

SHIMER - COLLEGE

PROMULGATES



FEBRUARY 2010

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## ❧ ANNOUNCEMENTS ❧

The opinions expressed in this edition of “Promulgates” are those of solely the author(s) and **not** necessarily those of the College!!!!

President Tom Lindsay was sent the entire contents of this edition of “Promulgates” and asked for general comments; he did not reply.

President Tom Lindsay will hold a discussion on the College’s mission statement at 2:00 P.M. on Tuesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> in Shimer’s Cinderella Lounge.

Assembly will be held at 4:00 P.M. on Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, also in Shimer’s Cinderella Lounge.

**FOR FIRST TIME IN RECENT SHIMER HISTORY, 6  
NOMINEES TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
“INDEFINITELY TABLED”**

*Guest Editorial: Dan Merchán, Shimer College class of '09*

To bring back balance to the Shimer College Board of Trustees, amidst community complaints that the seventeen most recent inductees lack experience with Shimer, familiarity with our community, or, in some instances, apparent qualifications to serve on a college board, six new candidates for induction have been placed before a newly-formed "nominating committee." These six candidates are all superlatively qualified for service by any objective standard.

One candidate, Erik Badger, is a long-serving member of the community: an alum, former staffer, and well-respected defender of Shimer College, his presence on the board would bring some calm to the now-roiled community. Another candidate is a civic-minded community leader, business owner and entrepreneur who has donated generously to the school both financially and as a former member of its board; his coordination of Chicago citywide events has resulted in a boon of positive publicity and financial windfalls for our host city, and no doubt this expertise in securing beneficence would extend to our still-struggling campus in its new home. David Koukal, Ph.D., is a respected professor of philosophy at University of Detroit Mercy and is himself an '80s Shimer alum and 1990 graduate; both he and his alum spouse have given generously over the years. Nick Schmitt, recent graduate, in his last year as an undergrad raised \$50,000 for Shimer College: an impressive feat by any measure; he is currently employed as a professional fundraiser at UC Berkeley. Linda Levy, Shimer alum from the '70s, is a well-known Chicago business leader of the same caliber as Peter Hanig; and a quick perusal of Shimer newsletters reveals that candidate Steve Zolno, currently serving on the Shimer College Alumni Association Board of Directors, has been a significant donor to our college since his graduation in the '70s.

On Monday January 18 2010, the newly-formed "nominating committee" voted to table all six candidates indefinitely.

My familiarity with Shimer history distant and present comes by accident: at various points I have researched it for class credit, through personal inclination, and most lately of necessity. In recent history—and, in hindsight, perhaps ill-advisedly—no nominee has been turned away from our board. In part this springs from our own perennial need for expertise and money—a need exacerbated recently by a decade-long

economic downturn. But it also springs from our genuine appreciation for a plurality of views: at a 2007 inductee's insistence (Patrick Parker, former trustee from the '70s and one of those voting to close Shimer at that time), we have even considered Larry Arn—controversial Hillsdale College's president—for induction to the board. Larry Arn withdrew his application citing the pressures of time.

Now with the benefit of having acquired greater familiarity with the seventeen new trustees, the Assembly and alumni community have loudly expressed a desire to see a board that respects our open, consensual and "dialogal" community—neologisms and all—and one that advances the college rather than spiraling it into spiritual and financial ruin. On the financial front, public records reveal that at this time in 2009 Ron Champagne and the old board had raised a total of \$1,276,000: just \$284,000 shy of their fiscal year goal of \$1,560,000. By contrast, at this time in 2010 and following the normally lucrative end-of-year "giving season," Tom Lindsay and his board have barely raised \$256,000, only 34% of the projected fiscal-year goal. Lindsay and crew, proxy grandstanding on the National Review or NAS blogs notwithstanding, have proven terrible fundraisers.

It should be stated that one half-million of Ron Champagne's sum is the "anonymous" donation that brought us Thomas Lindsay. But it should also be stated that Lindsay's actions since accession have prompted an outpouring of messages from the alum community stating a withdrawal of financial support. This further illustrates that for the board to continue both in its employ of Lindsay and in its march to the drumbeat of this "anonymous" donor would be a dereliction of duty over our public asset Shimer College, the management of which has been temporarily entrusted to them.

The call for new board members is clear: public records also show that the existing board voted unanimously in 2009 to increase their maximum number from thirty-five to forty. It is inconceivable, then, that all six able candidates and the immediate infusion of cash and talents their induction would bring have been "tabled" indefinitely. It should be noted that the "nominating committee" responsible for this action is stacked, four to three, by Patrick Parker and the 2009 inductees Bob Chitester, Bud Vesta and Kathleen McCreary, all infamous for their ill-informed statements to the Assembly decrying its existence, and seated opposite long-standing community supporters Edie Barschi, Phil Farina and Sally Brown. One suspects a decision took place based not in practicality, but in ideology. While the six new candidates are all superlatively qualified by objective standards, perhaps they don't conform to the new, mysterious "Objectivist" ones.

At a time when Shimer needs experienced board members, money and reassurance that we are not experiencing a hostile takeover, this tabling has unsettling implications for us all. ■

## Shimer Students at the Hamilton Institute?

Heath Iverson

Many of us at Shimer are already aware that on January 21<sup>st</sup> President Tom Lindsay extended an invitation for students to accompany him to participate in a colloquium on the theme of “the relationship between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” hosted by the Alexander Hamilton Institute. What many Shimer students may not be aware of is the turmoil surrounding the creation of the Hamilton Institute. I ask, therefore, that before any Shimer student attend this event, they first consider a few things about the Hamilton Institute as well as what participation in one of its conferences may mean for Shimer in light of recent events at the College.

Originally proposed in 2006 as a program within Hamilton College, the “Alexander Hamilton Center,” was to promote “excellence in scholarship through the study of freedom, democracy, and capitalism as these ideas were developed and institutionalized in the United States and within the larger tradition of Western culture.”[1] However, fearing that the Center would be infiltrated by the “liberal” faculty of the College, its founders argued that the Center should enjoy exemption from the academic oversight to which all other campus organizations are subject. According to the online journal, *Inside Higher Ed*, one of the Center's founders, “Robert Paquette, argued that “it was appropriate for the Hamilton Center to have more independence than other campus programs. ‘We needed to provide insulation to prevent faculty cooptation,’ he said. Paquette acknowledged that the way the charter for the Center was created, it would have been possible after the first round of appointments to the Center's board for that body to have only one Hamilton faculty member among its nine members.”[2] In the end, Hamilton College's administration rejected any affiliation with the Center, owing to its reluctance to submit to the University's governance structures. The failure to establish the Center within Hamilton College has been seen as “a cautionary tale for conservatives as they struggle to establish small beachheads on hostile campuses.”[3]

Nevertheless, within months the Hamilton Institute, as the proposed Center has come to be called, emerged from the of the “culture wars of the college”[4] and was able to constitute itself as an independent entity outside of Hamilton College, garnering enthusiasm from conservative publications like *The National Review*.

Not withstanding the similarity between the Hamilton Center's attempt to set up a lateral, yet institutionally unaccountable conservative organization within a larger educational institution and the recent questions surrounding the proposed relationship between the College of the United States and Shimer, the participation of Shimer

College in a Hamilton Institute sponsored event raises serious questions. Specifically, every Shimer student should ask how the perception of even a tentative and informal relationship with the Hamilton Institute may have broader implications for our school's character.

In my view, the proposed participation of Shimer in the Hamilton Institute's colloquium represents a continuation of a broader attempt to radically change public perception of Shimer College's character and educational philosophy. This effort to “re-brand” the College is perhaps most evident in President Lindsay's suggested changes to the College's mission statement. Jettisoning the current statement's commitment to “education for active citizenship in the world,” President Lindsay proposes to include that “[w]e at Shimer both acknowledge and appreciate the fact that the very possibility of an education for intellectual liberty depends on our being situated in a system of ordered political liberty such as we enjoy in American democracy.” Elsewhere in his proposed changes to our mission, President Lindsay seeks to explicitly privilege a narrow range of American political documents, to the exclusion of the rich and varied political thought studied in Shimer's core curriculum. Such language would grossly misrepresent what we learn and do at Shimer. These proposed changes to our mission, a document which in itself is perhaps the most important and formative feature of the College's public character, are not only less than fully accurate, but they are also redolent of the same kind of cultural chauvinism that is present in the Hamilton Institute's own mission, which states that “[t]he word freedom, it should be recalled, had no equivalent in the vocabularies of non-Western civilizations until imported from the West.”[5] What kind of message does President Lindsay's jingoistic modification of our mission send about Shimer? How does the casual association of Shimer College and the Hamilton Institute represent us to the outside world? How does it characterize our identity to prospective students or faculty? And most importantly, what will students' tacit endorsement of the ideology of the Hamilton Institute say about us?

