Charting the Future

Dean of Students Office

November 26, 2003
I. PAST: REFLECTING ON OUR HERITAGE

The position of Dean of Students (initially separated as Dean of Women and Dean of Men) has been an integral part of the University of Northern Colorado since shortly after the founding of the school in 1889. The title of Dean of Women was first given to Louise Morris Hannum in 1904. She was concerned with the general welfare of the women students, particularly with “womanly conduct and attitude” according to the 1907 Cache La Poudre Yearbook. Thomas Jefferson Mahan served as the first Dean of Men in 1929. Both of these Deans were concerned with the general welfare of the “girls” and “boys,” respectively.

In addition to the positions of Dean of Men and Dean of Women, the position of Dean of Students was created in the mid-fifties and first held by Jack Shaw who had overall responsibility for all of the Student Affairs functions. Ted Nelson, Dean of Students in the 1970s, had a title change to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Jerry Tanner, Dean of Men, during Nelson’s tenure then became Dean of Students. His office of 6.4 FTE included three Associate/Assistant Deans who functioned as generalists and had specific assignments in the areas of discipline, scholastic standards, problem solving, undeclared major advising, total student withdrawals, fraternity/sorority advising and honorary advising. In 1975, many of the functions of the Dean of Students Office expanded to the University Center in a satellite office. When Tanner became Vice President in 1980, Jean Schober Morrell became Dean of Students and all of the responsibilities of the Dean of Students Office (6.8 FTE with the addition of orientation and study abroad), were moved to the University Center except discipline, which was moved to the Vice President for Student Affairs Office.

The Dean of Students Office has always been proactive. As a need was discovered, a new program was developed including functions such as undeclared advising, two-day orientations, career and self-exploration classes, study skills, tutoring, study abroad programs and disability services. Some of the services were later moved to departments with compatible programs. When the Ombuds Office was eliminated in 1982, students contacted the Dean of Students for conflict resolution issues.

During a reorganization in 1985, the Dean of Students staff felt that orientation and undeclared advising needed more visibility and suggested dividing the office and staff, creating a separate Academic Advising Center (now known as the College Transition Center). A few years later, the Dean of Students Office moved to Carter Hall to share an office suite and staff with the Vice President for Student Affairs. When the Associate Vice President position was eliminated in 1995, the responsibility of discipline was moved to the Dean of Students. In 1999, the Vice President for Student Affairs position was eliminated and classified staff positions were moved to other areas. As a result, the Dean of Students Office has now been reduced to 2 FTE: the Dean and a classified staff administrative assistant.

II. PRESENT DESCRIPTORS: FULFILLING THE MISSION

The purpose of the Dean of Students Office is to enhance and recognize student learning and personal responsibility through resolving student issues including consultation with faculty and staff; responding to student concerns raised by faculty, staff and parents; disciplining and educating students who have exhibited conduct incompatible with the academic mission of the University; serving as an information and referral center for the campus community; and
coordinating a student recognition and awards program for academic and leadership achievement.

The Dean of Students Office supports the University’s mission and vision statement “to be a leading student-centered university.” Activities of the office work to prepare students “to think and act responsibly in a dynamic, diverse and global society.” The Dean of Students Office also promotes “a student-centered atmosphere of integrity that is grounded in honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.” Programs coordinated by the Dean of Students Office promote “an environment in which … excellence is sought and rewarded.”

The Dean of Students Office has a wide range of responsibilities and is staffed by 2 FTE: the Dean of Students and a classified staff administrative assistant. In addition to staff salaries, the office maintains a budget of $9456 for all operational and travel expenses. The Dean oversees a multitude of responsibilities in addition to the specific function as Chief Disciplinary Officer. The Dean of Students Office is located in Carter Hall where it shares space and equipment with the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Issue Resolution
In order for UNC to exemplify “Colorado’s Best University Experience,” it is critical that students know that the University concerns itself with their welfare. The Dean of Students Office assists students on a daily basis in resolving a variety of issues and concerns related to University policies, procedures and/or personnel. The Dean provides consultation, training, direction and support for faculty and staff related to student concerns, student behavioral issues, academic misconduct, emergency situations, policies and procedures. The office also responds to a growing number of student issues and concerns that are presented by parents.

The office ensures that a personal and compassionate approach is taken in coordinating a response to an emergency situation or tragedy that affects the campus community or its members. Collaboration among offices, faculty and staff facilitates a means by which to connect with family and friends in a caring and respectful manner. Examples range from student accidents or serious illnesses to death.

In resolving student issues, the Dean of Students Office works closely with the Provost’s Office, academic deans, department chairs and faculty across campus. Connections are made with many service areas primarily including the Registrar’s Office, Student Financial Resources, Admissions Office, Disability Access Center, Residence Life, Counseling Center, Health Center, College Transition Center and Accounts Receivable.

