Alumni Council Minutes  
Friday, April 8, 2022  
HSSC Multipurpose Room


Absent: Kelly Clements Hopfer ’96, Chris Meyer ’70, and Eric Mistry ’14

Excused: Jake Joseph ’11

Staff: Jayn Chaney ’05; Jennie Jackson, recording secretary; Jaci Thiede, Sarah Smith-Benanti.

Guests: Jazzmine Brooks, Vrinda Varia

I. Welcome and Housekeeping – Lester Alemán ’07
a. Lester welcomed Council and gave an overview of the schedule.

b. Approval of the Fall minutes
Motion: Ann Poor Cary, Second: Graciela Guzmán, Approved: Unanimous

  c. Lester informed the Council that Mike Niederman ’80 has resigned due to a new professional commitment.

II. Discussion of Affinity Groups’ Launch – Sarah Smith-Benanti, assistant director of alumni and donor relations.

  a. Sarah Smith-Benanti introduced herself. Today she will provide Council with information about the College’s plan for the creation of affinity groups.

  b. Sarah plans to launch Black and Latinx affinity groups in fiscal year 2022-23 and an LGBTQIA+ affinity group in fiscal year 2023-24. She gave an overview of the criteria for membership, how alumni will be placed in groups, and how the groups will function.

  c. Bernard Jackson asked about alumni speakers in College classes. Sarah encouraged alumni to weave their identity into the conversation when they are invited into classes, and recognized the importance of the visibility of BIPOC alumni.

  d. Sarah talked about visibility of affinity groups at Reunion and Multicultural Reunion, and the hope that each affinity group will design a signature event.

  e. Sarah gave an overview of affinity group recruitment and the Steering Committee. She talked through the different leadership positions that each affinity group would require.
f. Sarah shared a timeline of what her work on affinity groups will look like from now through July. She asked Council for their feedback on different discussion questions.

g. Bernard Jackson suggested polling different groups of alumni for their ideas.

h. Dawn Helsing Wolters suggested taking a step back and giving each group space to articulate what they want to do and want to be.

i. Ann Cary suggested tying these alumni groups to campus by having an event, film festival, or other campus activity to get campus excited about the launch.

j. Graciela Guzmán articulated that it is about the messengers as much as it is about the message.

k. Anton Jones brought up intersectionality vs. siloed affinity groups. Sarah talked about how she would have the leaders meet with each other, creating different pathways to engagement by providing both intersectional and siloed opportunities, and asked Council how they would respond to alumni who are challenging this idea.

l. Lester Alemán added that these groups are all a point of entry, and hopefully they all culminate with Multicultural Reunion. Lester also asked about the branding and what terms should be used. Sarah responded that Latinx is an academic term, and less than 5% of Latinx people actually use the term.

m. Graciela Guzmán encouraged DAR to talk about the data. Robert Gehorsam added that these affinity groups should be emergent from alumni, vs. DAR saying “here’s the data and this is what we should do.”

n. Bernard Jackson added that there are specific topics that should be discussed as part of an academic institution, for example anti-blackness in a college campus.

o. Robert Gehorsam added that different communities will have different issues that they would want to address.

p. Becky Neal noted it may be better for the group to form and bring up their own issues, instead of giving them an agenda.

q. Anton Jones mentioned the lack of data on other groups as a marginalization on those groups. We are beginning Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ as we have the data, and not anything else as we do not have good data. How do we communicate about this up front?

r. Graciela Guzmán encouraged the group to set a schedule, understand that the group will be small to start, and not pivot but stick to it and be consistent.

s. Lester Alemán made a distinction that we are growing something programmatic, and that all of the things the group is bringing up are things that the chairs will determine. Our primary goal is to re-engage alumni – there are people who want to have fun, people who will want to tackle issues, people who want to help the College, etc.
t. Becky Neal suggested that perhaps the groups should have a consultant. Graciela Guzman added that this could be an opportunity to lift up an alum who is doing DEI work.

u. Sarah provided an explanation of why DAR does not have as much data as they would like. The data initially comes from student data, and the rest is self-reported. DAR continues to have a lot of conversations about what data to house, what we feel comfortable asking for, and how to maintain privacy among constituents.

v. Sarah gave a brief overview of the listening tour led by Dr. Kesho Scott planned for this next academic year.

w. Session concludes at 10:20 a.m.

