

2009 Pride of CASE V Awards Program

Abstract

The Grinnell Magazine

6a. Best Alumni/Institution Magazine, 2,999 FTE or fewer

Institution: Grinnell College

Submitted by: Jacqueline Hartling Stolze, editor, *The Grinnell Magazine*/editorial director

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1. **General Description:** *The Grinnell Magazine* is a four-color magazine published quarterly for alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff, and friends of the college. It averages 40-48 pages per issue, and carries no advertising.
2. **Goals and Objectives of the Magazine**
 - Grinnell College is a place where lively discussion and friendly argument are considered a worthy pursuit and an agreeable pastime — perhaps even a competitive sport. The magazine's goals reflect this aspect of the College, and its overall mission to educate its students in the liberal arts through free inquiry and the open exchange of ideas, in a lively academic community that includes students, teachers, alumni, staff, and friends. *The Grinnell Magazine* provides a place for the entire community to exchange ideas and to continue the discussion well past graduation.
 - *The Grinnell Magazine* is the college's storyteller, and by telling interesting stories well, it keeps alumni and other audiences actively engaged in the life of the college.
 - The primary goal of *The Grinnell Magazine* is to create a publication that is irresistible. When people read it and are engaged what they have read, we have succeeded.
3. **How Does It Fit into Overall Institutional and/or Advancement Goals?**
 - *The Grinnell Magazine* is the college's storyteller. It is Grinnell's flagship publication, proven by research to be the most widely read and highly regarded of the college's communication efforts. The magazine helps establish and maintain enduring connections with our constituents by telling the stories of our people and our institution in a way that is compelling and appealing.

By doing this job well, we set the stage for other programs of the college to achieve their goals. For instance, the magazine does not fundraise, but it does enhance fundraising efforts by winning readers (potential donors)

and making them feel like an important part of Grinnell. We tell the stories of what their gifts make possible.

By doing what we do well, we lay the foundation for other institutional efforts.

4. Audience

- Alumni
- Faculty and staff
- Students
- Friends of the college
- Others

5. Staffing

- **Editor**—devotes about 50 percent of her time to the magazine
- **Art director/graphic designer**—devotes about 25 percent of his time to the magazine
- **Contributing writers** — two contributing staff writers produce a few stories for each issue of the magazine, in addition to their primary duties elsewhere
- **Classnotes editor**—devotes about 20 percent of her time to the magazine
- **Freelance writers** — due to our small staff, we use freelance writers for a significant part of the magazine
- **Freelance photographers** — since we lack a photographer on staff, most of our photography is provided by freelancers

6. Total Annual Budget

- \$208,426

7. Average Cost per Issue and Unit Cost

- Average cost per issue: \$52,106.50
- Average unit cost: \$1.89
- Note: The inclusion of the “Honor Roll of Giving” in our fall issue increases our costs substantially, but is not truly magazine content.

8. Special Circumstances or Challenges

- Our very small staff makes producing a quality magazine a challenge. With only the editor and art director able to make a significant time contribution to the magazine (in addition to numerous other duties), we have had to be resourceful to find and cultivate quality freelance writers and photographers. In rural Iowa, this can be challenging, to say the least.

We have made extensive use of professional networks, such as the CUE editors’ listserv, for help finding freelancers, as well as for the insights of other editorial professionals. We’re also developing the talents of college staff in other areas — for instance, the director of the outdoor recreational program has become a good

photographer whose work we have featured. Faculty members write feature stories. Students are a great resource, too, and working with young writers and photographers is fun and productive. We find this sort of involvement increases the engagement of people on campus, and brings new voices and perspectives to our content.

9. Results

- In 2008, The Grinnell Magazine was recognized by the CASE Circle of Excellence Award Program with a silver medal in the “Best Articles of the Year” category. “Campus Mystery,” written by Grinnell alumna Sarah Aswell, was published in the winter 2007 issue of the magazine.
- *The Grinnell Magazine* consistently receives more letters and responses from readers than we have room to print. Whether expressing approval or disapproval, every letter reflects a reader who is engaged and sometimes enraged by what he or she has read. We count that as a success. We now include an overflow letters column on the web so more letters can be published.
- In 2008, Grinnell College hired Readex Research to conduct a survey of magazine readers. Our survey of 1,500 was selected in a systematic, random manner and mailed to readers in October 2008. We received 491 usable responses, a 33 percent response rate. According to Readex, the margin of error for percentages is ± 4.3 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

The results showed an audience highly engaged with their college magazine:

- **Grinnell alumni are reading *The Grinnell Magazine*.** The typical or median alumnus has read or looked through all four of the past four issues. Also, 57 percent read or look through half or more of a typical issue. Only 1 percent does not read or look through the magazine.
- **Alumni are engaged by the magazine content, and they take action based on what they read.** More than half of the respondents (55 percent) have taken at least one action in the last 12 months after reading *The Grinnell Magazine*. The most common action was discussing the content they had read. Another action reported was visiting the Grinnell website. One in five (21 percent) said they had visited the website as the result of reading the magazine in the last 12 months. About one in 10 (9 percent) indicated they had made a gift to the College as the result of reading the magazine.
- **Nine in 10 (89 percent) of alumni frequently read (always or most of the time) at least one of the nine magazine departments.** Classnotes are by far the most widely read section; 83 percent of alumni reported that they always or most of the time read the Classnotes. Alumni Profiles (51 percent), Alumni Musings (48 percent), and feature stories (47 percent)

are all read by about half of alumni.

- **Alumni have positive opinions of *The Grinnell Magazine*.** More than four in five agree that the magazine: is attractive/professional looking (92 percent); is a quality publication overall (88 percent); includes covers that are inviting and encourage opening the magazine (83 percent); and has a writing style that is interesting (74 percent).
- ***The Grinnell Magazine* creates an affinity with alumni.** When alumni were asked how strongly they agree or disagree that reading the magazine makes them proud to be alumni, 73 percent agree (rating of +1 or +2), and only 4 percent disagree.

Here are a few comments from the survey:

- “I am very pleased with *The Grinnell Magazine*. I like the format, topics, etc. I read it in its entirety when it arrives.”
- “I enjoy reading the faculty profiles.”
- “Great magazine — look forward to getting it!”
- “I like it as is. Wish I had more time to read it. It’s great!”
- “I would have to stretch to find a shortcoming — it is a quality publication.”
- “I’m very satisfied and do enjoy and read *The Grinnell Magazine*!”
- “It strikes a good balance between present and past even though I’m probably more interested in past graduates, in the present that shouldn’t be the focus. Especially enjoy Iowa photos. Thank you!”