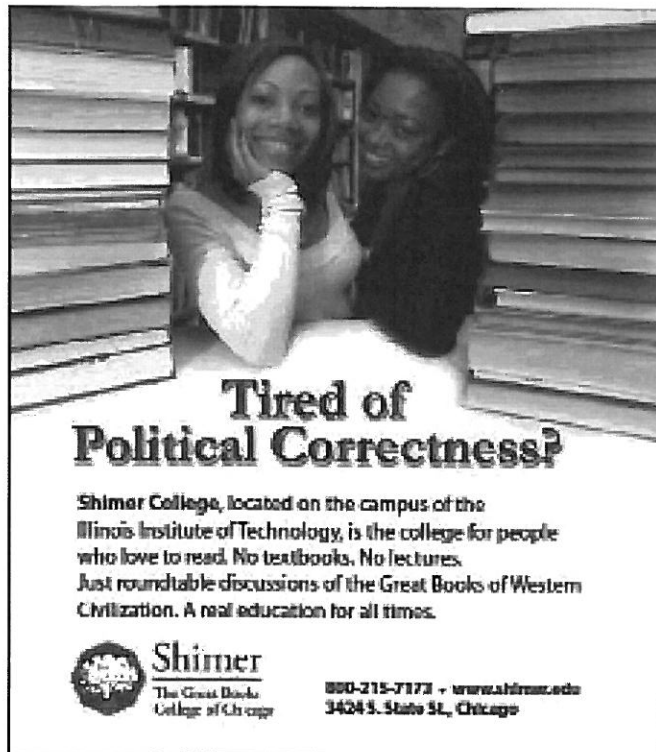
Yet, what is most disconcerting about President Lindsay's suggested changes to our mission is the connotation of much of the language he uses to describe the College. The word “freedom” or “free” occurs six time in his new mission statement; likewise, the word “liberty” occurs three times. Additionally, President Lindsay finds it necessary to refer to the “bondage” of “political correctness.” I believe most Shimer students have had a chance to hear President explication of his proposed language—that his intention is to articulate the nobility of critical and unfettered intellectual inquiry. Whether or not he has given us grounds to actually trust and believe this explanation of the motives behind his choice of words is something each of us must evaluate on our own. However, if we are to be truly honest with ourselves and free from dangerous naiveté, I think we all must admit that words, especially the loaded ones President Lindsay advocates in his mission statement, can have very different

meanings. Have we forgotten that it was largely through an appeal to “freedom” that this country was asked to engage in the war in Iraq? Are we blind to the fact that all too often “liberty” refers to the liberty of markets and *not* the liberty of human individuals? Shouldn't we remember that often the most hateful bigotry is cast as a proud defiance to “political correctness”? These words, whether we care to admit it or not, are part of the rhetorical arsenal of the Right, and I personally refuse to believe that President Lindsay doesn't understand this. Likewise, I cannot believe that the cultivation of a connection between Shimer and the conservative Hamilton Institute is a purely innocent and academic one.

Unless we should think that the drastic, and in my view, ideologically motivated reorientation of Shimer's public character is limited to the President's proposal of a trip to a conference or a new mission statement, we should all be aware of how Shimer is already being represented in the pages of the Libertarian publication, *School Reform News*. In its edition published in December, 2009[6] by the Heartland Institute, one may find the following advertisement, reproduced here. It is accompanied by the following copy: “Tired of Political Correctness? Shimer College, located on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, is the college for people who love to read. No textbooks. No lectures. Just roundtable discussions of the Great Books of Western Civilization. A real education for all time.”[7] To me, the image is hypocritical and condescending at best; the notion that we could have such happy students in an educational environment lacking race, gender, and class tolerance—whether or not one calls it by the pejorative conservative byword, “political correctness”—is, frankly, silly. What is sillier still is the ad's implication that the absence of “political correctness” is somehow of a piece with Socratic dialog and the study of the Great Books as it is ideally practiced at Shimer. Marketing such as this misrepresents the College in order to appeal to the presumed ideology of the readership of a publication with a specific and unabashed political bent. I ask again, at present, what kind of place is Shimer College being made out to be under the leadership of Tom Lindsay?

To be clear, President Lindsay has the right to propose a new mission statement. Additionally, though perhaps unfortunately, it is within the purview of the College's current administration to market the school as it sees fit. Finally, it is President Lindsay's prerogative to attend the upcoming conference at the Hamilton Institute. In fact, I encourage him and everyone at Shimer to pursue their academic interests as widely as possible. The real shame is that President Lindsay's decisions are directing the College towards a position of ideological narrowness, threatening to make Shimer into a place in which full, broad intellectual inquiries are stifled. When all of his decisions, taken together, threaten to radically misrepresent the school as an organ of a political or ideological agenda, it is within the students' power to decide whether or not they wish to endorse this tendency

with their participation. For those among us who wish to learn in and graduate from an institution whose intellectual integrity and independence is something to be proud of, I suggest we should not endorse the vision of Shimer College as propagated by the recent choices of Tom Lindsay's administration. The promise of a few treats, like an all-expenses-paid trip to New York, should never be enough for us to compromise the College we all love. It is for this reason that I plan to boycott Shimer's participation in the upcoming event at the Hamilton Institute. I urge the rest of the student body to consider doing the same. ♦



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[1] “Mission Statement” of the Alexander Hamilton Institute, <<http://www.theahi.org/charter/>> in Charter. 2006-7

[2] Jaschik, Scott. “Duel on Governance at Hamilton,” <<http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/dialog/news/2006/11/28/hamilton>> in *Inside Higher Ed*. 28 November 2006.

[3] Miller, John J. “The Death of the Hamilton Center” <<http://nrd.nationalreview.com/article/?q=MzJhMWEyZDgyYzc3NDI0ZmMyMTg3YThlOTU4MmVINzQ=>>> in *National Review Online*. 5 March 2007.

[4] Jaschik, Scott. “Duel on Governance at Hamilton,” <<http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/dialog/news/2006/11/28/hamilton>> in *Inside Higher Ed*. 28 November 2006.

[5] “Mission Statement” of the Alexander Hamilton Institute, <<http://www.theahi.org/charter/>> in Charter. 2006-7

[6] [http://www.heartland.org/custom/semod\\_policybot/pdf/26405.pdf](http://www.heartland.org/custom/semod_policybot/pdf/26405.pdf), page 14.

## The May '08 By-Law Changes and Shimer College's Alleged "Dysfunctional" Government

Jonathan Timm

President Thomas Lindsay and many of his newly-appointed trustees have threatened Shimer's long-standing tradition of democratic governance. Tom, as well as some members of the Board of Trustees, would like to see (or believe that there is already in place) a conventional "top-down" governing structure at Shimer. There are two main justifications for this opinion: (1) the now-infamous changes to the board by-laws of May of 2008 were an alleged "regime change," invalidating the Assembly's political power, and (2) the assertion that Shimer's self-governance is "dysfunctional."

However, a quick look at the history of both topics reveals that both claims are baseless. The May '08 changes to the board by-laws did not give the college President any additional power. For the 26 years that Don Moon was president, Don had the full authority to terminate any employee under his direct supervision and used that authority on more than one occasion. He also had the authority to disband dysfunctional committees of the Assembly when he deemed it necessary and he once exercised that power as well. Some members of the Administrative Committee which proposed the changes have expressed that the interpretation of the by-law changes as "regime change" is incorrect. One of them was alumna Denise Lane ('08). In her open letter to Tom Lindsay, the Board of Trustees, and the Shimer community, she writes (read the letter in full on page 21):

The changes made in May 2008 were proposed [...] in an attempt to more accurately describe the relationship of the president and staff of the college. In no way were these changes meant to dissolve the Assembly, nor devalue it, and I am disappointed to hear that interpretation made by members of the Board who weren't even here at the time.

The allegation that self-governance at Shimer has been "dysfunctional" is, too, factually inaccurate. Listed below are a series of accomplishments under the system of governance that some label "dysfunctional," "ineffective," or "wasteful."<sup>1</sup>

- Successful release from bankruptcy by 1980.
- Successful moving of the College from Mt. Carroll to Waukegan (1979).