III. Discussion with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI)—Jazzmine Brooks, Vrinda Varia, and Sarah Smith-Benanti (facilitator)

a. Jazzmine and Vrinda introduced themselves. Vrinda has been at the College since 2016 in various DEI roles, all student-focused. Jazzmine has been at Grinnell since December and is the primary liaison at Grinnell for Black students, with a passion for building Black community.

b. Discussed the mission and vision, which were developed this summer, as the ODEI office emerged just last February. Talked about an institutional approach to DEI, with leadership from the vice president in each department. Shared an org chart and talked about the ODEI team and their different roles. Many are new or recent hires.

c. Gave an overview of the different student-facing structures that are in place at Grinnell. Talked about the bias reporting mechanisms that are in place at grinnell.edu/bias.

d. Ann Cary asked for clarity on the Sawubona House partnership. The name was chosen because it is a Zulu greeting that means “I see you.” This is the culture Grinnell wants to foster for students. Students are able to live in single rooms in this house, an outcome of a recent study completed by Jazzmine.

e. Ann Cary asked if people of color are able to request to live freshman year with other students of color Vrinda noted that all roommate pairings are made manually, and there are a lot of intentional pairings made.

f. Sarah asked what some strengths of the College are, or what hurdles have been encountered.
   i. Vrinda responded that the strengths of the organization have enabled the college to really prioritize DEI work. The operational function that DEI has now has allowed the college to think institutionally instead of office-by-office, which is a massive shift in approach and culture. This shift calls for time for adjustment.

g. Sarah asked how are the students doing and how have they been the past couple of years?
   i. Vrinda said it has been a hard transition. The collective learning and development did not take place for our senior students, as they
only spent 1.5 years on campus before returning as seniors. They are also feeling pressure to uphold the Grinnell that they knew.

ii. Jazzmine added that she admires the activism of the student leaders. Vrinda talked about misplaced fights, fighting the right fight, and allocating energy appropriately. Vrinda talked about student groups that focus on activism and want to change different things about the school. Vrinda also noted that building community together again post-pandemic has been a learning process for everyone.

h. Bernard Jackson noted that maybe we should have some people come in to lead workshops about fighting the right fights, how to be an activist in the world, to help get students centered for the next step of their lives.

i. Graciela Guzmán talked about lifting up Black and brown alumni who are doing this work. It could be intergenerational and tied to alumni affinity groups. Vrinda noted that they have been planning fall retreats and would love to think about alumni guests that would be good partners for these.

j. David Jarvis asked how disability work fits in. Vrinda talked about how Autumn Wilke has been working to build out accessibility student resources in Steiner Hall. There is a vision to build out the co-curricular opportunities in that work.

k. Anton Jones asked Vrinda and Jazzmine to expand upon what level of support is being given to staff. Vrinda talked about finding joy with each other and finding different moments to just be with each other. We are doing what we can to communicate our needs to each other. Jazzmine noted that as a new staff member, as a full time staff member, Ph.D. student and Doula, that care is important. What doesn’t work, we stop doing. Jazzmine emphasized the importance of small group spaces, for example she has a Black women’s small group at the College.

l. Sarah asked what students thought of having a “Black student specialist” as she has heard from alums who wonder if this means the institution is failing our Black students.

i. Jazzmine noted that it is not just about work, but can also just be in providing joy, opportunities for cultural immersion, travel to Des Moines and Iowa City. She also plans to revamp the BCC and build bridges with alumni.

m. Tom Triplett asked if these projects have any impact on recruitment of students. Vrinda said we are in process of learning, as this is a new team. Over the last few years, numbers have all trended upwards. Our hope is that this will help with recruitment and retention. We want to bring students here, but also help them to meet their goals.

n. Becky Neal talked about the shock of moving to Iowa, and how that must feel for students and staff, and asked what type of spaces the College community has.

i. Jazzmine talked about the difficulty of moving to Iowa from Chicago. Finding more folks to bond with and be with in joyful spaces has been helpful. Jazzmine also talked about bringing some
of the partnerships she has built in Des Moines and Ames to Grinnell.

