GRINNELL COLLEGE

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September 13, 2013

W. Houston Dougharty
Vice President for Student Affairs
Grinnell College

Dear Houston,

Thank you for opportunity to participate in the Division of Student Affairs' cycle of departmental reviews. The Residence Life and Orientation staff found that the review process was a chance to reflect, think critically, and assess the state of our department's place in the Division and the Grinnell campus community. We especially found the self-study (Fall 2012) and the experience of meeting with review team (February 2013) to be inspiring and clarifying. We do sincerely appreciate the time and effort that the external and internal staff, faculty, and students contributed to this process, including preparing the report that we received (August 2013).

We're thrilled the team noticed that many areas have improved over the last few years in Residence Life and Orientation. The observations and commendations reflect a noteworthy change in the quality of Residence Life Coordinators (RLCs) that we've attracted and retained, an improvement in the effectiveness of training for both the RLCs and the Student Staff, the organization of New Student Orientation (NSO), and the caliber of the programs offered both residentially and through NSO, among other things.

The review team submitted only six recommendations, but four of those related to staffing concerns. Their recommendations apply to our professional staff, administrative support staff, and student staff. Therefore, we will focus our response to the review team on those areas, and will prioritize these areas when taking action from here.

1. <u>Compensation for Student Staff (and clarify HWC role)</u>

   The team recommended compensation for Student Advisers (SAs) because the *"position is the backbone of student leadership on a residential campus"* and because, at other colleges, *"when compensation has been increased, the caliber and consistency within the student staff has also increased."* I am in agreement that moving this position from volunteer to paid is a critical next step. We have made significant strides in modernizing this position (adding winter training, ongoing professional development, an appreciation and awards program, streamlined application and interview processes, and higher levels of accountability), but we have reached a ceiling that I sincerely believe cannot be surpassed until we compensate the Student Staff. Our staff is too large (82) and unwieldy, we struggle to fill all roles despite increased marketing efforts, and it's difficult to hold volunteers fully accountable. Because we don't compensate the staff, we permit them to "draw" into their desired positions, which results in abnormalities among cluster staffs such as too many/too few returners and poor balance among genders and other diversity markers. While there are many Student Advisers who admirably role model self-governance and build community in their areas, not all are fully invested in this leadership role among their other priorities,

and compensation would send a strong message about the College valuing these front-line positions that assist in student success and retention.

By October 1, I will submit to you, Houston, a variety of (reduced) student staffing structures and compensation options. These will supplemented by the benchmarking research we did in 2011 with our peer, ACM, and Iowa institutions. Because the budgetary implications are enormous, I look forward to continuing this conversation in person.

2. RLC Responsibilities and Collaborative Enrichment Program (CEP)

   The team recommended a review of the CEP program because *"the RLCs are stretched too thin."* At the origination of the CEP (the .25 FTE appointment outside of Residence Life) intentions were good to demonstrate collaboration among areas and offer the RLCs a chance to gain experience in another area of Student Affairs or the College. This opportunity was attractive to many of our candidates. Unfortunately, as Residence Life and Orientation took on more and more homeless projects (primarily those that typically fall under student activities/campus life; see below for more information), many of the CEPs were less collaborative in nature and instead consisted of critical "must-do" tasks that the department had responsibility for. Three – and as many as four – of the six RLCs' CEPs report to me directly.

   By October 1, I will submit multiple staffing suggestions to you that range in budgetary implications from the ideal (with additional 1+ FTE), to an intermediary plan with <1 additional FTE, to a suggestion for staffing improvements with almost no additional FTE. Some of these ideas include the continuation of CEPs and some do not; some involve a move to a "campus life" model and others do not. I look forward to discussing this with you more in person.

3. Technical Assistant II Responsibilities

   The team recommended a review of the Technical Assistant II position because *"this position does not include enough hours to complete the required work."* I am in agreement that this position needs to be enhanced. In recent years, significant improvement has been made to work flow and productivity with technology and other efficiencies, and there still isn't enough time to get everything done in 11 months, and within a strictly 8am-5pm work day, without overtime pay. The specific job responsibilities of the person in this role have also increased over time.

   By October 1, I will submit the staffing suggestions detailed above, which include recommendations on this position. I will also provide an analysis of the increase in duties that this position has enveloped that will demonstrate the need for an enhancement in the contract length and/or classification.

After adjustments are made to our staffing structures, we can more adequately address the two other recommendations suggested by the review team:

1. Revising our departmental learning outcomes to be aspirational but also measurable.
2. Considering a Residential Curriculum or other programmatic adjustments.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I felt there were two significant gaps in the review team's assessment of our departmental needs. Throughout my time here, two items have been discussed regularly with my supervisor (Travis Greene, Dean of Students). Our staff aspires to achieve even greater results in our department and these growth areas impact our ability to do even better work for Grinnell College students. At a time where the need for self-governance, harm reduction, violence prevention, and active bystanderism is at an all-time high, we would like to take a leadership role in these campus efforts but feel bogged down by extraneous responsibilities and not enough resources. Again, these were not mentioned by the review team, but felt them significant enough to mention in this response.

1. Clarifying the mission of the Residence Life and Orientation program.

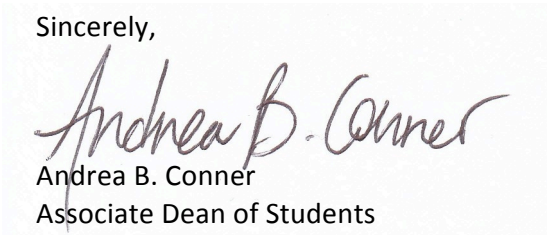
   As mentioned above, three of the CEPs (.75 FTE) cover projects and responsibilities that, in my experience, typically fall under student activities/campus life. These include, but are not limited to: advising Student Government Association, Bob's Underground Café, Lyle's Pub, and Student Publications and Radio Committee; supervising the [Weekend] sub-free programming series; training event hosts, administering Alcohol Agreements for student parties, and co-advising ACE Security. In short, I think we could accomplish more in Residence Life and Orientation if we either focused on those two things, or moved to a "campus life" model where we were more closely aligned with Student Activities and were funded accordingly (in both staff and operating budgets).

2. Sufficient funding for both Residence Life and NSO operating budgets.

   We have been careful stewards of the modest budgets we are allocated by the College. However, there are customary programs that we are unable to accomplish due to lack of resources. This includes but is not limited to: external trainers, educators, or retreats for RLC Training and Student Staff Training; more professional entertainment at NSO; program budgets in the residence halls beyond snacks; color printing to professionalize marketing; and phone plans for RLCs.

In closing, thank you again for this opportunity. We look forward to continuing our good work and also implementing some changes that will benefit the Grinnell College community.

Sincerely,



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