

Date: May 17, 2008

To: Trinity College Board of Trustees

From: Allison Read & Gary Reger, Co-Chairs, President's Council and Campus Climate

Cc: President Jones, Scott Reynolds, members of the Council on Campus Climate

The final Report of the Charter Committee on Campus Climate, which was issued in January 2008, called in tones of urgency for Trinity to address the underlying factors that have contributed to incidents of racism, sexism, and homophobia on campus. The Report set out a series of twenty recommendations “to be implemented immediately” and a further ten requiring medium- or longer-term planning and the investment of considerable College resources.

In February 2008, President Jones appointed the Council on Campus Climate (CCC), co-chaired by Allison Read and Gary Reger, to undertake the implementation of the recommendations. He provided the CCC with \$50,000 from his own discretionary monies, and the Planning and Budget Council (PBC) recommended the allocation in the 2008-2009 fiscal year budget a matching \$50,000 to support the CCC's work. The CCC has spent the last semester working to effect the implementation of as many of these recommendations as possible, as detailed below in this report.

Before we set out the details, however, we think it vitally important to remind the College community, and ourselves, of the fundamental aims of both the Charter Committee and the CCC. A series of ugly incidents shook the campus during the 2006-2007 academic year—some were clearly self-consciously racist, others revealed a stunning insensitivity to the historical position of minorities in the United States and a deeply disturbing insouciance in the broader community about actions that rang painful chords in minority and some non-minority students. The Charter Committee sought to understand the origins of these incidents, to see how they related to the kind of community Trinity is, and to offer substantive recommendations to change campus climate in ways that would render future incidents much less likely and empower students to act on their own to nurture a sense of community that rejects such expressions of prejudice and precludes appeals to ignorance as a defense when someone violates those standards.

In the deliberations of the current Council on Campus Climate about the recommendations—our efforts to prioritize, to assign tasks to the right bodies, to gather information, to promote change—we have tried to keep the fundamental reasons for our task before our eyes. Sometimes, for some of the issues, our discussions seemed remote from these basic matters: complex analysis of the mechanisms by which space gets assigned for campus events can appear only tangentially connected

with promoting a welcoming community. In other cases the central mission was unmistakably obvious: as when we heard about the difficult position of resident assistants, who are far more likely to be minority students than the student body as a whole, obliged to confront fellow students as enforcers of rules and regulations. We became convinced—as clearly was the Charter Committee before us—that the recommendations transferred to our charge would, if implemented effectively, contribute to changing the climate at Trinity and to enabling students to have more active control of the community in which they live. That improved space assignment mechanism will mean fewer conflicts between events that might appeal to the same people; earlier notice about events that will enable other interested groups in the community to co-sponsor and participate formally; a simpler way for student groups and even individual students to set up, advertise, and run their own events. Without better control of assignment of space, it would be impossible to foster a more diverse social and student-life scene.

Having been charged with the implementation of some twenty recommendations, the Council set out first to identify and prioritize those recommendations. The criteria were how important was the recommendation, or how significant; the potential impact of the recommendation on the life of the community; and whether it is something that the committee could run with effectively in the near term. The net result was a prioritization of the recommendations that complements the interests and talents of our group.

The Vernon Allen Planning Committee

In February, the Vernon Allen Planning Committee sought proposals from student groups who would use a house on Vernon or Allen to improve campus life. The committee identified between three and five buildings of various sizes where student groups could provide new and interesting forms of social interaction and help diversify and enrich the social life on campus. Our hope is that the Vernon-Allen area will become a “cultural quarter” where one might find a variety of social options appealing to a variety of appetites.

In late April, the Vernon Allen Planning Committee announced the new occupants for the four houses on Vernon and Allen we offered to the campus community. We expect these new institutions will bring even more variety, vibrancy, and innovation to the intellectual, cultural, and social life of the College. Here are the results:

- 115 Allen Place – **Bayt Al Salaam**—“The House of Peace.” This house will be a place to explore Middle Eastern politics, history, food, music, dance, religions, languages, and perhaps some occasional hookah smoking rituals (outside of course). The house will provide office space for College clubs and organizations whose missions are associated with Middle Eastern religions, languages, or other forms of cultural expression.
- 125 Allen Place—**The Treehouse**—This house has been granted to a group of students committed to sustainability and to environmental responsibility. The house will offer office space for campus groups that concern themselves with prolonging the useful life of the planet but also outdoor oriented groups. The group has plans to create a sustainable environment, cut utility costs, maintain an organic garden, and be a model for responsible living. They plan to help the campus at large become more conscious of the footprint we leave. It will also be a place where residence hall groups can plan a camping or kayak trip and get the leadership and equipment they will need. Social events held at the house will emphasize practices that use natural resources wisely.
- 104-106 Vernon St- **The I House** – This is a group of American and International students who will develop a place for social and co-curricular activities associated with all matters international. The house will provide a place for world citizens to gather, watch, read and discuss news from abroad, cook a meal, and host social events. It will be a place where a language class can practice conversation while preparing, eating, and cleaning-up after a meal. It will be a place where international students who remain on campus over breaks can stave off isolation. The group will work with the Modern Languages department and the Center for Global and Urban Studies to integrate the lives of students with intellectual opportunities and services by hosting Fulbright Fellows or providing an office for the International Student Advisor.
- 79 Vernon St.- **The Mill** – This will be a house that will be an incubator for artistic expression and a place to showcase art. The group plans to create an intimate performance and gallery space on the first floor as well as space to socialize. They will open one room as a consignment shop where campus artists can put their art up for sale. On the second floor they will be looking to create a recording studio for music and video, computer assisted design and photography lab, and some office space. The third floor will be the home of Trinity radio and television.

