Dear Houston Dougharty;

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct a review of the Office of International Student Affairs. The Self Study and the Review Team’s visit were invigorating and productive. I was especially pleased with the level of engagement of our students, in the Survey Monkey project and the Review Team meeting. I learned a few lessons, too. For the next review I’ll be more intentional about including the full staff when drafting our self study and setting the Team’s visit schedule. I’ll also considering alternate ways to gather faculty feedback, since scheduling their meeting was a challenge.

I offer my sincere appreciation to the Review Team. Their observations were astute and indicate significant engagement in the process. Their work will have a direct impact on the OISA. My staff and I were extremely complimented by their commendations - it was affirming to hear positive reflections from students, staff, faculty, and community colleagues! My comments below will focus primarily on the recommendations that were presented.

1. **Top Priority Recommendations:**

   a. **Review Staffing:** One significant recommendation was to “explore and establish a more sustainable staffing structure to support a vast range of regulatory, advising, and programmatic responsibilities.” I fully endorse the recommendation to reclassify the [Technical Assistant II] position and to add a shared administrative staff role to help DSA/OISA, and will submit a request with the next budget cycle. I appreciate the Team’s effort to highlight continued Professional Development support and the roll-out of SEVIS II as part of the staffing discussion. We will review our ‘use’ of the [International and Academic Advisor] position. We can consider new ways to partner with Academic Advising regarding our mutual interest in supporting students from abroad and we can explore more fulfilling ways to approach this shared appointment. This could include new initiatives in support of non-native speakers, training for faculty, and issues of academic honesty, writing and testing styles, etc. The Team also voiced concern about the non-permanent nature of the [RLC-CEP] arrangement. While not ideal, we truly appreciate this additional support and we find it rewarding to contribute to (and benefit from) the professional development of this entry level position within our Division.
b. **Increase collaboration with and training of faculty and staff:** The OISA has no intention of being responsible for ‘all initiatives for international students’ nor is that a healthy approach for the institution. We will continue to provide guidance for faculty, share stories with communications, and involve faculty and staff from across campus in IPOP and throughout the year. We will consider new ways to increase and re-energize these efforts and we will use the review team’s recommendation to help make that possible. Our most significant effort at this time will be: 1) outreach to faculty, and 2) collaboration with the Career Development Office. Both are essential partners, and while these efforts have been a part of our regular outreach, we can be more intentional about this work.

c. **Continue to issue visa documents for scholars (J exchange visitors):** We will re-evaluate our current approach and develop clearer documentation of policies and processes for the Exchange Visitor program. We have drafted an overview of the offices that support international visitors – students, faculty, staff, performing artists and lecturers, and we will continue to collaborate to finish this project.

d. **Develop new approaches to teach students about regulatory issues:** We will explore a transition to “drop in hours” and/or a web-based appointment system. We will continue to send the “FYI” as needed, but will also develop an OISA P-web site to post regulatory handouts and increase the availability of regulatory guidance. Increased collaboration with CDO and faculty advisors will also have a positive impact on student learning about regulatory issues. Our plan to host *F-1 Quiz Night* at Lyles Pub (this February) is another attempt to engage and teach students in a more active way.

e. **Increase our use of technology:**
   
   i. A transition to *Image Now* is a matter of staff time and energy. We are committed to this change, along with the Division of Student Affairs.
   
   ii. We will transition the IPOP Selection to an on-line application.
   
   iii. We will create a P-web site for regulatory guidance (we like that P-web is password protected so we can limit access to Grinnell users).
   
   iv. We will create on-line options for students to submit SEVIS updates and make standard letter requests.