- Vrinda moved to Grinnell in 2016 and echoes Jazzmine that there is a lot of good here, and it needs to be centered. For Vrinda, it’s engaging with the community, engaging with Des Moines and Iowa City, and leaving the state sometimes. Vrinda also thinks of Grinnell College as the “think tank” where ideas come and we create leaders to move through the world.

- Claudia Beckwith asked what are one or two of your big successes.
  - Vrinda said that building out a team has been a massive success. The work gets halted without having the staffing lines, and the staffing lines have been elevated in order to meet the needs of our students. It is not easy to recruit or retain people to work at Grinnell College, and this has helped significantly. Another success is that we think about our work as an imbedded institutional approach.

- Graciela Guzmán talked about the complication of getting diverse students the right way and in a way we are proud of. The primary metric we should use is student survival and retention rates. Vrinda responded that we should not be operating by a metric of student survival. If we are meeting two students and getting them what they need, then that is two more students than we reached before.

Meeting adjourned, 11:45 a.m.

Alumni Council Minutes
Saturday, April 9, 2022
HSSC Multipurpose Room

Present: Lester Alemán ’07, Ed Atkins ’66, Claudia Beckwith ’77, Ann Poor Cary ’81, Deborah Feir ’68, Robert Gehorsam ’76, Debbie Gottschalk ’90, Graciela Guzmán ’11, Phillip Hales ’02, Dawn Helsing Wolters ’87, Andrea Jackson ’95, Bernard Jackson ’86, David Jarvis ’04, Anton Jones ’02, Chris Meyer ’70, Eric Mistry ’14, Becky Reetz Neal ’65, Robert Ruhl ’76, Scott Shepherd ’82, Tom Triplett ’69,

Absent: Kelly Clements Hopfer ’96 and Ben Vaughn Jr. ’15.

Excused: Kate Goddard ’91 and Jake Joseph ’11

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

Guests: President Anne Harris, Sophie Neems ’16.

I. Meeting and Discussion with President Harris
   a. Jayn Chaney welcomed Sophie Neems ’16, assistant director of young alumni programming, to the team.
   b. President Harris started by talking about how Sophie’s position came out of the Young Alumni Listening sessions held in January 2022.
c. President Harris addressed the trustee task force on student financial support and success. The preliminary report came out in February 2020 with 5 recommendations, and the College has been acting on all of them.

i. The first recommendation highlighted the need for student assistance in navigating the system and access to financial, academic, and other resources.
   1. We created EASE group (enrollment and administrative services) led by Brad Lindberg to gather all the offices that are doing different things and sending different emails to streamline all of this. EASE took care of the summer onboarding of students (where a lot of financial aid stuff gets worked out) and we had less summer melt than we had before. The group will connect with student employment as well to streamline paperwork.
   2. We have also added a first-year experience course which is all about resource, recourse, and identity.

ii. The second recommendation highlighted the difference in overall experience of Pell-eligible vs. non-Pell-eligible students.
   1. A lot of students who are exclusively on campus without access to a car feel more isolated. We now have the Grinnell College Local Shuttle, which runs from 4-8 p.m. to doctor offices, parks, etc., and it has been always full when we see it around town. We also have a charter bus going to Des Moines or Iowa City every weekend now, which is always full. Transportation should not be a barrier to experience.
   2. The College has been steadily raising student wages and plans to look at the work experience portion of financial aid. We have increased our MAP wages, have moved to a sliding scale on stipends, and will continue to look at other things.
   3. Dining services is now open during school breaks (except summer).

iii. The third recommendation highlighted inadequate access to health care, including mental health care.
   1. The college now covers health insurance (in financial aid) for high-need uninsured students.
   2. The counselor to student ratio at Grinnell is 425:1. It is recommended to have 1,000-1,500:1. We have consistently increased the number of counselors we have available, and also have 24/7 telehealth.
   3. We still have a lot of work to do on academic rigor and labor and other things that cause stress.

iv. The fourth recommendation highlighted student concerns related to their expected contribution, including wage-related concerns.
   1. The no loan program has done a lot to decrease stress among low income students. We are one of eight institutions in the U.S. that is need blind, no loan, and test optional. We
spend more of our operating budget on financial aid than any other institution.

