

External Review of the Davidson College Registrar's Office
October 17-18, 2005

Susan Breeden, University Registrar, University of Richmond
Paul Wiley, University Registrar and Director of Institutional Research, The University of the South

INTRODUCTION

We were invited to conduct a review of the Registrar's Office at Davidson College, offer our assessment of its effectiveness, and identify future opportunities and challenges that it may face.

We are experienced collegiate registrars with over 40 years of experience in higher education, 30 of which have been in registrar's offices. Paul Wiley serves as University Registrar and Director of Institutional Research at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and Susan Breeden serves as University Registrar at the University of Richmond, in Richmond, Virginia. The University of the South enrolls 1432 undergraduates and 96 graduate and professional students while the University of Richmond enrolls 2920 undergraduates and 1567 graduate, professional, and continuing studies students. As is Davidson College, these institutions are members of the Associated Colleges of the South.

Prior to our on-site visit, we were sent a list of questions to consider during the evaluation. In addition, we reviewed a number of Davidson documents, including *Davidson Catalog for the Academic Year 2005-2006*, *Davidson Academic Regulations for 2005-2006*, *Davidson Faculty Handbook 2005-2006*, and the Davidson College website. We visited Davidson College on October 17-18, 2005, and interviewed the following members of the campus community:

- Chris Alexander, Director of Dean Rusk International Studies Program and Associate Professor of Political Science
- Marcia Beck, Assistant Dean for Academic Administration
- Laura Boyles, Assistant Dean for Academic Administration
- Debbie Brannon, Staff Assistant, Registrar's Office
- Kathy Bray-Merrell, Associate Dean of Students
- George Campbell, Research Analyst
- Kevin Cauble, Administrative Computing Programmer
- Nancy Dickens, Staff Assistant, Registrar's Office
- Hansford Epes, Registrar and Professor of German and Humanities
- Linda Erickson, Financial Aid Counselor
- Chris Gruber, Vice President and Dean of Admission and Financial Aid
- Lori Hayes, Staff Assistant, Registrar's Office
- Ernest Jeffries, Assistant Dean of Students, Director of Minority Student Affairs
- Linda LeFauve, Director, Planning and Institutional Research
- Carolyn Ortmyer, Study Abroad Coordinator
- Eleanor W. Payne, Senior Associate Dean of Admission and Financial Aid
- Clark Ross, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, Frontis W. Johnston Professor of Economics
- Thomas Shandley, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students
- Kenitra Smith, Director of Administrative Computing
- Wanda Underwood, Assistant Registrar
- Robert Vagt, President
- Sandy Wierman, Programmer
- Various department chairs and members of the Educational Policy Committee
- Three students

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In assessing the Davidson College Registrar's Office, we relied on a number of AACRAO publications including *The 2001 FERPA Guide*, *The 2003 Academic Record and Transcript Guide*, *The Guide to the Student Right-to-Know Act and Graduation Rate Survey*, and the *Professional Development Guidelines for Registrars: A Self-Audit*.

I. ROLE OF THE REGISTRAR

A. Mission

Mission Statement: The purpose of the Registrar's Office is to support the academic mission of Davidson College. As an office of the faculty, the Registrar's Office coordinates activities including but not limited to efficient course registration, maintenance and protection of academic records, and certification of students for continued enrollment and for graduation. The office maintains, interprets, and monitors academic policy and communicates procedures to faculty, to students, and to the college's various publics.

The Registrar's Office seeks to support the college's external reporting requirements and its institutional research and academic planning activities by maintaining a comprehensive database of student academic and demographic information. The office certifies student enrollments and academic eligibility to various governmental, public, private, and academic agencies including but not limited to the NCAA and the National Student Loan Clearinghouse.

The Registrar's Office is dedicated to academic advising and course planning to help students incorporate academic experiences at home and abroad in order to fulfill their educational and personal goals.

The clearly defined mission of the Registrar's Office at Davidson is ordinary and appropriate for such an office at an outstanding liberal arts college. The mission statement appears in *The Davidson College Faculty Handbook* (p. 95) and is clearly defined and understood by faculty, staff, and students. In practice, the office is a strong link between the academic policies of the institution and its faculty and students. As such, it serves as the primary resource for students and faculty not only for registration issues but also on matters of academic policy.

The office has recently reviewed its mission statement and defined its core processes in preparation for the College's review for reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). This exercise has sharpened the office's mission and further codified its central role in the academic life of the College.

Commitment to service is a central, unifying principle embraced by all members of the Registrar's Office staff. The office is appreciated throughout the College for its "professionalism and human kindness." We note, as do its constituents, that the office is highly efficient without imposing layers of bureaucracy. The staff was described as "very responsive," "prompt and accurate," and "always willing to go the extra mile." From the incoming freshman who spoke with the Registrar by phone several times before his arrival on campus this fall to the faculty member who appreciates the cheerful willingness to help, even with last minute requests, everyone we interviewed values the office and its responsiveness.

