

**CONCERNS ABOUT HIRING & FIRING PRACTICES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS
AND THE PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE TO OUR CONCERNS
(Do Not Circulate; Very Sensitive Material)**

Note: It is with immense reluctance that we release this information to the full faculty. We do so only after innumerable private interventions with the President and Chairman of the Board of Trustees over a five-month period. Aside from a job offer for Sheree in the CDO, we haven't been able to get the President or trustees to do much of anything, let alone launch an independent investigation. Perhaps if the full faculty learned what we have learned and kept secret (out of enormous respect for the status of confidential information and a desire not to damage other peoples' careers), the President would have to launch an investigation. As you know from the letter that the Group of 16 published in the *S & B*, information about Sheree's employment comes from her personnel file, which Sheree gave (and was free to give) to Ralph in September with the knowledge that he might have to go public with its contents, conversations that she had with Ralph before the settlement and confidentiality agreement, and accounts by those who accompanied Sheree to various meetings about her termination. Of course, Ralph and Sheree didn't talk about going public *after* a settlement; that became necessary when the settlement didn't include Sheree's reinstatement as associate dean of students. Ralph shared this and other material with us well prior to the cease and desist order, and he spoke of the need to release it to the faculty as it became clear that the President had no intention of addressing our concerns. We well understand the pain and awkwardness of sharing highly sensitive and confidential information, but the faculty as a whole needs to understand the basis for our concerns. Everything in this document has been checked to the best of our ability. There is nothing knowingly false; indeed, we have tried as much as possible to observe the two-source rule, and we have secured written statements from a range of high-level people. There are undoubtedly facts that we do not know, even exculpatory facts. There may be errors. We are not asking for conviction. We are asking for an investigation. Nothing stated herein is the opinion of, or written on behalf of, any organization to which any of the authors or sources of information belong or at which they are employed.

I Firing Practices

Sheree Andrews/July 2008 Review

In the review, Houston disagrees with the judgment of longtime Grinnellians, who vigorously praise Sheree's performance, in favor of his own negative assessment, which includes the accusation of her "instability" as a leader. Sheree is in the midst of a devastating personal crisis, one that requires daily visits to a hospital. She is an associate dean and director of residence life with nine years of service to the college and a very recent promotion (July 2007). The strong praise in the July 2008 review, which we quoted from in our *S & B* letter, finds support in Tom Crady's June 2007 review. That review concludes: "You are very organized and tasks that I assign you are completed quickly, accurately, and on time. This is very important to me since my work is held up when people do not complete their work. Finally, your leadership style has evolved positively over the past few years. I see less conflict in the office than two years ago. This doesn't mean that we can't disagree, but you are moving forward to resolve issues constructively. I am impressed. You are a pleasure to work with and I appreciate your honest and direct feedback. July 1st, your title will change to Associate Dean and Director of Residence Life. Keep up the good work!"

Houston has only been on campus full-time for about three months when he hands Sheree her July 2008 review. He has already instituted six-month reviews instead of the customary yearly ones.

At the conclusion of a meeting on July 31st, 2008 to talk about the review, Houston asks Sheree if she would like to leave Student Affairs. Sheree says, "No." In August, Houston will again ask her if she would like to leave, and again she will say, "No." (There is no other source for this claim than Houston, but Sheree was in the habit of keeping a detailed log of all job-related events and interactions.)

Sheree Andrews/September 2008 Termination

Sheree is charged with "insubordination" for stating, in the midst of an argument with Travis on September 3rd, 2008, that he is inexperienced. Travis has never been even an assistant or associate dean, let alone a dean. He has no high-level supervisory experience. With her husband directing Grinnell-in-Washington, Sheree was up all night taking care of one of her children before this exchange occurs.

