

Alumni Council Minutes
Friday, November 5, 2021
HSSC Multipurpose Room

Present: Lester Alemán '07, Ed Atkins '66, Claudia Beckwith '77, Ann Poor Cary '81, Deborah Feir '68, Robert Gehorsam '76, Kate Goddard '91, Debbie Gottschalk '90, Graciela Guzmán '11, Phillip Hales '02, Dawn Helsing Wolters '87, Kelly Clements Hopfer '96, Andrea Jackson '95, Bernard Jackson '86, David Jarvis '04, Anton Jones '02, Jake Joseph '11, Chris Meyer '70, Eric Mistry '14, Becky Reetz Neal '65, Michael Niederman '80, Robert Ruhl '76, Scott Shepherd '82, Tom Triplett '69, Ben Vaughn Jr. '15.

Absent:

Excused:

Staff: Jayn Chaney '05; Jennie Jackson, recording secretary; Jaci Thiede.

Guests: President Anne Harris.

I. Welcome and Housekeeping

- a. Lester Alemán, president of Alumni Council, called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.
- b. Lester gave an overview of the agenda.

II. President Anne Harris

- a. The session with President Anne Harris began at 2:06 p.m.
- b. President Harris introduced herself and gave an overview of the session. She will spend the first 15 minutes sharing a variety of updates, and the next 45 minutes as a question and answer period.
- c. President Harris noted that Grinnell is the safest institution in the state of Iowa right now, with 96% of students and 94% of staff fully vaccinated.
- d. President Harris talked about how alum comes from a Latin meaning “to nourish,” and she comes to alumni thinking about how alumni can be nourished by the College, but also how alumni can nourish the College.
- e. President Harris acknowledged that there is still work to be done within the institution. Immediate focuses include transportation shuttles to cities, spaces on campus, BIPOC faculty/staff/students, and communal meals.
- f. Of the 20 top liberal arts institutions, only two (Grinnell and Davidson) are in politically red states. President Harris expressed the importance of students having the opportunity to have community with larger cities. There is a lot of purpose in Grinnell College in being here, holding our purpose, bringing in speakers, and having these conversations. But, we also need to take care of people.
- g. The College has been working on a learning spaces policy, to include policy on the use of racial slurs and micro aggressions in the classroom.

The College is working to include DEI in the tenure promotion process, and has had productive conversations about academic freedom to learn as well as academic freedom to teach. The College is looking into adding a new major in Black and African Diaspora Studies; there are three tenured professors included in the 10-year budget.

- h. President Harris reported that there are many upcoming hires, including a new Dean of the College, Vice President of Finance, and Vice President of Communications.
- i. President Harris shared a handout, *Strategic Planning 2021-22*. President Harris hosted weekly podcasts in spring 2021 discussing the strategic plan. President Harris asked the Council, how can we most meaningfully engage the alumni community in developing and implementing the strategic plan? How can we use this plan to bring alumni together?
 - i. Bernard Jackson and Ann Poor Cary both suggested bringing President Harris to the major cities for events.
 - ii. Graciela suggested basing the conversation around people and their lived experiences by accepting the good and bad, and grounding it all in the plan.
 - iii. Robert Gehorsam suggested setting some context around what is a strategic plan, with continued communication along the way.
 - iv. Dawn Helsing Wolters talked about how Alumni Council could help to open the channels of communication in both directions, by making alumni feel heard, and providing alumni experience to the College.
- j. President Harris noted she has been thinking a lot about the College's communication plan, including how to communicate with parents.
 - i. Ben Vaughn advised President Harris to embrace her role as a celebrity on campus, and to be present and visible for and with students.
 - ii. Kate Goddard talked about how once the strategic plan is finished, that communication and repetition related to the strategic plan is important.
- k. President Harris talked about a shuttle to Des Moines and Iowa City. Planning the logistics is important, but it is equally important to continue to talk about how we will communicate and brand this program.
- l. Lester Alemán asked how prepared President Harris and Joe Bagnoli are to make investments in broadening the level of domestically diverse students of color outside of Questbridge. Lester communicated that overall, the data looks great, but when you break down the data Grinnell's diversity primarily comes from international and Asian students, and there is an underrepresentation of Black, Native, and Latinx students.
 - i. President Harris discussed institutional readiness, which is improving through financial investment in positions, the No Loan initiative, transportation/experiences, and Curriculum.