B. Scope of Responsibility/Intra-college relations

The Davidson Registrar's Office has historically held a place of authority in the academic life of the College. This authority was bolstered when Hansford Epes assumed the position of Registrar in 1999. The Office is respected throughout the College community and works well with other offices and colleagues throughout the institution.

The Office takes a leadership role in changes in academic policy as evidenced by the initiation of a revision of academic policies last summer. The Registrar undertook the project to clarify current policy and worked with the faculty Committee on Educational Policy, on which he serves as an advisory member, throughout the year to approve and implement the revised policies. He is especially appreciated for his application and interpretation of policy—a colleague described him as “rigorous, systematic, and brutally fair with the ability to be flexible when necessary.”

The office is widely recognized as a leader in the use of technology, which is thoughtfully implemented to improve service to students and faculty and not simply to utilize technology for its own sake. Faculty members appreciate the efficiencies and availability of information that the office's use of technology has spawned. This has improved their roles as both teachers and advisors. Students commented on the easy availability of information both about their personal academic records and about the College's academic policies.

The office was cited repeatedly for accuracy of data with special credit given to the Registrar and Assistant Registrar. The Office of Institutional Research was highly complimentary of the systematic accuracy and reliability of data maintained and produced by the Registrar's Office. Administrative offices throughout the college rely on the Registrar's Office for good information and recognize that office for the collegial manner with which such information is provided.

C. Organization and Personnel

The Registrar's Office is well-managed and effectively organized. The division of labor among the staff is equitable with responsibilities grouped to maximize efficiency. The reporting lines within the office are clear and each staff member understands his or her role within the office. The College's policies and deadlines are well understood by the staff who can, in turn, relate them to students and faculty. There is no hesitation, however, in referring complex situations directly to the Registrar. Staff members are qualified to perform their duties and do so with proficiency and alacrity. The office was repeatedly cited by faculty and administrators for its professionalism, accuracy, and efficiency.

As most of the members of the office staff are long-term Davidson employees, there is a strong understanding of processes across the College. Under the current Registrar, the office staff has coalesced into an effective and efficient group working with unity of purpose and a clear sense of mission, which we understand was not always the case. Each member of the staff expressed genuine appreciation for the work and talents of his or her office colleagues and is willing and able to pitch in and cover other areas when necessary. General and specific Banner training is accomplished within the office. The staff is effectively cross-trained on essential

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processes allowing the office to continue functioning during vacations, illnesses, and even personnel changes. Staff members appreciate the increased use of technology that has allowed them to become more efficient. In short, office morale is high.

The Registrar takes primary (and often sole) responsibility for study abroad advising, transfer credit evaluation, and assignment of classrooms. We are mildly concerned about the lack of cross training in those areas, but understand that the Assistant Registrar has recently taken on responsibility for reviewing some pre-approved study abroad credits. There are plans to delegate certain responsibilities from the Assistant Registrar to the newly-hired office assistant, which should allow the Assistant Registrar to develop some expertise in the functions for which the Registrar alone is currently responsible. We agree with these plans and encourage their continued implementation.

D. Publication and Communication of Academic Policy

The Registrar's Office, which is uniquely positioned to interpret academic and institutional policies, communicates effectively, accurately, and thoroughly across the campus community. One colleague praised the Registrar for his ability to communicate information to different constituencies in ways that are appropriate for and understood by those constituencies.

The college catalog is effective and serves as a central source document containing general policy information and course descriptions as well as matters of record. Students recognize the catalog as a document important to their academic success at Davidson. Course descriptions succinctly convey course content, clearly identify prerequisites, and specify when students and advisors should expect the course to be offered. The academic calendar is developed by the Registrar's Office and is available in the catalog and through the web as well as in a handout available in the office. Students indicated that requirements for graduation are clearly communicated. An on-line version of the catalog is recently available. While the catalog identifies the College's primary accreditor as required by SACS, contact information for the Commission on Colleges should also appear.

Academic policy is further communicated in an annual *Academic Regulations* booklet published by the Registrar's Office. The booklet includes clear information on degrees and degree requirements; majors, minors, and concentrations; attendance; examinations; grading scale; honors; transfer credit and off-campus study; and transcripts, diplomas and verification of enrollment. The web is also used to make information available to students and the advice on registration and departmental overviews found there are particularly helpful. Information on the acceptability of Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and transfer work for incoming students is available on the web and clearly communicated.