At a meeting billed as an attempt at mediation, to which Sheree brings Vince Ekhart and Emily Savarese, Houston hands Sheree a termination letter after just five minutes. The letter, dated September 8th, 2008, speaks of her being "in over her head" as an associate dean. It does not mention the extenuating circumstance of her personal crisis or single parenting. The termination letter will be *followed*, not preceded, by a corrective action form. President Osgood himself delivers the corrective action form, dated September 4th, 2008, on September 13th, 2008 in his office. Even if we can't prove that the President delivered a back-dated corrective action form, we can say without question that the college wasn't interested in corrective action—that is, improvement in an employee's performance. The 4th of September is a Thursday; the 8th, a Monday. This means that Sheree had one full workday to turn things around.

The corrective action form contains the following complaints: photocopying the *Residence Life Coordinator Manual*, instead of binding it; telling "inside jokes"; and taking off her shirt at a meeting of residence life coordinators to reveal another one under it that says, "We give the shirts off our backs to students." Travis, who authored the corrective action form, describes this gesture as "perplexing" and "irrelevant."

The corrective action form also cites two missed meetings and tardiness as evidence of a lack of professionalism, even though Sheree's superiors—Houston and Travis--knew about her personal crisis and the need to attend to her family. The missed July 23rd deans group meeting occurs at the height of her personal crisis, with one of her children still in the hospital. The form further complains about poor organization, including not remembering on July 25th to provide keys to an RLC who was moving into his apartment. Travis writes in the CAF, "I recognize that you were dealing with the immediate aftermath of a family emergency but had his arrival been prepared in advance none of the confusion would have occurred...as we all know first impressions are so important." Finally, the CAF complains about confusion over whether Student Affairs was to pay \$200 of a \$1000 dinner hosted by the CDO for student staff from Student Affairs. There were apparently two empty tables at the dinner. Travis then summarizes, "Given the severity and totality of these incidents, I believe corrective action is warranted. While some verbal counseling actions were taken, the written counseling actions provided in this corrective action form will hopefully provide greater transparency so that we can work collaboratively to create a plan for your success." In other words, in the CAF dated September 4th, Travis believes that he and Sheree can work together and that Sheree can be successful. Yet, the form is not given to Sheree until September 13th, and in the meantime Houston presents her with a termination letter and a request for her resignation.

President Osgood, in his own letter to Sheree, dated September 12th, 2008, remarks, "I have been aware for the past two years of issues concerning your performance, issues that arose before we even interviewed Houston. I am not at all sure that I can yet add up the various conversations I have had

with your successive supervisors but there have been two themes: 1) an inability to perform consistently and well in the full range of your responsibilities and 2) occasional outbursts that were seen to be unprofessional and disproportionate to the situation." The President not only retrieves criticisms from the period before Sheree's promotion to associate dean, but he also disregards the judgment of Tom Crady, who speaks exuberantly in the June 2007 review about her many accomplishments, the positive evolution of her leadership style, and the diminution of conflict in Student Affairs. The President disregards as well the judgment of those who speak positively about Sheree in the July 2008 review. What is more, he fails to acknowledge the extraordinary context for Sheree's heated disagreement with Travis, even as he mentions her personal crisis generally.

In November, Sheree settles with the college.

A Person at Lewis & Clark College Writes to the Group of 16/December 2008

After the faculty letter in the *S & B* appears on-line, a low-to-mid-level person at L & C writes to a member of the Group of 16 to express sympathy for what Grinnell is experiencing under Houston Dougharty. The person sends a total of four emails. S/he complains about Houston's "toxic leadership style" and contends that the "distrust that he bred within our institution is still in a long process of being expunged." S/he expresses "frustration that Houston Dougharty continues to descend upon institutions, holding stations of increasing power, breeding mistrust, and speaking out of both sides of his mouth." We do not even think to inquire of anyone at Lewis & Clark until a member of the Group of 16 receives these provocative emails.

Parallel Dismissals: Is There a Pattern?