The availability of these houses will depend on the moves of the offices that are currently in the houses, and much of that will depend on the moves between Seabury and Trinity Commons. Groups will be required to earn renewal of their privileges on a regular basis by demonstrating that they are making worthy contributions to the campus community and that they are engaging a cross-section of the campus in their events.

Trinity Admissions: Supplemental Essay Question

Larry Dow, VP for Admissions and Financial Aid, met with the Council to discuss the student scholarship and financial aid programs. The Council remains grateful for his comprehensive presentation and the good work that his office continue to do to attract the finest and most diverse student body to Trinity.

This year, in order to emphasize both Trinity's community values and our desire to build a healthier academic and social climate, a supplemental essay requirement was added to the generic Common Application process. Three essay topics were presented as choices to the applicants, each topic reflecting a subject of particular significance to Trinity. Candidates for admission were asked to address the topic of their choosing by writing a one-page essay.

This new requirement was expected to cause a reduction in the number of applications received. The experiment also seemed worthwhile in order to underscore Trinity's special values and to ensure that candidates for admission had enough initial interest in the College to invest themselves in writing the Trinity essay.

The application number remained well over 5000. Essays were thoughtful and useful to candidates. Currently, the yield on admissions remains quite high, with some 634 students accepting their Trinity College offer of admission. There has been a remarkably high yield (22%) among President's Scholars. It is expected that a class of some 590 students will enter this fall.

Events Committee

Several recommendations from the Charter Committee dealt with the need for more centralized scheduling and communications for campus events and activities. As suggested, the Council on Campus Climate has established a Campus Events Committee. The objectives of this committee are:

- Better coordinate the multitude of events and activities of the College throughout the year
- Interact with committees that already exist
- Generate ideas for new and timely occasions to gather community
- Created events that appeal to both students & faculty
- Consider consolidating student organization events and resources, especially spring semester
- Investigate funding sources for events and activities and consider the cost-efficiency of them
- Help coordinate Common Hour beginning Fall 2008

Co-Chairs

- Megan Fitzsimmons, Director of College Events and Conferences

- Student leader

Members:

- Five student leaders, one each from:
 - Student Government Association
 - Inter-Greek Council
 - InterSocial Council
 - MAC
 - TCAC
- Tom Mitzel, Associate Academic Dean (beginning July 1, 2008)
- Student Activities Director, Office of Campus Life (hiring in process)
- James Latzle, Director of Performing Arts Production, Austin Arts Center
- Jason Rojas, Director of Community Relations
- Karla Spurlock-Evans, Dean of Multicultural Affairs
- Patti Maisch, Administrative Asst., S.C. Davis Endowment, Multicultural Affairs and Italian Programs

Event Management Software

The Calendar and Special Events Office evaluated event management software systems that would allow Trinity to streamline meeting and event scheduling, produce a comprehensive online calendar of events, and maximize utilization of campus support services. The software will directly assist the Campus Climate Events Committee with its charge for the 2008-2009 academic year. Two vendors have been identified because of their successful integration with PeopleSoft and their use at schools similar to Trinity.

Scheduling software is but a small piece of larger puzzle that will require a fair amount of design as well as implementation effort—both technological and by the community. This software project will provide an excellent opportunity to rework the College's procedures while we improve operational efficiency through better use of technology.

The following staff members have been identified to assist in integrating the software system and overseeing its installation and implementation:

- Ron Joyce, VP for Advancement
- Megan Fitzsimons, Director of College Events and Conferences
- John Langland, Director of Information Technology
- Jenny Holland, Director of Marketing and Communications
- Patty McGregor, Registrar
- Jean-Pierre Haeberly, Director of Academic Computing
- Sarah Moriarty, Director of Enterprise Reporting and Analysis

Gary Reger, Allison Read, Ron Joyce, John Langland, and Meg Fitzsimmons will present this initiative to the President's Senior Staff in June to solicit the advice of campus leadership in developing an organizational strategy and designing a timeline.