Discipline
The Dean of Students serves as the Chief Disciplinary Officer on campus by providing daily leadership for the enforcement of student rights and responsibilities interfacing with academic departments, Residence Life, Greek Life, UNC Police Department and other units in order to promote a campus climate that fosters civility and academic integrity. Ongoing consultation, training and support are provided to faculty and staff members regarding disciplinary procedures, due process considerations and student behavioral issues. The Dean ensures that students who are accused of violating the University Standards of Conduct are treated in a fair, reasonable, systematic manner. Informal disciplinary hearings are held after the student has received notice of the allegations. The Dean also represents the University during a formal hearing if a student
requests one after being suspended or expelled from the University through an informal hearing. Holding students accountable for their conduct through the disciplinary process is intended to provide a positive, educational experience for students, resulting in personal growth and a greater understanding of one’s responsibilities as a member of the university community and the society at large. Parents have become more involved with the disciplinary process as FERPA will allow. The Dean is involved with a presentation at orientation regarding rights and responsibilities, sexual assault and substance abuse issues and also contacts with parents through the Parental Notification Policy regarding their students’ violation of alcohol and drug policies.

It is critical to establish, maintain and promote effective working relations with relevant campus offices and external agencies whose operations are relevant to the University disciplinary process. For this responsibility, the Dean works closely with Residence Life; the UNC Police Department; the Counseling Center; Assault Survivors Advocacy Program (ASAP); Greek Life; Drug, Alcohol, Tobacco Education Office and the University General Counsel. With student behavior becoming more public and high profile, it necessitates a close working relationship with the University Media Relations Department. Outside of the University, the Dean has worked with the Greeley Police Department, District Attorney, Greeley Municipal Judge and Colorado’s Attorney General’s Office.

The Dean of Students is responsible for the development, dissemination, interpretation and enforcement of the University Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, which includes the Student Code of Conduct. The Dean is collaborating with faculty and students to create a comprehensive approach to creating a culture of academic integrity. This has resulted in the development of an Honor Code by the Academic Integrity Task Force on which the Dean serves. The Honor Code stresses the five fundamental values that are expressed in the University’s value statement in the mission: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. The Dean of Students Office has been heavily involved in the dissemination of the Code across campus.

The Dean of Students stays abreast of regional and national issues through participation in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA). These associations disseminate weekly reports and sponsor annual meetings where current trends, education and information on law and policy issues related to the student affairs field are disseminated and discussed. The Dean currently serves as an ASJA national officer.

**Awards and Recognition**
Academic and leadership “excellence is sought and rewarded” through student recognition and awards coordinated by the Dean of Students Office. These programs have included an Honors Convocation to recognize departmental scholars from each undergraduate academic department, UNC’s Next Scholars to recognize first term freshman for academic achievement, Dean’s List to recognize student’s annual scholastic achievement, and the Robert and Ludie Dickeson President’s Prize for Leadership Award to two graduating seniors to recognize outstanding leadership. Due to budget reductions, UNC’s Next Scholars and Honors Convocation were to be eliminated for the 2003-2004 year. However, the Provost has found one-time monies for a continuance for this fiscal year. Such recognition programs continue to support the mission of the University and its reputation for excellence.
Collaboration with University Entities
The Dean of Students closely works with the student government leaders from the Student Representative Council (SRC). The Dean initially chaired the Student Governance Task Force that designed the SRC structure and currently serves as the Administrative Representative on the Council. Because of the broad perspective of the Dean of Students Office, the Dean is a part of University-wide committees (i.e. University Planning Council, Academic Review Committee, University Retention Committee, Honors Coordinating Council, University Liaison-Campus Religious Organization, University Assessment Committee).

Demands
Because of the constant and increasing contacts by students, faculty and staff, the need for the Dean of Students Office is evident. The demand for the resolution of discipline behavioral issues is manifested in and out of the classroom. Conduct that is incompatible with the academic mission of the University is evidenced in classroom behavior, academic misconduct, residence hall behavior, student organization behavior, illegal alcohol/drug possession and other behaviors addressed by the UNC police officers. The external demand for services has grown with more concerns expressed by parents. The Dean also provides a liaison for concerns from the greater community regarding behavioral issues. There have been approximately 4400 contacts with the Dean of Students Office during the past year.

III. THE FUTURE: EXPRESSING OUR DREAMS
To remain competitive in the State of Colorado, UNC’s niche is the individualized attention to student welfare which enables the University to be “Colorado’s Best University Experience.” The Dean of Students Office will continue to provide individualized attention to the full spectrum of the student population ranging from those with behavioral issues to those being recognized with extraordinary talents. The Dean of Students Office will continue to enhance the reputation of the University by providing a positive relationship with the campus community and the greater Greeley community.

As was discussed previously, due to budgetary reductions, two of the recognition and award programs were eliminated. These events (UNC’s Next Scholars recognizing freshmen with a 3.5 or higher GPA and Honors Convocation recognizing departmental scholars from each undergraduate department) involve recognition programs attended by approximately 500 family members each. It is proposed that these programs be institutionalized as an award opportunity for students supporting UNC’s mission statement where “excellence is sought and rewarded.”

