

Transcript

Barry Thomas:

Grinnellians, friends and family of Grinnell College, welcome to Grinnell in Iowa City. My name is **Barry Thomas** and I'm a graduate of Grinnell, in the **class of 1997**. I currently am on the faculty of the business school at the University of Iowa; for the last seven years I've had the honor of being a trustee of Grinnell College, and I currently serve as the chair of the board's audit and assessment committee. Before I continue I would like to also introduce you to another Grinnell staff member tonight. With us tonight is Beth Halloran, who is way in the back. So, Beth is our new vice president for development and alumni relations. She's in the back waving to us, so, "Hello, Beth! And welcome to the Grinnell family!"

Well, as a trustee, there are certainly a number of duties, but I think all trustees — whether at Grinnell or at any other college — would say that their No. 1 duty is to pick the leader of the college. In our last search that began in 2009, we were seeing a landscape in higher education in which we had rapidly changing demographics. We saw advances of technology that are taking place faster than any other time in history. And certainly we were deep in the midst of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. For the trustees, this then posed a particular challenge as we sought a leader who would have the skill set that could take all of these challenges and turn them into positives for Grinnell College. Well, today we have an opportunity to meet and to listen to the person that the trustees believe has that set of skills.

As many of you probably know, Raynard Kington was a unanimous choice of the trustees to be the 13th president of Grinnell College. This is despite the fact that Raynard's luggage was lost en route to his interview, and he found himself interviewing in clothes recently purchased at the local Walmart. Now, some may say that this was President Kington's ability to demonstrate substance over style. I think I would say that rather, it was really his ability to demonstrate that he could challenge the status quo. Fortunately, I think he has continued to challenge the status quo in ways that will make Grinnell College great as we move into the future. So, please join me in welcoming Raynard Kington, the president of Grinnell College.

President Kington:

Thank you, Barry. You know, I keep the outfit I bought at midnight at Walmart in the closet in my office, to remind me that sometimes you just never know how things will go. These days, when I talk to students and people who are starting off in their careers, I always tell them if you really want to prepare for everything, go to your local Walmart and pick out an interview outfit, because you just never know when that might be a useful skill. Thank you so much, Barry, for hosting tonight. There is a great example of a trustee and alum who is dedicated to the school and is open-minded and creative and thoughtful and all the things that presidents look for in the boards that hire them and that they work with.

Thank you and thank all of you for coming to night.

This is the 24th of 31 events that I am doing over about a 9½–10-month period. It started in London in August and ends in Seoul in the end of May. It has been an incredible experience going all over the country, meeting alums and supporters and the broader NI ... Someone asked me about NIH and I slipped and said NIH; and this would

be the one time that I said, in 24 talks that I have given! ... So, it has been wonderful meeting the broader Grinnell community. ... I want to talk a little about the school and how it is doing and what I think the future holds for it, and some of the issues that I have been trying to tackle over the last year and a half or so.

News of the School

I had a mentor once, who corrected me when we were sitting at a selection committee for a prestigious fellowship and I read an application and started off by saying the applicant had come from a great school. My mentor sort of stopped me and said immediately, "You know there's no such thing as a great school, only great students." I have amended what he told me, because I really believe there is no such thing as a great school, only great students and great teachers. That is the magic: its great students and great teachers. Grinnell has been incredibly fortunate over the years to have more than its fair share of each of those.

Student Achievements

Our students, every year, continue to surprise us and challenge us in all sorts of ways. They continue to excel when they go out and compete against other students.

- This year, **Wadzi Motsi** – she is **class of 2012**, she is graduating, she is vice president of the student government – was one of 40 students selected for a **Watson Fellowship**. Many of you may know about this great program, funded by the family of the founder of IBM. Students are selected every year; last year we actually had three of the 40, every year we have at least one. They go out overseas to explore things. She is exploring the whole idea of what motivates young people to be engaged in political change. She's going to Tunisia, Ghana, the Czech Republic, and Cambodia. Parents, you might want to encourage your kids to apply for this program because the rule is you cannot set foot in the United States for a year. You must go away. The students do, and they have an incredible experience.
- We have two students who were awarded **Davis Projects for Peace**. This is another program that funds students to do creative things, and two students from China are developing an Internet-based micro-lending project for accounting in China. We are looking forward to learning more about their experiences when they return next year.
- This year thus far we have had eight students selected for **Fulbrights**. These are awards that allow students to go off and teach for a year or to go to graduate school overseas. Every year we have another seven, I think, who are alternates, or three or four others who ultimately may be Fulbrights as well. We are one of the top producers of Fulbrights every single year.
- This year we also had a **record number of applications. We had a 50 percent increase** in the number of applications from the previous year, and we had about 10 applicants for every seat – the most selective year we have ever had in the history of the College and the largest number of applications in the history of the College. Every region of the country had at least a 20 percent increase in the number of applicants. We had applicants from over 100 different countries apply to Grinnell.