The importance of students taking responsibility for their own education is a theme reiterated without variation by the Registrar's Office. One student recalled that she once asked the Registrar's Office what she needed to do to ensure that she graduated on time. The office responded by email that understanding her progress toward a degree was her responsibility and gave her appropriate references so she could find the information she needed. This simple but effective use of email as a communication tool to answer student and faculty questions is a hallmark of this office. Students and faculty noted the Registrar's ability to answer their specific

questions, enlighten them as to how to find such answers on their own, and gently convey to them their responsibility for doing so. Far from being put off by such "instruction," both groups recognized the important role the Registrar plays in their rightful assumption of academic responsibilities. In our view, this seemingly mundane and no doubt repetitive message from the Registrar is an important reason why both students and faculty at Davidson largely operate "within the rules" and why other academic administrators are not inundated with petitions for exceptions.

The Registrar's Office administers the distribution and collection of self-scheduled examinations. The procedures for the process are clearly communicated to students and faculty and the system appears to run smoothly each semester. This tradition—central to the College's culture and honor code—is well understood and appreciated by faculty and students.

Davidson's Registrar's Office, as do those at most colleges, still requires paper forms for processing many routine transactions. The forms are clear, well designed, and readily available just within the office door. As an added convenience to students and faculty, many forms could probably be made available in Portable Document Format (PDF) through the web. There is little doubt that the submission of relatively routine student transactions (major declarations, transcript requests, etc.) will migrate toward the web in coming years. Davidson will want to be especially careful when implementing such "advances" that the important personal interactions fostered by paper forms are not lost to the technology. To this end, it may be wise to develop even greater technical expertise within the office especially in the area of web and database interactions.

II. REGISTRATION AND RELATED FUNCTIONS

A. Class Scheduling

Developing the schedule of classes is a core function in any registrar's office and is central to the academic mission of the institution. Class scheduling, when done well, assures that course offerings meet the needs of the various academic programs, allows students to build workable schedules, and ensures that faculty and classroom resources are used efficiently. Effective scheduling attempts to balance the desires and needs of individual faculty members, departments and programs, and faculty committees. Registrars understand that careful and thoughtful scheduling is, therefore, quite time consuming. At Davidson, the responsibility for scheduling is shared between the Assistant Registrar, who gathers and enters course, meeting, and instructor information, and the Registrar, who assigns classrooms, negotiates with departments, and adjusts meeting times as necessary. While both faculty and staff express satisfaction with the outcome of the current process, both groups understand that some efficiency might be realized if departments could directly enter some of the initial data into the Banner system. The office is investigating alternative ways of collecting and entering data that will reduce duplication of effort while allowing the office to exercise prudent oversight of the schedule. In addition, plans are in place to delegate some of the process from the Assistant Registrar to an assistant in the office.

The Class Schedule is well-designed and contains information needed to facilitate good advising and promote appropriate course selection. It is easy to read and includes necessary information on times and locations, enrollment restrictions,

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required permissions, fees, etc. Students commented that the schedule contains a lot of information, but that it is needed information.

B. Registration

The Registrar's Office provides accurate and timely advisee information to advisors prior to registration. The Registrar has developed an easy-to-read list of courses completed by each student, grouped by subject, so that advisors can quickly ascertain how their advisees are progressing in particular areas. One advisor expressed the need for more information on her advisees each semester. Other advisors quickly noted that that information is readily available on the web.

As mentioned earlier, the Registrar's Office makes effective use of the web to communicate requirements and registration information to students. Not surprisingly, there are different levels of understanding among both students and faculty on how the "tree" system works. Nonetheless, there was across-the-board agreement that the system allocates courses to students in an equitable manner. One student indicated that she had gotten the courses she needed every semester though she was unsure whether credit should go to the tree system or to "the grace of God." Another student eloquently described the way the tree system forced her to think carefully about her choices and think through the various schedule alternatives that would meet her needs—a valuable exercise in any registration system. The Registrar is often called upon to explain "the tree" and the registration system as a whole. He often personally answers the questions of students in the summer prior to their initial matriculation.

D. Schedule Adjustment

The schedule adjustment period is adequate in terms of length and is working well. Students drop and add courses directly through the web. Procedures and deadlines are well documented and clearly communicated. Students indicated that the schedule adjustment process was straightforward and easy to use. The relatively liberal Pass/Fail policy is also well understood by students and faculty.

III. STUDENT ACADEMIC RECORDS AND GRADING PROCESS

A. Class Enrollment Information

Accurate records of class enrollment are available to students, faculty, and administrative offices. Class rosters are available on the web. Students can view and adjust their course schedules through the web.

B. Grade Procedures and Processing

The grading system is clearly explained in appropriate publications with a clear key on the back of the transcript. Faculty members appreciate the ease with which they submit grades through the web. Deadlines are enforced, allowing efficient and timely processing of grades. Students may view their grades online. Student grades are mailed to parents. While the *Family Educational Records and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA) does permit colleges to release personally identifiable information, such as grade reports, to parents of dependent children, it is not entirely clear to us that the

office is verifying the dependency status of students by confirming that they have been identified as dependents on their parents' most recent income tax return.