- Growth of the student body from a low of 43 FTE to 120 FTE.
- Recipient of a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities of \$984,000.
- Salary increases from a low of \$6,000 up to a starting salary of \$30,000.
- Starting with the ownership of one building in Waukegan in 1979 to owning twelve buildings in 2000.
- Creating one of the first weekend programs in Illinois for working adults.
- Slow increase in fund raising up to approximately \$400,000 per year based upon a three person staff – only one of whom was full time in development. Combined salary expenditures for the development staff never exceeded \$75,000.
- Successful achievement of accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association after ten years of candidacy status.
- The implementation of a very careful review process for hiring and retaining faculty members that has resulted in one of the most effective and professional group of faculty that Shimer has had in the past thirty-five years.
- Outstanding success of Shimer graduates as measured by percentage of students that later obtain PhDs.
- A substantial growth in the net worth of the College, primarily in the form of real estate, that was instrumental in having necessary funds to make the transition to Chicago.

The Assembly also is also successful in serving the very mission of Shimer College: education. Many students and alumni have testified that serving in the various committees of Shimer College is an invaluable educational experience. This issue of "Promulgates" includes some of examples of this sentiment in open letters by Denise Lane ('08), Ted Krug ('08), Erik Badger ('97 and former staff '02-'09), Heath Iverson ('10 and current student Trustee), Eugene Lim ('11), and me ('11). ♦

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Don Moon for providing this research.

## **GROWING SUSPICION PITS PRESIDENT AND SEVERAL TRUSTEES AGAINST THE REST OF SHIMER'S COMMUNITY**

EUGENE LIM



### **President Tom Lindsay fires Admission Director Elaine Vincent; anxiety over executive powers and the security of Shimer's dialogical ethos**

On September 3, Thomas Lindsay fired Shimer's admission director Elaine Vincent. The first member of the internal community to learn Vincent would be fired was Marc Hoffman, Shimer CFO and Administrative Committee Chair. The president first informed Hoffman of Vincent's pending termination less than one day before the face-to-face meeting where she was let go; Hoffman was contacted in his role as the school's human resources officer and was only informed of the termination, not consulted about it.

Apart from Hoffman, no other internal community members have said they were informed beforehand; a September 8 faculty resolution crafted largely in response to the firing states that Lindsay was known to have consulted only a trustee:

Neither the Directors, nor the Faculty, nor the Dean of the College, nor the Director of Finance and Operations, nor the Administrative Committee of the Assembly, nor the Board of Trustees, nor the Admissions Committee of the Board, nor the Executive Committee of the Board were consulted prior to the termination. We understand that there was individual consultation with the Chair of the Board.

Chair of the Board's Admissions Committee Rebecca Sundin confirmed in conversations after a November 15 Assembly meeting that the president did not consult with her before the firing. The Assembly's Administrative Committee itself did not convene to discuss it until September 8, at an emergency meeting that the president did not attend.

Later on September 3, President Lindsay notified faculty, staff, and members of the Administrative Committee that Vincent was "no longer affiliated with Shimer College"; he sent a college-wide announcement the next day through the Cosmos e-mail list. Neither communication included Lindsay's rationale for the firing, although the Cosmos post ended, "If anyone would like to discuss this, my door is always open when

I am on campus. Please do not hesitate to stop by to talk about this—or anything else of concern." According to attendees of a September 8 Fireside, however, whenever community members pressed Lindsay for further details on the firing, the President pleaded liability exposure and declined to explain his action.

The community fell to speculating. Critics of the firing argued that Elaine Vincent, though not universally popular, was highly competent. Wrote alumnus Byron Keys on a September 5 post to Listen, "Elaine was hard, uncompromising and often unpleasant, but I believe she was doing what she thought best for the college." Numerous community members, including faculty, recalled that since Vincent's arrival in 2006 rates of enrollment and perhaps the quality of incoming students had improved. Forty-five students enrolled at Shimer in fall 2008, an entering class size unmatched for 30 years and greater than the previous year's by 28 students.

As President Lindsay had not consulted the Assembly's Administrative Committee and other governing bodies of the college, doubts were raised over the constitutionality and even legality of how he had handled a major personnel decision. Lindsay's strongest critics claim he overstepped the boundaries of his power in failing to consult, and they point to both the Constitution of the Shimer College Assembly and the By-Laws of the Board of Trustees. Since May 2008, Article V.4 of the By-Laws has read:

Subject to the direction and control of the Board of Trustees, [the President] shall be the chief executive administrator of the College and in that capacity shall exercise such supervision, direction, and management of the College as shall promote its efficiency in the purposes thereof in consultation with the Administrative Committee of the Assembly.

Article V.2 of the Assembly Constitution specifies that the Administrative Committee plays an advisory role to the president in decisions related to hiring and other matters:

The Administrative Committee is responsible for advising and counseling the President and the Executive Team regarding the supervision, direction, and management of the College on matters including, but not limited to, the hiring of new non-academic administrators and the setting of policies and practices.

Before May 2008, both documents read differently from their current forms. They were changed because



they found to conflict: at the time, the Constitution required the consent of the Administrative Committee before the president could hire administrators, while the By-Laws were unclear on the committee's exact role in that process. A revision of the By-Laws was undertaken at the behest of then-president Ron Champagne, who suggested they would clarify college governance and make decision-making more efficient. The project was given to a task force on which students, faculty, directors, and trustees served, and following the task force's recommendations, delivered in April 2008, the Assembly revised its Constitution and the Board its By-Laws so that both documents expressly recognized the president's authority to hire personnel, with the Administrative Community occupying only an advisory role. According to some, the By-Laws changes also formalized the President's authority to fire employees without consulting the committee: President Emeritus Don Moon has claimed that the college president has always had this authority, and Moon's actual practice shows he used it. Community members have contested this interpretation, however.

Some Shimerians, while believing in President Lindsay's constitutional authority to fire without consultation, claim that he nonetheless violated the school's long-standing practices of democratic governance and dialogue. At least one official document besides the By-Laws, the "Board of Trustees Expectations of the Shimer College President," is cited by critics who argue that the President, far from having the power to fire without consultation, is explicitly expected to consult. Received by the faculty from Board Chair Nelson in September 2008, the document was authored from within the Board and specifies guidelines for the use of executive power in Shimer's management. The sixth Expectation reads: "In making personnel and operating decisions, the President will seek the advice and counsel of the stakeholders at the College among trustees, faculty, students, and the various committees of the College and the Assembly." The Expectation then specifies what typically counts as "advice and counsel": "The President shall maintain Shimer College's tradition of candid and frequent communications with trustees, faculty, students, and staff through fireside chats, open spaces, Assembly meetings, committee meetings, and Board meetings."

### **Another of Lindsay's personnel decisions prompts accusations of unilateral decision-making**

Community discussions of Vincent's firing came to revisit Lindsay's earlier personnel decisions. One near the end of spring 2009 was fresh in memory. At a meeting with an Assembly committee in late April or early May, Lindsay first revealed his intention to engage IIT dean of students Doug Geiger as interim Shimer dean of students for the 2009-2010 academic year. Students later learning of the appointment were quick to denounce it. Lindsay explained that his decision was motivated by finances: he had made a preliminary request, and Geiger had since agreed to stand in as Shimer's dean of students at low cost. And cost was crucial: there was not, Lindsay reported, enough money in the budget to keep both a new salaried administrator and new faculty members. (Shimer had lacked a full-time dean of students through spring and was also seeking new professors to manage growing class sizes.)

All the same, many students continued to attack the Geiger decision. Listen posts variously suggested that involving IIT staff in Shimer's internal student affairs was inappropriate; that the Administrative Committee, which had been reviewing applicants for the post, was not sufficiently involved in the pending appointment, and that the option to hire Geiger was announced too late for the community to respond. (Classes ended on May 1 and final conferences on May 14.) In a May 5 Listen post, student Meg Nelson invited the Shimer community to collaborate on a letter of protest to the Board, set to meet on campus May 8. The invitation began a thread of e-mails on the subject of Geiger's pending deanship, some of them qualifiedly positive. Dean of the College David Shiner wrote:

While I'm not happy about us not hiring a new Dean of Students (no one is, including Tom) ... , for a couple of weeks ... it looked like we might not be able to hire any new faculty members for next year ... . It has worked out -- not wonderfully, but well enough so the [Academic Planning Committee] was able to staff courses for next semester without raising class size or burning out the faculty. Given the financial situation of Shimer ... I'm grateful for that.

