

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE
EVALUATION VISIT TO GRINNELL COLLEGE
Grinnell, Iowa November 16-18, 1998 for the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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I. Introduction

This is the report of a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the bachelor's level, conducted for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education November 16-18, 1998.

This report has five sections. Section I is this introduction. Section II addresses the Evaluation for Affiliation, including the GIRs and the five Criteria for Accreditation. Section III lists the strengths and concerns identified by the visiting team. Section IV lists the team's advice and suggestions for institutional improvement. And Section V includes the team recommendation and rationale.

Grinnell College was founded in 1846 in Davenport as Iowa College by a group of missionary/pioneers. The college moved to Grinnell in 1859, and in 1909 became Grinnell College. Grinnell College was first accredited in 1913, and has held continuous accreditation since then. Following an accreditation visit in November 1988, Grinnell's accreditation was continued for ten years.

The six members of the 1998 evaluation team read the documents mailed to them, and studied materials provided in the resource room. While on campus the team met with the president, the vice-presidents, other administrators and staff, many department and program chairs and other faculty, students, and five trustees. The team conducted well-attended open meetings for students and faculty, and toured the campus facilities. The team was impressed by the openness, helpfulness, and friendliness of all the Grinnell people we met.

The team was pleased by the excellent quality of Grinnell's Self-Study Report, which was well organized, clear, thorough, and interesting. It was a pleasure for the team to read about Grinnell, and then to be here in person.

With the permission of Grinnell College and the CIHE, the team was accompanied by an observer, Norval Kneten, Ph.D., Vice President and Dean of Nebraska Wesleyan College. Dean Kneten has recently come to Nebraska Wesleyan from Texas, which is outside the North Central region. As he will soon be guiding his institution through a self-study and an NCA accreditation visit, he wished to learn through observation how an NCA visit operated. Although he joined the team in all of its meetings, he remained faithful to his role as an observer, not an evaluator; the entire substance of this report is the work of the six official team members.

II. Evaluation for Affiliation

A. The General Institutional Requirements (GIRs)

The team found that Grinnell meets all of the GIRs. The Self-Study (pp. 30-34) documents the means by which the GIRs are met, and while on campus the team found ample additional evidence of compliance.

B. Institutional Response to the 1988 Team Report

The 1988 Team Report listed eight concerns about Grinnell. In the Self-Study (pp. 26-29), the college reports on the ways in which it has addressed those concerns. In most cases, very specific steps have been taken to strengthen Grinnell. In other cases (mentoring of untenured faculty, and women and minority in key administrative positions) Grinnell is still working toward the standard that it knows it should achieve. The present team judges that Grinnell has made and continues to make good-faith efforts to reach these goals.

C. Criterion One: The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.

The team finds that Grinnell College meets this criterion admirably. Since the last NCA visit Grinnell has revised its mission statement; the current one was adopted in 1990. To support its mission, Grinnell has recently (December 1997) endorsed a list of ten core values, and has used the mission statement to guide the development of six institutional goals. Then in February 1998 the Trustees announced a \$5.7 million Fund for Excellence to support projects consistent with the core values and the institutional goals. Clearly the college is not satisfied merely to articulate its mission, but is moving ahead with ideas and money to make that mission more tangible and effective.

D. Criterion Two: The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.

The team finds that Grinnell College meets this criterion.

Board of Trustees

The team noted especially clear signs of continued vitality and change on the Board of Trustees. For example, a comprehensive revision of the Board's By-Laws concluded in early October of

1998. Among other changes, this revision added two new committees to the Board's organization (the Academic Affairs Committee and the Student Affairs Committee) and a new section describing the procedures in detail for the annual performance review of the President--an evaluation the absence of which was noted in the last NCA review of Grinnell College. In addition, the Board has undertaken this year and on the advice of the President a new schedule by which a single and substantive issue is discussed at length at each meeting of the board; thus, the Board discussed Admissions in its meeting of October, 1998, and plans a session on the deployment of faculty resources for its upcoming meeting in February, 1999.

Members of the visiting team met over dinner with five current trustees, several of whom traveled to Grinnell from great distances. The team was impressed with both the clear engagement with and knowledge of the issues currently before the college and the clear understanding by these Trustees of the extent and the limits of their responsibilities. Recently the campus community has expressed concern about supposed "micro-management" by the Trustees, who have acknowledged this as an issue. One of the challenges for the new president will be to establish a new and effective balance between the Board of Trustees and the campus.

Administration

Grinnell's administration is led by the President, whose election, duties, and responsibilities are described fully in the newly revised (October 1998) By-Laws and Policies of Grinnell College. The President's duties include overall administration and governance of the college, responsibility for the buildings and grounds, the task of reporting regularly to the Board of Trustees, and general supervision of the college's finances.

Four Vice-Presidents report directly to the President: the Vice-president for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College; the Vice President for Business and Treasurer; the Vice-President for Development and Alumni Relations; and the Vice-President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students. The President meets with this group of four Vice-Presidents weekly, in addition to meeting weekly with the Executive Council of the college. The Interim Director of Public Relations also reports directly to the President.