In one of the emails, the person from L & C claims that, shortly after arriving at the college, Houston forced the resignation of the director of residence life, an Asian-American woman. She was accused of ineffective leadership and an inability to work with others. She had been at the college for five years; Houston, for seven months. (The woman would remain in her position for two more months before leaving in April of 2007.) Ralph finds the woman, and she agrees to make a statement, which he drafts after interviewing her and which she then revises. The woman contends that virtually upon arrival, Houston created division and distrust. (All five of the L & C people with whom we end up communicating offer some version of this complaint.) With respect to the director's termination, Houston asked her repeatedly to tell her colleagues that she was leaving voluntarily, but she refused. The former director of residence life at Lewis & Clark College provides the names of three people who can confirm her story. Two of the three respond to an inquiry and, indeed, confirm it. One is a dean with 20+ years of experience at the college; the other is a director with 25+ years of experience. Both provide written statements about their interactions with Houston.

In a striking parallel, Houston moved against Sheree after roughly a half-year of (full-time) employment at the college. She, too, was accused of poor leadership and an inability to collaborate, and she occupied the position of director of residence life. In less than two years, on two different campuses, two experienced women are ushered out the door by Houston Dougharty. A third woman, the Dean of Students at Grinnell, Jennifer Krohn, was presented with an "opportunity" by Houston and Elena Bernal and offered some encouragement to leave. Jennifer had twenty years of experience as an associate dean and dean of students. With only seven years of post-masters experience and none as an assistant or associate dean, Travis is hired as Grinnell's new dean of students. Barely six weeks pass between Jennifer's departure in late April and Travis's hire in June.

Even if we stipulate that Houston has been brought in to be a change agent in Student Affairs and that cleaning house is part of that change, and even if we stipulate that an employer can fire at will so long

as he or she doesn't engage in discrimination, objections can be made to the manner in which that change is presented and instituted. If the departure of Jennifer Krohn and removal of Sheree Andrews were indeed part of an attempt to clean house, why weren't they declared to be such? A range of people from Lewis & Clark speak to us about their experience of Houston's change agenda while at their college for eighteen months from 2006-2008.

Restructuring at L & C

In her written statement, the now retired director of the health center at L & C relates that after she submitted her resignation for retirement, the head of counseling services did so, too, because he believed that Houston was about to remove him. Neither she nor the former counseling services director (he was still working at L & C as a psychologist) were invited to participate in the search, which sought to combine the health center director and director of counseling services into one position (the same search the dean complained about). The retiring health center director was asked by Houston for advice on how to reshuffle staff and was promised there would be no changes for a year. "He told members of staff as well. Of course, this was a lie," she writes. The retiring director complains about his treatment of "staff members who deserved so much more." "Houston was not a transparent leader though he repeatedly said he was," the retiring director contends. "We were happy to see him leave." She concludes her letter, "I feel for the school [Grinnell]."

The Need for an Ombudsperson

In her written statement, the retired director also notes: "After [Houston] left, the division required counseling and intervention with an organizational rescuer. We needed this. It amazes me what one person can do in only 18 months." A high-level administrator at L & C, with whom Ralph spoke and who is willing to speak to our trustees privately, confirms this account. The college's ombudsperson (at L & C the ombudsperson is a totally independent conflict-resolution agent) interviewed every member of Student Affairs division at the new dean's request and then did periodic follow-ups. The administrator reported that the "entire division was a basket case. Valerie [the ombudsperson] needed to heal us." According to the administrator, who was quoting the ombudsperson, Houston had imposed a regime of "unrelenting change." He literally changed everything: titles, positions, personnel, organizational structures, chains-of-command, stationary, and he apparently did so all at once. (The new dean at L & C has now gone back to the old way of doing things, the associate dean reported—in part to ease anxiety.) The administrator claimed that Houston preferred very young people who "would owe an allegiance to him and be ga-ga about him." He constantly used the language of transparency, the administrator said, without being transparent. "He was very manipulative." The administrator wanted us to understand that Houston has very good ideas and is very knowledgeable, but "when he puts the theory into practice, it's a disaster." "All he does is make people very, very angry." The administrator contends that the provost at L & C remains quite fond of Houston and that Houston enjoyed some support at high levels outside of Student Affairs. Change was needed at L & C, the administrator said, but not this change and not in this way. Another high-level administrator said that he was "appalled" by Houston's leadership style and "over-zealous self interest." "He was notoriously underhanded," this administrator claimed. He was "personally very disappointed with Houston. In the span of eighteen months, he didn't do anything to bring people together." This administrator began his phone conversation with Ralph by saying, "I didn't want to respond to your email, but I felt I had a moral obligation to tell you that you were barking up the right tree."

