

May 27, 2004  
Westmoreland, NH

Dear Fellow Trustees:

A year ago, the Antioch University Board of Trustees took the historic step of confronting the problems that have challenged Antioch College for more than a generation. At its June 2003 meeting in Keene, New Hampshire, the Board voted to create a Commission charged with outlining a vision for the Renewal of Antioch College. The Board charged the Commission with conceiving a “new” Antioch College which would reverse 30 years of endless and unproductive struggles, while adhering to Antioch’s core values and legacy.

At its meeting in Santa Barbara this past February, the Board approved the initial work and vision of the Commission. By a unanimous vote, you endorsed the concept of Experiential Learning Communities and you directed the Commission to complete its work with a final report due at the Board meeting in Seattle in June 2004.

As co-chair of the Renewal Commission, and on behalf of its 17 members, I am pleased to provide you with the final report and recommendations of the Commission. These written materials, which are being provided to you in advance of the Board meeting, represent the bulk of our report. Next Friday, in Seattle, we will provide you with a brief presentation followed by an opportunity to answer your questions and engage in a dialogue about the Commission’s work.

In the enclosed binder, you will find the final written report of the Commission and the financial model for ten years for the “new” Antioch College.

Some of the material may seem very detailed, and the Renewal Commission debated how much information was too much. We have included it because the texture of our discussions led us to explore issues in this way. The details provide one kind of framework. In some cases, they flesh out the concept. In other cases, the details are illustrative.

**What is the role of the Board in this process? As Trustees, what actions are you expected to take?**

I believe the Board should endorse the work and plan of the Renewal Commission next week. At the meeting, the Board's role is to charge the College administration with the implementation of the plan. The actual details of the plan must be worked out by an Implementation Task Force appointed by the College President. As the details are worked out by this Task Force, they will be brought back to the Board, in stages, for final approval. This will occur over successive meetings during the next 12-18 months.

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The RC's work has been both challenging and consuming. Over the course of nine months, the Commission met in person ten times, nine of those in Yellow Springs, for a total of 15 days. Outside of our face-to-face meetings, we spent additional hours on conference calls. Drafts of drafts of various position papers were exchanged, edited, and re-drafted. We exchanged literally thousands of emails with threaded discussions about everything from racism and co-op to sequential learning and technology.

Shortly after the Board gave its initial approval to the RC's plan in Santa Barbara, the RC convened a group of leaders in higher education to get feedback on the plan. I have attached excerpts from their comments at the end of this letter. The full text of their comments is contained in the Appendix.

Since the last time we reported to you, we have begun to integrate the stakeholders of Antioch College in the process of its Renewal. The engagement with the Antioch College community took many forms and was a significant challenge for the RC these past four months. Our meetings became less efficient. On the other hand, the engagement was clearly necessary. Not only is it an Antioch value to have a voice in one's own destiny, but the RC was *informed* and *transformed* by its experiences with the Antioch community. Our plan is significantly better because it includes the voices of and our experiences with the community. Indeed, sections of our final report and several curricular innovations came directly from the work of Antioch students and faculty.

The RC wishes to acknowledge that it has not fully covered some issues. Specifically, while we had discussions about governance at both a local level and in the University, we have chosen to recommend to the Board that this is a bigger issue, and needs more deliberation and consideration at the Board level.

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The Renewal Commission's plan creates an Antioch College that – as the Board charged – is visionary, viable, and sustainable. There are two drivers in particular of the financial plan. By creating a more efficient method for delivering the curriculum, Antioch is able to raise the student faculty-ratio by 50%. At the same time, the College will invest

in those physical and human resources which have the highest impact on admissions and retention. In the end, the delivery system costs less, and more students are attracted to and stay at the College.

Naturally, there is a price tag to the kind of changes the RC is recommending. This plan will require a substantial investment. The RC believes that a majority of the investment – in technology and physical plant infrastructure – would need to be made whether or not the RC’s plan is adopted by the Board.

*This infrastructure investment – in the neighborhood of \$23 million – is the price of keeping the doors open in today’s competitive environment.* But just making an investment in infrastructure does not meet the threshold of creating a viable and sustainable Antioch College. Providing for adequate/competitive infrastructure leaves the same non-sustainable programs in place – just with nicer dorms and minimally acceptable 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. In the end – without the transformational changes proposed by the RC – this would be a short-sighted investment.

As with any restructuring there is a cost. Including the additional endowment, the incremental investment required by the RC’s recommendation is approximately \$20 million. The RC’s plan, and this necessary investment, creates an Antioch College that will be attractive to both prospective students as well as donors. We believe it is far easier to sell this plan to both groups than it is to sell the current non-sustainable model. New money and new students (and lower attrition) will create an Antioch College that has a future as a leader in American higher education.

I have asked Lois Mann and the consultants from Ketchum to give you a presentation at the Seattle meeting on their assessment of the RC’s plan and the viability of raising additional money in the current campaign.

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Finally, let me say a few words about the Report itself and the Seattle Board meeting.

The RC’s final report is in three parts: **Part One** contains the report itself, along with financial projections; **Part Two** contains appendices explicitly referenced in Part One. **Part Three** contains additional material you may find informative.