Grinnell's new president has both revised the previous administrative structure of the college and added a new position: Special Assistant to the President, Director of College Relations, and Secretary of the College. The person holding this new position fulfills a wide and demanding series of responsibilities, including communication with the Board of Trustees and with other institutions of higher learning, thus freeing the President to lead the college more effectively. The President's administrative reorganization, including in particular the new position of Special Assistant, struck team members as a wise and potentially most effective series of moves.

Members of the visiting team met with each of the Vice-Presidents as well as with the Interim Director of Public Relations and with the Administrative Coordinator for Community Relations and the Campus Master Plan. The team was repeatedly impressed by the clear understanding of the college's mission exhibited by each of those holding these key administrative positions. Grinnell College has a most able, informed, and enthusiastic administrative team which bodes

very well for the college's future. There is no question of any administrative excess at Grinnell; indeed, if anything, the opposite may be true, since this is a markedly lean administrative team.

Finance

Among Grinnell's greatest assets is its continuing and notable financial strength. This strength is clear already from the AAA/Aaa ratings granted by Standard and Poor's and Moody's rating services, respectively, the highest possible bond ratings. Grinnell is the sole liberal arts college in the United States with these ratings.

Widely and justly known for the remarkable size of its endowment, Grinnell College has managed the growth and the spending of its endowment in a way which merits the admiration and the envy of other institutions. This endowment, which is in the neighborhood of \$1 billion, is the result of a consistent and carefully monitored investment policy. Essentially, Grinnell has long practiced an investment policy of investing consistently in equities chosen for value, rather than, for example, for growth; thus, Grinnell sees its investments as investments for the long term in specific companies, in accord with the "value philosophy" advocated by some of America's leading investment thinkers, some of whom serve on the college's Board. This policy has been formulated and then practiced by a Board of Trustees notable for their expertise and success in finance.

In meeting with various college officials, for example the Vice-President for Business and Treasurer, the team was impressed both with the annual budgeting process and with the budget discipline practiced by Grinnell. With regard to the former, the college has in place a Budget Committee which receives widely solicited recommendations. With regard to the latter, it is especially notable that a college with the resources of Grinnell continues wisely to consider how best to allocate these resources in order to ensure the continuation and heightened excellence of the college's mission. In addition, it is worthy of note that Grinnell has virtually no deferred maintenance (indeed, the team was repeatedly impressed by the state of the college's buildings and grounds) and that Grinnell carefully grows and manages a series of reserves to ensure the continuation of this marked care for all of its facilities.

Grinnell's past development efforts, somewhat surprisingly to those who first learn this, have not been as systematic and successful as one might conclude from the significant size of the college's endowment. The growth to approximately \$1 billion of the endowment has rather come chiefly from the success of Grinnell's consistent investment policies.

However, the college has recently devoted much more attention to its development efforts, and signs of current and future success are readily available. In the autumn of 1995, the college formally announced the \$75 million "Grinnell Campaign: Building for an even Brighter Future."

That Grinnell has secured commitments through early November 1998 of over \$80 million for the "Grinnell Campaign" indicates the success of the revitalized development efforts. Additional evidence of this same success comes from recent annual fund totals, which have been in the range of \$4 million annually. In meeting with the Vice-President for Development, the team was pleased to learn that already, before the current campaign is concluded, Grinnell has established

some clear and ambitious post-campaign goals. These include broadening participation among the college's graduates (though it must be said that the recent annual giving participation rate of 47% is already very high by most national standards), parents, and friends; getting to know better those in the wider Grinnell community with the greatest ability to help the college financially; and ensuring that the Development Office continues to be run effectively and efficiently.

Long-Range Planning

Grinnell College does not have a long history of formulating comprehensive and strategic plans for the future, as noted in the previous NCA review. However, it is clear that the long regnant tradition of failing to so plan for the future is now under careful review and that many different groups are now engaged in such planning. The Board of Trustees formed recently a Budget/Endowment Study Task Force ("BEST") that was aided by other efforts in establishing eventually the new "Fund for Excellence." Though still in its early stages, the "Fund for Excellence" promises to aid greatly the college's continued efforts to further the excellence and distinctiveness of its mission. The "Fund for Excellence" will fund specific initiatives as proposed by a wide array of college constituencies and is managed separately from the college's base budget.

Faculty

Grinnell is blessed with fine faculty who are passionate about teaching and about their students. They have a fine salary structure, a favorable 3-2 teaching load, active publishing and creative lives--and have a heavy sense of being overly busy and suffering from a lack of time.

The faculty is organized into 26 departments in three divisions (Humanities, which includes the fine and performing arts; Sciences; and Social Studies). Department chairs rotate in most departments, and receive a one-course release during one semester of their two-year terms of office. Division chairs sit on the Executive Council, which is the senior governing committee of the college. Responsibilities of the Executive Council appear to overlap with other committees, and governance at the committee level appears to be excessively complex and burdensome. The addition of a Faculty Personnel Committee has freed the Executive Council from a substantial portion of its historical responsibilities. The Executive Council is feeling its way to a new role, perhaps most strongly focused on long-range planning.