II Hiring Practices

Hiring Houston Dougharty

Knowing what we know, the Group of 16 asks, did the search committee for a new Vice-President for Student Affairs at Grinnell practice due diligence? Eliza Willis assures us that references were called and appropriate procedures were followed, but she also says, "Of course, the search committee just handed its recommendations to Russell who then, I assumed, did further reference checking. The final selection was totally up to Russell." A key question: how many people *at L & C* did the committee and/or Russell talk to? Who were they? Were people below and beside Houston contacted? How could we not have detected any sense of this dissatisfaction and turmoil? As the second high-level administrator at L & C put it, "If anybody had called me during the [Grinnell] search, "I'd have said, "Take another look."

Hiring Travis Greene

The second high-level administrator at L & C reports being "totally shocked" when he learned that Travis had been appointed dean of students at Grinnell. In the summer of 2007, just one year before this appointment, Travis was doing an internship at L & C with Houston. "It's crazy to let someone with that level of experience be in charge of Student Life," this administrator remarked. This feeling was echoed by the first high-level administrator. As the first administrator pointed out, it took Houston many years in the profession and two associate deanships at large universities before he was appointed dean of students for the first time in 2006 at Lewis & Clark. (At the University of Puget Sound Houston served briefly as interim dean before that.)

Scrutiny of Travis's experience reveals a number of fairly low- to mid-level positions. Let us stipulate that Travis is talented and full of potential, but even a cursory look at the Student Affairs hierarchy of the University of Maryland, his most recent place of employment and the institution at which he is pursuing his doctorate, reveals his inexperience in a significant leadership position. Working out of the Office of Student Conduct in the Division of Student Affairs, Travis held the position of "Coordinator, Education & Outreach." Above him were the Director, Associate Director, and two Assistant Directors, and he was but one of three Coordinators. Before that, at the Art Institute of Chicago, he served as one of two Directors of Campus Life--there was one for "Student Experience" and another for "Student Success." He was below the Vice-President for Student Affairs/Dean of Student Affairs and the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. He was likely below the Assistant Dean of Residence Life, too. Finally, at Iowa State, Travis was even lower in the chain of command--indeed, well below the Dean, Associate Dean, and three Assistant Deans. He was just one of a number of student service coordinators. To repeat, he had never been an Assistant or Associate Dean anywhere before coming to Grinnell, and he had no high-level leadership or supervisory experience.

When asked if Travis's career trajectory, which culminates in his appointment as dean of students at a highly selective school like Grinnell, seems plausible, longtime professionals in the field all say, "No." "He could easily have been appointed assistant dean," one says. "Associate dean is a stretch but still conceivable. Dean? No way."

Circumvention of Proper Search Protocols at L & C

A dean at L & C provides a statement about Houston's involvement in a search for an Associate Dean of Students/Director of Wellness Services/Chief Psychologist in April and May of 2007. He speaks of "Houston's willingness to circumvent proper search protocol in a unilateral way." To the dismay of personnel in the Health Cluster, Houston refused to appoint a search committee and to show them the applicant pool. Only after the dean complained to Houston and he left an angry message on the dean's voicemail (about their unwillingness to "trust" him) did Houston allow the dean to review the applications. A search committee, however, was never formed. The dean concludes his letter with this statement: "Had we on the Health Cluster not intervened and questioned the process and asked for

input, I am convinced that Houston would have proceeded by himself to select the finalists to bring for on-campus interviews." We later receive a second report of procedural violation--this one involving a failed search for a position in which Houston then simply hired someone himself.