1. The BCC position, for example, could not be hired or retained because it was an hourly position. The College has increased its investment in this position.
 2. President Harris noted that there are more offers being made to Black and Latinx students than ever, but extremely low yield on these offers.
- m. Eric Mistry asked about whose voice is missing from the strategic plan, perhaps non-managerial staff? Eric also encouraged the College to continue with virtual events.
 - n. Bernard Jackson suggested asking professors to make videos about belonging and mentoring, or encouraging professors to create closer relationships with students.
 - o. President Harris talked about realism in the College's business planning. During student recruitment to Grinnell, we talk a lot about social justice, and then students have even more of a letdown when it's not perfect when they arrive to campus.
 - p. David Jarvis asked for an update on Bob's.
 - i. President Harris expressed that while she does not know why Bob's is still closed, she is looking a lot at the downtown student residence, "Civic Engagement Quad," and student discussion surrounding Bob's was very informative to the architect.
 - q. Jake Joseph asked about the current status of the CRSSJ.
 - i. President Harris noted that the College is working to hire a first-gen coordinator, and the food pantry is well stocked. We have been working to make it clear to students that Deanna and student affairs are working together. One of the big strategic changes last year was creating an office of DEI.
 - r. Graciela Guzmán asked about low-income/first-gen students, and how they have panned out around the pandemic in relation to retention, happiness, support, etc.
 - i. President Harris responded that the College has used a trauma-based approach with the return to campus, by opening up more mental health support (lots of telehealth) for both students and staff, and working with faculty to understand more specifics surrounding workload in the classroom and flexibility.
 - ii. Low-income students were sent utility and food allowances when they were sent home.
 - iii. President Harris brought up student employment. We are working with faculty to get them to list their jobs instead of just asking a student they like. We currently have mostly students of color and international students working in the dining hall.
 - iv. The College needs an emphasis on transportation back home and communication with families.
 - s. Eric Mistry asked how the College is managing faculty/staff burnout.

- i. President Harris noted that we have had two faculty members just walk away from higher education entirely as a result of the pandemic.
- ii. President Harris responded that we are not doing enough, which is why health/wellbeing is being considered as part of strategic planning.
- iii. Reinstating travel budgets has been important, and the College will be conducting surveys.
- iv. If we are focused on meaningful work, we will get somewhere with burnout.
- v. President Harris also noted that the College has been offering three days of remote work per week, and is re-thinking summers. Can summers be worked from another location in order to have that space?
- t. Becky Neal talked about developing and sustaining resilience as a frame for how to support faculty/staff and students. Becky also noted how anxiety-provoking the political climate is in Iowa.
 - i. President Harris talked about her experience, politically, trying to implement mask mandates and vaccine mandates on campus.
 - ii. President Harris brought up resilience as it is incorporated into the First Year experience courses. These are 0.5 credit courses, consisting of six 90-minute sessions over the semester. President Harris is teaching one of these courses this spring.
- u. Lester Alemán thanked President Harris for having the conversation with the Council. The session ended at 3:33 p.m.

- III. Student Alumni Council and SGA President Updates - Maddie Sevier '23, Stella Schaefer-Brown '22, Fernando Villatoro '22
- a. Stella gave an overview of what SAC has been doing this year, and the transition from online to in-person programming.
 - i. Messages for midsems
 - ii. National Philanthropy Week
 - b. Maddie talked about Arctic Lights, which is the big winter celebration with the lighting of Gates Tower. It will be outdoors and there will be food, sparklers, a student music group, and paper lanterns.
 - c. Maddie served as the student rep this semester to the Wall Award.
 - d. SAC will be doing student care packages this year, which will be packaged and distributed in December.
 - e. Fernando talked about SGA. They set up institutional priorities to address and work towards through different initiatives.
 - f. Bernard Jackson asked how Alumni Council could connect more with Student Alumni Council, how SGA is assisting incoming students, and how students are doing in general.
 - i. Fernando talked about advocating for self-gov, supporting student activities, and how to best support students and their experience at Grinnell.