The sheer number of standing committees (12) is quite large to begin with, but there is evidently an overlay of ad hoc committees, task forces, awards selection committees, etc., that make the situation even worse. On the other hand, the count of faculty committee membership, which suggests an excessive burden of committee service, appears to include any and every opportunity for service, rather than just the major standing committees, thus perhaps overstating the burden to some degree. Nevertheless, there is a strong perception among members of the faculty that they are seriously overburdened with governance responsibilities that impinge upon their primary responsibilities as teachers and scholars, and many consider themselves overworked even with a 3-2 teaching load. An additional area that merits review is the distribution of and recognition for supervision of independent study, as these responsibilities are unevenly spread among the faculty and continue to grow.

While the team acknowledges that it is commonplace for faculty members at undergraduate liberal arts colleges to view themselves as overburdened with work, nevertheless we agree that the Grinnell College governance system might benefit from some pruning and consolidation to help reduce the size and scope of faculty committee responsibilities. To do this successfully, the faculty and administration will have to come to a shared understanding of the boundaries between governance and administration and agree on which of the current faculty responsibilities can be ceded to the administration for day-to-day management. The Faculty Organization Committee and the Dean's Office are reviewing the committee situation this year and will recommend some options for simplifying and reducing the committee service burden.

Faculty meetings are theoretically scheduled bi-monthly, though these may be canceled at the discretion of the president and the dean. Faculty meetings are not necessarily used as policy meetings and sometimes are used for presentations by administrators or for other purposes. The meetings are called by the president and the dean, rather than by the chair of the faculty, and agendas are set entirely by the administration. While the college prizes and trumpets student self-government and self-determination, a stronger sense of faculty self-governance might be achieved by addressing these two matters. Currently, the Faculty Handbook lacks any provision specifying the setting of faculty meeting agendas, and the chair of the faculty chairs faculty meetings only in the absence of the president and the dean.

Part II

The science faculty, like all of the Grinnell faculty, are passionate about their students. It is obvious that the science departments enjoy a stream of high-caliber students who are challenging and dedicated to the course of their studies. Most of the science students are recruited into the top graduate programs throughout the US. Only a limited number of students are pre-med.

There is excitement and enthusiasm in the division, and especially in the two departments directly involved in a new science program, a biological chemistry major. Proposed and advanced jointly by the departments of biology and chemistry, this program is considered a major step forward. At Grinnell interdisciplinary programs are termed concentrations rather than majors, which is the term used for programs offered by a single department. Because the outcome is expected to be greater than the sum of its parts--biology and chemistry--and the two departments are involved equally in developing and teaching the appropriate courses, this new program is proposed to be called a major. Communication between the two departments appears to be amicable and collegial. The biological chemistry program is scheduled to be offered in the new millennium. Apparently, the motivation for offering a biological chemistry degree came from student requests for an improved and modernized science program.

A concern expressed by some of the science chairs, and elaborated upon by the division chair, centers around research mentoring which represents some of the best teaching in the science departments. The faculty devotes a great deal of time, including evenings and weekends, to instructing students in research skills and helping them advance their research projects. For these efforts, which are obviously time consuming but which the faculty clearly enjoy and at which they are highly successful, they receive no teaching credit.

Likewise, no teaching credit is being given for curricular development. Faculty in the science departments, especially in biology, wrestle with the task of how to teach science to all students on campus, taking into account the needs of the diverse student population. Models for case-study learning and cooperative learning are being considered and explored. The limited time that the faculty has available and can afford to expend on these efforts impedes the desired progress. A division-wide effort at exploring and developing new philosophies and pedagogies to achieve better science teaching would therefore be desirable.

The humanities division at Grinnell is a broad one, because of the inclusion of the arts within the group. This is a practical matter for a college of its size and in general may work adequately. There are some clear fault lines between the applied arts and the theoretical and historically based aspects of the disciplines that seem to be expressed in a hierarchy of value, situating the latter with the preeminent status. Perhaps the new fine arts building will help to minimize such tension, although there may be other creative ways to address it directly. The division as a whole considers itself a step-child to the sciences; this is a national pattern, given funding resources, which makes it hard to discern if there are specific elements at Grinnell exacerbating it.

It was wonderful to see how well the campus buildings and various offices showcased the fine arts, including the work of Grinnell alumni and faculty.

Most of the humanities faculty, when asked about teaching they hoped to do, expressed interest in collaborating with other faculty, typically in other departments. Some were already initiating such efforts for the pure pleasure and stimulation of the collaboration; others had developed syllabi for submission to the Fund for Excellence; still others felt constrained by a heavy workload from embarking on such projects. The potential in such projects for faculty renewal, and for exciting curricular innovation, sometimes across major divisions such as science and humanities, suggests that administrative inventiveness in supporting such partnerships as part of their work load is desirable. Grinnell is not alone in struggling with how to count collaborative teaching in faculty workload. However, the smorgasbord of small-grant incentives for new initiatives, including the faculty tutorial and reading groups, already gives Grinnell an advantage in addressing this challenge.

