.
- The College Strategic Plan was published in 2012, and any major department initiatives would need to connect with the core concepts of teaching and learning, post-graduate success, enrollment, alumni relations, and distinctiveness.
**The appendices will be provided in hard copy format.**