- g. Lester Alemán added that Fernando has joined a few Trustee meetings and has given a lot of insight into the student experience and challenges that the students are facing.
- h. Kate Goddard asked Fernando to talk more about the divisions within the student body.
 - i. Fernando talked about how peer-to-peer engagement was disrupted during Covid. From an institutional memory standpoint, it has been hard to carry on the traditions and work of former students. Students now are trying to bridge between Grinnell's core values of the past, and how current students can pave the new road forward.
- i. Kate Goddard asked the students what they would tell alumni about how students are doing.
 - i. Fernando responded that students are in a transition period. It's been difficult because the pandemic is not over yet, so students are trying to maintain regular activities while being Covid-safe and recovering from last year with minimal engagement.
 - ii. Maddie noted steady progress.
 - iii. Stella added that many people became more isolated and independent, so moving forward from that, it has been important to try to create a more cohesive community.
 - iv. Fernando noted that it feels like there is a lack of support in student agency and student processes. Advocating to new leadership the importance of self-gov and the ability to learn how to pave our own road forward, has felt like a lot of work for students. Students often do not feel supported from our partners at the school. We still advocate because we care about it and believe in the value of what this institution was founded on, but are trying to figure out how to best bridge that gap between the old and new Grinnell.
- j. Ann Poor Cary asked if there are any positive aspects that have resulted from Covid.
 - i. Maddie responded that professors have been more open and appreciative of the complexity of student lives.
 - ii. Stella talked about how all of the students and professors have this common experience that bonds them, and that financial aid/monetary support from the school has been a positive as well.
 - iii. Fernando added that people are giving more grace and understanding more where people are coming from. Everyone feels the stress.
- k. Ben Vaughn asked about the student-felt impact on the school's responsive plan for underrepresented communities on campus.
 - i. Fernando talked about how there was not time to process everything. We are all kind of acting like school is the new priority, while also still trying to deal with everything going on at home. There has been support from some professors.

- I. Claudia Beckwith asked if there is anything that Council can do for students.
 - i. SAC would love to have Council members join their meetings as an alumni speaker.
 - ii. Fernando wants to increase engagement and communication between SGA and alumni.
- m. Eric Mistry asked if the students think the College is ready for another crisis of that scale, or what they could do to be better prepared.
 - i. Stella noted that consistency across the board would be better, instead of each professor doing everything different.
 - ii. Maddie added that being on campus and worried about being sent home again is an added stressor for students.
 - iii. Fernando added that operationally the College has an emergency team, but is not prepared in terms of addressing emotional labor on students/staff, and academic compassion/leniency.
- n. Lester Alemán closed by saying that the combination of the student feedback and President Harris' feedback will together be helpful as Council considers how to support the College.

**Alumni Council Minutes
Saturday, November 6, 2021
HSSC Multipurpose Room**

Present: Lester Alemán '07, Ed Atkins '66, Claudia Beckwith '77, Ann Poor Cary '81, Deborah Feir '68, Robert Gehorsam '76, Kate Goddard '91, Debbie Gottschalk '90, Graciela Guzmán '11, Phillip Hales '02, Dawn Helsing Wolters '87, Kelly Clements Hopfer '96, Andrea Jackson '95, Bernard Jackson '86, David Jarvis '04, Anton Jones '02, Jake Joseph '11, Chris Meyer '70, Eric Mistry '14, Becky Reetz Neal '65, Michael Niederman '80, Robert Ruhl '76, Scott Shepherd '82, Tom Triplett '69, Ben Vaughn Jr. '15.

Absent:

Excused:

Staff: Jayn Chaney '05; Jennie Jackson, recording secretary; Jaci Thiede.

Guests: Chris Clarke, Ryann Haines Cheung '93.

- I. Engagement Discussion
 - a. The session began at 9:08 a.m.
 - b. Chris Clarke from BWF introduced himself, and explained that he is here to conduct a listening session with the Alumni Council. He explained how

the listening session will work, and provided suggestions to Council on how to best participate.