Shiner continued:

It seems that a lot of the problem with the situation as it has unfolded has to do with Tom's being new to Shimer. I can't (and don't want to) speak for him, but it's got to be really hard to spend 30 years in much more conventional settings and then have to adjust to Shimer in a few months.

Ultimately the Board was not given the letter Nelson had proposed through Listen; Professor Stuart

Patterson agreed to serve part-time as dean of students for fall 2009.

### **Faculty formally requests that Lindsay explain Vincent's firing; he declines**

On September 8, the faculty passed a formal resolution, passed unanimously with one abstention. The resolution read in part:

Resolved: The Faculty of Shimer College respectfully asks President Thomas Lindsay for an explanation of his not having consulted relevant governance bodies and officers of the College prior to the termination of Director of Admissions Elaine Vincent on September 3, 2009.

Having attended the Fireside discussion on the 8th of September, in particular we request clarification of what potential detriment to the College, including liability exposure, led the President to bypass consultation with relevant governance bodies and officers. We ask how it would have been dangerous for the College for the President to have consulted in the way it is customarily done at Shimer and elsewhere when personnel issues arise, that is, in confidential or executive session.

The resolution continued to name the constitutional and contractual grounds for the faculty's concern, among them the "Board of Trustees Expectations of the Shimer College President." The past controversy over Geiger was also raised:

Conversations with the President, and statements by him, especially following widespread complaints and protest regarding the appointment of a Dean of Students in the spring of this year, led us to believe that the President was in agreement with the policy that at least major decisions are to be made after proper consultation.

The resolution closed by requesting that President Lindsay either reply in seven days with the demanded explanation or inform the faculty if he would need more time. After doing the latter, President Lindsay formally responded on September 26 in a brief letter. "I cannot say anything more than what I shared at the Fireside conversation," he wrote. "I am committed to dialogue and will engage the appropriate committees and groups as available. But there are rare times when such dialogue is not appropriate. This was one of those times. It is time now for us to move on." The letter then mentions the approaching review of Shimer's mission and vision statements as mandated by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the body through which Shimer regularly renews its academic accreditation. "I

am eager to meet with you soon to discuss the foundational principles that support a Great Books education and Shimer College."

"It would not be a mischaracterization," said Albert Fernandez, a month later of the reply, "to say that the President stone-walled."

After receiving the President's reply, the faculty in turn crafted another, more strongly worded resolution on October 6. It passed unanimously with no abstentions. This second resolution read in full:

The Faculty of Shimer College takes strong exception to the lack of consultation on the part of President Thomas Lindsay prior to the termination of the Director of Admission on September 3, 2009. The unilateral way the decision was reached violates the written Expectations of the President that the Faculty received from the Board ... as well as verbal declarations by the Board and by the President himself. The Faculty believes that executive power without adequate consultation in the making of major decisions that deeply affect the future of Shimer College threatens its distinctive identity and mission in American higher education.

This resolution was submitted to both the president and the Board. The faculty expected it to be read and discussed by trustees during one of the sessions of the approaching October 16-17 Board meeting. The student body was purposely not told of the faculty's first resolution, pending a reply from President Lindsay. (Once the faculty had received a reply, Fernandez informed students of the faculty's resolutions at a community meeting on October 19.)

### **Search for an admission director begins; several student members of the Administrative Committee accuse Lindsay of ignoring community input**

President Lindsay initiated the search for Elaine Vincent's replacement in mid-September.

Student Administrative Committee members Peter Vincent and Jonathan Timm have explained the procedure for hiring new directors. The process is split between current directors, the Administrative Committee, and the president, who each evaluate candidates' CVs. All three then present the candidates they think the most promising, and eventually a group of finalists is drawn up. Directors then interview the finalists by telephone and reveal the salary range. The finalists who "pass" this preliminary interview and remain interested in the position are then flown to campus, where the directors, the committee, and the

president separately interview them. The community at large is also invited to meet the candidates during their visits; community members thereafter submit voluntary written evaluations. The directors and the Administrative Committee, having considered all the collected input, then give their final recommendations to the president, who makes the final decision.

Hoffman placed notices for an admission director on websites listing higher-education job openings. Inquiries soon arrived, and from about sixty applicants, the Administrative Committee compiled a list of eight finalists to interview by telephone and possibly bring to campus for an in-person evaluation. One candidate whom the committee did not include in its list was Amy Pritts, a 2008 MBA graduate from the University of Dallas. President Lindsay, however, insisted that a director give her the preliminary telephone interview and, later, that she be brought to the school, as she was, on October 5. Between October 5 and 13, four candidates in all made campus visits: Amy Pritts, Rod Bugarin, Michael Morsovillo, and John Lucchesi.

At a morning meeting on October 14, the Administrative Committee analyzed community feedback, members' opinions, and the short essays each candidate had written in response to a prompt from the president. Eventually, the committee drew up a recommendation that either Rod Bugarin or another of the candidates besides Pritts replace Elaine Vincent, with the committee declaring Bugarin and the other candidate the only two viable ones among the interviewed finalists. The committee further recommended that, if the president disapproved of both Bugarin and the other candidate, then the search be continued, as many applicants remained in the pool and Cassie Sherman had recently agreed to continue as an interim admission director if needed. Before they adjourned, Hoffman told the Administrative Committee that, if Lindsay made a decision contrary to the recommendations, the committee would meet with the president at lunch.

Near 12:50 P.M. the committee was told to reconvene in Room II and await Lindsay, who appeared after ten or fifteen minutes. It would be the first appearance he had made at any Administrative Committee meeting for the duration of the Admissions Director search. Lindsay announced that he would need more time to come to a final decision, but he would choose between Bugarin and Pritts. The president cited various reasons for his preference that, according to

Peter Vincent, the committee found vague and not compelling.

Fearing that the president would not make his decision until after the imminent Board meetings, several Administrative Committee members as well as students closely following the search conjectured that the move was calculated to prevent the school from appealing a possibly unpopular choice to the Board. They further accused President Lindsay of treating his duty to consult with the Administrative Committee as perfunctory. According to them, that Lindsay had twice reinstated a candidate rejected by both the Administrative Committee and the college community demonstrated a pattern of unilateral decision-making against established traditions of self-governance.

### **Students signal discontent at a meeting of the Board of Trustees; trustees rally to support Lindsay's authority**

Just before the Board meetings of October 16-17, Student Trustees Bob Carpenter, Heath Iverson, and Katie Martin-Seaver learned that Trustee Patrick Parker had prepared a counter-resolution to the October 6 faculty resolution. The counter-resolution in part would have the Board express "its support for President Lindsay and his leadership at a critical time in the history of the College" and urge "Dean Shiner and the faculty to respect the leadership of President Lindsay, as chief executive officer of the College." The Shimer community has interpreted the import of this counter-resolution variously: trustees have cited it in arguing that complaints about Lindsay's use of executive power resort to outdated views of Shimer's governance, while students generally think the counter-resolution is too vague to clarify the issues composing the controversy.

When the counter-resolution was first received by student trustees in October, however, it threatened to produce at least one definite effect: it would prevent the faculty's own resolutions from being discussed by the Board or even seen by the majority of trustees until the following day.

Carpenter, Iverson, and Martin-Seaver (who is also an Administrative Committee member), as well as Jonathan Timm and Peter Vincent, held a students-only meeting in the Gunsaulus Dormitory on October 14. There, Administrative Committee members shared their grievances over the course of the admission director search, while the student trustees related Parker's counter-resolution to the student body.

At the same student meeting, an effort was coordinated to show the Board of Trustees the pitch of student discontent. Concerned students were asked to come to the Board lunch on October 16 dressed in black (as a show of solidarity and of “mourning” for Shimer’s ethos), ready to engage trustees in conversation with talking points agreed on by the meeting’s attendees: (1) “We want to protest the President’s termination of the Director of Admission without consultation/explanation”; (2) “We want to express our support for Rod Bugarin’s candidacy in the search for a new director of admissions”; (3) “We want to express our displeasure regarding the President’s tendency to bypass or disregard the community’s input, which we feel violates the democratic traditions of Shimer College.” Another idea to refuse food at lunch was dropped as antagonistic. After the meeting let out, its organizers drafted a student resolution overnight, which sixty-one students would later sign. It read in part:

We, the undersigned, take strong exception to President Thomas Lindsay’s neglect of the community’s advisement regarding the selection of candidates for the Director of Admissions. We believe this neglect represents a continuation of the President’s unilateral approach to decisions that affect the future of the college and violate the written “Expectations of the President” as well as verbal declarations by the Board and the President himself. In agreement with the Faculty, the students believe that executive power without adequate and good faith consultation threatens the College’s commitment to democratic self-governance and its distinctive identity and mission in American Higher Education ... .