v. The fifth recommendation highlighted student need for financial literacy.
   1. The college has been working to categorize different things as developmental experiences, including internships and student employment. At Grinnell this past year, 65% of our student employees were on financial aid, but 90% of our students worked. Right now, we are in the midst of student union elections which will help to inform the future of student work at the College.

d. Robert Gehorsam asked about the faculty expansion, what it means for academics, and how it relates to overall diversity goals.
   i. Over the past 10 years, Grinnell has made a series of moves to raise faculty salaries to be competitive. There was a decision made to cap the number of tenure lines at the College in order to do this. There was no cap on the budget, but a cap on tenure lines, so we were hiring more term lines. President Harris lifted this cap by converting term hires to faculty positions (17 searches this year) and expanding the faculty by 10. The launch of this growth begins with Black and African Diaspora studies as a department.

e. David Jarvis asked what has happened with Bob's Underground.
   i. Bob's is open right now, and President Harris hopes to find more student-owned, student-run hangout spaces on campus for students.

f. Graciela Guzmán asked if there were any communications surrounding this report, and what the perception is on campus.
   i. The College is currently undergoing a shift in communications from informational to relational. We recently hired a new VP of Communications. The College also needs a greater social media presence.
   ii. President Harris talked about how Grinnell College is presented to students of color vs. how it is experienced by students of color.

g. Graciela Guzmán asked if the College is thinking of how they can be a leader in the space of what students get to take risk in the positions they take after College.
   i. President Harris expanded on why she was supportive of a process with the student union towards a neutrality agreement. We had eight negotiations sessions and are in a better understanding now that we have established principles in common and are advocating for our constituents.

h. Ann Cary asked President Harris to expand on her thoughts regarding social media.
   i. President Harris talked about the tremendous financial support we provide our students, coupled with the social health/community care aspect of the institution, and sharing these stories with alumni.
ii. How do we become known as a no-loan school, instead of just making an announcement that we are no-loan?

i. Debbie Gottschalk asked President Harris if there is a practical impact on campus from the recent transgender legislation in Iowa.

i. The Iowa governor came to our IAICU meeting last week and was asked questions similar to yours about the bill. Private colleges in Iowa are currently caught between the regulations of NCAA and the legislation of its state. The governor has put us in this impossible position, where we do not know if the NCAA, Midwest Conference, or state legislation should take priority.

ii. Nothing happens until a lawsuit is filed. If an individual sues for “harm” or “perceived harm,” then the state will side with the individual. To our knowledge, we do not have any female transgender athletes. But we do not ask students about their birth certificates or their gender because this information is protected by FERPA. We are in a “don’t ask, don’t tell” scenario. If a lawsuit is filed, then Grinnell’s resources become important.

iii. President Harris noted that she is beginning to understand Iowa higher education politics as a caucus space that she can do a lot of good work in.

j. Tom Triplett brought forth an idea about identifying the Twin Cities for one summer as a major push for internship space. There are a lot of under-utilized opportunities in this area. President Harris responded that it is an intriguing idea to have a geographic push for summer employment, and she will take this to Mark Peltz.

k. Debby Feir talked about hearing privileged information from President Harris that she wants to be able to share with her classmates. She asked President Harris what shouldn’t we share and why? President Harris noted that she has shared only open information today but wonders how to best share this information so things are not taken out of context.

l. Graciela Guzmán mentioned that lead volunteers should potentially receive talking points for issues.

m. Claudia Beckwith asked what the ideal number of students is at Grinnell.

i. President Harris clarified that the goal is not to grow the College, but to deepen the student experience with additional dining halls, student spaces, everyday life moments, and feelings of home. The goal is 1,650.

n. Chris Meyer reminded Council members to contribute to the Council’s internship for racial justice work.

o. Lester Alemán asked if current students understand the Grinnell heritage that they are a part of, including standing on the right side of history, progress, and values.

i. President Harris noted that the College has few traditions. It is going to take a lot of listening to this generation in order for Grinnell College to become a trustworthy place.
p. The group thanked President Harris for her time. Lester reminded the group that President Harris’ inauguration will be taking place in a month.