What that tells me is that we are doing a much better job explaining why we think Grinnell is special. I think that is probably one of the strongest indications of the strength of the College – its applications. Not because we want some magic number of applications; there is no magic number. What we want is the ability to choose the right class for the College. When we get this number of applications – and they were strong

applications — we actually will probably have an increase in the average score, a substantial increase the average scores in academic records of students entering in the next class. That's actually unusual, to have a large increase in applications and a large increase in the metrics of the quality of the students coming in. That is, I think, a great indication of the ability of the school to do a much better job, to tell people what we think is distinctive.

Faculty Achievements

Our faculty continue to excel in all sorts of ways.

- Professor of History **Victoria Brown was chosen by The 2012 Princeton Review** as one of the top professors in the country.
- **Ralph Savarese**, who as many of you know has written an incredible range of books, many about his challenges of raising his autistic son, actually was just awarded a National Humanities Writ Large Fellowship. He's going to spend a year at Duke University's Institute of Brain Science, looking at this relationship between language and literature and neurology. [This is] a great example of a faculty member who is devoted to students, who is an extraordinary teacher, and is constantly sort of pushing the envelope in terms of the types of knowledge that he is interested in, ways to teach, and how he can bring his experiences and his skills and talents to help motivate students to do well.

Alumni Achievements

Our alumni also continue to excel in all sorts of ways, and what has been great about this tour over the last year is I have met so many alums who are doing such great things. I will just mention a few from across the country:

- **Samuel Harris, class of 1958**, who led the effort to construct the Illinois Holocaust Museum, which opened in 2009.
- **Carter Newton**, who is sitting before me, **class of 1977**, a current Alumni Council president and owner and publisher of the Galena Gazette in Galena, Ill. We are going to make it there, we are. We've heard great things.
- **Nate Borenstein, class of 1980**, one of the people who helped invent the way that you attach a document to emails 20 years ago opened up. Now, we may have mixed feelings about that some days, but [it was] a great advance.
- Our board member and alum **David White, class of 1990**, Rhodes Scholar, who is now the executive director of the Screen Actors Guild in Los Angeles.
- **Angela Onwuachi-Willig, class of 1994**, also a faculty member at the University of Iowa School of Law, has been named one of the top, up-and-coming professors of law in the United States.
- **Emily Westergaard Hamilton, class of 2002**, who is the executive director of Des Moines' I Have A Dream Foundation and a former Grinnell Corps-Namibia Fellow.

That is just a small taste of the extraordinary range of achievements of our alumni; and so many of our alums are deeply connected and continue to feel connected to the school.

Business of the School

Now, I was not the typical applicant to be president of a liberal arts college. I think I was euphemistically called a "nontraditional candidate." A physician, I had been in government and done other things before I came to this world. While that has some disadvantages, the great advantage is I got to ask lots of questions and no one was surprised that I asked lots of questions. I could start with a clean slate. Just as one of the responsibilities of the board is to choose the president, the key responsibility of the president is to make sure the institution stays financially stable and is managed appropriately. So, I began to drill down into the financial picture of the College.

Some of you may have seen a PowerPoint presentation that we posted, and we also had an article in the alumni magazine about this, partly because we wanted everyone to understand where we are at this incredible time in American history for higher education. We have a number of great advantages and wonderful traditions and commitments to our mission. But, we are facing the same challenges as every other institution of higher education in the country. There is a growing discussion, public discussion about the costs of higher education in this country. There have been a series of meetings at the White House of presidents of colleges and universities. Some people have even spoken of a bubble, a higher education bubble. There was a time when many people were saying that once a year of college education sort of reached \$50,000, that is when we knew that there would be a sort of revolt. Many colleges now are over \$50,000 and Grinnell is about to join that club. **We are about, now, \$49,000 a year for our comprehensive fees.** This is a huge amount of money. What has allowed us to be true to our values is that we have had resources that have allowed us to support lots of students in spite of that cost.