Perhaps, as you are reading this, you are in a plane headed for Seattle. While you are literally at 30,000 feet, I urge you to figuratively stay there as well. The RC has given you more of a “vision” than a detailed plan. We did so deliberately, because we saw our role – and the Board’s – as defining a strategic direction for the College. The tactics and the execution belong to the management of Antioch College.

So, from your perch at 30,000 feet, I propose that the role of the Board is to:

1. Examine the RC's report and determine whether the charge to the Commission has been met.
2. Realize that if you endorse the RC's plan, you must also commit to raising the investment that will be necessary to make the plan successful.
3. Identify issues needing special attention in the implementation of the RC's plan.

When we meet on Friday, these are the macro-level questions on which the Board will deliberate.

The work done by the RC and the Board is only the beginning. If the devil is in the details, then the challenges for this plan lie in the next step as the Antioch College administration, faculty, and community execute its implementation. This must be done relatively quickly, and in a culture that sometimes resists or slows things down. It is not hyperbole to state that Herculean tasks lie ahead.

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On behalf of the Renewal Commission, I want to thank Leslie Johnson for all of her amazing work supporting the group. We asked a lot of her and, without her valuable assistance and support, our work could not have been done.

And finally, I want to acknowledge the dedication and devotion of my fellow Commission members. They contributed long hours, at times difficult debate, and – for the out-of-town members – impersonal hotel rooms away from family and loved ones. Yellow Springs is a lovely place to visit, but nine trips there in nine months is asking a lot of anyone.

Back in March, in our most difficult meeting punctuated by the demands of attention by various College constituencies, I think every RC member must have had a moment where they wondered why they were doing this. Why were they investing so much emotional energy in this institution?

I know the answer to that question. They share a love of Antioch College and its future. Pure and simple. In my role as chair of the Antioch University Board of Trustees and on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I express Antioch's gratitude.

*Dan Kaplan*

## COMMENTS BY EXTERNAL EXPERTS

At the time of the presentation to the Board in February, the White Paper was submitted to two national authorities on learning communities for review. These were Jean MacGregor, Chair, National Learning Communities Project, and John O'Connor, consultant to the American Association for Higher Education. Their reports are contained within the comprehensive set of appendices, but here are two short excerpts.

“It brings together some of the pedagogies that have the most appeal with students and faculty over the past decade – experiential learning, community-based teaching and learning, learning communities, undergraduate research, competency standards, and communication technologies. There are small programs around the country trying to bring these different progressive pedagogies together; the Antioch proposal is the most comprehensive that I have seen. I applaud the conception.” (*O'Connor*)

“My first reaction to reading the white paper was one of excitement for the possibilities in this renewal vision. The Executive Summary claims, ‘we know of no other institution which has conceptualized the learning community approach in the manner being proposed.’ Indeed, that is the case.” (*MacGregor*)

Shortly after we met in Santa Barbara, several RC members met with five of the nation's leaders in higher education in Chicago, a meeting funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. I encourage you to read their responses to the White Paper, each of which is contained in the comprehensive set of appendices. In the meantime, here are some excerpts:

“The Renewal Commission has developed a bold and innovative plan to transform Antioch College. Building on the historic strengths of the College, the plan combines an adaptation of Antioch's traditional co-op experience with the learning community model. This plan has the potential to deepen student learning while also providing students a practical experiential education.” (*Ron Crutcher, Provost and Executive VP for Academic Affairs, Miami University*)

“The overall curricular design presented in the White Paper appears to me to be both exciting and workable. Centered on carefully configured and sequenced Coop experiences and Experiential Learning Communities (ELCs), it is based upon proven research-based principles about how to construct effective undergraduate learning settings, draws visibly upon Antioch's own history and core values, and should command a small but

steady market niche for recruiting new students.” (*Peter Ewell, Sr. Associate, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems*)

“[My] questions all stem from the fact that the Commission has put its predominant focus on a plan for curricular reform and revised academic organization for students at Antioch College. It makes sense to see this as the centerpiece of a new Antioch, grounded in its traditions but rethought for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The questions I wish to raise concern the ways in which Antioch will address other major issues related to but distinct from the curricular renovation.... my purpose is not at all to cast doubt on the Commission’s proposed directions, which seem to me constructive, imaginative and exciting. Rather, I aim to contribute to continuation of the kind of hard, critical thinking that the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees have called for.” (*Michael McPherson, President, Spencer Foundation*)

“As the Commission understands, increasing retention as well as recruitment will be necessary to a sustainable revenue model. The ELC model will predictably do a good deal toward improving retention, as learning communities have on other campuses where they have been introduced in first-year programs and the like. However, for improvement in both recruitment and retention, Antioch should pay close attention to campus culture. As members of the commission recognize, the current culture of the campus can be at best off-putting and at worst ‘toxic.’ A key to improved recruitment and retention of students will be the creation of a welcoming and stimulating campus culture; professional attention to student life is necessary to lead a cultural shift on campus. I strongly urge that attention be paid to developing a model for student life parallel to the ELC model for curriculum.” (*Jo Ellen Parker, President, GLCA*)