C. Transfer Credit

The policy of acceptance of grades associated with transfer credits is clearly explained. Decisions about acceptance of transfer credit are made by the Registrar, with decisions about applicability of transfer coursework to a specific major made by the relevant department. Matriculated students receive a letter in the early fall clearly detailing AP and IB credits awarded and their application to degree requirements.

D. Transcript Processes and Procedures

Processing of transcripts is carried out efficiently and accurately and is the primary responsibility of a single staff member, with others helping out during busy times. The office takes appropriate precautions by using good quality security paper with a seal, securing the paper stock, etc. Transcripts are easy to read and appear to include the elements recommended by AACRAO.

E. Records Management and Retention

The Registrar's Office maintains records in a file room that doubles as a staff member's office. Older records are stored in an attic storage area in the Chambers Building. Online records are backed up nightly as part of Information System's process with a copy stored off-site. The office has a record retention schedule developed as part of the College's Records Management Program several years ago.

We are concerned that the paper records maintained by the office are not stored in fireproof filing cabinets. Even though the Chambers Building is equipped with a sprinkler system, we would still recommend that all paper records be stored in locking fireproof (not simply fire resistant) cabinets. Fireproof filing cabinets are extremely heavy and it may be that the attic storage space is not structurally suitable for them, in which case we suggest removing those records to another secure location that can accommodate them. Such cabinets also should be specifically water resistant as the possible damage to paper records from a sprinkler system is only slightly less concerning than that from fire. Finally, cabinets should be "impact-rated" to resist bursting during a fall from one floor to another or after being struck by a collapsing wall or ceiling. Fireproof filing cabinets are rather expensive. After only a single use, however, most consider them to have been a prudent investment. Even if all needed cannot be purchased in a single fiscal year, the College could budget for four or five units a year for several years.

IV. CERTIFICATIONS

The Registrar's Office is responsible for providing enrollment and degree verifications at the request of students, alumni, and outside agencies. The request process is well-documented. A form is available for students to request enrollment verifications.

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The office submits student enrollment information to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) each semester. The NSC, in turn, completes Student Status Confirmation Reports (SSCR) for the Department of Education's National Student Loan Data program and also communicates enrollment status of students to lenders and guarantee agencies. This process is accomplished with the help of Information Technology Services (ITS) and works well. Since the College is already utilizing the NSC, it might consider utilizing the NSC's enrollment and degree verification services as well.

The Registrar works with the Athletic Department to certify the academic qualifications of student athletes. Veterans Administration Certification is also handled within the Registrar's Office

V. ADVISING/DEGREE AUDIT/GRADUATION/COMMENCEMENT

A. Advising

Accurate advising enhances the student's ability to make satisfactory progress toward graduation. The Registrar has developed an easy-to-understand worksheet so that each student may keep track of his or her progress in fulfilling core and other degree requirements. Advisors receive a simple, easy-to-read list of courses completed by each student so that they may quickly ascertain which required courses a student has completed. Students' complete chronological course records are available through the web. The evaluation of transfer credit is handled by the Registrar in a timely fashion consistent with institutional policies with results communicated to student and advisor.

B. Degree Audit

Degree requirements are well documented in the catalog, Academic Regulations booklet, and on the web. Students are clearly responsible for tracking their own progress toward a degree. Early in each academic year, the Registrar's Office projects which students might graduate the following spring. A preliminary degree audit is completed for these students in the fall semester and is finalized prior to commencement in May.

C. Graduation Processing

As mentioned above, the Registrar's Office conducts degree audits for all students prior to commencement. The Registrar is recognized as one of the principal organizers of commencement ceremonies. Diplomas are produced by a local printer and their accuracy is verified at several points prior to commencement.

VI. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPORT

SungardSCT Banner, a leading Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system utilizing an integrated relational database, works well at Davidson with definitions of data elements agreed upon by the various offices which utilize and maintain them. A data warehouse is the primary source for reports generated by administrative units. The data warehouse functions efficiently with offices having access to the data they need for reporting purposes and confidence in the accuracy of the data.

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It is difficult for most institutions to keep pace with the speed of technological change affecting them. Information Technology Services (ITS) at Davidson has taken a proactive approach, planning to use a technical writer to help codify policies and procedures related to data. A search for an enterprise-wide reporting tool is in its early stages. Both of these measures will provide important support to the Registrar's Office, which should play an important advisory role in the projects.

As mentioned earlier, the Registrar's Office is viewed as a campus leader in the area of information technology and has made elegant use of relatively straightforward technologies to streamline processes and provide needed information to faculty and students. ITS appreciates the office's thoughtful use of technology. The Registrar has mastered available reporting tools to create reports for advising and degree auditing from the data warehouse. There is little doubt that technology will continue to play an ever greater role in the administration of registrar's offices even at relatively small institutions like Davidson.