- c. A quiz was distributed to Council members about the Campaign.
 - d. The group split into small groups to discuss different questions, and spent time reporting out about their discussions. These discussions are all kept in separate notes. See Appendix A.
 - e. Chris Clarke thanked everyone for their participation and engagement.
- II. Alumni Awards Presentation and Vote
- a. The session began at 10:46 a.m.
 - b. Ryann Haines Cheung invited each of the committee members to present the alumni award finalists.
 - i. James “Jim” Lowry ’61
 - ii. Katherine “Kate” Villers ’61
 - iii. Ron Gault ’62
 - iv. Alan Cohen ’72
 - v. Jodie Levin-Epstein ’72
 - vi. Dick Knapp ’76
 - vii. Kit Wall ’77
 - viii. Rebecca Quirk ’86
 - ix. Rhonda Stuart ’86
 - x. Sherry Gupta ’88
 - xi. Karmi Mattson ’97
 - xii. Samuel Sellers ’00
 - xiii. Julian Zebot ’00
 - c. Debby Feir asked for clarification on life trustees’ eligibility for the Alumni Award. Ryann clarified that life trustees are no longer involved in meetings with the active trustees, so they are eligible.

Motion: Kelly Clements Hopfer

Approved: Unanimous

- d. The session ended at 11:18 a.m.

- III. Approval of spring 2021 meeting minutes
- a. The session began at 11:30 a.m.
 - b. Lester asked for approval of the spring 2021 meeting minutes.

Motion: Ann Poor Cary

Second: David Jarvis

Approved: Unanimous

- IV. Committee Updates
- a. The session began at 11:31 a.m.
 - b. Membership and Awards Committee, Robert Gehorsam

- i. Committee members are: Tom Triplett, Claudia Beckwith, Kate Goddard, and Jake Joseph.
 - ii. Six Council members will be leaving Council at the end of this term. The committee is looking at the various parameters and diversity, has 30 past applicants that will continue to be evaluated, as well as seeking new applications.
- c. Alumni and Student Connections Committee, Phillip Hales
 - i. Committee members are: Anton Jones, Ben Vaughn, Andrea Jackson, Debby Feir, Scott Shepherd, and Dawn Helsing.
 - ii. The committee's work this year will be structured around the challenges heard yesterday from SGA and SAC Leadership.
 - iii. The committee will work towards speakers for SAC Meetings, the Meetway event series, student events during the Spring Council meeting, and a discussion surrounding the use of Grinnell Connect.
 - iv. It continues to be a challenge to think of how to engage students without adding new events.
- d. Alumni Engagement Committee, Robert Ruhl
 - i. Committee members are: Graciela Guzmán, Becky Neal, Michael Niederman, Ann Poor Cary, and David Jarvis.
 - ii. This year's primary goals are to implement the Council town halls, continue the column in the magazine, and encourage alumni award nominations.
 - iii. Robert outlined the Let's Talk sessions. He asked Council members to save the date for their particular event, as we will ask them to host the event. Robert will send a reminder via email.
 - iv. Robert talked about the President Harris Town Hall that will take place during the spring 2022 Council meeting.
 - v. Robert talked about the 2022 Alumni Food Week Proposal, which the committee is planning for the week prior to Thanksgiving in 2022.
- e. Diversity & Inclusion, Debbie Gottschalk and Bernard Jackson
 - i. Committee members are: Ed Atkins, Eric Mistry, and Kelly Clements Hopfer.
 - ii. Multicultural Reunion is entirely virtual next week, November 11-13. There are more people registered for this event than have ever attended before. Debbie and Bernard gave an overview of the schedule.
 - iii. Book Club with Caste has been going very well.
 - iv. The committee met with various campus constituents this week.
 - v. The committee is wondering if the Board ever finalized the report about low income and first-generation students, as they want to make recommendations, but have not yet seen this report.
 - vi. The committee is concerned about the issue of computers for low-income students, as they have heard the loaner system is not working well and this is a necessity for education. The committee will continue to follow up behind the scenes on this.