Worrying about credibility and faculty vulnerability, the student meeting’s organizers were careful to show that the resolution and the lunch dialogues were efforts arising from the student body. After several tweaks to the plan, student trustees decided that the student resolution would be given to Board Chair Nelson privately and read by a student trustee at one of the sessions of the two-day Board meeting.

Roughly thirty students arrived in black to the October 16 Board lunch in Cinderella Lounge. It was the day of Convocation. Opinions vary on the results of the student-trustee dialogues. One student at the lunch reported feeling “very ‘mission-accomplished’” after telling a trustee her concerns, including her fear that new and largely conservative Board members might exercise undue influence on Shimer’s curriculum. At least one internal community member worries that some students represented extreme or incorrect views of the college’s positions and governance policy.

The agenda of the day’s Board meetings included a plenary session devoted to Parker’s counter-resolution. Roughly fifteen students, along with professors Stuart Patterson and Ann Dolinko, entered to hear the proceedings just after the session began in IIT’s Technology Business Center. Board Chair Nelson closed the meeting to non-trustees so that the Board could discuss whether or not these visitors should be privy to the discussions. Non-trustee Shimerians waited for a short time outside of the conference room until the Board voted to let them return.

After Nelson’s introductory remarks on his hopes for the session’s outcomes, President Lindsay opened by asking the Board to establish “clarity”—for both his benefit and that of students—on the extent of his executive powers. He suggested that recent grievances over his actions had resulted from a misconception of Shimer’s present governance structure: “For over thirty-five years, Shimer was run as a participatory democracy. Yet when I was hired two years ago as Shimer’s president, I was told that was no longer the case.” President Lindsay reported that his attempts to claim his legal “final say” on personnel matters had repeatedly earned “ultimatums, threats, and subtle expressions” of defiance that impeded him from doing his work and could harm Shimer.

In the ensuing discussion, most trustees appeared unconvinced by the internal community’s criticisms of the president’s actions. To Faculty Trustee Steven Werlin’s argument that self-governance and participation were not independent from Shimer’s curriculum or pedagogy, recently inducted trustee Matt Franck replied, “How is it harmful to the education of Shimer students to learn that participatory democracy is not always the best way?” To student and faculty trustees’s complaints that Shimerian self-governance was under threat or being besieged by outsiders’ demands to reform, most Board members who spoke argued that the abandonment of the participatory model was necessary, even mandated by the changes made to the By-Laws in May 2008. Kathleen McCreary and Patrick Parker called Shimer’s past democratic model “dysfunctional,” so proven by the school’s troubled recent financial history. Shimer must give up the participatory model, argued McCreary, as “doing what it did in the past—because it doesn’t work.” Shimer “was a failed institution—financially, not intellectually.” As Shimer’s current finances were “bordering on dysfunctional,” she offered that the school’s best solution was to adopt a “modern, non-profit corporate model.” Patrick Parker added,

“The democratic model has been proven to be dysfunctional.” To this Faculty Trustee Albert Fernandez replied, “If anything has been shown, it’s that the corporate model has turned American higher education into a business.”

Many trustees affirmed aloud that “consultation” is not “obedience,” and two trustees the formula, “Let the students learn, the teachers teach, and the administrators manage.”

After brief argumentation over language and a second from Trustee F.H. Buckley, the Board passed what has since become known as the “Parker-Buckley Resolution,” twenty-two to eight with two abstentions.

The meeting did not end before Christopher Nelson had offered Fernandez, as Speaker of the Assembly, to start a task force—composed equally of trustees and non-trustee Assembly members—dedicated, in Nelson’s words, to “studying the effects of the changes in the Board By-Laws and the Assembly Constitution through May 2008.” Fernandez, who regretted aloud that “people [had] spoken about this college without knowing it,” replied that the offer would be put to the Assembly. Numerous students at Shimer have since repeated Fernandez’s complaint that many of the trustees who are most vocally opposed to participatory governance at Shimer are the newest to the college.

Discussion of the President’s and the Assembly’s respective powers and obligations spilled over into the next day’s Board meetings, which were closed to all but Board members. The student resolution, though read near the end of the day, was left off the minutes because it was not addressed to the entire Board.

A student-planned information session was held on October 19, the Monday after the Board meeting. Fernandez, who attended the information session, noted that the Board had voted to urge respect for the President’s authority by over two-thirds, although the faculty’s resolutions were not read until the very end of the discussion and only partially, the first faculty resolution never being read. He felt that the board had treated the issue too narrowly: trustees insisted on seeing the resolutions as challenges to the president’s ability to fire Elaine Vincent rather than his manner of firing or his ability to fire without substantive Assembly or community consultation. It was noted that President Lindsay had introduced sixteen new Board members within only the past year. (Trustees now number 34.) Their newness to Shimer, claimed several students, weakened the right of these trustees to judge or legislate over the school’s culture. Fernandez speculated that new

trustees and President Lindsay himself may have been “sold” Shimer by being informed of its Great Books curriculum and of its small classes but not adequately of its self-governance traditions. One student also suggested that most Board members, particularly the new ones whom Lindsay had recruited, were probably eager to show loyalty to the school’s chief executive officer. A consensus emerged that the resolution did little to clarify the questions surrounding the president’s authority.

Many spoke of a cultural gap between the college and its trustees. Peter Vincent observed that trustees often came from business backgrounds and were probably accustomed to “top-down” management. Meg Nelson and Allie Peluso worried that new donors and trustees, in Nelson’s view consistently conservative, hoped to reform Shimer’s curriculum and left-leaning culture, although Fernandez cautioned against believing that a “hostile corporate or right-wing takeover” was underway, these being “extreme scenarios.” Multiple students reported feeling neglected as stakeholders of the school.

The meeting ended after identifying ways of bridging the gap between the Board and the internal community: these included Chris Nelson’s suggested task force, increased trustee attendance at Assembly meetings, and broad community participation in the Board-led review which President Lindsay will undergo this year and potentially next.

### **Pritts hired; the mission statement review and Strategic Planning update intensify distrust of Lindsay and the Board**

On October 22, President Lindsay announced to the college by Cosmos that Amy Pritts would be hired as Shimer’s new admission director:

Earlier today, I sent the following message to the Administrative Committee:

Dear Members of the Administrative Committee,

Thank you for your consultation last week on the director of admissions position. After completing reference checks and consulting further with a number of other faculty, students, the directors, and board members, I have decided to extend an offer to Amy Pritts. I have informed the directors as well as Cassie Sherman. I am informing you, the members of the committee, before making the general announcement on Cosmos.

Tom Lindsay

Let me add to this my thanks to all of you with whom I consulted about this decision. I understand that passions have run high on this issue. Now that it has been decided, I ask that we all come together to support the admissions office in its critical efforts to spread the good news to prospective students about the unique and ennobling education that Shimer offers.

Shortly after hiring Pritts, Lindsay relocated his office to within Shimer's admission office on the first floor.

Accusations that President Lindsay, the Board, or both had violated the Shimer ethos reappeared in disputes over the approaching review of Shimer's mission statement, which the school is mandated to reconsider regularly. On November 2, Lindsay distributed his "Suggested Guideposts" through Cosmos. This document, in which Lindsay offers starting points for a discussion on the mission statement, appears to recommend that Shimer adopt one differing markedly from the current statement. The "Guideposts" have drawn criticism for this reason. Professor Steve Werlin wrote in an open letter sent October 9 to Stuart Patterson:

When I read the Guideposts that President Lindsay shared, I was struck by how little they have to do with our current mission statement. As interesting as they might be, and as much as we might learn by working through them, they fail to recognize that we are a College with a history of more than 150 years. We're not starting from nothing.

The current mission statement invokes "active citizenship" and "informed, responsible action" as the ends of education. Neither phrase is found in the "Guideposts," which omission is frequently targeted by critics. Several students have also attacked the references to the Founding political documents of American government. An example of such a reference:

In the course of examining the whole of existence, Shimer recognizes that, to be true to its quest, it must likewise examine its act of examining; that is, must explore the context in which its inquiry takes place. Accordingly, Shimer studies the Founding documents -- the Declaration, U.S. Constitution, and *The Federalist* -- as well as the other original sources that both informed the Founding and, later, reacted to it.

