August 2012

Dear Geneseo Faculty Member:

Since the fall of 1999, I have started each semester with a letter to the faculty on some of the issues related to the administration of student life at Geneseo.

I have addressed such topics as the student involvement theory of Alexander Astin, how we define “co-curricular” activities, the role of the College Union, the impact of college on students, campus safety, Ernest Boyer’s conception of campus community, student civic engagement, and my vision for Student and Campus Life at Geneseo.

Reviewing these letters recently provided me with an opportunity to reflect upon the development of our Student and Campus Life programs during my time at the College. Last year, our Middle States accreditation visit provided another opportunity for those of us in Student and Campus Life to reflect upon our work, and to set our direction for the future. We were gratified that the Middle States team affirmed our contributions to the fulfillment of the mission of the College. Here are some statements taken directly from the Middle States report:

- The Division (of Student and Campus Life) has a structure designed to enhance the goal of transformational learning and has excellent programs that are known campus wide and are accomplished through a great deal of collaboration among the student life staff, faculty, and other college staff. The intentionality of this organization allows the Division to effectively impact the education of the Geneseo student.
- The Division is committed to assessment and there are numerous examples of how the information is used to evaluate and improve programs. Assessment data is also utilized in the planning process.
- There are several programs and activities offered through this unit that clearly meet the goals of transformational learning. Geneseo Opportunities for Leadership Development (GOLD) is highlighted across campus and nationally…. It is clearly well integrated as a collaborative effort with student life and academic affairs, as well as Bringing Theory to Practice. The number of programs, as well as the number of students who participate is admirable….
- The organization of the Center for Community and the College Union and Activities clearly helps to address the holistic needs of students. Programs like Bystander Intervention Training and Stand Up for One Another are distinctive programs that may provide models for emulation. Geneseo is to be congratulated for addressing important needs through such innovative programs as Geneseo Cares, Geneseo Goes to Town, and Into the Streets, to name a few. These initiatives provide transformational learning.
- Recognizing that new transfers are important to admissions and retention efforts, the development of “You Belong” is an example of a new program to assist the successful transition for those transfers. Goals such as social transition and academic transition continue to be assessed and adjusted for improvement. The program evolution further highlights the collaborative work culture in the division.
While we were pleased with the findings of the evaluation team, we certainly recognize that with a new academic year comes the opportunity to become even more effective in fulfilling the mission of the College and advocating for our students’ welfare.

When catching up on my reading this summer, one of the articles that I found particularly meaningful was *Reinventing the Extracurriculum: The Educational and Moral Purposes of College Student Activities and Experiences*, published in the *Journal of College and Character*. In it, Jon Dalton and Pamela Crosby of Florida State University, state that “the perennial challenge for student affairs staff in dealing with the extracurriculum is to find ways to accent the positive while eliminating or reducing the negative influences…. In order to promote positive student engagement, colleges and universities seek to create centripetal influences that pull students toward educationally purposeful and beneficial connections with academic classes and institutional mission.”

Dalton and Crosby go on to write about the need to establish “a cocurriculum core that consists of those student activities that are formally sponsored by student affairs and funded and staffed by the institution.” The programs, activities and services highlighted by the Middle States team, such as Geneseo Opportunities for Leadership Development (GOLD), Stand Up for One Another, You Belong and our extensive community service programs could all be seen to be part of the “cocurriculum core” at Geneseo. So too are other programs at Geneseo such as our Residential College Houses, our Cultural Harmony Week and other multicultural programs, our annual Student Leadership Symposium and Student-Athlete Leadership Summit, our Campus Standards Community Circles, and our Greek Life Values Integration Series.

While our core programs continue to evolve, we recognize that there is more to be done to address, again in the words of Dalton and Crosby, “connecting and integrating cocurriculum student activities with the formal academic curriculum.” There are, however, a number of examples that show that such integration is already taking place. One example from last year that involved connecting and integrating the cocurriculum and the formal academic curriculum was the collaboration between several Student and Campus Life staff members and students from Mary Mohan’s Conflict, Negotiation and Mediation (Communications 346) class to examine issues of town-gown relations. Another is the important work that is being accomplished through Real World Geneseo, a collaborative effort involving the School of Education and the departments of psychology, communicative disorders and sciences, institutional research, and chemistry as well as the Student and Campus Life Center for Community and the Milne Library. Another was the introduction of the Residential College Seminar (INTD 102) on hydrofracking held in one of our Residential College Houses, EcoHouse. Other examples of collaboration that we can point to include the visiting writer and artist series in another one of our Residential College Houses, Writers House; the work of several faculty and staff members that culminated in the submission of a Department of Justice Violence Against Women Campus Grant proposal; and the establishment of a liaison relationship between a College clinical psychologist and the students of Professor Susan Bandoni-Muench, a member of the biology faculty.

In the future we will be looking to build on this record of collaboration. One specific way we intend to do so is through the establishment of a centralized internship program in our Department of Career Development, something I know you will be hearing more about in the new year. We relish the opportunity, as described by Dalton and Crosby, to continue to work together with you, “helping to design and manage (the) many … influential … experiences students have in college,” and extend our best wishes as we embark on a new academic year.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Bonfiglio
Vice President of Student and Campus Life