- vii. Lester Alemán talked about the group being able to problem solve and work towards solutions to these issues instead of pointing fingers. Think about the things we noticed this weekend, but then ask yourself how you can be of service to the College in finding a solution to these problems.

Meeting adjourned 12:06 p.m.

Appendix A.

Prepared by Jordan Bancroft, Campaign Coordinator, DAR.

Alumni Council Listening Session Themes

Common Themes Across All Groups

- Desire for authenticity in communications from the College (Love Train video cited often).
- Less of a polished, corporate feel and more content that tell Grinnell stories from Grinnellians.
- Less scripting.
- Open, honest, and proactive dialogue between the College and alums.
- Desire to hear newsworthy/important items about the College *from* the College first.
- Desire to hear controversial items from multiple viewpoints to help alums make their own decisions.
- Voicing of the messaging, more student voices and less of a filter.
- Seeing all Grinnellian stories, not just the “ideal/quintessential Grinnellian.”
- Evaluating how these stories are delivered (social media, email, mailings, etc.) - everyone receives a lot of emails.
- Providing better specificity and clarity around volunteers and amplifiers (what do we want our volunteers to do and how do we make it clear to them?).

Question Responses - Summarized

If you were telling the Grinnell College story of late, what would it say?

- Moving forward.
- Exceeding goals.
- Helping students, staff, and faculty with anxiety of uncertain times, and carving out a comfortable place for them in a challenging environment.
- “Energy, dedication, thoughtfulness, seeking, intentional.”
- Improving College infrastructure.
- “Bernard talked about how the President isn’t aware of everything that’s on campus, and we wonder why. This disconnect may be a part of the College that needs to be looked at.

Bernard talks about how Anne does not seem to be a President that gets in the weeds, micromanages, etc. But she also doesn’t seem to know everything about everything. Bernard talked about how some people who were maybe here prior to Anne, are continuing to do things the way they do things, set in their ways, but aren’t letting Anne in the circle of what’s going on. Really complex.”

- Attempting to improve communication and relationships.

What motivates you and other alumni to connect with the College?

- “I love it.”
- Grinnell College was transformative, changed their lives in a positive way.

- Desire to take their good experience and make it even better for current students.
- The world needs more Grinnellians more than ever.
- Desire to represent underrepresented communities. Motivation to be the voice for young alumni of color.
- Representing the College in a way that builds its reputation, but also maintains accountability.
- “People feel like they can’t return/engage because they don’t have enough to “show” since graduation. 5th reunion specifically. People feeling like they haven’t achieved as much as they should as a “Grinnellian” but the expectation is that people are just making it every day.”

Describe the messages you have received from DAR over the past few years.

- Positive, praise and appreciation of alumni.
- Look past the endowment, funds are needed for other things.
- Thoughtful, especially in giving key stakeholders heads-up/previews.
- Deceased alumni emails are thoughtful.
- Enjoy Mae sharing donor progress, but not sure what to do with that info.
- Define and share takeaways for us.
- What are the expectations DAR has for sharing information, expectation of the Council?
- “We do get those little movies...”
- Some confusion over how long the Grinnellian has been going out – 1 to 4 months.
- Heard about Student Union and Brownells from media before the College.
- Danger of alums not hearing both sides if not coming from the College.
- Is there a communication of important topics/speaking points that can be shared?

What has Grinnell College done over the past few years to positively impact you, and fellow alumni, engagement with the College?

- Campaign events.
- Events where the President and faculty speak.
- “Grinnell-in” Events.
- Alumni Council and Reunions.
- Academic and scholarly conversations are particularly valued.
- 1:1 meetings with Mae, Jaci, or the President – “unvarnished opportunities to engage and connect” – people and relationships.
- What will there be for us to stay engaged once we’re done with the Alumni Council?
- Love running into DAR people in the community – little conversations make them feel connected.

Do the messages you get from DAR align with how you think about the College? In what ways?