The social studies chairs viewed the college as having an engaged and caring faculty, dedicated to teaching and with a strong sense of community. Nevertheless, some believed that there remains some sense of fragmentation in the community, viewing some newer members of the faculty as somewhat alienated and less connected. This is due, in part, to changes in family responsibilities and living arrangements, with more newer faculty choosing to live outside of the immediate Grinnell area. In general there is a sense of a strong teaching community, but less of a sense of a community of scholars. Efforts to address these issues include a variety of special reading groups and colloquia, as well as regular convocations with outside speakers. In addition, the Ford Foundation-supported Bridging Project in conjunction with the University of Iowa provides research and scholarship opportunities for faculty and students in the summer. Other positive opportunities include the Minority Scholars in Residence Program which helps to enrich the college environment with greater diversity in the faculty and has been used to advantage in the social studies.

Concerns expressed by the social studies chairs were few, but included a clear sense that despite great improvements from ten years ago, there is still a significant gap between Grinnell investment in the arts and in the sciences, and investment in the social studies (and humanities) with respect to facilities and office space.

Team members met with faculty members responsible for new initiatives in the social studies which include proposals to the Fund for Excellence in the areas of Prairie Studies, and in ExCo, an experimental college, a non-credit experience taught by students, members of the local community, and others. Team members also met with the chairs of the Global Development Concentration to examine the role of concentrations in the curriculum, the strengths of the social studies faculties and programs, as well as the success of this particular interdisciplinary effort. The participating faculty value particularly the opportunity to engage colleagues across the disciplines in conversation and instructional activities in an environment that appears not to have been especially rich in interdisciplinarity in the past.

Within the social studies division, the faculty have sought to provide opportunities for common conversation through divisional research presentations, and through the Rosenfield lecture program, bringing outside presenters to the campus as often as twice a month. The faculty appear interested in expanded opportunities for collaboration across the disciplines both within and among the divisions. Like other faculty throughout the institution, social studies faculty express the concern that new opportunities and initiatives, while welcome in themselves, tend to be presented as add-ons to existing workload and not as replacements, and therefore as additional burdens to a faculty that views itself as already swamped with teaching, advising, research, and governance expectations.

Students

Self-governance at Grinnell is a concept, a work-in-progress, a set of high expectations, and a tradition. It seems near the core of the student experience and is a source of pride for them. Rather than a structure of organizational functions or a litany of rules, it is a way of life that shapes the levels of interpersonal and inter-group respect within the student community. It defines relationships and individual behaviors by insisting that students take responsibility for their own affairs and then leaves them alone to do that--mistakes and all. It is one of the reasons students choose Grinnell.

In academic matters, the concept defines how students make their curricular choices. They are expected to make wise decisions; they are expected to craft their own array of breadth and depth in the liberal arts. They are trusted as well as expected to be young adults, and they seem to welcome and accept the challenge.

As is often the case with the marriage of trust and expectation, there is always a worry that good choices will not be made. That's understandable, because sometimes they are not. But in the arenas of residential life the overall results are impressive. There are behavioral excesses, yet they seem to be less than in the much-more-common rule-driven collegiate environments. Students themselves are taught to intervene rather than depend upon residential staff and administrators to do so. Along the way students learn the chores of democratic citizenship, that

friends are usually one's best critics, that reason rather than force is the way to resolve conflict, and that acceptance and acknowledgment of difference are essential to a civil community. These are matters not well taught from books, nor, for that matter, in the classroom. They are best learned in a small residential setting such as a Grinnell residence where the concept of self-governance is regularly unfolded, tested, shaped, adopted, and never really finished. The team applauds Grinnell's students, faculty, and administration for embracing this powerful approach to education.

The team noticed that the concept has not been taken for granted. It was recently the focus of study and systematic discussion. The college also seems to recognize that it is distinctive; the concept is not common, and newcomers to the college's faculty and staff must surely find it difficult to understand. Hence, there is careful training of residential staff because it is they, as much as anyone, who create the expectations and guide the process in the non-academic arenas. Faculty, on the other hand, have the primary responsibility to nudge and guide students toward making wise use of their freedom to make their own curricular choices. The faculty help each other to learn and refine the difficult craft of advising. This too is recognized as a work-in-progress.

Relatively little is said in the admissions materials that would prepare students for the reality of these freedoms from residential restrictions and curricular distribution requirements. Perhaps that is as it must be because the concept of self-government probably must be experienced before being understood.

The team believes that the Student Handbook sends unwanted signals that Grinnell might be more of a "rule" place than it really is. There are too many rules; it is too thick. We were told that it was not always as big. The team suggests that the college, and especially its students, review the Handbook, shrink it, and find ways to keep it slim and in keeping with the concept of self-governance.

The college offers a strong, successful residential experience. Some of the important factors in that program include:

- human-scale environments;
- an expectation that students will govern themselves;
- a skilled professional staff and peer volunteers with clear roles of helpers, counselors, and educators rather than as rule or law enforcers;
- quality proximate dining services; and
- high-quality and well-maintained facilities.

One admirable practice is to provide Resident Life Coordinators with responsibilities in other areas of student life.

