

Review of Campus Center Operations/Student Activities and the Student Conduct Program

April 24-26, 2011

Introduction:

The purpose of this review is to offer observations, commendations, and recommendations with regard to two programs within the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) at Grinnell College. These programs consist of the **Student Conduct Program** (led by Travis Greene, Dean of Students) and **Campus Center Operations/Student Activities** (led by Michael Sims, Director). For the Student Activities, the focus was on how effective and efficient are the facilities and services for Grinnell students, staff, faculty, and members of the Greater Grinnell community. For Student Conduct, the charge was to review existing protocol and procedures as it relates to addressing student behavioral issues through various forms of disciplinary procedures.

Members of the Review team consisted of:

- Grinnell students **Courtney Sheehan '11** and **Cyril Afeku '13**
- Grinnell staff and faculty **Val Vetter** (Coordinator of Peace Studies), **Erin Hurley** (Associate Professor & Head Swimming Coach), **Chris Bair '97** (FM Environmental & Safety Coordinator, and **Rebecca Stuhr** (Associate Professor & Collection Development and Preservation Librarian)
- Off-campus student affairs colleagues **Sentwali Bakari** (Dean of Students, Drake University) and **Jim Hoppe** (Dean of Students, Macalester College)

The review was conducted April 24-26, 2011. On Sunday evening, the review team met briefly with Vice President for Student Affairs Houston Dougharty, Travis Greene, and Michael Sims; on Monday the team met with faculty, staff, and students involved with Student Conduct and Student Activities; Tuesday morning the team had individual follow-up sessions with Travis Greene, Michael Sims and Houston Dougharty.

Student Conduct:

The student conduct process seems confusing to those not intimately involved with the process or proceedings. This does not seem to be the case with those actually participating in the hearings process. It does not appear that the process needs fixing, but it does need to be better understood by the community at large. The process seems very well documented, perhaps too much so. It could be that users are lost in the volume of written information. Suggested changes to the process include establishing ongoing and formal training for Judicial Council and College Hearing Board members, better communication to victims/survivors of decisions and outcome, continued work toward informing students of the hearing process and consequences of infractions.

Observations:

- As underscored by numerous interviewees, the conduct system is highly appreciated by students and functions well within the context and culture of self-governance. In light of the

self-governance paradigm, reported student conduct issues are minimal and appear to be a manageable process for students who serve as community assistants, administrative staff, and Hearing Board members. Instead of addressing numerous cases of minor misconduct through a disciplinary process, the self-governance paradigm creates a unique learning opportunity for students to govern themselves within the campus culture.

- There is a perceived lack of transparency in both process and outcomes. With regard to process, this perception is largely felt by faculty, staff, and students who have not had any experience with the actual student conduct proceedings.
- Those that are directly involved with the Student Conduct process were in agreement that the process is successful. There appeared to be few if any recommendations for changing the actual process.
- Residence Life staff would like to be appraised of what stage cases are in as they progress through the Student Conduct system.
- Victims of an incident are only notified of the outcomes if the incident was a sexual assault or if the outcome had a direct impact on the victim, i.e. a no contact order.
- “No contact orders” are not consistently enforced and often the duration of the order is not clear.
- Under the self-governance system on campus where student conduct monitoring is based on mutual respect and responsibility between students and their Student Advisors and Residence Life Coordinators, what would be termed minor incidents are not documented, as they would on other campuses. Documentation only occurs if the incident reaches the level of a formal complaint and possible Judicial Council or College Hearing Board hearing.
- Also, under self-governance, it is sometimes difficult (for e.g. an RLC) to know when to intervene at a more pro-active level. There seems to be a big gap between informal intervention and the much more serious level of hearing boards and sanctions.
- It was mentioned a couple of times that one case that occurred during the beginning of a semester did not provide timely feedback to the complainant five months later.

Commendations:

- Members of Judicial Council and the College Hearing Board who met with the review team were unanimous in their confidence in the process.
- The publishing of incidents and outcomes via the S&B and online have definitely increased the transparency of the proceedings.
- The hearing board members were appreciative of the follow up from Travis explaining the final outcomes. This provided some closure for the Board members after an intense process.

Recommendations:

- Increase educational efforts aimed at the campus community with regard to judicial proceedings and consequences.