Fund for Events and Activities to Improve Trinity Campus Climate

The Campus Climate Council (CCC) will announce now and in the fall semester the availability of funding for events and activities intended to help foster a more open and caring sense of community at Trinity College. Successful applications will contribute to the chief goals of the CCC:

1. Promote interaction among students, faculty, and/or staff that help break down barriers of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, and other categories
2. Challenge stereotypes
3. Foster new ways of creating conversation about social issues and social dynamics on campus
4. Promote meaningful interaction between the campus community and the surrounding neighborhood
5. Work to make the Trinity community a safer, more open, caring place, where the default attitude is acceptance and everyone feels comfortable in moving among a wide variety of social and academic groups with a wide range of friends
6. Bring the academic mission of the College to bear on the goals of the CCC

Anyone—students, faculty, staff, individuals or groups—can apply to the Campus Climate Events Committee for funding. Preference will be given to applications that involve more than one campus group; that have significant cost benefits; that involve more people or engage more people for a longer period of time.

Co-Curricular Initiative

The faculty members of the Council on Campus Climate have been working on the business of pulling together co-curricular initiatives. These initiatives involve interaction and collaboration between faculty and students across disciplines and involves intellectual engagement both inside and beyond the classroom. Past experience indicates that this can be a genuine force in building intellectual community among students and faculty and, given that such an initiative is likely to take on controversial topics such as race, gender, sexuality, youth culture, political activism, and the like, it could be a useful means of modeling how to deal with such matters in ways that are intellectually serious and respectful.

Several initiatives have been outlined by members of the faculty:

1) International Hip-Hop

Maurice Wade, Philosophy Department, identified interested faculty and recruited leadership for this initiative. Gail Woldu, Chair of the Music Department, with the assistance of Emily Musil, ***, will take advantage of the International Hip-Hop Festival to build an academic co-curricular initiative around hip-hop as an art form and the connected questions of race, class, and other issues intimately linked to the work of the CCC. Modeled on the very successful initiatives of the mid-1990s, this initiative will include regular academic classes; small mini-courses; talks and panels; films; and other appropriate events. Emphasis will be on interaction between students and faculty in planning and participation.

2) The 200th Anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Birth

As the United States observes the two hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth (<http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov/>), we propose to mark the bicentennial with a co-curricular initiative during Trinity's 2008-09 academic year. Neither a biographical study nor a hagiographic exercise, this program aims to engage the Trinity community in an extended conversation about

aspects of American political and cultural life that Lincoln has come to represent: the historical context and enduring consequences of slavery, race and racism; the texture and influence of Lincoln's rhetoric; the role of iconic figures and notions of presidential greatness in American political culture. This initiative seeks to spark both close scrutiny of these in individual classrooms and wide-ranging discussions of them in community-wide events.

3) Global Warming

Some faculty members have also considered a co-curricular initiative that revolves around issues of global warming and will pursue this possibility for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Center for Teaching and Learning

The Charter Committee recommendations connected to faculty included a call to expand mentoring programs for new faculty and to sponsor teaching discussions on creating inclusive classrooms. In April, Dean of the Faculty Rena Fraden announced the creation of a Center for Teaching and Learning, whose chief aims will be to foster good teaching in the broadest sense at Trinity and to help newly hired faculty find their place in Trinity's world of teaching and scholarship. The two co-directors of the Center, Dina Anselmi of the Psychology Department and Gary Reger of the History Department, have expressed to the CCC their commitment to carry out these recommendations under the aegis of the Center.

Student Leadership and Community Life

Several recommendations related to community building and social responsibility were considered together, bringing leadership from several departments together:

- Office of the Dean of Students
- Office of Community Service and Civic Engagement
- First Year Dean's Office
- Residence Life
- Orientation Planners
- Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Calendar Office
- Members of the faculty
- Intersocial Council

1) Faculty and staff have considered means through which we can engage current student leaders and incoming students with Greater Hartford. We have developed a new dimension to the first year mentor program to promote engagement with Hartford and will continue to develop shared leadership training.

2) Students took the initiative to develop events which brought together student leaders from Greek, cultural and social organizations along with faculty and staff to engage in conversation about campus climate. These occasions were highly successful in generating a sense of community and student ownership of climate issues.

3) Members of the Council have worked closely with the Student Government Association, specifically President, Andrew Pedro; Treasurer, Beth Frazier; as well as with the Trinity College Activities Council (TCAC). In talking with members of both organizations it has been our goal to discuss how effectively school sponsored events were being taken advantage of and what other options could be offered to Trinity students. Members of both of these student organizations are optimistic that in future years some Trinity functions could be altered to have more student participation, while at the same time keeping in place the events that have already been well established.

4) The Council considered and endorsed an anti-discrimination policy compiled by members of the Student Government Association and encouraged them to place it and a letter from the new SGA President in the front of the student handbook. Deans Card and Alford were instrumental in advising the committee on this issue.