

December 2005

## *A Moment for Grove City College*

My Moment for Grove City College this time will focus on what we call Student Life and Learning. At its core, this letter will speak about what life is like for our students outside the classroom, i.e., in our residence halls, in our 100-plus clubs and organizations (including social organizations and organized sports), and life in general on campus.

Because 93 percent of our students reside on campus (the remaining seven percent are almost all commuters and take part in many activities on campus outside the classroom), it is an important subject. To our students, it is how they live together, a culture of living and learning bound up, in part, by rules (yes, rules) principally motivated by the promotion of mutual respect and the acquisition of transitional life skills.

First, a bit of background, much of which will be familiar to Grovers. Remember just above I wrote the word “rules?” That word is anathema to lots of folks and lots of colleges and universities today. Some of our more senior alumni will perhaps be quite surprised to learn that many other campuses have co-ed dorms, co-ed bathrooms, etc. And the principal rules are often those criminal statutes that are in force in the municipal/state/federal jurisdiction of the school! Even Christian colleges vary significantly when it comes to student life.

Where is our College today in regard to student life? First, let’s look back in time... Just before she retired in 2004, Vice President for Student Affairs Nancy (Lee ’54) Paxton was engaged in that most difficult of all tasks, i.e., “cleaning out her desk, files, etc.” Like my mom, she had saved a lot of “stuff” through the years (you never know when you might need it!). Among other things, Nancy sent me the “rules” for the young women who, as GCC students, lived on lower campus in Colonial in the 1920s. Here are a few:

1. Women were not permitted to wear shoes between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.
2. Very early and strict seven-day curfews were in place.
3. Ladies could go downtown only for 20-minute intervals and only to what were called tea rooms.
4. And finally, young ladies and gentlemen could not be seen together except at college sports contests. As soon as the game ended, they could no longer be seen in each other’s company.

(The gentlemen also had a number of similar rules.)

Well, things are not quite the same today, but we do still have rules. I write to each student at the beginning of the year and say this about our rules:

“We do have rules of conduct... Before the rules, however, comes something more important and that is the mutual respect we must have for each other and for each other’s property. Our rules and approach to student life and learning are consistent with a college that is Christ-centered and where that most fundamental of Christian concepts, the ‘Golden Rule,’ still has meaning and application.”

We do care, and in fact care deeply, about our students. Accordingly, our education process works 24/7 with the mind, body and spirit of all our students. All of us alumni can, I believe, relate to this. This caring approach will continue and **that is a promise.**

Let’s look at things today. All of us remember some wonderful men and women who served as Student Life deans: Robert Thorn, Mary Florence Taylor, Miss Jean MacLeod, Dr. Fred Kring, Dr. Ross Foster, Dr. Nancy Paxton, Barbara (Bechtell ’48) Eshelman, etc. In fact, hundreds of Grover recollections and stories surround these noted and memorable leaders! I probably know a couple of hundred myself! And, I have heard many of the others.

Pictured above with students is Dr. Jean-Noel Thompson, who succeeded Mrs. Paxton upon her retirement. I recently asked him a number of questions about our student life philosophy and practices and I want to share his responses:

**RGJ:** What is the overriding emphasis of Student Life and Learning at Grove City College?

**JNT:** As we consider the experiences of our students outside of the classroom, there are several areas and levels of emphasis that deserve recognition. In short, our umbrella theme or foundation that guides such co-curricular interaction with students is the following: We view each and every student as a **“young adult professional in training.”** The college years are arguably the most formative years in which young adults learn to successfully navigate personal, social and professional opportunities independent of the daily guidance of their parents or guardians. As Student Life and Learning staff, we can either sit back and merely respond to a host of student issues, or take an active and intentional approach in shaping young adult individuals for life. We enthusiastically



choose the latter, as we are committed to creating opportunities beyond the classroom and laboratory that will challenge students toward moral character driven by Christian principles, social responsibility and personal excellence.

One such opportunity that some might overlook involves our approach to addressing student disciplinary issues. For instance, under our “mold” vs. “scold” approach, we see student disciplinary cases as yet another opportunity to foster growth and maturity in our students. Much can be learned about one’s character in times of trial and conflict. We commit to meeting in person with each and every student who violates a student conduct policy. In these meetings, we focus not only on the consequences of the student’s action or inaction, but also on providing students relevant opportunities to grow beyond such negative conduct. Much counsel and prayer are involved in these sessions. Moreover, such emphasis on moral development and personal responsibility through Christian counsel will serve our students for a lifetime.

