

To: The Trinity Community
From: The Council on Campus Climate
Re: Council work and the recommendations of the Charter Committee
Date: December 6, 2011

The resources critical to the success of the Council on Campus Climate include time, money, and people. The Council works most effectively where there are sustained partnerships with various constituencies on campus. Individual members of the faculty, student organizations, and departments and offices across campus respond well to the mission of the Council and work collaboratively with Council members on all kinds of initiatives.

The list of recommendations outlined by the Charter Committee on Campus Climate was a very useful aid in launching our work and the Council returned to it periodically. At the same time, many initiatives emerged that were not in the list but that promoted the transformation of campus climate.

In its first semester, the Council on Campus Climate set out first to identify and prioritize the recommendations in the Charter Committee's recommendations based on

- how important or significant the recommendation seemed;
- 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.

There were a number of items that we addressed immediately; several that will remain ongoing concerns; and a fair share of recommendations that require resources that neither we nor the College could afford during these last several years of an economic downturn.

1. Refurbish spaces in dorms and on Vernon St. for student use and under student direction.

The four theme houses on Vernon Street—the International House, the Mill, the Treehouse, and Bayt al Salaam—represent an important development in shifting the social and cultural landscape on campus. These spaces are all for student use and under student direction. They also receive significant support from the SGA.

The College recognizes that there still is precious little common space available in the dormitories for student life. Yet even while the Office of Campus Life has seen drastic cuts in its budgets and professional staffing, the department reconfigured its staff to promote community building and activities that bring residents together.

While the outstanding models for student residential community remain the Fred Pfeil Project, Praxis, the successful wellness dormitory has come online and grown in the last several years, as has single-sex housing and theme housing generated through student proposals.

Related initiatives include

- a possible revision of the College social and alcohol policy;

- “Let’s Clean Up Our Act,” initiative to clean up the Quad and Vernon Street on weekends;
- enhanced security lighting on campus;
- facilitating positive relationships between students and campus safety staff members.

2. Establish an events committee that will fund, coordinate, and publicize more cultural, artistic and intellectual events on campus and subsidize some of those off campus. Consider funding a co-curricular initiative as part of this process.

The Council on Campus Climate established a Campus Events Committee comprised of student leaders as well as staff. They successfully launched three initiatives:

- the **Common Hour** program in cooperation with the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, the Curriculum Committee, and the Calendar and Events staff;
- the **administration of designated funds and a call for proposals** to funding activities intended to help foster a more open and caring sense of community at Trinity College;
- to advocate for an entirely **new internal communications** software to manage events and activities on campus as well as the complete redesign of the College **Website**;

At this point the Council might designate a similar group to look at both student life and academic calendars to better coordinate scheduling and communications.

Subsidies for activities on and off campus were funded initially by funds designated for the Council, which has been depleted. Other initiatives have been supported by co-sponsorships shared by student organizations, academic departments and other partners.

Co-curricular initiatives have covered the following topics:

- **hip-hop as an art form** and the connected questions of race, class, and other issues intimately linked to the work of campus climate;
- the **200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth** that aimed to engage the Trinity community in an extended conversation about aspects of American political and cultural life that Lincoln has come to represent;
- the **fortieth anniversary of co-education** at Trinity.

Continuing these programs requires financial resources to compensate faculty for the additional coursework; to hire staff for the additional workload; to bring speakers to campus; and to host events.

Co-curricular initiatives represent a promising means of engaging students, faculty and staff in issues related to campus climate. As recently as this spring and summer, 2011, faculty met with members of the Council to outline new ideas for co-curricular initiatives, common hour series, and colloquia. The Center for Urban and Global Studies suggested there might be potential to design new courses related to these initiatives.

3. Improve transportation options for students using Hartford in courses or to attend events or civic venues.

Improvements to transportation options for students include:

- bus passes to all students
- enhancement of the campus shuttle service
- the addition of ZIP cars to campus
- shuttle service to downtown Hartford on Thursday evenings and to West Hartford on Saturdays, an initiative of the Student Government Association.

Those with low or no costs attached:

1. Create a President’s Special Council to implement, oversee, and evaluate the effectiveness of these recommendations.

The President’s Council on Campus Climate was established in January 2008 and has been active since.

2. Strengthen our harassment policies, Code of Conduct, Integrity Contract, and judicial procedures and make sure they are consistent and effective.