We do believe that one professional member of the Registrar's staff should attend the Banner user's conference each year. This annual meeting is a good place to learn what other registrar's offices are doing to effectively utilize the Banner system. Many of these institutions have extended Banner without modifying the baseline code and we have found that most are very willing to share information on their processes and even their programming code free of charge, allowing our institutions to do at least some of the things on our technological wish lists. Being able to talk to so many other professionals from registrar's offices that are using the same administrative computing system is invaluable.

VII. LEGAL ISSUES

A. FERPA

FERPA provides a framework for assuring privacy of student education records and the right of students to control access to those records. Staff members in the Registrar's Office are aware of FERPA policies and the importance of safeguarding sensitive information. A student's signature is required for the release of his or her records and students are given the opportunity to request that their directory information not be released without consent. A note prohibiting release to a third party appears on transcripts. The Registrar's Office displays FERPA information on its web site and uses that display to fulfill its annual notification responsibility.

As mentioned earlier, grade mailers are sent to parents rather than students except in the case when a student is verified as independent. We understand FERPA to require that institutions consider students to be independent and verify dependence through a copy of the parents' most recent income tax return. While it is no doubt the case that the majority of Davidson's students are dependents, we believe that FERPA requires that each student be verified as dependent and recommend that Davidson review its contrarian practice. We also recommend that the Registrar's Office reexamine the practice of sending of grades to parents rather than students, which appears to run counter to Davidson's usual emphasis on student responsibility for academic progress.

The Department of Education's Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) is charged with interpreting and enforcing FERPA. The ultimate penalty for non-compliance with

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FERPA is loss of eligibility for Title IV federal financial aid. In fact, however, this penalty has never been levied against an institution of higher education. Rather, the FPCO works with non-compliant institutions to bring policies and procedures into compliance. Given that, there is relatively little danger that Davidson will suffer any negative consequence for non-compliance with FERPA. In general, we applaud Davidson's Registrar for his sensible and balanced approach to implementing FERPA, but recommend more deliberate policy documentation if the practice of sending grades to parents is continued.

Many institutions conduct FERPA training for faculty and staff. Training may be offered in person or through an online tutorial available at the registrar's web site. The office might consider developing some formal training for faculty and staff. The interpretation of FERPA will continue to evolve and the Registrar's Office should be prepared to review the College's FERPA policy on a regular basis to keep up-to-date with changes in and new interpretations of the law.

B. Student Right-to-Know Legislation (SRTK)

The 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 requires that institutions participating in Title IV federal aid programs notify prospective and currently enrolled students that its graduation rates are available on request. Some institutions provide only this notification in their catalogs and web sites while others go a step further and actually publish the graduation rates. We could not find evidence that Davidson is in compliance with this requirement. We recommend that the institution take appropriate steps to comply with SRTK. The Registrar need not be the party responsible for such notification although the Registrar's Office is the source office for the information. If Davidson awards athletic aid to students, it should note that SRTK would also require the College to provide graduation rate of student athletes to current and prospective athletes and their parents.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Q3. Does the administrative model—Registrar a direct report to the VPAA/Dean of Faculty, rather than other models also prevalent nationally—appear to be the best for Davidson?

The current administrative model with the Registrar reporting directly to the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean of the Faculty works well and we would not recommend a change. Many institutions have adopted an integrated enrollment services model designed to force disparate offices to share information and work together. We believe such models erode the authority of the Registrar and frankly consider them to be a passing fad. Even if those models survive longer than we anticipate, the various offices at Davidson already communicate and work well together. The main mission of the Registrar's Office is to support the academic mission of Davidson College, so the current model of the Registrar reporting to the VPAA makes the most sense in terms of accountability and support.

Q4. Does the present climate of customer service for the principal groups served—faculty, students, parents, and other campus offices—seem adequate in terms of (a) personal service and (b) web resources?

We are somewhat reluctant to characterize the various constituencies served by the Registrar's Office as "customers." Having said that, Davidson's Registrar's Office provides excellent service to all those it serves. The staff of the Registrar's Office was consistently

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praised by faculty, students, and other campus offices for its professionalism and responsiveness.

Though we encourage further development of web resources, the Registrar's web site is of high quality and serves various constituencies well. Students recognized the site as a primary resource for academic information. We found the web site easy to navigate with a wealth of information. The explanations on registration procedures and choosing courses are clear and easy to follow. The recent addition of an online searchable college catalog further extends the college's web resources. Students and faculty commented on the ease of use of Banner self-service applications.

Q5. Does the office appear to need particular attention in the areas of (a) security, (b) archiving, (c) FERPA issues?

