

Part I: Introduction

Trinity College is not immune to the bigotry and closed-mindedness that have too often marked life in this country. Despite our rules, our hopes, and our high-minded pronouncements, our community has been marred repeatedly by malicious acts of racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of hatred. In the winter of 2006, following the posting of racial and homophobic epithets, vandalism and a public display of appalling racist and sexist insensitivity, Trinity students and faculty demanded a re-examination of the campus's policies and silences that may have contributed to an atmosphere where such offensive acts of hostility and intolerance could occur.

Following an all-campus open forum on November 15, 2007, President Jones and the Board of Trustees created a Charter Committee on Campus Climate to take a serious look at these issues. There had been many studies of the problem; this committee was to move beyond study to action. There had been several committees that had offered policy recommendations; this committee was not only to present recommendations but also to propose mechanisms to see that those recommendations are implemented. There had been committees charged with finding revenue-neutral solutions; this committee was charged with proposing recommendations without regard to cost.

The President and Trustees understood that achieving the results they sought required the participation of the entire Trinity community, and a process as transparent and democratic as the policies it would propose. It therefore created a committee consisting of three faculty, three staff, three administrators, three Trustees, and three students, and charged it with envisioning how best to strengthen the sense of community

on our campus, reinforce our sense of responsibility to each other, and help all of us better understand and appreciate new and different perspectives and ways of thinking.

Our committee began its work by collecting and examining the studies others had done before us (see Appendix A for a list of materials consulted). We requested ideas and proposals from the campus community, collected, organized, and discussed each one. The committee then divided into subcommittees to look at what we do at Trinity, where we do it, how we do it, and with whom, and how we communicate our values. The subcommittees interviewed a number of members of the College community to learn more about the forces that shape our community life, and how we might intervene in those processes. We also enlisted the support of the College Affairs Committee in drafting a statement of what we thought we should expect from members of the Trinity community (See Appendix B for Trinity's Statement of Community Principles.) We then combined forces once more and talked through and edited all these data and observations, and crafted a set of overarching goals and specific recommendations. In the final phase, we circulated a draft copy of our report to the entire campus and held three public forums and solicited emails to receive community feedback, which we then incorporated into the final draft. This report represents our best effort to embody, as well as promote, community.

We wrote our report with an eye toward action rather than study, and toward holistic rather than piecemeal approaches. We also propose specific implementation mechanisms, the most central being the creation of a presidential-level oversight committee, for moving our recommendations forward effectively and expeditiously. As a

result we believe that the report's specific recommendations, rooted in an overarching vision of the Trinity we can become, can begin to transform our community.

We also believe that these changes are urgent. Not only are we morally and intellectually compelled to combat those behaviors and ideas antithetical to our mission of training critical thinkers and global citizens, but we are also motivated by a pragmatic concern to sustain long-term institutional vitality. Demographic shifts occurring over the next decade assure that our future applicant pool will be more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse, will include more students from other nations, and from families who have not previously sent anyone to college. Trinity must respond now. We must be in the forefront with regard to these changes if we wish to remain competitive and provide an effective and meaningful education for our students.

We begin our report with principles, and with a vision already articulated in Trinity's Mission Statement: we seek to "free the mind from parochialism and prejudice." We envision Trinity as a distinctive community of engaged learners and open-minded world citizens. We hope to create a community within Trinity that is not only tolerant of difference but appreciative of the diversity of experience and perspective such differences bring. We hope to create a community in which we all feel responsible for each other, in which we all understand ourselves as personally responsible for fostering a sense of community, intellectual curiosity, and mutual respect. We emphasize that this report does not focus exclusively on students. We understand these as institutional issues that must be addressed in the policies and practices of administration, faculty and staff as well as of students.

We see our curriculum, our social lives, our work, our interactions, and our relationship with the larger community in which we live as interrelated. Therefore, the values of community, openness and responsibility that we seek must be embedded in everything we do. We also believe that transforming this community will take everyone's, not merely the students', best efforts. How can we move closer to achieving this vision? The second part of this report tries to answer this by identifying and explaining six goals, and offering specific recommendations to achieve those goals.