- The messages are more polished than my image of Grinnell.
- More authentic and honest messaging from the College would hit well.
- Less of a corporate feel.
- In video messages, etc., even if the message is correct and the right alum is providing the message, it feels scripted and fake.
- The best marketing from the College is when students take over the Instagram account – it feels more authentic and “Grinnell.”
- Doesn’t reflect Grinnell as it is now. It would be good to include current students and connect their experience at Grinnell with the things alums are going.
- “Yes, the materials align and actually help me to better understand what the college is becoming. Alums like to think the college is the same as when we were there, but the communications help me keep up. I picked Grinnell instead of a fancy and polished east coast institution because my tour guide was wearing his pajamas. I was sold!”
- If messaging tilts too far to the recent grads, it might alienate the “old folks.”
- Alums receive messages in different ways. Audience needs to be considered.
- “I don’t think we do enough to communicate that it’s perfectly fine and important to do whatever you want to do, even if it isn’t saving the world in dramatic ways.”
 - “I agree with this, I wasn’t the “ideal Grinnellian” and felt turned off by the quintessential Grinnellian being lifted up, which is what you get with the polished messaging.”
- Campaign messages seem to lift up monetary successes rather than all the different kind of Grinnellian successes.
- “Grinnell is such a messier place than they want to project into the world. And that’s okay because that’s Grinnell. The People of Grinnell always felt more authentic and like it was putting out into the world that messiness. Also, a success for Grinnellians is living a life well lived, and that seems to have gotten lost a little bit.”
- “It’s absolutely fine to be a mess! That’s how we learn and grow!”
- Maybe we should look at hiring Grinnellian experts as consultants on Tik Tok, Instagram, etc.

What obstacles are in the way of you and other alumni fully connecting with Grinnell College?

- A lot of competition for time and attention.
- What is the value-add of Grinnell’s communications?
- “Just because Grinnell wants to have a conversation with me, that doesn’t mean I’m ready to have a conversation with you. So why now? Why do you want to have this conversation now?”
- After the pandemic “squashed” Grinnell communities because we can’t meet in person, need to work to rebuild those connections.
- “There’s this feeling that we get from the College whatever we want, but missing in the communications is an authentic space where we (the College) can learn

from conversations with alumni, here's the kind of relationship we want to have with you, here's our concerns, let's build a relationship. It seems like as soon as the way things are is going to impact money, that's when we hear from the College."

- Where in the hell is Grinnell? Who the hell cares? That attitude and not the polished image that makes Grinnell special.

What have you heard from the College recently about the campaign?

- Train video – very positive, liked seeing the people, cute and fun.
- Reports and updates.
- Giving emails, special giving days.
- Relatively short videos.
- Campaign Report – comprehensive without being too much.
- A lot of the communication becomes a blur.

Describe ways the College culture aligns with your values. Do you think this contributes to pride within our alumni community?

- Ongoing lifetime education – the degree is not the end of your education.
- Great attitude about learning.
- Constant learning.
- Finding commonalities with so many different people.
- Hardworking.
- Smart.
- Opinionated.
- Engaged.
- Inquiry.
- Still a progressive school – founded by Abolitionists and tries to be on the right side of history.
- Long history of social activism.
- Not always the first but never the last to do the right thing.
- Importance of relationships.
- Giving back as an important value.

Have recent messages from DAR/the College included stories or news that is new to you? Please describe.

- The class of 2021 had a high percentage of giving. Not in their senior year.
- David was surprised that the overall amount of gifts was down but the overall number of donors was up.
- "I received a personalized letter from the head of the area that was really special. I felt seen and thanked."
- Stories are meaningful. Jeetander's story at the campaign event was so memorable.

- Used to really like seeing student videos but now they feel SO polished they are almost not authentic anymore. Gritty, raw, off the cuff stuff is actually more interesting.
- Student networking event was much more authentic than most College communications.

HOW DO WE ENERGIZE?

- Like-minded people here? Really important to create spaces for people to be together.
- “The conversation here can be about an issue. There’s a way to harness this meaningfully. You can do this without alienating the outliers. The College can, at times, make people feel like they do not belong but it’s important to create spaces for talking about BIG questions. Let’s have conversations and debate.”
- Grinnellians are best engaged intellectually.