- The interesting thing is that even with the fee approaching \$50,000, we are still about \$5,000 less than almost all of our peers, a nontrivial amount of difference; and it still doesn't cover all our cost.
- Our average cost is somewhere between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year — the average cost per students. So even students who pay the full ride get a substantial scholarship to Grinnell.
- We have also had a very generous policy of financial aid. We are need-blind — and 100 percent of a demonstrated need — and that's increasingly unusual in the world of higher education. That results in a high discount rate. "Discount rate" is a term that is used a lot in higher education; it is sort of comparable to the discount you get over the list price when you go on to buy a car.
- Our discount rate for the incoming class now, is 60 percent. Now, on the one hand that is great, in that we are giving opportunity to students in a major way. On the other hand, though, it creates some challenges in terms of resources. Only 15 percent of students pay our full fee at the College. Only 15 percent. I think at Williams, 30–40 percent. So, 30–40 percent of their parents write checks for \$50,000 a year to that institution, which gives them a huge amount of money. Millions every year, which they use to give better aid to the students with need.
- I was looking, just today actually, at the average percentage of students who pay the full fee at all the other leading institutions that are need-blind and 100 percent of need. It's somewhere around 40 percent. So, most of those institutions who have that policy have a rather large influx of money from students who are very high quality, very competitive schools, and have the resources to pay that.
- Now, I am not suggesting that we have to immediately sort of abandon our policies. But what we do have to do, we have to think about it how we have not thought about it in the past. Because now, with our discount rate going up so high, and our average need of students going up so high, we are basically attracting really good students, but we are also becoming a place where a lot of students come because they know

we will give them great aid. There is a positive side to that, because it is very much consistent with our values, but it means we have to think about money in a way this College has never thought about money before. We need to raise money in a way this College has never raised it before, and that is a real challenge.

- We actually calculated how much aid we are giving to the graduating class this year, how much we gave over four years to this graduating class — \$40 million of aid. For many members of our graduating class it will be the single largest economic transfer of their adult lives, the single largest gift of their adult lives; and most of it is in the form of gift, of grant. Again, it is wonderful that we are giving opportunity, but we have to think about how we make this entire institution sustainable in a way we just did not think about in the past.
- One of the ways we are doing this is we are investing and really trying to make a stronger case for support from our alumni, from our community of supporters. Across the country, our average engagement rate of alumni who have given in the last five years is about 30 percent. Now, every reception we check the giving rate for those who RSVP to the reception. You will be happy to know that your rate is 72 percent. So, you are all overachievers. We like that, and we want you to do more overachieving; and I will get back to that.
- So, I know I am preaching to the choir. I know that all of you are deeply committed to this institution and give what you can, and we appreciate that. That is not true of our alumni body as a whole. We are going to have to change that. We have to renegotiate the social contract with our alumni in order to be able to continue to live our values the way we live them today.

Strategic Plan

One of the things we are doing is trying to make a compelling case for what we are thinking about in the future and how supporting the institution will help us get even better in the future.

We have had a yearlong strategic planning process. We have received over 1,200 ideas. This is Grinnell, so of course we have gotten lots and lots of ideas from everyone imaginable. We have been going through them, and that has been good.

When we met last year we had a retreat with the Board of Trustees. Last summer they identified five errors that they wanted us to focus on. Our dean, who is a wonderful professor of English, of course came up with a great mnemonic. Those of you who are in medicine know that mnemonics are used a lot in gross anatomy to remember the human body and how it is all put together. When I was in medical school, I would remember the mnemonic, but could not remember what each letter stood for, and I can tell you the mnemonics now, to this day. I did OK, but it wasn't because of the mnemonic. But this time the mnemonic is actually working: ADEPT. A-D-E-P-T.