The "Guideposts" mention no other text of Shimer's Great Books curriculum by name. They also reprise parts of the president's inaugural speech. This has intensified speculation among students and alumni that

Lindsay or conservative trustees have a predetermined agenda and eschew community input in seeking to reform Shimer through its academics. "Is there a particular 'strategic planning' reason for this patriotic rhetoric?" asked student Kathleen Hisey in a November 2 Listen post addressed to Lindsay. "Is it to make us eligible for grants? If there are underlying motives for the increased focus on America in your Suggested Guideposts, it would be responsible of you to let us know what they are so that we can accurately evaluate your proposal."

Lindsay has defended the allusion to Founding documents on the grounds that a superior education must lead students to examine the conditions of free inquiry and to recognize that liberal education can operate at "an institutional basis" only in the context of a "liberty" secured in political systems like American democracy. The references to America are not jingoistic, he says. "If we were in France," Lindsay stated in a November 23 interview, "I would say that we should be studying the origins of the French government, because, in order to understand who we are, you have to understand how you got there."

In preparing Shimer's self-study report to the HLC, the school's Self-Study Committee invited Shimerians to submit both model mission statements and thoughts on the direction that the review should take. On January 28, the committee released a compendium of this input. Of 43 submitted comments on the review, none expressed support for Lindsay's "Guideposts," and of 6 submitted model mission statements, all included either the phrase "responsible action," "responsible thought and action," or "responsible citizenship."

Another departure from Shimer precedent was found in the first version of the president's Strategic Plan prospectus, e-mailed to the community with his "Guideposts." According to Fernandez, in the past, an Assembly committee directed the mission statement review, which moreover was not conducted as part of Shimer's periodic Strategic Plan updates. The prospectus, however, merged the review (and synchronized the self-study process as a whole) with the broader effort of Strategic Planning and put the Board's Executive Committee in charge of it. The document also placed the "responsibility" of drafting the Plan's components on the Board, which would only later solicit "other stakeholder groups"—such as faculty, students, staff, and alumni—for their input through "group and personal conversations, drafts disseminated, and comments invited." After objections to the

language by Fernandez and Chris Nelson at a meeting of the Board's Education Committee, the language of the Plan prospectus was changed: the revised prospectus no longer gives the Board "responsibility" over the Plan update but rather has Board "coordinating" it.

### **November 15 Assembly meeting reaffirms Shimer's dialogical ethos**

The November 15 Assembly meeting approached. A finalized agenda was sent to the internal community by Cosmos on November 10, and also to alumni and external trustees who had said they would attend. The agenda presented a series of resolutions originating from within the campus community: the first, Item IV, was motivated by Professor Stuart Patterson, while the remaining resolutions, Items V to VII, were motivated by the Assembly's own Agenda Committee.

As Patterson would admit at the Assembly meeting, his "resolution addressed to the Board of Trustees" was modeled after the four-part Parker-Buckley Resolution the Board had passed nearly a month before. Whereas the Parker-Buckley Resolution's last item "urge[d] the Dean Shiner and the faculty to respect the leadership of President Lindsay," however, Patterson's "urge[d] the Trustee and the President to respect the moral authority of the Faculty and of the Assembly, as the embodiment of the College's democratic ethos."

The next resolution proposed that the Assembly adopt a "Declaration of Principles of Shared Governance at Shimer College." Among these principles:

1. All members of the Shimer College community -- which embraces students, faculty, trustees, administrative staff and alumni ... -- have both a right and a responsibility to participate in its governance and direction ... .

3. It is an integral part of education at Shimer College ... that students actively concern themselves with the welfare of the College community ... .

4. Shimer College recognizes and appreciates the value of experience, education, and expert knowledge in the making of decisions, in reaching them expeditiously

5. Notwithstanding all the preceding, all decisions that will substantially influence the identity, ethos, or future of the College must be reached, even when the consent of others is not constitutionally required, after adequate consultation and discussion, and in accordance with the dialogal traditions of the College and the process set forth in its constitutional documents.

6. [C]onsultation must be in good faith and never merely perfunctory.

7. The mere general invocation of peril to the College, including legal liability exposure, is not a justification for decisions or conduct that violate the letter or spirit of its ethical norms or constitutional processes.

Item VI of the agenda was a resolution prompting the Assembly to reaffirm the historical, ethical, and constitutional grounds for the continuance of shared governance at Shimer College; it ended with a list of "constitutional and other official documents" that it claimed supported shared governance, among them the Assembly Constitution, the Board By-Laws, and the "Expectations."

Item VII instructed "the Speaker to address and disseminate the resolutions adopted" at the November 15 Assembly "to all the constituencies of Shimer College, including Trustees and alumni."

Interest in these resolutions—and concern over the controversies to which they responded—reached an uncommon intensity among alumni in the days before Assembly. Learning of the conflicts at their alma mater primarily through Listen, Facebook, and word-of-mouth, they joined in Internet discussions on the unrest at the school. Many alumni resolved to appear at the coming Assembly. To accommodate the anticipated swell in attendance, the Assembly meeting would be broadcast using Internet conference technology.

At 4:00 P.M. on November 15, an impressive body of Shimerians gathered in Cinderella Lounge. A graduate from 2003 looked about the room and declared it "a reunion." More trustees than usual had also decided to come, among them Kathleen McCreary, Rebecca Sundin, and Edward Walbridge. Two faces were conspicuously absent: President Lindsay was away fundraising but sent his regrets through Speaker Fernandez, while Professor Eileen Buchanan was at home recovering from surgery. (Buchanan was in fact attending Assembly by video conference.)

After the approval of minutes and a brief treatment of committee reports, Dean of the College David Shiner delivered his yearly State of Academic Affairs report, which detailed the college's situation as it related to the next semester's course offerings, the anticipated expansion of the Shimer-in-Oxford Program, the relative health of the Weekend College, the Teaching Fellows Program, the imminent curriculum review, the expansion of the faculty, and the secure authority of the faculty and the Academic Planning Committee over academic affairs.

After the address, Speaker Fernandez read two and then distributed two more of six statements sent *in absentia* by trustees Patrick Parker, Michael McDonald, Matt Franck, Carson Holloway, Bob Chitester, and Claudia Allums, the last two received just hours before the Assembly meeting began. Iverson presented a motion to keep the statements off the minutes because they were addressed to the Speaker and not the Assembly; yet Jim Donovan and Stuart Patterson, arguing that the Assembly should show courtesies to the Board which the Board itself had withheld, convinced Iverson to withdraw it.

McCreary contested the decision to read or distribute only four statements, claiming a deliberative body like the Assembly should publicize all six if it wanted to be well-informed. Fernandez countered that Assembly precedent was to read statements from members *in absentia* only if they had been invited, and noted the shortness of time; in a response to a question, he also claimed the two he planned to read adequately represented the rest. Alumna and trustee Mary Lou Kennedy, attending in person, spoke against straying from the agenda to address the letters: "Unfortunately one cannot have a dialogue with an e-mail." She reminded the Assembly that the opinions in the e-mails were those of the authors and not necessarily those of the whole Board. What Shimer needed most, she suggested, were clarifications of the May 2008 By-Law changes.

Professor Jim Donovan also saw the larger issue being obscured by the letters: "It's unfortunate that we don't have these trustees here for dialogue. On a certain fundamental level, I'm with them: we shouldn't have a system where everyone is making every decision. And while I won't speak for the faculty, I know of no faculty members who are saying, 'The president should not have authority.' The goal is to figure out what the appropriate execution of the President's authority is, not his authority in and of itself."

Though it violated precedent, the Assembly at last resolved to have all six statements distributed. The Assembly then recessed for ten minutes to allow attendees to read.

All six letters voiced dismay at the internal community's continuing demands for a form of shared governance the writers thought inconsistent with Shimer's current governance policy. Several letters argued the May 2008 By-Law changes had definitively settled matters that the Assembly would soon revisit. Michael McDonald wrote, "Indeed, I understand that

certain members of the Assembly may even plan to introduce measures to reinstitute the participatory model of decision-making that is no longer in effect and that the Board rightly discarded eighteen months ago because of its deleterious effect upon the College's academic, administrative and financial management. I would hope this is not the case; but if it is, I am genuinely amazed." Similarly, Patrick Parker, the only trustee of the six who has sat on the Board for longer than a year, wrote, "The lengthy deliberations last year which resulted in serious revisions of the Shimer [B]ylaws left no room for ambiguity as to the implications of the revisions ... . [Shimer's largest donor and I] expect, in return for our support, that the rest of the community will do its job, i.e. for the teachers to teach, the students to learn, and the managers to manage."

