

Proposals for a Freshman Year Program at Grinnell College

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The following proposals embody the initial proposals of the Freshman Affairs Committee at Grinnell. We in the Committee reached these decisions after studying returns from more than 37 queries to colleges and universities in the U.S. pertaining to their freshman year programs. We do not claim originality in all cases, but do believe that as proposed, the program is a vital, workable set-up for a successful freshman year. The accompanying preface goes into great detail as to what we feel to be the purposes and ideal aims of a freshman year program. Briefly, we feel that a good first year program should be one with a vision and direction. The present set-up is a hodge-podge of various experiments and philosophies. The base of a good program should be the goal of expanding the students' realization of himself as an individual and scholar and his perception of the College and its resources.

Following, then, are the proposals we have reached:

I. Counseling: academic counseling at Grinnell can and should be greatly improved. At present, it often amounts to little more than a brief meeting between student and faculty member that results in a signature and little else. In the future, counseling should embrace a philosophy of informed concerned advice.

We recommend that academic advisers meet more frequently than at present with advisees. We further advise that resident advisers be used in a much greater capacity in counseling. Also, faculty advisers should keep closer contact with hall advisers for the purpose of making counseling a complete service that exists outside of the classroom or office.

II. Upper-level Courses: we recommend that the faculty of each department meet and determine which upper level courses can be opened up to freshmen. We believe that first year students can profit immensely from upper level courses, and that they should be encouraged to enter them. Exposure to such courses, we believe, will quicken students' interest in a field. As the drive for specialization loses steam, students show greater and greater desires to explore the interesting aspects of various disciplines. They do this with the idea not of a major, but of broadening their knowledge and experience.

These upper level course offerings should be widely advertised. Further, first year students should be encouraged to take new steps like this in their education. At present, by putting freshmen in introductory courses, we often force them into classes which mean little to them and smack highly of high school style. We cannot emphasize how greatly we feel that the freshman experience should differ enormously from anything the student has encountered in high school.

We do not mean here to cast aspersion upon introductory material. On the contrary, we acknowledge their important place in education. We do feel that such courses would be more properly given to classes composed of students who have chosen the course because they feel that they have reached the point in their studies where they really need the basic tools. This need is best discovered by the student himself, rather than forced on him first thing. Experience would seem to indicate that basic tools have little meaning to one who has no real concept of the structure with which he is tinkering.

III. Freshman Seminars: We recommend a freshman seminar required of all freshmen. This course should stress the basic communication skills needed by all students in their later lives. The curriculum of this course should be decided by a student-faculty committee composed as follows:

- equal student faculty representation
- representation of at least each major department of the humanities division (excluding foreign languages) and the social science division. This representation could be achieved through faculty, students or both.

We recommend that the course embrace aspects of both the humanities and social studies divisions. By this provision it is hoped that the program will retain a permanent relevance as well as contemporary importance to the students.

We recommend that grading of the freshman seminar be carried out on a credit/fail basis, with frequent written evaluations of the individuals' progress and work by the instructor. Students should also be encouraged to criticize the program.

IV. In conjunction with the above mentioned mutual criticism, it is recommended that serious consideration be given to the formation of regularly scheduled programs of informed discussion between freshmen and faculty members. Such meetings would be held in various residence lounges, on a rotating basis. Or, they could be held in each hall each week. This would perhaps be more advisable as it would mean smaller gatherings. The meetings should be held in the spirit of free and open discussion – there should be no attempt on the part of either group to dominate the proceedings. The purpose of these gatherings would be to explore such questions as ongoing programs; nature and purpose of education; the role of students and teachers; and so on. It is hoped that by such get-togethers students will be able to form some mature and informed judgments of their experiences.

V. Freshman Tutorials: It is strongly recommended that the College institute a freshman tutorial program – independent study for freshmen. After long thought and deliberation, we recommend that the program be optional and open to all freshmen. Once again, academic counseling can play a great role in directing students to this program.

The set-up of the tutorials should be considered as follows:

- The nature of the independent is to be considered basically “group”. That is, the student would choose his basic preference in independent work and enroll in a group (tutorial group) devoted to this subject or interest.
- Ideally, the groups would not enroll more than ten or twelve students.
- The interest groups would be formed on a double basis:
 1. A preliminary poll should be taken of future freshmen, as soon as they acknowledge acceptance. This survey would question students as to their general preferences in independent work.
 2. Faculty members would then be invited to form tutorials in proportion to the professed desires of the incoming group. In this way, students will be assured of tutorial offerings that interest them, while faculty are allowed considerable latitude in defining the topics of the tutorials, thus insuring their interest and competency as tutors in their fields.

- It is hoped that the tutorial part of the program would consist of one faculty member, chosen in the above-mentioned manner, and two or three upperclassmen already declared in their majors. These students would be chosen from volunteers. As an incentive to participation, thought should be given to the possibility of granting credit for participation in the program. These preceptors would form the resource and counseling core of the group.
- Ideally, the faculty adviser for those students who opt for the tutorials would be their preceptor. We feel that this would facilitate good academic counseling for freshmen in general, and also enhance the tutorial nature of the program.
- Grading of the freshman tutorial should be finally decided by a student-faculty committee similar to that mentioned above. We recommend that this committee remain as a standing committee to oversee the freshman tutorial program in the future.
- Students and faculty members involved in the program should be required to meet with one another at least once every ten days. The purpose of this requirement is to insure consultation and tension, though it is hoped that, by the nature of the program alone, this would occur unassisted.

April, 1970