Substantial Prior Relationship

With minimal research, it quickly becomes apparent that Houston and Travis have known each other for a long time. They have worked together at three institutions before coming to Grinnell: at Iowa State University (where Travis did his MA), at the University of Puget Sound, and at Lewis & Clark College. Here is what the web page announcing the University of Puget Sound's "Diversity Theme Year" says: "Travis Greene worked at UPS over the summer and will be returning to work with groups on campus on diversity issues. Travis may also assist 'Understanding Sexuality' and present a workshop for faculty and staff interested in participating in the SafeZone project." We have already mentioned Travis' summer 2007 internship under Houston at L & C, for which, two sources report, he received "full room and board" and some sort of stipend. The two men have also published papers together and presented together at conferences. Did Houston fully disclose this relationship as the search commenced?

The Search for Dean of Students at Grinnell

We begin with questions about the search committee's composition. On the search committee were Erin Duran '09 (Stonewall Resource Center Coordinator 08-09), Elena Bernal '94 (Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and Achievement), Steve Briscoe (Director of Campus Safety and Security), Katie McMullen '09 (student-at-large), John Burrows '10 (SGA Vice President for Student Affairs), and the above-mentioned administrator. Other students participate in the search; some faculty members do as well by interviewing candidates and filling out forms. Why would there be, proportionally, so many students on the committee, as their opinions could be swayed? Why would regular faculty be kept off the committee and instead be asked to interview candidates and fill out forms with boxes? Why would they not be offered a chance to deliberate collectively? Other than Houston, why were there no significant Student Affairs personnel on the committee who might better be able to judge the candidates' respective credentials (what job titles actually mean, etc.)? Why was Steve Briscoe on the committee? Though an excellent head of campus security, how equipped was he to offer discerning judgments about candidates for this position? Why wasn't Joyce Stern on the committee or Sheree Andrews, who at that time was still in good standing? Why wasn't Jennifer Krohn invited to join the committee? The former Dean of Students was still employed by the college and could have offered crucial insights. Indeed, twenty years ago she worked in Student Life at Lewis & Clark.

We also have questions about the search itself. Did Houston recuse himself when the committee considered Travis? Elena Bernal said that Houston recused himself. A student on the committee said that Houston recused himself at the beginning of the search. An administrator, who joined the committee when there were ten semi-finalists, said that Houston did not recuse himself. In fact, in a written statement that she prefers to share with the trustees or an official investigative body, the administrator contends that Houston advocated against the other serious finalist, claiming that he "would not be able to relate to our students." If Houston did indeed recuse himself, at least at the beginning of the search, why would he then unrecuse himself? Why would he be participating in the deliberations at all, even if the students were opposed to the other finalist? The administrator says that she "did not know that Houston and Travis had worked together in different settings." She says that she *did* know that "Houston and Travis knew each other, or at least of each other." She and Elena both said that Houston told the committee that he knew five people in the pool. Travis was one of them. This, he apparently said, shouldn't surprise anyone, as Student Affairs is a relatively small profession.

Were procedures designed to ensure fairness manipulated and/or violated?

The Other Serious Finalist Is Diverse and, at Least on Paper, Appears To Be More Qualified

The field is winnowed to ten semi-finalists and then three finalists; only two of these finalists are serious contenders. Research reveals, and faculty who participated in the search confirm, that one is a member of a domestically under-represented group and can speak, like Travis, to LGBT experiences. This finalist is an associate dean for academic programs at a highly selective liberal arts institution, where he has been employed since 2001. He has held a range of positions there, including special assistant to the Vice President/Dean of the College, dean of the sophomore year experience, assistant dean of multicultural affairs, and associate director of campus life. Before that he held numerous positions in student life at Wesleyan University, the State University of New York at Geneseo, the College of the Holy Cross, Western Illinois University, and DePaul. These positions date back to 1995. The diverse finalist has a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation topic: "Sophomore Men: Their Growth, Relationships and Search for Direction at _____ University." He is a national expert on this topic and quoted in lots of articles on the web.