We offer two general comments before we present those goals and recommendations. In our efforts to understand the policies, practices and attitudes that shape campus climate, we came to see two distinct areas in which we operate. The first comprises structural matters such as how we spend money, how we govern ourselves, how we communicate, how we define our core mission and values, and the like. These are matters that can be altered by decisions and decree and it is these which we tried to address in our recommendations. We believe Trinity as an institution has a responsibility and an opportunity to provide what tools we can to build an inclusive and intellectually cosmopolitan community. We can and must make systemic, institutional changes in how we conduct ourselves and the business of the College. Individuals and the choices they make are constrained or liberated by the structures within which they operate.

However, we also understand that institutional change is not in itself enough. The second area we recognized as crucial to the development of community comprises how individuals think, feel, and act. We recognize that these are not easily swayed by or necessarily obedient to the dictates of imposed rules. It would be facile to suggest that structural changes will put an end to intolerance, meanness, or indifference, or that we

should not brace ourselves for new acts of bigotry and ignorance. This has several implications. First, if Trinity is going to change, each one of us must take responsibility for how his or her individual actions enhance or detract from community life. Second, if acts of intolerance, intimidation or coercion do occur, we must be ready to respond effectively to them, both with adequate and effective procedures and with a willingness on the part of each of us to stand up in the face of such acts.

These two areas of structure and attitude are interrelated. Structural changes will influence prevailing attitudes and prevailing attitudes influence individuals, but it will take time and persistence to bring about real and lasting change. Thus we see our report and recommendations as a starting point rather than an end point in this process.

A second observation regards the interrelationship of these proposals. We have described goals and designed specific proposals to enact them. But we are mindful of the fact that when it comes to implementation, many of these proposals are linked. For example, it is no use subsidizing tickets for Hartford events if there is no means of transportation available to get people from here to there. Nor is there any use to call for the refurbishing of arts or social spaces without creating a mechanism for deciding their use. Therefore we envision many of the proposals we offer below being addressed not piecemeal but as a set of coordinated initiatives that bring multiple proposals under one structure.

We don't have an answer to what those initiatives might be, but in our discussions we have seen some trends emerging. We see a broad initiative that would focus on events, another on improving residential and community life. A third would address

means of extending diversity at Trinity, and a fourth communicating our commitment to community. Each would incorporate multiple proposals within it.

An initiative focused on events requires thinking about the best structure for allocating program funds, coordination of groups planning such programs, how to provide transportation if needed, how to best advertise and generate audiences for these programs, and making sure there are enough quality spaces in which that programming can take place. Thinking about improving residential and community life requires coordinating proposals regarding Resident Advisors and Mentors, reconsidering ways to structure residences (both thematically and physically), promoting rules and behavioral expectations that build community and support, exploring control of social and community spaces, and so on. Enhancing our diversity is addressed in proposals regarding bridge, support and retention programs, outreach mechanisms, making sure spaces are available to support diverse groups, examining recruitment and admissions, and making sure support systems and rules are in place to create a welcoming environment. Communicating our commitments involves making sure ideals of responsibility, community, and intellectual openness permeate our curriculum, public relations and recruitment materials, and orientation and other programs.

In other words, the structures required to implement our proposals must be broadly conceived and carefully coordinated. This will require the support and goodwill of all the officers and offices of the College, and a coordinating and assessment body to oversee the process. Therefore, our first and central recommendation is the immediate creation of such a presidential-level oversight group, reflecting Trinity's multiple

constituents, to determine how to create the synergy among the proposals that could help to truly transform the College.

We end this section with a note of cautious optimism. The overwhelming support we received during this process, the number and quality of the suggestions and comments we received, and the goodwill we see on all sides reminds us that the vast majority in our community are committed to the institution and to one another, and are willing to engage in the honest self-examination required to begin the process of personal and institutional transformation. We have much to do but we do not want to underestimate the quality of community we already have at Trinity. Rather, we celebrate it, as a fundamental requirement for moving forward.

In Part II we list six specific goals that we see as crucial, explain why we think so, and list for each goal a set of specific recommendations. While the proposals are not ranked in strict order of priority, generally speaking the higher on the list, the more important we believe the proposal to be. In many cases specific operating details, which are crucial but complex, will have to be worked out after consultation between the new oversight committee and the individual, office, or organization responsible for implementing the proposal.

In the final section of the report we offer two priority lists. The first names those things we can begin to implement in the very short term, that are pressing and require a modest amount of money. The second list offers our sense of the most important recommendations to achieve our stated goals, regardless of the cost, for longer-term planning.