As previously stated, we believe that Davidson needs to review its policy of assuming that students are dependent unless proven otherwise. Other than this issue, we identified no other FERPA problems. A recommendation was made that the Registrar's Office should develop some form of training for Davidson faculty and staff. Such training could be offered as a tutorial via the Registrar's web site or as a link from the Banner faculty self-service web site. Some institutions conduct mandatory FERPA training for faculty and staff. Mandatory training would probably be "overkill" at Davidson but having a quick reference available for faculty and staff could only help to heighten awareness of FERPA among those that have access to student education records. While the office does not have any current problems, FERPA is constantly evolving in light of new technology or simply at the whim of lawmakers and the office needs to monitor developments closely.

In the Registrar's Office, student records are handled with an eye toward confidentiality and security. Even so, all institutions should regularly review procedures for maintaining the security of student records. With the threat of identity theft, the ever increasing number of fraudulent transcripts, and the emphasis on national security, the security of electronic records, in particular, requires special attention. Davidson should regularly assess its procedures for assigning identification numbers and replacing PIN numbers.

The Registrar's Office should investigate the NOLIJ document imaging system that is currently available on campus as a means of archiving paper documents. Electronic images provide redundant copies of paper documents and may allow easier and quicker access to older paper records. As mentioned earlier, paper records should be protected in fireproof filing cabinets.

Q6. Are there areas (e.g. enrollment or degree verification, transcript ordering) in which we should be using the Clearinghouse or Banner Web for students more fully?

The College should consider utilizing the National Student Clearinghouse's web-based enrollment and degree verification services, which would not only extend additional services to students but should also relieve staff members to work on other projects. Both the University of the South and the University of Richmond have found that these services have freed hours of staff time at no cost. Davidson should also consider extending its services through the use of online transcript ordering, which is already available through Banner. As is true in the implementation of any self-service technologies, the institution must take appropriate measures to ensure that student records are maintained in a secure and confidential environment.

Q7. Should we and could we go more to the use of web-based forms for relatively routine matters such as declaration of major or minor, approvals for leaves, pass/fail declarations, address changes, or awarding of transfer credit?

While current paper-based forms work well for most students at Davidson, we encourage the development of web-based forms for relatively routine transactions. It is particularly important and especially so at an institution like Davidson College, however, that the implementation of such technologies not erode the personal interactions among students, faculty, and staff that paper forms sometimes engender.

Q8. How can we work with departments to improve the task of receiving and entering the schedule for an upcoming term?

Creating the class schedule each semester continues to be a large undertaking for registrar's offices everywhere. In our conversations with department chairs at Davidson, several expressed the desire to enter their department's schedule directly into the Banner system. Reducing the duplicative data entry required by having both the department and the Registrar's Office enter the schedule is a goal that should be pursued.

Some institutions, such as Bucknell University, have developed online entry processes for departments to enter their own schedule information. Such department-entered information might be stored in an interim database until it is finalized and then loaded *en masse* into Banner's underlying Oracle database. Or, the departmental data might be recorded directly into the Banner Oracle database. Each of these models holds out the possibility of reducing duplicative data entry. When Davidson implements Banner 7.x, the Banner client (Banner GUI) will become obsolete and all Banner forms will be web-enabled. At that time, it may be possible to give department chairs access to the SSASECT and related forms, allowing them to enter their schedule data. Or it might be feasible to develop web-based forms for this purpose.

At least initially, having departments enter their own schedules is likely to require more rather than less resources from the Registrar's Office as departments learn a new system. As the departments become familiar with the system over time such support is likely to decline although there will always be new department chairs and departmental assistants who require help. The Registrar's Office should also ascertain whether departments hope or intend to make changes to their offerings after the class schedule is published. While such changes might be made for perfectly legitimate reasons, having departments simply make these changes without the advice and consent of the registrar could be problematic. For instance, having a department change the meeting time of a course without first ensuring that a classroom is available at the new time would create new headaches for the Registrar's Office. At the end of the day, the institution must balance the costs of creating, implementing, and maintaining a schedule entry system against the expected benefits.

Q9. Procedures reflect broader policies not determined by the Registrar, but should Davidson give particular thought to (a) relatively generous transfer policies, especially in regard to core or major requirements, and with particular encouragement of study abroad; (b) the registration lottery procedure; (c) drop/add procedures; (d) use of Incomplete grades and authorized withdrawals; (e) procedures for final examinations?

While it is somewhat difficult to make specific judgments on Davidson policies, we find that most policies are not egregiously inconsistent with those of peer institutions. More importantly, the policies currently in place appear to be serving the institution and its

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students well. Davidson's transfer policies are fairly standard for selective liberal arts colleges. The Registrar should closely monitor the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which is expected to be passed by the U.S. Congress in 2006. It is likely that this legislation will include provisions that prevent institutions of higher education from basing transfer decisions in whole or part on the accreditation of the sending institution. If such legislation is passed into law, then Davidson's policy of restricting transfer credit only to that which comes from regionally-accredited institutions will have to be modified.

