

The Grinnell Magazine

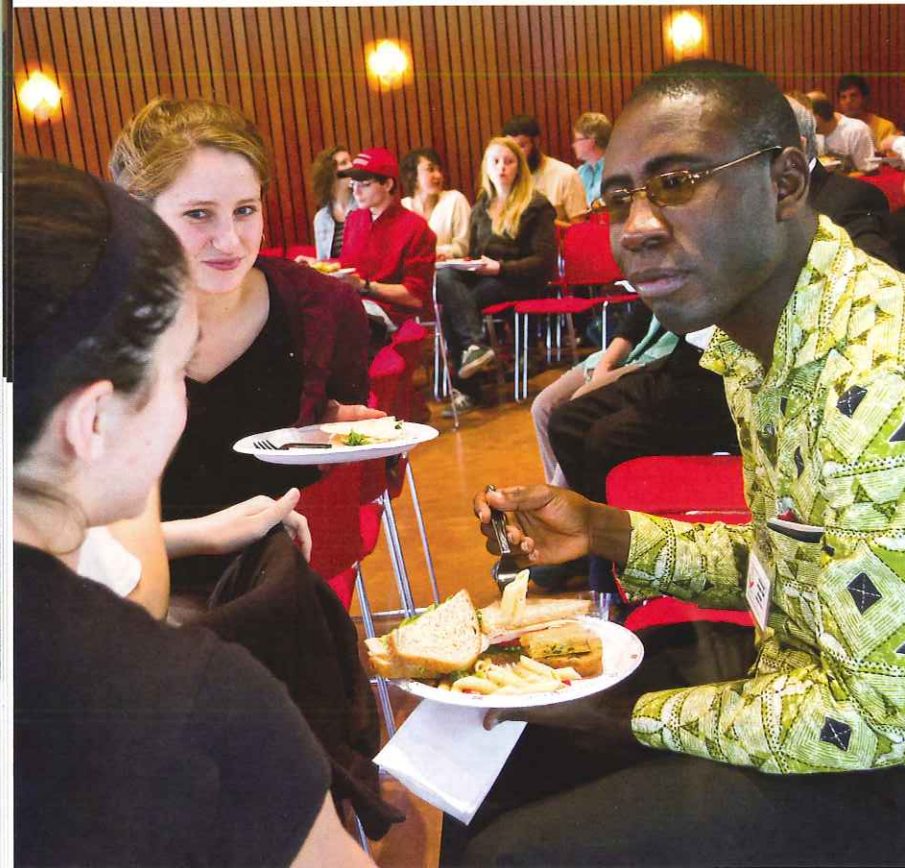
Winter 2011

What Makes Grinnell Distinctive?

Academic
Community
Challenging
Excellent
Passion
Rigorous
Engaging
Place
Liberal
Independence
Fun
Ambitious
Beautiful
Intense
Awesome
Rural
Eye-Opening
Amazing
Hard
Social Justice
Free
Freedom
Quirky
Friendly
Weird

my energy, the reason for my existence—that is what has brought me where I am today, talking to you.”

“What is your commitment?” he asks his audience, looking at them intently, letting his words hang in the rafters for a time before continuing. It is, he says, “important for us to identify our *own* mission — our calling ... once we have identified our calling, we will find that we are not going to replicate or do the same things that other people are doing. But we will be doing the things that we are called to do. And it is only when we are called to do those things that we are doing, and it is only when we are doing the things we are called to do, that we will find fulfillment.”



“What is your commitment?”

— James Kofi Annan

Jumping in the Deep End

Eric W. Glustrom and **Boris Bulayev** lead Educate!, an organization that empowers Ugandan youth to create and lead solutions to poverty, disease, violence, environmental degradation, and unemployment. Their story about jumping into a huge project with more motivation than expertise was particularly reassuring to Grinnell students.

Educate! provides social entrepreneurship training, long-term mentorship, and access to capital to help youth become social entrepreneurs and problem-solvers. Their model is exponential empowerment — investing long-term in youth so they can positively impact many others. The government of Uganda recently asked Educate! to incorporate its social entrepreneurship course into the national education system. It will reach 45,000 youth annually and be the first national social entrepreneurship curriculum in the world. Educate!’s work to empower Uganda’s youth aims to help the country develop a generation capable of determining their own future and defining progress for their time.

“Today I want to talk about a few lessons that I think I have learned in my short life that to me seem relevant no matter what you choose to do,” says Bulayev, age 26, who arrived in the United States from Latvia at age 7 and ended up, as did Glustrom, age 27, as a student at Amherst College in Massachusetts. He was determined to be a star basketball player, and was — until an injury sidelined him twice and left him feeling that he’d lost not only a dream, but also a personal identity.

Unknowingly, his life up to that point provided him with three essentials for entrepreneurial success: experience with high motivation and extreme focus, the ability to survive a significant loss, and the experience of starting from scratch. His advice is to “find opportunity in failure,” and “take risks to pursue your passion.”

In fact, he says, just pursuing a passion and taking risks can take you a long way. “We really had no idea what we were doing” during the early stages of Educate! “We really started out without a clue,” he says. But the desire to learn, “really coming in blank and not knowing anything but just asking a lot of questions and slowly piecing something pretty cool together,” eventually trumped their lack of experience and created a model of social entrepreneurship that has gone on to win several awards.

That led to Bulayev’s third point: “If you try really hard to be good at something, eventually you will be.”



“You just have to jump in and figure it out as you go, do whatever it takes.”

— Eric W. Glustrom

“I want to encourage all you guys to find your purpose ... and take advantage of your opportunity,” he says, echoing Annan. “I realized I had been given so much opportunity that my path had already been set up for me, I just had to run down it. It began to feel very unfair that others don’t have that same opportunity. I personally find that fundamentally unfair and unjust. So I have dedicated myself to helping others get that same opportunity.”

Not that he feels he’s given up something to do so. “In many ways,” he says, “it seems like pursuing your purpose is pretty equivalent to pursuing happiness.”

Educate!’s co-leader Eric Glustrom spoke to the crisis of senior year. “I did not know clearly what I was going to do. My friends had no idea what they were going to do,” he says. “Really, I think it is something that comes with the privilege of a place like this. We have so many choices. We have so many interests. We can do so many different things. It is just a problem choosing which one to do.”

The solution, in his case, came in a “moment of obligation” that he describes as “when you see an



“We really had no idea what we were doing.”

— Boris Bulayev

opportunity with such promise that not doing something to take advantage of that opportunity would be an injustice in and of itself.”

If recognized, Glustrom says, that moment of obligation sets the course for a journey “that is often times really messy.”

“In hindsight,” he says, “the narrative of someone’s life often times makes a lot of sense. But ... going through that narrative [at the time] really does not make that much sense at all.”

“It is really messy,” he says, talking about the year after his college graduation when he survived on M&Ms, dorm food smuggled to him by a student friend, and money made from volunteering for medical studies at a research hospital while trying to advance Educate!

“You just have to jump in and figure it out as you go, do whatever it takes,” he says. “Don’t worry about finding that perfect opportunity, just jump in. Start somewhere ... We are inclined not to like uncertainty, but living with uncertainty and accepting uncertainty as part of life is one of the most important things we can do.” ■