Many students and alumni accused the statements' authors of misunderstanding the college. Alumnus Bill Arnold took issue with Parker's assertion that at Shimer "teachers should teach, students should learn, and managers should manage"; as a Shimer student, Arnold said, he had worked only with "facilitators," never "teachers," and the process was much more complex and cooperative than Parker's formulation acknowledged.

The Assembly at last proceeded to the resolutions. The Assembly largely supported Patterson's motion. Student Juan Guerrero said it was clear that certain members of the board were ignorant of Shimer's governing structure; he pointed out that most of the trustees who had written statements were new, and so it was important to pass a resolution similar to the Parker-Buckley Resolution, demanding the Board to respect the Assembly's moral authority and restore the balance of powers. Student Gerry Welch commented, "We demand the respect for dialogue." McCreary also voiced support for the motion; she reported being unable to see where the recent disagreements between the campus and the Board lay. The resolution passed easily.

Discussion over the remaining two motions proved more contentious. McCreary took issue with the fifth Principle of the "Declaration." She called it inconsistent with both the preceding Principles and the purpose of the By-Law revisions; she also warned that the language on "consent" and "adequate consultation and discussion" was vague enough to cause legal and managerial difficulties and would alarm lawyers on the Board. Other attending trustees largely agreed. A motion to withdraw the resolution failed, however, as



well as a number of friendly amendments intended as a compromise between supporters and opponents of its most controversial language. In the end, opponents' concerns failed to dissuade the Assembly from voting to pass this resolution with slight emendations.

The resolution occupying Item VI also drew criticism; McCreary claimed that the motion asked Assembly members, especially the trustees present, to judge upon the meaning of documents with which they were unfamiliar and could not now examine whole. (Short selections from those documents meant to the support the motion had been prepared and distributed.) Student Erik Boneff countered that it was not an unreasonable expectation that trustees would already examined those documents. Once again, the Assembly voted to pass the resolution.

A concluding motion instructed Speaker Fernandez to disseminate the passed resolutions to the constituencies of Shimer College, including trustees and alumni. Before adjourning, a Fireside discussion was announced to work out a plan for a joint Board-Assembly task force, proposed by Board Chair Nelson as part of the dialogue initiative accepted in principle by the Assembly with its first resolution.

The Assembly adjourned at 7:30 P.M.



• JESSA WRIGHT •  
NOVEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2009

Tom,

You've been the subject of a lot of kaffuffle around Shimer lately. While I haven't physically been around Shimer much since I graduated (2008), I'd like to give you my take on what's been going on. I discussed it a bit with some current Shimer students who are around, and they seem to think I'm on the right track with this.

You are the new guy. When a new guy is brought into an established community, it is common for that established community to be a bit wary of the new guy. When the new guy has an enormous amount of power in that community, that sense of wariness is intensified. Before the new guy gets accepted by the community, he usually has to prove himself by demonstrating that he shares the values of the community and by earning the trust of the community. This is how things usually work, but I see no problem with that; I do think that this is an entirely appropriate way for a newcomer to be accepted into a community. It appears that, as of yet, you have neither demonstrated that you share the values of the community nor earned its trust. It is worrisome that, as president, you seem to have put forth very little effort into earning our trust and acceptance. Because, in addition to being an untrusted and unaccepted newcomer, you are also a president who is making big changes, I don't think it is at all unreasonable for us to be concerned about your intentions. It might appear that we are just hostile to outsiders, but you simply haven't earned our trust and acceptance yet.

Shimer is a community that values dialogue very highly. As president of the Shimer community, I do not expect you perfectly embody all of the Shimer's shared values. However, it is worrisome that you seem to shun dialogue so completely. In a normal community, shunning dialogue is cause for concern and makes it seem like you have something to hide (think of all the organizations working toward corporate and governmental transparency), but in the Shimer community, shunning dialogue sets off all of our alarm bells and puts us into a bit of a panic. In making your big changes, you offer us very little explanation. Assuming your big changes would be entirely amenable to us if we knew your reasons for them, the fact is that we do not know your reasons for them and, because we don't trust you yet, it is far easier for us to imagine malicious explanations than amenable ones. Whether your intentions are malicious or amenable, right now it looks the same to us. I imagine that can be frustrating for you, having us constantly question your motives, but the best solution I see to that is to earn our trust and explain the reasons behind your decisions. It doesn't sound like you have been very responsive to the concerns of the community, which doesn't help us trust you and actually gives us more reason not to trust you. If you are not frustrated by the lack of trust the Shimer community has in you, that would concern me even more because it indicates to me that you may not care to gain the trust of the Shimer community, and that you may not care about the Shimer community at all.

I would love to dialogue with you about any of these things, but keep in mind that I think it is more important that you dialogue with the current students, faculty, and staff about these things than it is for you to dialogue with me about these things. If you aren't discussing these things with them, I see little point to your discussing these things with me.

Earnestly,

Jessa Wright, 2008

# ERIK BADGER

November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

President Lindsay's "guideposts"- which, seem more like a carefully written replacement mission statement to me - ignore vital elements of what has made Shimer what it is for as long as I've known it.

To put it simply, this is how Shimer has educated students at least since my era ('93-'97):

1. You read challenging, transformative, foundational texts - mainly from the Western canon, but from other traditions as well (our canon doesn't have a monopoly on such texts) - which require you, if you're serious, to deeply question your ideas, both of yourself and the world in which you live.

2. You go to class and work, together with your teacher, as a group through dialogue both to better understand the text and to learn how to learn together. This requires more than absorbing content - as the current mission statement recognizes. It requires learning to actively question; learning to speak so that others can understand; learning to respect the ideas, histories and experiences of your classmates so that you can actually learn from them; and, at its best, it involves learning to listen well enough and becoming intellectually honest enough so that not only do you understand the content of what's being presented, but you remain open to the possibility that your ideas - and even you - might change as a result. In the classroom, these things make up "the process leading away from passivity" that the current mission statement refers to.

3. You go to Assembly and participate in the self-governance of the College. In Assembly, students bring their theoretical knowledge of how power is exercised to bear against the practical reality of governing a small institution. In perhaps its most concrete form, here Shimer students practice "active citizenship." Though some choose not to participate much in Assembly, over time most do,

and the very possibility of meaningful participation - much like in our vaunted American democracy - matters.

When you put it all together, a Shimer education reveals itself as not just an academic or intellectual project. It is a political and social one, too. At our best, we not only introduce students to powerful, liberating ideas, but we cultivate the habits and skills that prepare them to meaningfully participate in and, if they see fit, transform their world. In this way, Shimer offers not only a theoretical, but a practical education in democracy. For some time now, this has separated Shimer from other so-called "great books" programs. Indeed, it's what makes us unique.

With all this in mind, I don't think President Lindsay's "guideposts" document captures what Shimer does. It lays too much emphasis on 'freedom of the mind' and 'freedom from ideology,' while masking its own powerful ideology; it lays too much emphasis on examining our context as it's represented by the American founding documents; and, it completely ignores the notion of preparing students to participate responsibly and productively in the world in which they live both through thought and in action.

At the alumni gathering last Sunday, the following question was posed directly to President Lindsay: "Should the Shimer mission statement reflect a consensus of the community?" He responded, simply, "Yes." Given the obviously widespread commitment to active citizenship among students, faculty, administrators and alumni, as defined in our current mission statement, echoed in our motto, and represented in our core curriculum, classroom practice, and mode of self-governance, it appears that the position that requires defending is that this consensus doesn't already exist. If Shimer's mission statement needs changing, I encourage President Lindsay, or anyone else committed to open, authentic dialogue, to make this case publicly, preferably in writing, to assure that any new consensus legitimately represents the broader Shimer community.

Erik Badger,

Class of '97  
Former staff '02 - '09

# T E D K R U G

N O V E M B E R 1 9 <sup>T H</sup> 2 0 0 9

In his letter to the recent Assembly, one Board Member made the claim that Shimer's main appeal to incoming students is the Great Books curriculum, not the mode of self-governance. As a recent alum (Class of '08), I can honestly say this is not true for me. It was *both* the Great Books curriculum *and* the opportunity to participate in the democratic governance of the College that drew me to Shimer. And, in retrospect, participating in Assemblies and serving on committees were some of my most valuable experiences from those years. They gave me the opportunity to practice active citizenship in something that really mattered, rather than only taking classes.

