

May 14, 2004

I am writing to update you on the status of Willamette's residential commons program.

#### WHERE WE ARE

Under the leadership of Bob Hawkinson, Dean of Campus Life, we have made much progress towards the initial phase of what will be a multi-year project.

In particular, the planning process to date has given us a fuller appreciation of the immediate needs of undergraduate housing. As we move forward with bringing the residential commons program to life, it is clear that we need to do two things: first, we need to provide new, attractive and desirable on campus housing for upper class students and second, we need to renovate and upgrade existing housing.

Towards this end, the first phase of the residential commons program - the transformation of Kaneko Hall to Kaneko Commons - will include additional housing that will attract upper class students now living off-campus to return to campus.

This phase of the planning process has also concluded that the University should not establish a freshman commons at the Kaneko Hall site as had been previously proposed.

#### NEXT STEPS

I have established a broad-based residential commons planning committee that will meet routinely beginning this summer. The committee will include faculty, students, administrators and a planning architect. Members of the Board of Trustees will be included in the planning process and the work of the committee. I will chair the committee, and I will announce the committee's membership in a separate correspondence no later than the first week of June.

The charge of the committee is two-fold:

- Develop specific plans for the addition of new upper class housing at the Kaneko site
- Develop planning for locations, student composition and funding for future residential common facilities

The first charge involves meeting immediate housing needs. It is my hope that our planning efforts will permit the University to begin the construction of additional upper class housing at the Kaneko site within the next twelve months.

The second charge involves long-term planning, and it will seek to answer four essential questions: (1) where will each commons be located; (2) in what order will they be established and over how many years; (3) who will live there; and (4) how will the project be funded.

#### WHAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE

During the last month, I have met with CLA faculty and student leadership to discuss the residential commons project. I am mindful that while the faculty has endorsed the residential commons in principle, it requested that the planning effort ensure that the project not have "unintended adverse consequences for faculty workload," and that careful consideration be given to whether a freshman commons or "concentrating all

Greek organizations in one location on campus" are in the best interests of facilitating "more extensive and substantive interaction between faculty and students within the student residences on campus." (from Resolution on the Residential System, voted at CLA faculty meeting, October 9, 2001) The students that I met with also expressed reservations about the wisdom of a freshman commons.

The planning committee will, of course, give serious consideration to each of these issues and more. It will consult widely and routinely with faculty and students as the process moves forward; and it will make sure that there are adequate opportunities for all members of the Willamette community, including alumni and parents, to comment on the process and suggest ideas or express concerns.

I am confident that the residential commons program will satisfy our twin goals to integrate more fully and effectively the curricular and co-curricular lives of our students as well as create a program of distinction that will continue to attract the very best students and faculty at Willamette.

I appreciate your support and look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Warmly,

M. Lee Pelton  
President