2. **Recommendations to Contemplate:**

a. We constantly “think about how much the staff is doing for students versus educating students to do for themselves.” That said, I would like to respond to three specific recommendations from the review:

   i. The Team questioned our investment in supporting tax compliance. We have stepped back from tax advising in significant ways, but we do feel justified in our current approach. We coordinate CINTAX administration, provide minor guidance on State of Iowa returns, and offer basic trouble shooting / referral for non-resident tax filers. The Accounting Office issues I-9’s, W-8s, & W-4s. They speak with students and scholars about their tax obligations and their treaty benefits. They issue and distribute W-2 and 1042S Forms. The Financial Aid Office issues end-of-year tax documents and communicates with students about tax obligations. When
we receive questions, we refer students to appropriate offices. The current distribution of work seems appropriate and works smoothly.

ii. The team recommended that we ask students to submit their own OPT applications. We envision a ‘middle of the road’ approach – a balance between encouraging self-reliance and a heightened responsibility on the part of students, while also facing the reality that problems with OPT processing are common. Our goal has been to prevent problems through tighter oversight of the process.

iii. The Team recommended that we better define our relationship with the International Student Organization (ISO). We are invested in ISO’s work because they have a direct impact on the international student experience. We take a fairly ‘hands off’ approach, with the exception of the ISO Food Bazaar. We also offer funding to ISO, so we are interested in how that money is used. We could more clearly articulate that relationship – for our sake, for the sake of students and student leaders, and for the sake of collaboration with the Office of Intercultural Engagement.

b. The review suggested increased assessment of our programming efforts. We actually feel good about our current assessment practices. A related effort, however, that we could (and should) focus on is increased data collection. While not addressed by the Review, we would like to establish a biennial data sheet specifically about non-immigrant students at Grinnell - to help us gain a richer understanding of who they are. We envision a report that could possibly include:

i. # of F-1 students, other non-immigrants, and geographical distribution
ii. Retention rates specific to non-immigrants
iii. Financial Aid and on-campus employment data specific to non-immigrants
iv. Distribution of majors declared by non-immigrant students
v. Number of non-native speakers, and GPA progress
vi. Ave. GPA of non-immigrant students (perhaps by region?)

vii. Statistics on and off-campus employment / internships / research.

3. Recommendations we will not pursue at this time:

a. We do not wish to add the term “scholars” to our office name. This change would increase the expectations placed on the OISA, as well as our own sense of responsibility to support these individuals beyond their immigration needs. While we feel invested in supporting the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, and we will certainly continue to collaborate with the Center for International Studies and other departmental hosts to promote our mutual interest in campus internationalization, the OISA is not equipped to take a more active role in support of faculty scholars.

b. We are not able to invest significant time to advocate for Grinnell’s commitment to engage international faculty. The review specifically mentioned advocacy and support for H-1B and LPR work. We can continue our current level of consultation on these matters, but will defer to the leadership of Human Resources and the Chief Diversity Officer on these matters. Increasing the
OISA’s responsibility for international faculty would require significant changes in staffing, training, and budget.

c. The Team recommended that we expand peer-mentoring opportunities. Intercultural Engagement already coordinates a Peer Mentor Program and international students are invited (and do) participate in that program – as mentees and as mentors. In addition, the IPOP Leadership Team is assigned small groups, and part of their job description includes some mentoring responsibility. The OISA does not intend to create new initiatives for peer mentoring, rather we will continue to collaborate with Intercultural Engagement to encourage international student participation in programs that already exist.

d. The review suggested that we partner with host families as potential fundraisers to support international student needs. I think it would be a significant mistake to place additional expectations, especially financial, on our amazing host family volunteers. Recruiting and maintaining host families is a significant task. This type of activity could jeopardize those relationships that we depend on. Alternately, I would be interested in enhancing the benefits of participation for the families (e.g., access to athletic facilities, discounts for dining access, etc.) because their work supporting our students is an incredible asset to the College.

4. In Conclusion

Diversity and internationalism are inextricably intertwined. In order to fulfill the OISA’s mission, it is essential that we collaborate across departments and divisions – within the Division of Student Affairs, and including Diversity and Inclusion and the Center for International Studies in particular.

Social Justice is also central to our mission. Everything the OISA does is tied to supporting Grinnell’s enrollment of international students – whether through our day-to-day work with them, or through our advocacy and training across campus in recognition of the broader responsibilities of institutional policies and practices to support universal access.

The Office of International Student Affairs will indeed continue to embrace our role of leadership in conversations and initiatives about diversity, internationalism, and social justice at Grinnell College. The observations, commendations and recommendations provided from the External Review Process provide valuable encouragement in this regard.

Sincerely,

Karen K. Edwards
Assistant Dean and Director of International Student Affairs