**RGJ:** What changes are being made within the residence halls that foster further growth and learning among our students?

**JNT:** The residence hall experience (referred to by some as “dorm life”) is not simply a place for students to sleep and eat (i.e., the “bed and breakfast” mentality). Rather, it is an active community full of opportunity for social and civic development among students. Recently, we have made and are making several positive changes based on this paradigm. For starters, through comprehensive and purposeful training, we have reconstructed the responsibilities of our Residence Life staff. In addition to the basic responsibility of maintaining a residence hall full of students, Resident Directors are full-time professional staff members who invest in their student Resident Assistants (RAs) through strong one-on-one and group mentoring relationships. Such efforts include a new leadership training component for our student RAs focused on assessing and developing leadership potential. These students are encouraged to integrate their Christian worldview into daily interactions with peers in the residence halls. As a result, we equip them not only for their role in developing living and learning communities in the residence halls, but also for the challenges they will face far beyond the Grove City College experience.

Speaking of challenges beyond the college years, our “step up before you step out” approach in the new Colonial Hall Apartments for senior students will contribute immensely to such efforts. We are implementing life skills programs particularly aimed at these students nearing their transition to post-collegiate life. We will be offering workshops and other resources in the areas of personal finances and mortgaging your first home, the first years of marriage and family, civic and community leadership, etc.

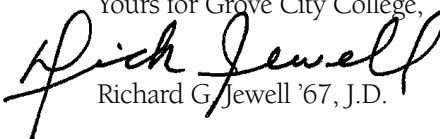
**RGJ:** What is the current status of our fraternities, sororities and housing groups in relation to the general campus community and the Grove City College mission?

**JNT:** Upon my arrival at Grove City College as the new Vice President for Student Life and Learning and Dean of Students, a student asked me the following question: Are you pro- or anti-Greek? My response was something like this: I am not so much interested in the name or title held by a group, but rather the extent to which the members of a campus group serve one another, as well as positively contribute to the greater campus community (Greek letters or no Greek letters). In my discussions with seasoned and recent Grove City alumni, current students, faculty and administration, I have learned that Greek life at Grove City has seen its ups and downs. Allow me to summarize by saying that, as of late, we have seen many more ups than downs. Through much open dialogue, active mentoring and planning, our eight sororities and nine fraternities are most closely aligned with our vision and values than perhaps at any other time in College history. Our student leaders in these organizations have worked swiftly and with great wisdom to realign their purpose and practices with the Grove City College and Student Life and Learning mission, while maintaining their uniqueness and tradition. Last year we witnessed a 30 percent increase in the number of students who rushed fraternities and sororities, and anticipate even more impressive numbers this year. Our men’s housing groups are also in positive dialogue with us and are positioned to improve upon many of the good things they contribute as well. While our work is not yet done in this area, we are pleased with the early assessment.

**RGJ:** It is highly recognized that Grove City students put much time in for studying. As an effort to achieve a healthy balance, what social and recreational outlets are available to students on campus?

**JNT:** Contrary to popular belief that Grove City students are all academic work and no play, our students and staff have cultivated one of the most active and exciting campus life experiences I’ve seen. As you have already mentioned above, our students are actively involved in more than 100 clubs and organizations, including special interest groups, faith-based and service organizations, mission trips, honorary groups, and fraternities and sororities. Within any given week, we host several social activities, including big-name concerts, student-led coffee concerts in the Student Union, ballroom dancing, movie nights, talent shows, drama one-acts, and the list goes on and on. If this is not enough, more than 60 percent of our student body participates regularly in 30 different intramural sports and seven club sports programs. Furthermore, recreational space such as Ketler Rec. and South Rec. have been magnificently transformed through creative and cheerful renovations in part due to the wonderful giving of a number of alumni. No doubt our students offset their hard academic efforts with activities that are fun and that occur on a truly vibrant campus.

**RGJ:** Thank you, Dr. Thompson. As you can tell (and as many alumni know), a Grove City College education doesn’t just occur within the classroom. Our entire campus experience is intended to be a learning experience. We will continue that tradition and approach and **that, too, is a promise!**

Yours for Grove City College,  
  
Richard G. Jewell '67, J.D.