II. **Senior Class Gift Committee Presentation** - McKenna Doherty ’22, Camila Hassler ’22, Maddie McCabe ’22

a. The group presented on the recent disasters experienced in Grinnell, including the derecho, and Covid, and provided a proposal to plant a tree near the JRC to replace one lost during the 2020 derecho, and to allow the class of 2022 to “establish our roots” at Grinnell College.

b. The group gave an overview of the Stephen K. Kent ’67 Challenge. The group shared a video that they plan to share with their classmates to encourage support of this project.

c. The Council agreed to support this project.

d. The tree will be planted post-graduation, and photos will be shared.

III. **Housekeeping**

a. Robert Ruhl provided an update to Council. The Town Hall Let’s Talk event is scheduled in May for the 1960s and 1970s decades. There are 32 summer picnics, which is more than we have ever had before. Robert asked Council to participate by attending at least one picnic this summer.

b. Becky Neal raised the topic of should we consider paying alumni for their volunteer time and if so, how would we communicate about that to older alumni, noting generational differences.

i. Graciela Guzmán noted that we want to remove barriers for young alumni to be able to participate, and money/time is one of those barriers.

ii. Dawn Helsing Wolters encouraged staff to think about expertise and places where the College needs help, and there may be times where paid expertise is appropriate. This might not be a volunteer task.

   1. David Jarvis added that specialized expertise in social media is important, and paying people can add increased expectations to those who are managing it.

iii. Robert Gehorsam noted that a VP of Communications was just hired to manage this communication strategy, but we look to DAR to lead on how we establish/advance volunteerism at the College.

iv. Lester Alemán talked about the difference in having an alum fill an established need of the College (i.e. an alum who comes back to teach at the College) who would obviously be paid, vs. a volunteer.

IV. **Discussion of Council’s Mission and Structure** – Lester Alemán, Alumni Council President

a. Lester introduced the topic of discussing Council’s work. He’s suggested a reconsideration of the role of Alumni Council.

b. Lester read the mission statement of Alumni Council and asked for immediate feedback and thoughts.
c. The mission of the Alumni Council is to support purposeful, lifelong relationships among Grinnell alumni and between the alumni and College communities.
   i. Bernard Jackson noted we are falling short of this mission and we need to determine Council’s capacity.
   ii. Debby Feir questioned what support means, and does it mean being physically here?
   iii. Robert Gehorsam elaborated on the word support, as it means we aren’t leading, but rather listening to others and what they need.
   iv. Becky Neal added that the word purposeful means we have to talk about what purpose we want to serve.

d. Lester noted that this session is for us to take a step back and evaluate what we are doing, where we have succeeded and failed.

e. The group was sent to breakout groups to discuss the following questions, and reported back out on their responses.
   i. What are we good at as a Council?
      1. Financial support (Stephen Kent Challenge, internship)
      2. Alumni engagement, coming together as a community of volunteers (internal group cohesion) – we get here, we participate.
      3. Raising good questions and learning more about the College
      4. Well-defined projects with clear outcomes (ad-hoc committees with specific projects, interaction with students while on campus)
      5. Coming up with creative ideas
      6. We take our charge seriously
   ii. What are we not good at as a Council?
      1. Mandates to do stuff
      2. Listening to others
      3. Establishing who we are – what our purpose is
      4. Not as good at connecting with other alumni (except Multicultural Reunion)
      5. Not having a clear sense of objectives, what are the specifics jobs we are taking on and how are we measuring outcomes?
      6. Committee structure feels limiting or rigid
      7. Interaction with younger alumni
      8. Continuity of projects, continuing multi-year projects
      9. Executive committee summaries to know what others are doing
      10. There are some Alumni Council members we haven’t seen in a while.
      11. Connecting with other volunteers
      12. Acronym cheat sheet
      13. Communication with the greater alumni body, and what makes sense in our role vs. class agent role
iii. What have we been successful at doing, or what are some of our greatest successes?
   1. Code of leadership
   2. Social Justice Internship
   3. Awards
   4. Cookbook
   5. Career clothing closet
   6. Magazine articles
   7. Book club
   8. Recruiting new members
   9. Multicultural Reunion
   10. Learning what is happening on campus – there is a lot of chatter out there and not all of it is informed, and we have an opportunity to inform.