The Council oversaw two significant reviews of our discrimination and harassment policies:

- an overall review included students, faculty, and staff in a rewriting of policy for personnel
- the second review made far more clear and explicit in the student handbook the language regarding acts of harassment and discrimination.

Public forums have been offered to discuss the review harassment policies as well as the integrity contract. Presently, student members of the Council have taken on a fresh review of the integrity contract.

Additionally, an **incident response team** is in place to serve as a locus for processing and responding to situations as they arise on campus.

3. Expand criteria for merit scholarships to include other proven indicators of quality beyond test scores.

Several years ago members of the Council were included in conversations about the Presidential Scholars program; since then this has not been a focus of the Council’s work.

4. Sponsor a competition for best organization of residential spaces.

This was implemented to the extent that it could be, and this recommendation remains an important one. Students have been and still are invited to submit requests for theme housing, which has expanded beyond the Fred and Praxis to a thriving wellness dormitory, single-sex housing, as well as other, smaller housing units that students have put together. Again, the kinds of resources—money and space—to expand this campus-wide are welcome. This would be among the most important recommendations to retain and develop further if investments were being made.

5. Advocate for curricular requirement that engages Hartford.

Any initiatives regarding curricular requirements need to come from the faculty.

6. Create an e-transcript for non-credit bearing community or intellectual activities.

This was not pursued by the Council but is under discussion by other committees on campus.

7. Expand mentoring programs for new faculty and staff.

The **Center for Teaching and Learning** was created 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, carry out Council recommendations under the aegis of the Center.

8. Hold campus-wide convocations with opportunity for dialogue each semester.

This recommendation has been visited and revisited, most systematically over the 2010-11 academic year that included a study of the social habits, behaviors, and patterns—especially alcohol use and risky behaviors as well as Greek life—among our student population; inventory of all common spaces on campus for their potential uses to benefit community life; and a review of common life of campus and the promotion of shared experiences and values.

There is consensus that a College-wide convocation of sorts—for the whole campus and not just the first year students—would be valuable. The challenges to implementing this are:

- the time in the academic calendar to do it;
- how to make it mandatory or incentivize participation by all;
- and funding something people felt is worthwhile and effective.

Much consideration has gone into this and it would be worth pursuing.

In the meantime, the Council introduced the idea of an annual campus climate action project as a means to engage various departments, offices, student groups and constituencies in shared learning and praxis. This year's project is **"Participating in Democracy"** and includes a film series, discussion tables at Mather, a common hour programs, and other such events as **"9/11 Ten Years Later: Contemplation and Commemoration."**

In partnership with faculty, staff, and student organizations, the Council has convened numerous conversations, town hall meetings, and dialogue groups, including

- the **"Conversations over Cocktails"** series that brought together the SGA, faculty, the Council, and student organizations;
- **"Let's Talk Trinity,"** (a response to trintalk incidents) where members of the Council would sit with students in Mather to probe climate issues;
- the **Campus Climate Coalition**, a working group of students who sought to identify, connect with, and follow through on all the little initiatives we had underway across campus to advance our mission of improving campus climate;
- and **"Give me liberty or give me lunch,"** which brings faculty and staff together with students at lunchtime.

Members of the Council have been actively involved in the rallies and protests on campus over the last several years.

9. Sponsor teaching discussions on fostering inclusive classrooms; work with First Year program to incorporate issues of community and responsibility more completely into the first year experience.

The Council has come to understand that whether climate issues are important as academic rigor is a matter of debate among faculty. Further incorporating issues of community into the first year experience would require revisiting the scope of that program and resources available to it.

This is a recommendation worth grappling with by the faculty and advocating through the Council.

10. Enable RAs to do more effective community building.

With budget reductions over several years, residential life resources have diminished. Yet the clear emphasis in that department continues to be community building and a reconfiguration of the residential life staff promotes this goal. Related is the creation of a staff position in the athletic department to oversee intra-mural and recreational athletics programming.

11. Call on Student Government Association to explore options for allocating Student Activity Fees differently, to allow them to fund a wider array of student activities and organizations.

The Student Government Association completely overhauled its committee structure and funding procedures to diversify student activities, to promote new and creative partnerships, and promote the goals of campus climate. The SGA provides significant resources for all of the theme houses and the cultural houses. Much SGA work emphasizes the transformation of social and cultural norms; they have been a ready partner at every turn in our work and have also generated important initiatives of their own. Social and cultural houses on campus benefit significantly from the leadership and involvement on the part of faculty and staff.

12. Add a question about diversity to the Trinity application.

The additional question was put in for a year and then taken out.