The Shimer College Assembly includes all community members and represents the true spirit of the college. It ensures that the college is never managed in an arbitrary manner, but only according to its core values as defined by the Mission Statement and Assembly Constitution and as embodied by the Assembly itself. Above and beyond that, the Shimer College Assembly also represents the ideal of all free peoples—one that no nation has yet achieved—the ideal of a true democracy. At its best, the Assembly is emulative of what a nation can potentially be; it is hard to think of a more worthy experiment or better training in active citizenship.

Neither did I choose Shimer because it was a rich school. Over the years, I have come to appreciate the importance of material things. But of what importance is survival, whether of an individual or an institution, if one surrenders one's core values and most important principles? Self-governance is as much a part of Shimer as the Great Books curriculum. Self-governance is not always pretty; in fact, it can be messy at times. Some see it as dysfunctional. Yet to those who love freedom, I argue and believe many at Shimer share this view, it is the most just form of governance.

The President and the new Board want to take our beloved college in a direction that, if realized, would dramatically alter the Shimer we know. In my view, it would change a Shimer education into a product rather than a practice; it would become a point on a resume rather than an active, lifelong pursuit. It is true that in this country and probably in most of the world, you do not have to bother about democracy if you have money. Shimer College, if it is to be at all unique and worth preserving, *must* remain a place where this maxim does not hold true. Dialog and true community, rather than money and power, must determine the direction of the college. Above all, we must not be influenced by threats of financial failure or breakdown "if" the President and Board's position is not adopted. None of us will starve if donor X withdraws support; but we will starve ourselves if we lose touch with our mission.

Ted Krug

Class of 2008

# DENISE LANE

DECEMBER 16<sup>th</sup> 2009

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To Mr. Tom Lindsay, Members of the Board, and the Entire Shimer Community,

I recently received a letter from you, Tom, on "behalf of Shimer College" asking me to send in my monetary support. I do like to support Shimer, am very proud to have graduated from this fine college, and I would like to give monetary support in the future. However, I refuse to do so while members of the Board make it very clear that they devalue the voices of the Shimer community and the Assembly. The emails sent to the November Assembly meeting insult my Shimerian sensibilities and values.

Back in January of this year, when you were inaugurated as president of this college, you extolled our school as unique and said it should serve as an example to all colleges and universities. You mentioned that one of the primary problems of those mainstream schools is that they are not adequately "preparing students for citizenship," and later that same day in an interview, you mentioned one of Shimer's strengths "is that it prepares students for democratic citizenship." I strongly agree with this and was impressed with your speech. In practice I believe you are falling short of your words.

As Chief Executive Officer of the college, I expect you to stand up for the college, its community members, its traditional governance system, and its mission statement. To that end I truly hope that you have spoken with the Board members who sent those disrespectful emails. I hope you have eloquently defended the self-governance system of the Assembly as the practicum side of that education towards citizenship which you extolled.

The Assembly is an integral part of the Shimer experience, it is a forum for all Shimer community members to gather together, air issues, support the school, and understand the current state of the college. Shimer's dialog based learning teaches us that discussion of big decisions is necessary because there are many sides to every story, and also to every potential decision. Our desire to be involved in those decisions shows a high level of commitment to the school.

The changes made in May 2008 were proposed by the Administrative Committee, which I was a part of at the time, in an attempt to more accurately describe the relationship of the president and the staff of the college. In no way were these changes meant to dissolve the Assembly, nor devalue it, and I am disappointed to hear that interpretation made by members of the Board who weren't even here at the time.

Please, instead, listen to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni who are trying to explain things to you. This defense of the Assembly goes much deeper than any faculty and/or staff "agitating resistance." Rather, it points to the very heart of what we learn at this college, that everybody's voice has value when spoken with respect and honesty. Please stop de-valuing our voices by insulting our community through attacking the Assembly.

Concerning the proposed changes to the mission statement, I prefer the current mission statement which calls on "education for active citizenship in the world" and do not like the newly proposed one. Further, it deeply concerns me that you are attempting to change the college's stated mission before taking the time to really get to know the college. This feels like irresponsible leadership.

Since you have not been a member of the Shimer community for very long, I have some advice for you and the new members of the Board, its pretty simple: get to know us. Truly listen to the issues we bring up, don't just give us lip service. As you mentioned in your Inaugural Address, Tom, Shimer is incredibly unique, and you won't truly understand that until you spend some serious time with us. Shimer isn't for everyone, maybe its not for you, but you won't know unless you make a real effort to listen and understand us.

In closing, I again urge you to listen to the outcry which has been pouring in from the wide community of Shimer. We don't quit easily, nor quietly. I have no desire to give any monetary support to the college until it is clear that the President and the Board are listening to, and supporting of, the voices of the Assembly. Since this speaks to the very heart of learning at Shimer, I urge all my fellow alumni to stop their support at this time as well.

Sincerely,  
Denise Lane  
Class of '08

# AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## A Student Proposal to the Board Taskforce on Governance:

All parties at Shimer hold shared aspirations for the future of the College. These mutual hopes are for a Shimer that enjoys robust enrollment, fiscal stability, and continuing intellectual excellence. It is our hope that the Board will understand that Shimer's tradition of community--which includes real student participation in committees charged with admissions decisions, academic planning, faculty hiring and review, budgetary planning, and community grievances and appeals--is the best way to achieve our common goals.

We all want to increase enrollment. To do this we must understand what competitively distinguishes Shimer from other Great Books colleges and makes it so exciting to those individuals who eventually attend. Perhaps Shimer's abiding appeal to prospective students can best be summed up by the pithy marketing slogan the College used in the 1960s: "If your youngster doesn't fit the pattern, where should he go to college? To the college that doesn't fit the pattern." Shimer has had the greatest success in recruiting either students who, like home-schoolers, have been intimately involved in their own education or those who have been alienated by the distant and impersonal management of their past educational institutions. If we use the tremendous marketing potential of our Assembly to reach out to the unconventional prospectives who are the base of our recruitment strategy, our enrollment will soar.

Student participation is not necessarily inefficient or wasteful. Shimer history shows that, when the President and Board voted to close the College in 1973, a steering committee of four faculty and four students alone managed feats of astounding fund raising and financial acumen. This community body not only assembled the funds necessary to buy the College out of receivership but also restored sustainability to the institution's expenditures. We believe that the optimal strategy for reaching a financially stable future is one in which the conventional fiduciary role of President and Board is alloyed by the input of everyday community stakeholders through committees of the Assembly. We can and should inquire into ways of unlocking the potential for an active student citizenry to lead to new heights of financial security.

Finally, the above is all for naught if Shimer does not remain committed to providing a unique and sterling education, unparalleled in American academia. There is a broad tendency to criticize the Liberal Arts as disconnected from the real world and to lament the apathy of youth. Shimer College puts the lie to these spurious claims. Our dual commitment to the serious examination of the greatest ideas in history and their real application in the affairs of our community prepares Shimer students to apply the critical intellectual skills which they hone in the classroom and Assembly to their post-Shimer lives. Shimer alumni who have benefited from the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the character of the College will attest to the fact that it has made them more thoughtful, articulate, organized, and confident in their professional, civic, and personal lives. This is the best possible retort to those misguided individuals who question the value of a Liberal education. To those of us who believe that an education in the Liberal Arts is so much more than an impractical indulgence, a Shimer education is a shining example.

As stakeholders and individuals immediately involved in the day-to-day operations of the College, we believe community input is an invaluable asset to any strategy for achieving our shared goals. To be clear, when Shimer students and faculty speak about a participatory community, we do not mean a chaotic commune or perpetual plebiscite. Our participation is mediated by the Assembly, which operates according to a written constitution, observes standard parliamentary procedure, and divides its administrative duties among committees. A strong role for our Assembly is optimal for the responsive and accountable leadership needed to both improve internal morale and achieve our long-term strategic goals. We understand that there are issues upon which reasonable members of the internal and external community may disagree. However, we also ask how the roles of self-governance outlined above specifically hinder the College's ability to meet its goals.

The chief designer of the Great Books program, Robert Hutchins, once defined the necessary conditions of community as "common understanding, common tradition, common ideas, and common ideals." We propose that, through a real dialog, this common ground can be reached at Shimer and when we find it we will secure the felicitous functioning and bright future of our shared institution.

Sincerely,

Heath Iverson, Eugene Lim, Jonathan Timm