While unusual, the registration lottery system is valued by faculty and students. We find that the system produces enviable results and recommend no change to it. The two-week drop/add period is fairly standard and there seems to be no compelling reason to lengthen it. The current deadlines communicate the Registrar's desire "that student's take their course registration seriously and that they not assume that the first several days of a semester's course do not matter." The College's use of "incomplete" grades and authorized withdrawals is reasonable. The fairly liberal pass/fail policy allows students to continue in a difficult class rather than simply withdrawing from it. We do not believe that liberalization of the withdrawal and incomplete policies is in the best interest of students or the institution.

Administering a self-scheduled examination system is not something that most registrars at Davidson's peer institutions have to shoulder. Nevertheless, the Registrar's Office handles this task with aplomb and recognizes it as an affirmative expression of Davidson's honor code. Faculty and students alike appreciate the organizational effort, admire the operational efficiency, and recognize how directly the Registrar's Office is connected to the academic life of the institution. In what way might a Registrar's Office be more clearly successful than this?

ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES:

As Davidson encourages more students to study abroad, the volume of transfer work will continue to increase. In addition, the aforementioned provision in the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will force colleges to develop detailed policies on acceptability of transfer credit that meet the guidelines that will ultimately be established by the U.S. Department of Education. Both of these changes will directly increase the workload of the Registrar's Office.

Continued changes in technology have the potential to affect the office in several ways. As mentioned above, security requirements and FERPA laws will continue to evolve to keep pace with new technologies. Student information systems, including Banner, will also continue to grow and change. The newest version of Banner, version 7.x, makes major changes in the curriculum tables which require extensive testing, and may necessitate procedure changes, the rewriting of reports, etc. SungardSCT seems to be favoring the Luminis portal system in terms of enhancements, which may force many schools to move to this tool to keep up, necessitating a campus implementation. As mentioned earlier, Davidson is beginning the search for an enterprise-wide reporting tool. Ideally, this will give the Registrar's Office additional abilities to manipulate data from the Banner system. In the short run, however, it will necessitate learning a new tool and rewriting a number of reports.

Q2. What seem to be the greatest structural challenges in office organization—skills of current staff, new skills likely to be demanded—in light of both current and future needs?

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Q1. Given the certainty of the Registrar's retirement during the next five years, what steps does the office need to begin taking to assure the smoothest transition possible?

We chose to answer these two questions out of sequence and at the end as they are closely related and constitute a summary.

The Registrar's Office operates effectively. It supports the academic mission of Davidson College and coordinates diverse activities including registration, maintenance of academic records, interpretation of academic policy, and administration of exams. Efficiency is a hallmark of the office and it has even reduced staff in recent years with wise use of technology. The Office is respected across campus for its collegiality and professionalism. Indeed we would hold up the Registrar's Office at Davidson as an ideal registrar's office for a liberal arts college. The impending retirement of the incumbent Registrar, however, requires that Davidson develop a careful succession plan to ensure that this office remains strong and continues to serve the College community well.

To the Registrar's Office, Professor Epes has brought his wide-ranging knowledge of the College, technological prowess, and status as a senior member of the College Faculty. He is able to move seamlessly between his roles of administrator and faculty member and to serve the institution all the better for understanding these roles so thoroughly.

Looking forward, there seem to be differing opinions on the qualifications and background a new registrar must possess. A few faculty members suggested that Dr. Epes' successor must come from the current faculty, while others felt that a "professional" registrar might serve just as well. Administrators, while acknowledging that Dr. Epes' retirement will be a tremendous loss to the College, did not express the view that the registrar must be a member of the teaching faculty. Regardless of one's view of this matter, there appears to be no obvious heir apparent among the faculty.

A serendipitous combination of experience, technological expertise, commitment to the institution, and disposition toward this work has made Professor Epes uniquely suited to be successful as Registrar. In our experience, however, this combination is highly unusual and we recommend, therefore, that Davidson not constrict its pool of potential successors to members of the current faculty. That is not to say that another faculty member could not be successful but rather that the appointment of a faculty member will not guarantee success to an individual who does otherwise possess characteristics making him or her especially suitable for this position.

If the choice is to seek a "professional" registrar as a successor to Dr. Epes, we recommend that Davidson consider the following steps to attract someone with the appropriate experience and skills and ensure success:

- Begin the search for a replacement well in advance of Dr. Epes' announced retirement date. Recent searches for registrars at Middlebury College and Furman University took an entire year to reach successful conclusions; the most recent registrar search at the College of William and Mary took two years.
- Be prepared for a small pool of applicants. The entire national population of professional registrars (including assistants and associates) is likely to be less than 5,000 individuals. When Davidson begins its search, the vast majority of those individuals will not be actively seeking a new position. Of those who are,

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personal, familial, and geographic considerations will rule out Davidson as a possibility. Davidson will necessarily impose minimal qualifications and experience requirements that will further constrict the pool. Fine liberal arts colleges that are accustomed to receiving a hundred applications for an open faculty position or scores for a deanship or presidency are often bewildered by the dearth of viable applicants when they search for registrars. In this environment, the College may bolster its applicant pool through a direct mailing to the registrars of the top 100-150 *U.S News and World Report* liberal arts colleges about a month in advance of advertising the position in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and on AACRAO's Jobs Online. You might also consider free advertisements through related networks such as the listservs of HEDS or the Deans of the Associated Colleges of the South.