- Let's start with the "A": **Alumni**. As I said, I am convinced that if we did a test of intensity of feeling of our alumni for this institution, we score up with the top institution in this country. Our alumni feel deeply committed. We have to do a better job as an institution in making the case and helping the alumni connect to the institution in ways that we have not done well in the past. We take responsibility for that, and we are going to get better. A big part of that was recruiting Beth Halloran, but also Jane Chaney, who is the new director of alumni relations and an alum. We are delighted that she has joined us. We are going to get better at making the case and making it easier to recent hires, for example. We recently hired someone in the alumni affairs office whose sole responsibility

will be to help engage alumni in recruitment. We have a couple hundred alumni interviews a year. I think Middlebury has a couple thousand alumni interviews a year. Many of the schools use this to both introduce the school to prospective students but also as a recruitment tool to help students learn more about what is distinctive about the institution. We have also hired someone to help specifically connected alumni to students in terms of career development. Whether it is offering a place to stay during a summer internship or providing a summer internship or giving advice on how to succeed in a career, we are going to get better in helping our alumni community get connected in all sorts of ways. We have to increase our alumni giving rate. We know that everyone cannot give large amounts of money, and that is OK. Even small amounts — every bit helps, and we have to get that message across.

- **“D”:** **Distinctive.** We know we are distinctive. We know we are special, but we have to explain how we are special and we have not always done a good job doing that. We have a new vice president for communications who is helping us think through this in all sorts of ways. Many of you may have gotten the email today that you can download a new Grinnell College app. It is wonderful: You can do a virtual tour of campus, you can find out what is being served in the dining facility tonight, what sports, entertainment; it is a great tool. We encourage people to download just to remain connected to campus in all sorts of ways. It is just the beginning of a process to try to get better at using technology to connect to alumni. We have to get better at explaining what makes us distinctive. We know part of that is our commitment to social justice and the quality of our education experience, but we have to articulate it better.
- **Enrollment.** Unlike many other schools, we have not, historically, been very specific in describing the types of students that we think constitute the right body of students for an incoming class. We have to get better at that. Other schools have, and we’re going to get better.
- **Postgraduation.** Every college in America is thinking about how to make the case for the investment in five years of a very expensive education and how that translates into advancing the quality of life for a student across his or her life, but also their careers. We have not done a good job, historically, of that. I don’t think any of the liberal arts colleges have done that historically, and we’re going to get better.
- **Teaching.** [We are] very good at teaching, but the world of knowledge is constantly changing and we have to change. We cannot just sort of rest on our laurels because we know we are good. We have to continually try to get better and better and better, and there are lots of suggestions about how we can do that.

[There will be] more to come about strategic planning as we begin to sort of work down to a smaller list of themes for initiatives that will roll out over the next several years in particular. So let me end on talking about a few things. 1) I want to talk about my charitable giving; 2) I want to talk about the most memorable experience I had on campus my first year; and 3) I want to talk about what I think are among the most distinctive characteristics of very, very extraordinary institutions, great institutions.

- Why am I talking about my personal charitable giving? I am talking about it because when I began going around the country this year, it occurred to me that I was asking alumni to really think hard about their giving and to really be sort of thoughtful and directed in how we make decisions. I thought that if they go through that process, they would see that we were deserving of more support, but I had not done it personally. So, we rethought our family’s giving and it has

changed substantially.

Where do I give? One, I give primarily to education, because I believe deeply in the power of education to transform lives, mostly higher education.

- But, I start off with my high school. I went to Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. It is a public institution, founded in the 1880s in Baltimore. It has been sending students from every conceivable economic background onto the best colleges in this country for 120-odd years. I believe it has never been more important to have institutions like that where poor kids, kids from every conceivable background, can have a chance to get a free education that can set them on the road to the most competitive institutions of higher learning in our country. So, I support that institution.
- I support both of the universities I attended. I attended the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania. Now, I must admit, for a long time I thought, you know, I would almost laugh when I would get these calls. Michigan just closed a \$3.2 billion campaign; Penn just closed a \$3.5 billion campaign. I think it is fair to say that I will never have a building named after me at either of those institutions. It occurred to me that I was looking at it all wrong. I was looking at it from the perspective of the institution and, I thought, I needed to look at it from my perspective — what I owed to the institution. The reality is, even though I got very little aid from those institutions, the checks that I wrote or that my parents wrote did not cover all the cost. Those institutions gave me a first-rate education and they gave me opportunity. I am committed to giving modestly, but I'm committed to giving for the rest of my life because I believe that I owe those institutions. They too can do whatever they can with whatever resources I can give to continue to give opportunity to other students.
- The No. 1 institution I give to now is Grinnell. I give to Grinnell because I believe that I cannot go out and ask other people to give to the College if I do not think it is worthy of my greatest investment in an institution. I give at the level that is expected of trustees in terms of an annual donation. I give substantially to the institution and I will continue to give to this institution.
- The No. 2 institution actually is Fisk University. Why do I donate to Fisk? One hundred years ago Fisk admitted my grandfather. My mother, who recently died, was a fourth generation Texan and both of her parents were the children of slaves; all four of the grandparents had been born into slavery. Her parents were each the first in their families to go to college. Because of their higher education they were able to bring the family from slavery to the middle class in one generation. My grandfather and grandmother both became schoolteachers; the family has an endowed scholarship now in their honor, and I give every year to that institution. I give because 100 years ago they gave an opportunity to my grandfather and his life was better. As a result, my mother's life was better; as a result my life was better. I believe I owe that institution, and I'm going to give to it in the future.