The campus is rich in opportunity for students; it is easy to become involved and engaged in all sorts of activities. They can, and do, learn and participate in varsity and intramural sports, music, drama, public and campus service, special interest groups, politics and social action, campus governance, and religious activities. The "Campus Memo" offers compelling evidence of an expansive array of lectures, exhibits, rallies, film, music, and drama.

A full array of student services is available to Grinnell students. They are traditionally and well organized, adequately supported, and staffed by competent professionals who are committed to the mission of Grinnell.

Grinnell's student enrollments have risen slightly over the past few years, and completed applications have increased by some 50%. Grinnell appears to be able to attract all the qualified students it wishes to have.

In the interest of developing greater interconnections with the community of Grinnell and Iowa beyond the campus, the college may find it fruitful to rethink the rationale for some of its current structures and reporting lines. The growth of mutually beneficial interactions among students, faculty, and the community will enlarge public service activity and increase the potential for generating academic internships and service-learning courses. It may be helpful to think in terms of pathways for students that have the potential to lead from volunteer activity--as they explore the community as well as their own skills and motivation in relation to new opportunities, challenges, and learning--to credit-bearing work as their own commitment and capacity to raise and address meaningful questions increase with their off-campus experience. Such developments will open up further discussion about the relationship among college offices that deal with academic affairs, service-learning, public service, and careers. The Community Service Center has an important role because of its knowledge of the community and will need to work closely with the Dean of the College Office, where the knowledge of the professional and personal expertise of faculty is chiefly located. The Annual Faculty Activity Report will need to make explicit the value the college places on building connections with the community, such as "Grinnell Productions" or the initiative of paid leaves to enable school teachers to have a "sabbatical" at Grinnell and to join Grinnell faculty and students in the Teaching Colloquia to build important bridges for ongoing activity and interaction between the two communities. At the present time it seems that faculty working in the community often feel quite alone in their work; there may be value in bringing such faculty together to strengthen the community of such individuals, to share their experience, and to increase their knowledge of one another's initiatives.

Physical Resources

The team observed the substantial and well-maintained campus that appears to serve Grinnell's mission well. In the past ten years most campus buildings have been renovated and upgraded, and impressive new construction was nearing completion while we were there. Everything is computer networked, and there is no deferred maintenance. Some find the scattered administrative locations to be less than ideal, and the long-standing need for an appropriate place for multicultural activities should be addressed soon. But all in all, Grinnell has a fine physical plant serving its needs.

Libraries: The team met with the Library Director and the two Associate Librarians. The Library is housed in a building which, though serviceable and spacious, seems architecturally not altogether in keeping with the rest of the Grinnell campus. Librarians judge that the rapid development of technology has greatly increased the burdens of librarianship, in keeping current, in providing bibliographical instruction, in maintaining systems, etc., and consider the library understaffed. Nevertheless, the team views the facility as adequately staffed for a college of Grinnell's size, with 8 full-time librarians and a support staff of 14.5. Librarians serve on five-year contracts; those with faculty status receive tenure when promoted to Professor. Although tenure for librarians is a vexed issue on many campuses and the team makes no recommendations on the matter, the college might seek to establish formally the same assurances of academic freedom for librarians as are enjoyed by faculty members.

The College Archivist is a member of the library staff. The Archives is responsible for college records management, and includes a collection of local area historical materials as well as college archival materials. All librarians are involved in reference duties, providing the college community with full-reference services. The librarians expressed a strong desire to improve community understanding of and access to electronic services. They view themselves as having their greatest strengths as an organization oriented to service. While the facility is open to anyone in the larger Grinnell community, and views itself as having a good relationship with the larger community, it does not get a great deal of use by townspeople. This indicates an opportunity for building some new and strengthened connections to the Grinnell area, an expressed goal of the college and its Board of Trustees.

Major issues facing the library in the near future include the need for additional space, which might be achieved by the provision of storage space for less frequently accessed materials, and by the consolidation of the science libraries. In addition, the library seeks to increase technology training for its own staff in order to keep up with the rapid pace of change in that area, and to permit the staff to provide further instruction to faculty and students. The library seeks continued resource development for improving student access to primary sources. Some newer collections supporting the curriculum, particularly in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean text materials, are currently catalogued under contract through OCLC, since the Grinnell librarians lack the expertise to catalog these materials.

Housed on the lower floor in a corner of the science building is the science library, obviously cramped for space. More room for the library is envisioned, which should permit consolidating the entire science library. Currently, part of the physics and psychology holdings are housed in the Burling Library, while the entire math library is also there. Budgets for serials are tight; acquisition of a new journal requires cutting an existing journal. Decisions on acquisition require division-wide consent. The science library struggles with decisions on electronic access to data bases for literature search. High prices for some of these data bases render them particularly cost ineffective for small colleges with a restricted number of users. Of particular concern for the library staff is the inadequacy of support for and training in computers for the library-specific needs. The lack of a computer technician dedicated to the library is a source of constant frustration.

E. Criterion Three: The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.

The team finds that Grinnell meets this criterion.