An area, which can be enhanced in the future, would be an expansion of the partnership with academic units to improve academic integrity by students in the classroom thereby reducing the incidences of academic misconduct. A University-wide effort of “Ethics Across the Curriculum” is being discussed by Richard Blanke and the Academic Integrity Task Force. The Dean will provide additional in-service training and materials to faculty designed to reduce academic misconduct. The faculty will be encouraged to refer students to the Dean of Students Office for tracking purposes and possible non-academic sanctions which could include an ethics workshop yet to be developed.

Discipline issues are increasingly becoming more complex. Nationally issues such as hate speech, violent behavior, riots, substance abuse and sexual assault have been growing concerns
on campuses. Increased accessibility to technology has brought new dilemmas to the discipline forefront with computer misuse pertaining to first amendment, copyright and additional academic misconduct issues. The Chief Disciplinary Officer must continue to be trained and, therefore, knowledgeable about these issues. In order to better manage discipline cases, the purchase of a university-wide tracking system would be beneficial.

Another dream in the area of judicial affairs would be to have the resources to offer additional programs to promote student learning, development and retention. One such program would be in the area of restorative justice, which would provide opportunities for students to hear directly from others as to how they had been negatively impacted by the students’ behaviors. The program would then provide opportunities for students to repair the harm they may have caused to others or the community. This action would give students a “real world experience” when they consider the consequences of their actions. Both CU (.5) and CSU (.25) have FTE dedicated to a restorative justice program. Another viable program in the area of discipline would be the option of mediation where a trained mediator could assist students in resolving conflicts that resulted from their behavior. Both CU and CSU have an ombuds officer who specializes in mediation. These Universities have separate conflict resolution/judicial affairs offices that can focus on discipline issues.

Prevention is critical to improve the health and safety of students. UNC’s Focus Class, which discusses substance abuse issues, is sponsored by the Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Education Office and is well received. In addition, there are several commercial substance abuse prevention web-based programs that have shown positive results in decreasing substance abuse by students.

Some of the increase in behavioral issues is as a result of psychological issues. More students are coming to the University with clinically identified mental health issues. As a result, the increase in staffing in the Counseling Center has been critical and utilized by referrals from the Dean of Students Office who will continue to work closely with the Counseling Center.

The increase in contact by parents has been discussed previously in this report. The Dean of Students Office would like to initiate a parents association which would initially be comprised of freshman parents. A communication piece could be developed to be distributed by e-mail, which would be a cost-effective method. Parent e-mail addresses were collected during summer orientation. Currently, freshmen parents are receiving weekly e-mail messages including success tips and resource information to assist their students. This program, which has been developed by Goal Quest, has been well received and should be continued. This effort has come through Enrollment Services and is being coordinated by the College Transition Center.

Communication between students and the University is essential. A University student listserv could be one avenue to increase communication. Students could be reminded of important deadline dates and other information that would be of assistance.

There are several programs that have been discussed over the past few years at UNC that would help improve retention of students. Several different Freshman Year Experience Seminars have been attempted at UNC with mixed results. There are some national models as well as a program at CSU that could be studied. A task force began meeting last year to design such a Freshman Year Experience class. It would be beneficial if the task force were resurrected. The
Freshman Year Experience Seminar could be taken for credit through the ID 108 course offering and could orient a new student to campus and to student and academic life. The results would be an increased retention of students. The Goal Quest program for new freshmen could tie into the class. The coordination of this program may fit best with the College Transition Center.

Academic advising at UNC has been the focus of discussions for many years. The academic advising system could be improved through advisor training and by rewarding good academic advising as part of faculty evaluation. Continued cooperation among the Academic Advising Centers across campus will be beneficial.

For students to be successful academically, they need to receive feedback. Mid-term grades could be helpful in this process for freshmen, transfers and those students on academic probation. This feedback could encourage the student to seek assistance, speak with the instructor, receive tutoring or possibly withdraw from the class.

If the University is to demonstrate that it is a student centered institution where “Students First” is a true motto, the University must consider reinstating a Division of Student Affairs. For the majority of the history of this institution there has been a person in the role of a Senior Student Affairs Officer who was a part of the President’s executive staff and whose primary responsibility was the general welfare of students. Reinstating a Vice President for Student Affairs through a national search could help in the coordination of the student affairs functions on campus, breaking down the silo affect. Currently the unit directors in student service areas attempt to communicate and work with other areas to better serve students. A position could better ensure this communication occurs and provide leadership, vision and a common ground for the Division. Areas to be included in a Student Affairs Division could be the enrollment services areas, multicultural affairs areas, Dean of Students, Counseling Center, Health Center, Student Activities, Residence Life and the Women’s Resource Center.

Thank you for the opportunity to dream.