13. Extend orientation programming into the academic year; consider ways to expand on the possibilities and successes of PRIDE.

This has been considered and each year members of the Council sit on the Orientation planning committee. Inroads are made each year but a complete overhaul has yet to be realized. The basic challenges to radically changing orientation to emphasize intellectual engagement and involvement with the city of Hartford

- shortage of available faculty and staff over orientation weekend;
- resources to carry out such programs
- how to incentivize student participation in orientation programming.

To replicate the kinds of experiences provided by PRIDE or Quest programs for all students would be wonderful, had we the staff and financial resources to do so. This recommendation would be a priority if serious investment of resources were going to be made.

14. Require organizations to consider how their policies affect efforts at inclusion.

The campus climate coalition of several years ago; the Vernon-Allen initiative; recent examination of alcohol policy; and evaluation of the practices of Greek-letter organization have all revolved around the question of inclusion. More systematic approaches to this question are emerging.

15. Inform the Trinity community of all crimes, including student-on-student crimes, with appropriate sensitivity to issues of confidentiality.

All crimes are listed on the college website and anyone can gain access to them via Trinity Today.

16. Publicize Hartford area events more widely on campus.

Publicity addressed above.

17. Post more and better maps around campus.

This is not a recommendation the Council prioritized.

We consider these recommendations (some of which have significant costs associated with them) to be central to the achievement of our goals, and we urge their incorporation into the planning process:

1. Allocate more money for financial aid.

Student scholarship remains the College's first fundraising priority.

2. Restore funding for faculty opportunity hires and expand the program to include recruitment at all ranks.

The Council has been impressed with the increased diversity in new faculty hires over the last several years, especially during the economic downturn when procuring funds to fulfill this recommendation were out of the question and many schools stopped searches but Trinity kept its open and hired many new, highly qualified and diverse faculty members.

3. Continue to create and refit arts, cultural, exhibition and social spaces.

The capital campaign included a complete refurbishment of the Austin Arts center, and portions of a renovation have been completed. It is my understanding that the ambitious goals of the fundraising campaign had to be reduced in this area when the economy turned but that Austin remains a priority. A related project is the renovation of the Mather quadrangle, which will take place next summer.

4. Restructure residential options in accordance with the model chosen from the competition.

Once we have some good ideas, we'll need money to implement them. We have done what we can with no and reduced resources in this area and the council would be eager to see resources allocated to residential life.

5. Build a true student center.

The ideal is a student center but requires, again, resources we have not had. In the meantime, the renovation of the ground level of Mather Hall is a valuable project that is underway. This recommendation remains among the top priorities.

6. Hire a full-time arts director.

This is not a recommendation the Council has the resources to pursue. However, members of the Council are stepping up to implement a modest program to bring faculty and students together for arts and cultural programs on and off campus.

7. Sponsor annual co-curricular initiatives.

See above, recommendation #2. Co-curricular initiatives are a promising means of engaging the community in issues of campus climate. This should be looked at along with the Common Hour program and its funding.

8. Reinstate or strengthen Human Rights, Tutorial College and other programs that promote community and intellectual engagement.

Reinstating Tutorial College is cost prohibitive on account of the expense of hiring faculty to teach courses that go offline once departmental faculty head into tutorial work. Common Hour, the faculty in residence program, and a few other initiatives were efforts to respond to promoting community and intellectual engagement.

9. Expand funding for artistic, cultural and intellectual programs beyond existing levels.

To be clear, the Council received \$50,000 to do its work; a portion of that non-renewable fund still remains.

10. Strengthen programs like IDP that reach into the Hartford community and bring local people onto the campus as fellow learners.

Both IDP and the graduate studies program that draw from the community are not administered by the Council.

The kinds of large-scale reconfigurations of College life that the Council might promote include

- serious investment in the residential life system, both physically and programmatically;
- the building of a true student center or its equivalent on campus;
- promotion and significant investment in the First Year Program, Orientation, and the Office of Community Service and Civic Engagement as excellent means of promoting the transformations we seek;
- funding for co-curricular initiatives, Common Hour, and a College convocation of sorts to focus our shared experience.

This report offers just a thumbnail sketch of the work the Council on Campus Climate has undertaken these last several years. The principles we value in our efforts to promote inclusivity and move beyond tolerance are individual responsibility for self along with commitment to the greater good; the priority of student leadership in shaping climate and culture; and sustained collaboration among faculty, staff, and departments in moving initiatives forward.