The Open Curriculum

There is widespread support for the curriculum and its philosophy of education among faculty and administrators, and many are deeply committed to the developmental and educational advantages of the curriculum for their students. Printed material about Grinnell's philosophy of education in the Academic Catalog and on the website is exceptionally clear and well articulated.

Careful tracking of distribution patterns outside the area of concentration reveals that a substantial majority of the students distribute themselves well. Individuals, and to some extent the Self Study, express anxiety about students who choose not to distribute themselves widely (see below under Assessment of Student Achievement). Given the educational philosophy of choice reflected in the open curriculum, there will invariably be some students who will depart from a required distribution pattern, and some of them will have reasonable and probably even persuasive reasons for making the choices that they make. It may be useful to become informed about the students who do not choose a standard distribution pattern to understand the reasons for the choices they make.

In respect to the distribution of science courses by non-science majors, it is not surprising that distribution may fall short of the ideal. The catalogue reveals a much greater range of humanities and social science courses open to the general learner than in science and mathematics, where courses are more sequentially ordered and built on a small number of introductory courses. There are also few options of integrative courses that situate a study of scientific issues in a social context or that integrate science with the humanities and social sciences. Consequently the distribution statistics may challenge the college to consider 21st-century issues of science education for non-science students in a way that institutions with distribution requirements can avoid addressing. This may in fact be another national leadership opportunity for Grinnell.

Academic Advising

The success of an open curriculum lies in the quality of the academic advising that interprets it. Grinnell has a faculty culture predominantly committed to advising as a strategy to guide, educate, and challenge students in their curricular choices and educational plans; the administrators with oversight for academic advising in both the Student Life and Dean of the College Offices communicate well with one another and collaborate effectively in providing orientation and training for new faculty while keeping abreast of the national discourse on advising in institutions with structured curricula. Once again, written material in the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog is excellent, and every opportunity to teach about a liberal education is exploited, as for example in the section on Liberal Education and Careers. The college has used thoughtful assessment approaches for evaluating academic advising, including comparison with other colleges of the same size and the sampling of student and faculty reactions to advising at Grinnell. The high percentage of students who agree with the statement that faculty respect their autonomy is a credit to the faculty.

The college has articulated the goals of advising and illuminated the personal and intellectual results for students, as the process of making curricular choices becomes the occasion for learning and maturation. Current initiatives under discussion to structure a midpoint comprehensive academic plan at the end of the second year, when the student is filing a declaration of major, may prove a useful development.

Involving students in discussions about advising initiatives would seem a typically Grinnellian move and would undoubtedly contribute richly to the discussion and to the development of further innovation. On a campus that involves students as extensively as Grinnell does, the college might also consider pairing upper-class students in collaboration with faculty advisers. Institutions that understand the differing perspectives that a student and faculty member together can contribute to an advisee have enabled individual students and faculty, typically with differing curricular interests, to profit from the mutual learning that evolves from that three-way discussion. The involvement of upper-class students in advising issues has the additional beneficial effect of stimulating their deeper reflections on the implications of an educational philosophy of choice over prescription. By making them collaborators in delivering the advising, one enlarges the community that takes ownership for the effectiveness and meaning of the process, and that in turn makes them take their own educational planning more seriously.

Grinnell may have a special leadership function among liberal arts colleges of comparable style and educational philosophy to further develop and share its experience with the developmental issues that advising in an open curriculum can promote, as well as the special challenges and rewards that the system offers to faculty and to the curriculum.

Assessment of Student Achievement

The Grinnell College Assessment Plan is an ambitious and detailed program, with specific assessments across the curriculum in the Writing Program, though none in general education, since the college has an open curriculum with no general education requirements. Thus virtually all of the college's learning outcomes assessment is conducted in and through the academic departments, except for alumni satisfaction surveys. The college is following a somewhat cautious implementation schedule with a very small number of programs expected to provide assessment results in any given year.

A major issue for Grinnell assessment is, and should be, the question of whether and to what degree the college's own professed aims of providing a broad liberal education are being achieved in its open curriculum, through advising and other means. The assertion that students learn best when they are responsible for the learning choices they make is certainly not self-evidently true, and the college is seeking to support that notion through a careful analysis of learning outcomes. A liberal arts education means, among other things, an education that provides breadth of experience and exposure to a variety of disciplines. Grinnell has done some very careful statistical analyses, based upon the assumption that one measure of breadth is study across the college's three divisions. Summer workshops conducted extensive transcript analysis to determine whether (unspecified) breadth requirements were, in the view of participating faculty, being met by the students whose transcripts were analyzed. Subsequently, faculty were asked to define their criteria for breadth, based upon their initial determinations. As a result of

these transcript analysis workshops several striking results were identified. First, most Grinnell students (approximately 80%) were viewed as having sufficient breadth in their programs of study, although of course in colleges with required distribution 100% of students would have such breadth. Second, out of the process, four specific curricular models of ideals of what constitutes appropriate breadth were identified by groups of participating Grinnell faculty members. This is not surprising in itself, since it might be expected that nearly any faculty member at a liberal arts college has some conception of what constitutes the required breadth of study to constitute a liberal arts education.