- o Possibilities may include handouts with the core principles of self governance (statement of values) on one side and a flowchart/description of JudCo and the CHB to help clarify the process.
 - o Townhall meeting
 - o SA educational study breaks about JudCo and CHB in the spring semester when first years are not so overwhelmed.
 - o Consider utilizing Tutorial as an avenue to educate students on the process of the student conduct system and how it relates to self-governance.
 - o Share outcome of hearing board decisions and sanctions with affected parties so they can also experience the kind of closure mentioned by the board members (see above). This would include explicit time frames for no contact orders.
 - o Could Residence Life staff, student staff in particular, have a more structured/intentional process for pursuing educational discussions about the process?
- Formalize training for faculty, staff and student members of both JudCo and CHB.
 - Hold an annual refresher session for ongoing members of the board pool where procedures and concerns can be reviewed and changes discussed.
 - Increase the pool of available members. Rotate membership on the boards to increase the number of people who have experience and knowledge of JudCo and CHB, and reduce the secrecy which has previously surrounded these institutions.
 - Review FERPA to see if a reinterpretation could include increased communication of outcomes to complainants. This interpretation should also be included in the handout with core principles and statement of values.
 - Posting the report of outcomes on student floors in addition to the S&B
 - On-going communication with RLC's regarding the status of cases under consideration for hearing board reviews.
 - Provide opportunities for students to acquire conflict resolution skills so that problems can be more efficaciously and effectively addressed, rather than ignored, accommodated, or suppressed in order to support a more effective self-governance system.

Student Activities:

Observations:

- There appears to be significant room for improvement with communication between Conference Operations and the Student Activities Program.
- There is no central vision for student activities, largely due to the decentralized nature of student programs on campus.
- There are now three RLCs that are assigned to Student Activities work. This was not true in the past. If RLCs were relieved of Student Affairs responsibilities, it is unclear how those tasks might be handled.
- The awareness of the process for event planning varies greatly among student groups. Student groups lacking a mentor/advisor or direct involvement with SGA seem to be the least aware.
- Although outside of the scope of Student Activities, several space related issues arose including:
 - o The need for more medium size spaces on campus.

- o The design of JRC 101 lacks set up flexibility. There are no options for the placement of the podium and there is no way to completely block outside light from coming in.
 - o Multicultural Suites, by the nature of the design, do not appear welcoming and inclusive. The size of the individual spaces, are also small and without an obvious larger group area.
- Although Mr. Sims is extremely capable and knowledgeable about the services and functions of all three facilities, there was a consistent theme from the interviews that Mr. Sims is viewed as a one-person operation and may not be equipped to effectively manage all three facilities without additional professional support. The most compelling concern was related to the lack of professional staff available after standard office hours as it relates to addressing technical issues and the behavior and performance of student employees. Thus, calling into question why one professional staff who works primarily between 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., is responsible for technical services and co-curricular activities of all three centers that occur primarily during the evening hours.
- One specific observation during interviews with student employees reflected a subtle culture of enabling one another. During several interviews, it was noted that when student employees fail to work their scheduled shift, other workers will cover their shift. Yet, the absent student is paid for working when they actually didn't work. The Campus Center Director is not notified and as a result, students are not held responsible or accountable for fulfilling their employment obligations. In addition, certain interviewees complained about the unprofessional behavior of students working at the Harris Center.

Commendations:

- Michael appears to go beyond and above expectations by being ~~on~~ "on-call" all the time and is great at responding and troubleshooting when called during non-office hours.
- Many mentioned they appreciated Michael's personable style and enjoyed working with him.

Recommendations:

- Formalize a process for review of JRC and Harris Center events including review of student staff and technology. For instance, students using the cinema or planning Harris parties would have an evaluation form to fill out immediately following their event commenting on space, equipment, and Harris and JRC staff effectiveness.
- Have Harris Center and especially JRC student staff, participate in TC training.
- Increase cooperation between IT, AV Center, and Student Activities.
- Station a TC during the evenings in JRC. This would serve two purposes. The TC would be available to assist students studying in the JRC after 5:00 p.m. and would also be available to assist JRC staff with evening lectures and events taking place in JRC 101 or other places in the Campus Center as needed.
- Institute either a staff presence after hours or a tiered student management system for better oversight of student staff after hours. Specifically, hire experienced students to be "senior students." Part of their responsibility would be to assist with training and setting a standard for

their peers. Another possibility would be to have a staff member whose hours were staggered with Michael's (e.g. 10am to 7pm).

- Establish a centralized place to go to for technical help for the JRC and Harris.
- Alleviate necessity for Michael Sims to be on call all of the time. Some of the above suggestions might assist with this.
- Formalize the pre-Harris Center event meetings to include a more concise description of expectations for all parties including what to expect from Harris Staff and ACE security. Improve post-event feedback so problems can be addressed.
- Clarify application process for JRC and Harris Center staff and use the standard campus procedures for application for student positions.
- Arrange for outside evaluation of Harris Cinema project equipment and work with SGA to repair and ensure that all equipment is working properly.
- Given the complexity of the technical issues in Harris Cinema and the large amount of the SGA Films budget recently spent on upgrading the cinema by installing a new digital projector and Blu-ray player, decisions regarding both the actions that need to be taken to fix existing problems as well as future efforts to upgrade the Harris Center should be made collaboratively with ITS, SGA, and other knowledgeable parties. This should include extensive research before selecting the specialist or company to attend to the problems.