iv. What are our failures? The projects we never got off the ground?
   1. Clear objectives for each year
   2. Continuity of projects between years
   3. Holding each other accountable. There are Council members who don’t participate or don’t show up, and we need to hold them accountable.
   4. What do alumni want? We don’t know. Diversity of expectations.

v. In an ideal world, what would success look like?
   1. More direct communication within the council
   3. Effective collaboration with DAR.

vi. Additional ideas:
   1. a livestream of Council meetings
   2. Reunion presence of Council members

f. Jayn Chaney added that Alumni Council plays such a large role for DAR in allowing us bring a problem to them and giving us meaningful, authentic counsel.
   i. Dawn Helsing added that she thought more of this could be done, and Council could ask DAR what they need more.

g. Lester asked the group to talk about what ambassadorship means to them.
   i. Graciela Guzmán noted all different types of ambassadorship are important, including social media posts, emails, being available, and telling all of the narratives.
   ii. David Jarvis noted we do not have defined roles about who we are ambassadors to.
   iii. Anton Jones noted an ambassador is an “individual who willingly authentically, and at times vulnerably, amplifies a mission or vision in ways that are individualized to other people.”
h. Lester said that he thinks the committee structure is ineffective. What Council enjoys and is most successful at are task-oriented, consultative roles. Lester asked for feedback on an Alumni Council where instead of signing up for a committee, you commit to a specific project.
   i. Bernard Jackson noted that the Diversity & Inclusion committee has well organized meetings and a task-oriented structure due to Sarah Smith-Benanti’s great leadership, and he does not want to lose the ability for these opportunities.
   ii. Claudia Beckwith expressed that this does not sound like a big difference from what we do now.
      1. Lester added that it provides clarity about what Council can communicate externally about their accomplishments.
   iii. Graciela Guzmán added that the current Council structure does not lift up individual capabilities. She also expressed that the Diversity & Inclusion committee’s work should be woven throughout all of the tasks.
   iv. Dawn Helsing Wolters talked about the value to just listen. In our rush to be task-oriented, we need to pause, slow down, and listen.
   v. David Jarvis expressed the importance of increased communication with the absence of standing chairs or co-chairs.
      1. Anton Jones added that we should make sure these task forces don’t become siloed.
   vi. Robert Gehorsam added the importance of thinking about what tasks we want to accomplish, and don’t just come up with tasks to fill our time for no reason.
   vii. Becky Neal talked about building in evaluations so we have better data about what works and what doesn’t.
   viii. Robert Ruhl added that Council should not lose sight of having fun with what they do.
   ix. Chris Meyer mentioned that both could co-exist – task forces and committees. Committees were initially formed to come up with tasks. It may be an organizational nightmare to take on having task forces alone without the committee.

V. Membership Committee Presentation and Presidential Election – Robert Gehorsam, Tom Triplett, Claudia Beckwith, Jake Joseph (not present), and Kate Goddard (not present)
a. Appointed current Council members to second and third terms.
b. Appointed to second term:
   i. Becky Neal ’65
   ii. Ed Atkins ’66
   iii. Tom Triplett ’69
   iv. Scott Shepherd ’82
   v. Ben Vaughn ’15
c. Appointed to third term:
   i. Debby Feir ’68
ii. Debbie Gottschlk '90
iii. Andrea Jackson '95

Motion: Ann Cary Second: Robert Ruhl Approved: Unanimous

d. Appointing eight new members to Alumni Council:
   i. Sasha Aslanian '90
   ii. Jennifer Beinart '06
   iii. Suha Gillani '16
   iv. Tony Pham '03
   v. Donna Rothenberg Savage '74
   vi. Natz Soberanes '13
   vii. Atavia Whitfield '06
   viii. Jeremy Youde '99

Motion: Robert Gehorsam Second: Ann Cary Approved: Unanimous

e. Bernard Jackson self-nominated for the next Alumni Council president.
   The group has already received his letter of nomination.
   i. Bernard was elected president by majority ballot vote.

f. The group gave Chris Meyer a standing ovation for his work for Council as
   past president and in establishing the Racial Justice Internship Fund.

Meeting adjourned, 3:46 p.m.