However, the team also learned that within the open curriculum there is an unstated distribution requirement not unlike one or another of the four curriculum models or ideals. Specifically, for any student wishing to participate in study abroad or desiring to apply for early graduation, there is a fairly strong distribution requirement across the three divisions. Some students complained that while the faculty is aware of the hidden distribution requirement, and while advisers are good at ensuring that students who make clear their desire to study off campus or graduate early meet the requirements, their existence is not widely known among students who expect and believe in the open curriculum. Hence for some students, who opt late for off-campus study or early graduation, it comes as a surprise and an obstacle to implementing their otherwise reasonable educational plans..

Faculty Development

The college provides an impressive array of faculty development opportunities and makes available a substantial sum of money to support faculty travel, research, and curriculum development, and appears to generate widespread faculty participation. The overall program of faculty development workshops in writing, oral communication, technology, etc., is very impressive, with a history going back to at least the 1970s. The faculty development program appears at present to be entirely funded out of the college's annual operating budget, and would benefit in the long term from being underwritten by substantial endowment support. The 3-2 teaching load for an undergraduate teaching institution is certainly generous, and faculty complaints about workload and lack of time would be surprising, were it not for a burdensome governance system. The sabbatical program is appropriate and is viewed both as a development opportunity and as an entitlement (no eligible faculty member is turned down).

Multiculturalism

The self-study is very explicit about the institutional commitment to diversity and about the fact that implementing that commitment falls short of Grinnell's desires in respect to the recruitment of students and faculty, retention of students and faculty, appointment of administrators of color, and the campus climate. Administrative staff and faculty are swift to praise the good will of the senior administration on this issue and their substantial efforts in support of diversity initiatives: the short-term minority scholars, one-year post-docs under the Consortium for a Stronger Minority Presence, and the new initiative to look into spousal employment issues for new faculty/staff recruits are all recognized as important. The responsiveness of some faculty to the call for mentoring of students of color, the willingness of concerned faculty to work on the Color Diversity Initiatives Group, and the careful and sustained work on the New Science initiatives to

encourage women and under-represented minorities in science were cited as valuable and appreciated. Yet in spite of all these and other student projects like DIVCO, there is considerable frustration: for example, the very slow institutional response to the repeatedly expressed need for multicultural space has discouraged students, even though there is genuine discussion about creating such space in the proposed student center. Another concern is that the classroom at Grinnell does not exemplify and uphold the values of equity and commitment to diversity that the college espouses. Individuals cite problems such as students of color being called on to speak for a racial group, assumptions about students' abilities or ideologies being expressed directly as well as implicitly through advice given, and the failure of faculty to model proactive intervention in the face of stereotyped comments by other students. These problems are not unique to Grinnell, but they provide a compelling opportunity for faculty discussion and learning that can be both educational as well as essential if the college is to continue to make progress toward implementing its mission in "serving students, educating citizens and leaders, and expecting and respecting social diversity."

Curricular offerings and the addition of new courses by new appointments will enhance the curriculum; the college can also be proactive through the development of existing courses by encouraging and providing support for faculty to collaborate with students and colleagues to explore and include material historically excluded from the curriculum. The resources of the Grant Board, cited above, are already in place to further such initiatives, and the intellectual, pedagogical and scholarly results will richly reward the participants and the college community.

Characteristics of Student Life and the College

Grinnell is a remote and relatively isolated college that has a strong national reputation and student body. That appears to be an anomaly that invites a closer look at why that is so. There are a number of reasons that, taken singly, mean little, but when taken as a whole mean much. These are some of Grinnell's distinctive characteristics.

--Grinnell seems to have "stuck to its knitting" in its commitment to the study of the liberal arts; to its insistence on teaching as a priority; to its small size; to its residential nature; to its open, collaborative, and egalitarian ways; and to its continued reaffirmation of the concept of students' self-governance. The college cherishes its legacy of attracting high-quality faculty, students, and staff. It seeks no change other than becoming better.

--The boundaries between student affairs and academic affairs seem to be unusually permeable. That is due, in the main, to the willingness of the faculty to teach, to advise, and to see students as individuals and as whole persons. It is rare to see an entire college with those qualities.

--The faculty are very involved in the affairs of the college. Put differently, Grinnell is an "old-fashioned" faculty-centered institution as contrasted to an "administration-centered" or "system-centered" college. The primary teaching commitment of the faculty is the most profound element of the student experience.

--The open curriculum embodies the concept of self-governance; it puts responsibility for educational decisions squarely in the hands of the student. It is an important reason why students choose Grinnell, and it is a point of pride after they leave.

--There is a curious paradox of diversity at Grinnell. On the one hand, the college is not as diverse as it would like to be, especially regarding the minimal presence of students and faculty of color. The team notes this in our general advice and recommendations, especially regarding a need to increase the presence of minority men and women on the faculty and administration, and of women in the senior administration. Progress to diversify the student body by race and ethnicity has been slow but steady. That is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, there is existing diversity that begs greater recognition and celebration. Grinnell's policies ensure that the ability to pay does not influence admission to the college nor to any of its academic and social programs once here. That is a quiet but powerful policy that ensures uncommon levels of social and economic diversity. In addition, there are important geographical, religious, familial, gender, and sexual orientation differences that enrich the student body. Grinnell is a better learning environment as a consequence of these matters.