I believe all of us need to have these conversations with our families and need to think about why we give. If you think about Grinnell, we can make the case that we are deserving of support. We are a great institution and we need deep commitment in order to continue to live our values.

- So what was the most moving experience of my first year? It took place the night before graduation, Commencement, last year. There is a president's reception

every year. It used to be in a tent at the president's house; now it is the tent between ARH and Noyce. Every now and then I slip into my medicine, just like I said NIH. I recently called ARH "Academic Resuscitation Hall." It may be, for some students, but that is not its name. So, ARH and Noyce. My kids were there. They were in heaven because they had lots of chocolate cookies and free license to climb all the trees in that area. I was leaving and a mother stopped me, and she said, "Before you go, I have to thank you on behalf of our family." She said, "My son is graduating. I'm a single mother, I have three children, I work in a factory. I didn't go to college. I told my kids, every single day, that if they worked hard they could do anything, but it was Grinnell that made that a reality. My son came here, he got an incredible financial aid package. He's not the person I dropped off; he's everything I wanted him to be. He's articulate, he's thoughtful, he's going off to law school. He's a remarkable kid, and I take some responsibility for that; but the College gave this opportunity to my son." She was crying at the end of it, and it was a perfect way to end that day.

- When people ask me why I came to Grinnell — and I was asked a lot why I came to Grinnell; I joke that friends of mine would have been less surprised if I said I was opening up a practice in Dakar — I would sort of jokingly say, well, the reason I chose Grinnell is because it is a good "buy." It is undervalued in the higher education market — and I think it is — and has lots of upside potential. That may have been why I came to Grinnell, it is not why I stayed. I stay because I deeply believe in the mission of this institution and I believe that it plays a distinct role in the community of higher education in this country. I think what we do is important. I think it is really important that we engage a community that supports us. When I was thinking of the last year and looking at other institutions and trying to sort out what made some of them quite successful, one thing was consistent — great institutions have communities that support them no matter what. They support them whether you like the president or not, whether you like me or not, whether you like the last initiative or not. I had an alum say he stopped giving because Angela Davis spoke at Commencement. I said, "That was 30 minutes of 150 years." I'm hoping that he will reconsider now. We need supporters who deeply believe in the entire arc of the institution.
- My mother was deeply committed to the church that she belonged to. She belonged to a church that was actually one of the first churches on the East Coast, that was actually founded by slaves in Baltimore in the 1820s. She was on the board for 20 years. When I was a teenager, my brothers and I didn't think much of the minister of that church. Every Sunday we would say the same thing, "Mom, how can you go and listen to that guy?" and that we think he has nothing of value to say. Her response was always the same. "You know, the minister's not the church. The congregation, the people, are the church. The minister is like this little sliver of this congregation that's been here 150 years. He'll be gone." This institution will be here long after he's gone. She remained committed to that until her dying day. Even when she could no longer go to church, that institution, once a month, sent two women to my parents' condominium to give her communion and to sing a cappella hymns to her. It meant the world to her because she deeply believed in the arc of that institution, from its founding to the present, from the present as far to the future as you can see. That is the type of support this institution needs. That is the type of support this institution deserves. We are a great institution and we need great support. Support that is supportive of this entire arc, even though there are things that you might not like at any particular time. We are deeply committed to our mission. We do what we do very well, I am hoping that as a result of these conversations all over the country and the world that we can become an institution that has that level of commitment from its alumni body in particular.

- I will end on that note, I think we are going to see that change. I have every confidence that the alumni community is going to rise to the challenge, and I will open up for questions, always the most interesting part of the night.