Grinnell's Diversity Policy and the Role of the College's Diversity Officer in this Search

What role did Elena Bernal play on the search committee? After all, she had been Interim Head of Student Affairs and was also the college's diversity officer. Can she be *on* a search committee *and* certify its results? Did she in fact certify that the search for dean of students was properly conducted? If Houston didn't completely recuse himself and instead participated in the finalist deliberations by advocating against the diverse candidate, should Elena have signed off on the search, if she indeed signed off on it? Should she have closed down the search at the very moment that Houston unrecused himself? How hard did she push for the diverse candidate? Even if we stipulate, as has been reported, that students were less fond of the diverse finalist, her job was to interrogate opposition to a clearly qualified—in this case, perhaps a more qualified—diverse candidate. Furthermore, in the context of diversity, what could Houston's claim that the other finalist "would not be able to relate to our students" mean? We know from the administrator's statement that the administrator pushed for the diverse candidate.

III The President's Response to Our Concerns

Inconsistencies and Contradictions

Over the break, Ralph repeatedly emails the President with the information that has come in, and he meets with him twice. He also communicates with two trustees. He asks the President in an email for a proper way to bring a complaint against a vice president and dean in a matter that involves the President, but the President doesn't get back to him. From the beginning he has suggested only that Sheree be reinstated with protected reviews. At a meeting, with Mark Schneider as a neutral observer, he informs the President of new material. He doesn't yet have some of the statements from L & C, particularly the ones about the "organizational rescue" and the "search protocol circumvention." The President says at this meeting, "I want to give Houston and Travis a second chance." Ralph inquires about restoring Sheree's first chance. The President asks Ralph to go and get Steve and Sheree because he wants to offer Sheree a job at the college. He thanks Ralph repeatedly for talking with him and, in emails, for "his commitment to Steve and Sheree." At this second meeting with Steve and Sheree, the President once again says that he "wants to give Houston and Travis a second chance," and that he has an excellent opportunity for Sheree. He offers her a job in the Career Development Office, where she

would be working under Elena Bernal, who as a soon-to-be new vice president will oversee the CDO. Sheree agrees to consider the position but later decides that she wants her old job back. It is the job for which she has been trained and in which she was very competent and much loved.

Further Inconsistencies and Contradictions: An Official Reprimand

At the very end of the break, Ralph emails the President to request a meeting at which the Group of (now) 18 can present their demands. He tells the President, in an admittedly brazen and exasperated way, about the many problems at L & C and asks if Grinnell practiced due diligence when hiring Houston. He mentions having spoken to a lawyer about various legal issues. The next day he receives an email from the President, ccd to the Dean, Elena Bernal, David White, Craig Shives, Mark Schneider, Eliza Willis, and Mark Montgomery, that accuses him of "harassing faculty, staff, and students." The President contends that he has received multiple complaints. Ralph has only communicated with one student, a former advisee and current assistant to Elena Bernal, by email twice, to which he received no response. He has spoken with a number of faculty and staff. The following night, he will find in his campus mailbox an official letter of reprimand in which he is accused of "improperly contacting" people and ordered to "cease and desist" with respect to this matter. The good citizenship clause in the *Faculty Handbook* is cited as an implied threat to his tenure. Earlier that afternoon, the Group of 18 walks to the President's office and demands the reinstatement of Sheree with protected reviews and an investigation of hiring and firing practices in student affairs. The President later responds by questioning the accuracy of the information that Ralph assembled and by claiming that it was improperly gathered. Despite the fact that Grinnell is a small, residential liberal arts college that boasts close student/faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom, the President asserts that issues in Student Affairs are beyond the faculty's purview. He also expresses full confidence in the Student Affairs leadership. The Sunday before these vents, Mark Schneider, acting on behalf of the Group of 18, asks Houston and Travis if they will suspend the search for Sheree's replacement as a good faith gesture. They say, "No." Mark Schneider is able, however, to get on to that search committee.