--The palpable egalitarian qualities of Grinnell's campus culture are traced to its founders. These qualities are manifest in financial aid policies, in social policies, and in a culture of inclusiveness, collaboration, and acceptance of difference. Hence, the college is free from some of the more destructive qualities of student life that can be found elsewhere, such as Greek organizations and pervasive habits of competition. (On the other hand, we did see that students do compete well in sports!)

--Students are asked to write throughout their academic careers, and improving the quality of that writing is a continuing and active concern of the faculty.

--Grinnell is a safe campus.

F. Criterion Four: The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

The team finds that Grinnell meets this criterion.

As indicated elsewhere in this report, Grinnell has assembled excellent resources to carry out its mission, and the team found every reason to believe that those resources will grow and strengthen. Since the previous NCA visit Grinnell has taken great strides to overcome some weaknesses. The new administrative leadership has begun to arrange itself in a forward-looking way, and the Trustees have organized themselves to better communicate with and serve the campus community. The Campaign for Grinnell and the Fund for Excellence, to say nothing of the college's extraordinary endowment, bode well for the future. Grinnell is taking steps to strengthen its relationship with the city of Grinnell and other parts of Iowa. Good students keep coming, and good faculty do too. We are convinced that Grinnell is sure to get better and better.

G. Criterion Five: The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships.

The team finds that Grinnell meets this criterion.

Grinnell's mission statement and its list of core values reveal high standards of ethics and integrity that characterize the institution. The team found Grinnell to be open, consistent, and in compliance with professional expectations, federal and otherwise. Its practices and relationships with its various publics appear to be admirable.

The Self-Study Report now includes an addendum on Federal Compliance. The addendum and supporting documents made available to the team reveal that Grinnell is in compliance with Title IV of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act and other federal programs, including a variety of federal grant and student loan programs. The current student default rate of 3.4% does not require institutional action.

The college will begin to include the NCA address and telephone number in appropriate publications, beginning with publication of the 1999-2000 academic catalog.

Prior to the visit the team received no third-party comments regarding the institution, and believes that the absence of such comments were not due to inadequate public information regarding the comprehensive evaluation; the college publicized the visit appropriately.

III. Strengths and Challenges

A. Strengths 1. The faculty are passionate about liberal arts education and their involvement in student learning. 2. Student self-governance is a concept, a work-in-progress, a set of high expectations, and a tradition that is at the core of student experience and a source of student pride. 3. The college enjoys strong administrative leadership that complements and supports the institution's distinctive qualities. 4. The dedicated Board of Trustees is re-examining its organization, its membership, and its functions with the campus community. 5. During a time of institutional stress, the college has successfully articulated its mission and reaffirmed its core values. 6. The college has impressive fiscal resources, and practices continuous budgetary discipline. 7. The support staff exhibits a high degree of friendliness and an admirable work ethic. 8. The college has an attractive and unusually well-maintained campus and facilities.

B. Challenges

1. Individually and collectively, the faculty need to find a satisfying balance among teaching, scholarship, and service to the community. 2. The college community should hold itself to high standards of critical, reflective, and reasoned argument, so as not to confuse tolerance with avoidance of healthy conflict. 3. Although space for multicultural activities is a priority in long-range planning, the need is no less now, and should be addressed for the short term.

IV. Advice and Suggestions for Institutional Improvement

1. The college should renew its commitment to diversity in its faculty and staff, including women and men of color, and women in the senior administration. Meanwhile, it should recognize and celebrate the many kinds of diversity already here. 2. The college's multiplicity of

long-range planning efforts should be integrated and sustained. 3. Recent initiatives in support of junior faculty should be developed and strengthened. 4. In order to better encourage international study, the college should review its policies and practices, including the consideration of developing more Grinnell-sponsored programs led by Grinnell faculty. 5. The college should strengthen technical support for computing services and for training the users. An aggressive replacement plan for computing equipment is necessary to stay current. 6. The college should continue the good work it is doing to strengthen relationships and service to the city of Grinnell and to its development.

V. The Team Recommendation and Rationale

The team's recommendations for action, including its recommendation to continue without changes the accreditation of Grinnell College for another ten years, are shown on the attached Worksheet for Statement of Affiliation Status. The team's reasons for its recommendations are that: 1) Grinnell fulfills the General Institutional Requirements and meets the five Criteria for Accreditation; 2) the fine Self-Study Report and supporting documents, and the team's meetings with faculty, students, administrators, staff, and Trustees, have provided ample and comprehensive evidence that Grinnell College is an exemplary liberal arts college and shows every promise of continuing as such into the distant future; 3) the college has come through a recent period of awkward transitions, and in the process has maintained a healthy self-study process and has developed an assessment plan and procedures that appear to have stimulated lively campus attention to the college mission.