



August 18, 2011

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To: Grinnell College Staff
From: Angela Voos, Special Assistant to the President, Co-chair of Strategic Planning
Mary Phipps, Operations Manager, Admission, Co-chair of Staff Council
Re: Choosing Grinnell's Future: Prospectus to the Five Topics for Strategic Planning¹

During a retreat in June 2011, the Board of Trustees charged Grinnell College “with the development, within the academic year, of an ambitious, five-year Strategic Plan.” In the July memo from Dave Lopatto, Chair of the Faculty and Co-chair of Strategic Planning, he reported on the retreat and described the strategic planning process. This memo fleshes out the five suggested topics for discussion and frames them in such a way as to facilitate discussion.

The Board of Trustees named five topics for the strategic plan to address. It also outlined several themes that must be considered as the community tackles each of the main topics. The community will examine the topics and themes together since a full discussion of any of the topics could not occur without the thematic contexts listed below.

Topics

- Distinctiveness of Grinnell College
- Teaching and Learning
- Enrollment
- Post-graduation Success
- Alumni Engagement

Themes

- Innovation and Ambition
- Fiscal Management and Responsibility
- Globalization
- Visibility and Communication
- Evidence-based Decisions
- Adaptive Processes

¹ Parts of this memo are excerpted from the memo to the faculty sent by Dave Lopatto, Chair of the Faculty, on August 18, 2011.





- Diversity
- Environmental Sustainability

The five topics

1. Distinctiveness of Grinnell College

A subtitle for this topic might be, “Identify and build-on the distinctive qualities of Grinnell College.” The old strategic plan used the term “distinctive” in connection with strengthening the public profile of the College:

Articulate more clearly and prominently our distinctive academic qualities and devotion to the common good to establish a stronger national profile for the College².

Discussion at the recent Board retreat focused on naming what distinguishes or could distinguish Grinnell in the higher education landscape. The discussion will pursue the substance of our distinctiveness. Note that distinctiveness used here does not mean merely different, but different and excellent. The following phrases were offered during the retreat:

- A call for a vision that will include new and big ideas.
- A challenge to be the best at accomplishments related to our mission.
- A plan for using the College’s strategic assets to move the College forward and achieve its goals.

2. Teaching and Learning

A subtitle for this topic may be, “Create a powerful and adaptive learning environment.” The topic subsumes many issues that composed three of the six strategies of the old strategic plan. These were:

- Increase the emphasis on inquiry-based learning and broaden our liberal arts curriculum.
- Foster student, faculty, and staff sense of ambition, adventure, and well-being.
- Advance Grinnell College as a more diverse, robust intellectual community.

The first of these three strategies proposed the launching of the Expanding Knowledge Initiative and endorsed the Mentored Advanced Projects program. The second addressed technology, facilities, and support (as well as student career preparation). The third advocated diversity. In the July memo, Professor Lopatto reported a list of items the Trustees considered successes, and these included the success of the Expanding Knowledge Initiative and increasing diversity of our faculty, staff, and student bodies.

² Strategic Plan (2005).





Today, several paths suggest themselves and will require some preliminary decisions about which paths to pursue. Do we look past the existing programs to invent a new one to generate excitement and opportunity? Do we inspect the impact of our programs on faculty organization (e.g., departmental structure) and vice versa? Do we match our interest in the recruitment of diverse faculty, students, and staff with a clear strategy for development, mentoring, and retention? Do we address the issue of faculty, staff, and student workloads and how to prepare ourselves to remain current in the face of the explosion of information and disruptive technologies?

3. Enrollment

A subtitle for this topic might be, “How will Grinnell intentionally attract and select a student body that complements and enhances its mission?” This topic has been spotlighted recently by President Kington’s presentations on Grinnell’s future. In those presentations, the President has uncovered the tensions inherent in need blind admission, meeting full demonstrated financial-aid need, tuition revenue, and reliance on endowment revenue. Discussion and planning on this topic may include the questions listed below, but these examples do not exhaust the questions that might be discussed under this topic.

- What is the optimal size of the student body?
- What is the ideal and multidimensional composition of the student body?
- How do our admission policies and practices affect who applies, enrolls, attends, and graduates from Grinnell?
- How do our financial aid policies and practices affect who applies, enrolls, attends, and graduates from Grinnell?
- How are our core values borne out in our policies?
- What external forces and trends are on the horizon that will have an impact on Grinnell’s ability to recruit and retain the best qualified applicants?

4. Post-graduation Success

A subtitle for this topic might be, “Within Grinnell’s residential, liberal-arts framework, how will Grinnell provide guidance to its students and alumni to foster personal, educational, civic, and career success after graduation?” According to documented sources, Grinnell does very well in facilitating student paths to academic doctoral degrees. We would like to provide the same facilitation to other career paths. Questions related to enhanced career success might include:

- How can Grinnell be intentional about helping graduates transition to the next path in their lives?
- While students are here, what can the College do to help them explore diverse post-graduate options?
- What role should/can internships and externships play in helping students chart out their post graduate plans?
- For the students who intend to go to graduate or professional schools, how best can Grinnell prepare them and assist them in the application process?





- For the students who intend to pursue careers in non-profit or for-profit organizations, what resources can Grinnell provide to help them be successful?

Given various forecasts that current students may have more than 5 jobs or careers in their lives, given that some students will create their own career, given that some careers the students may have do not exist yet, how does a liberal arts education answer the need for an adaptive approach to life?

5. Alumni Engagement

A subtitle here might be, “How will Grinnell intentionally engage the talent, passion for learning, and generosity of its alumni—starting in the first year of college and continuing throughout a lifetime?” Grinnell’s alumni have a history of serving as a resource to students, faculty, and other alumni. This resource could be more energized and networked to the benefit of all. The discussion of alumni engagement might include questions such as:

- How best can Grinnell develop and make available the network of alumni?
- How can Grinnell benefit from the expertise of its alumni?
- How will Grinnell develop in its alumni a culture of giving to the College?
- How can we connect our students with the passion, success, and talents of alumni?
- How can we encourage students to appreciate the help of alumni and feed forward their appreciation to the next generation?

On Task, On Time

The strategic planning process is scheduled for one academic year. In order to progress, participants will need to focus on these topics and work on manageable plans. Before we begin the discussions, we need to re-familiarize ourselves with the mission and core values of our residential, liberal-arts college (www.grinnell/offices/president/). They will function as criteria for the evaluation of any new policy or program that emerges from the planning process. Keeping this in mind, please re-familiarize yourself with the core values and consider them as we go through the strategic planning process.

Kick-off

On August 24, 2011 at the all-campus picnic, President Kington will launch the Strategic Planning process. The President will be joined by a member of the Board of Trustees and a student in the senior class; they will give brief remarks to officially mark the start of this strategic planning year. Staff, faculty, and students attending the picnic will be encouraged to contribute to the first engaging question in the Strategic Plan: "What makes Grinnell College distinctive?" Please join us for this kick-off event.

If you wish to comment on this memo or on aspects of strategic planning, we have set up an email account at sp@grinnell.edu to receive your comments. Information and updates about strategic planning will be posted www.grinnell.edu/future starting August 24, 2011.