- Given the above, Davidson must be prepared to make the position as attractive as possible to potential applicants, offering a highly-competitive salary and benefits package. It is unlikely that Davidson would attract a registrar from one of its peer or aspirant institutions for a lateral move in compensation. As a rule of thumb, Davidson should budget a minimum salary outlay at least equivalent to that of a senior, full-professor.
- Identify and attract a successful, experienced registrar from a respected liberal arts institution. Such an individual would bring a wealth of experience, an understanding of the role the registrar plays in a liberal arts institution, and a clear appreciation for the centrality of faculty in the academic life of such institutions. The centrality of faculty can be taken for granted by those who have spent significant time in liberal arts settings but colleagues from comprehensive and doctoral institutions, community colleges, and less-selective private colleges neither understand nor appreciate the pre-eminence of faculty in academic matters. An individual from a similar type of institution would help Davidson avoid a potential cultural mismatch between a professional who might not fully understand the complexities of the selective, liberal arts college.
- Anticipate that an established professional may require assistance in identifying employment opportunities for a working spouse, especially if that spouse also works in an academic setting.
- Consider "enhancing" the title of the position, e.g. "Assistant Dean and Registrar." We consider "Registrar" to be a venerable and honorable title and are wary of title inflation. We recognize, however, that such a title might make the position more attractive to some.
- Be prepared for reconfiguration of personnel in the office. We discussed this on campus during our exit interviews. Currently the Registrar handles all study abroad advising, transfer work, and classroom scheduling. He is also recognized as the technical specialist in the office. Finally, he plays the important role of policy advisor for the College. The review team considers it unlikely, though not impossible, that the College will identify a single individual who will perform all these roles as well Dr. Epes does. The Assistant Registrar is highly capable but her time is already fully utilized. In addition, it is unreasonable to expect that the new registrar will be able to devote as many extra hours to the position as Professor Epes does. Hiring another staff member at a middle-management level would take some of the pressure off these two positions and could bring new

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expertise to the office. The reviewers consider it important that the College seriously consider this possibility before Dr. Epes' announces his retirement. Approving such a hire prior to searching for a new registrar is likely to influence that search both in terms of the qualifications sought and in the attractiveness of the registrar position to potential applicants.

We initially considered recommending hiring this new mid-level management position prior to Dr. Epes' departure because it is important that the addition of another new professional in the office not be attributed to the new registrar's inability to adequately fill his predecessor's shoes. In the end, however, we have concluded that it is more important to hire the new registrar first and then allow him or her to hire this new position.

This process of letting a new registrar choose his or her own staff is a professional courtesy that will also promote greater diversity and balance of expertise within the office. If the College were to hire the new mid-level position first it would further constrict the already small applicant pool from which to choose a new registrar in order to avoid duplicating the strengths of the new mid-level position. Or it will have to risk duplicating those qualifications and thus lose the opportunity to strengthen the office through diversity of expertise. Hiring the new registrar first also avoids the potential problem of having the new mid-level employee become disgruntled if he or she were to unsuccessfully seek the top position when Dr. Epes announces his retirement. Finally, the particular strengths that a new registrar brings to Davidson might obviate the need for a new mid-level position altogether or the new registrar might determine that a support staff position is more appropriate.

In order to combat the erroneous assumption that any new hire is the result of a new registrar not measuring up to his or her predecessor, the VPAA should clearly communicate to the campus community that in addition to hiring a successor to Dr. Epes it is anticipated that another professional position will be added once the new registrar has been hired. Such an announcement should be made at the time that Dr. Epes announces his retirement and reiterated throughout the search process.

- Finally, to ensure a smooth transition for the new registrar, we recommend a period of overlap between the incumbent and his successor. It is important, of course, that such a transition period is not so long as to undermine the ability of the new registrar to establish himself or herself as the director of the office in the eyes of the staff and faculty. Conversely, it could only be beneficial to the success of new registrar to have the benefit of Dr. Epes' tutelage at the beginning of his or her tenure. Because of the yearly cycle that informs the work of a registrar, perhaps having Dr. Epes remain on staff for two or three months after the new registrar is hired plus having him available three to five days each month for the remainder of that first yearly cycle would allow for a smooth transition for both. That initial two- or three-month full-time overlap would allow Dr. Epes to "anoint" his successor and allay the concerns of those who are skeptical that he can ever be replaced.