

Year One Progress Report Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience

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The Task Force report, issued in May, 2003, offered 37 recommendations to improve the curricular and co-curricular life of the campus. These recommendations are classified under three major headings: climate, community, and coherence. One final recommendation falls under the heading of constraints. What follows is a report on the first year of implementation of the Task Force report and the status of these recommendations.

Climate

1) Improve Oral Communications: This year, the Academic Resource Center will consolidate video equipment from various locations on campus, making it available to students for presentations and critiques. The ARC, under the leadership of Nadia Medina, will offer some “short courses” available to interested students. These courses will be non-credit bearing (5 or 6 meetings) and experiential. They will involve many different aspects of public speaking (employing humor, using power point effectively, organizing a talk, speaking to a general audience) and will bring in some of the superb speakers from around the university to offer advice and perspective. A spring version of the course may cover different but related topics (e.g. the art of conversation, civil dialogue, interview skills and techniques). Goals for the future include infusing more oral communication instruction and practice into the regular curriculum.

2) Four-Year Writing Program: Discussions took place in 03-04 in the Educational Policy Committee. Several different proposals were reviewed: 1) eliminating exemptions for English 1 and English 2 (or scaling them back) so that even our best writers get some directed attention to their writing 2) moving English 2 into the sophomore year under the premise that the experience will inform other coursework being taken simultaneously 3) offering a “menu” of writing options for junior and senior year. This was one of the more ambitious proposals coming from the Task Force and several pedagogical and political issues must be worked out before it becomes a reality.

3) Tisch Library Café: “The Tower,” an intellectual café in the library, will be opening on September 8, 2004. The Tower, built in the Dranetz Tower on the first floor of the library, will incorporate the ideas discussed in the Task Force report. Designed and constructed at some expense, the café will be a “gem” on this campus, a place for faculty, staff, and students to come together over refreshments at a centrally located place that represents intellectual life on this campus. There are many important concepts built into the café. The name itself is not only a reference to the Dranetz Tower, but also connotes an “Ivory Tower,” a concept used with derision by some people, but one that the Task

Force embraced. In a vestibule adjacent to the café, one will find an art gallery displaying student art (juried by a committee of arts faculty and students) and a display of faculty books and articles (the only really public place on campus for students to see the intellectual product of the faculty). The café itself will offer various spaces for different kinds of activities: quiet reading (books, journals, and magazines of some intellectual value will be available), computing (the whole library is wireless), and meeting with study groups. The space will be able to host various events (poetry readings and author talks). Faculty will be encouraged to meet with students in the space (via coupons given to every member of the faculty and possibly a fund to support student-faculty interactions in the café). This fall, the café will be open from noon until late at night. The menu will offer fair trade coffee and a variety of beverages and modest snacks.

4) Examination of Requirement Structure: Rather than a wholesale review of requirements, two parts of the requirement structure are under separate examination. As discussed above, EPC is studying the writing requirement and the exemptions from it. An Ad Hoc Committee on Language and Culture also will be meeting in 04-05 to review and reform the foreign language, culture option, and world civilization requirements. This committee, with representatives of many different groups on campus, is charged with restoring and bringing some sense and order to requirements that, over time, have lost their meaning and intent due to changes in the faculty and the curriculum.

5) Augmented Undergraduate Research Fund: The Undergraduate Research Fund has not been augmented, but it is sufficiently funded at this time. The fund is actually a naming opportunity for a donor and this idea has been forwarded to Advancement.

6) Summer Scholars Program: The Summer Scholars Program has now completed its second successful year. In both years, about 30 students have participated in the program (31 in summer 04). Presently, four of the summer scholarships have been funded and are officially slated as “Gantcher Summer Scholarships,” in honor of Trustee Nathan Gantcher (the Gantcher Summer Scholarships are defined as those fostering research across the schools). Next year, there will be ten additional scholarships available. Demand has been steady and competition for the spots has been vigorous, with about 90 students each year competing for the spots. This past summer, students worked with faculty in the Medical School (1), the Sackler School (1), the Dental School (1), the U.E.P. graduate program (1), and the affiliated hospitals (3). No collaborations occurred with faculty from Fletcher, Nutrition, or the Veterinary School. Scholarships were offered in the arts (2) and the humanities (3) this year, in addition to the A&S sciences (6), engineering (3), and the social sciences (9).¹ The scholars program this summer attempted to create more community among the scholars and the university sponsored a weekly dinner (several of these meetings were “themed”).

¹ Some of these classifications, based on the home department of the mentor, are artificial. Several psychology projects, for instance, could well be classified as science-based instead of social science-based.

Scholars who participated in the first year summer program clearly derived benefit from the program and have much to show for it. Of the 30 summer scholars in '03, seven wrote senior honors theses (only 23 of them were seniors), two presented their research at a professional conference, and five co-authored published papers (three others have papers in the works).

7) Research Funding for Students at Professional Schools: In addition to the summer scholarships, some funding has been made available for summer scholars carrying their work into the school year. This includes students working at the professional schools.

8) A “Research Clearinghouse”: This project is in process and will be rolled out this fall. Many thanks to Omidyar Scholar Mitchell Lunn ('03) for spearheading this process in his senior year.

9) Expanded Undergraduate Research Symposium: Nothing to report.

10) Changes in Relationship of latin honors to honors theses: Nothing to report.

11) Initiatives that Deepen the Connection between Arts and Sciences and Engineering: In 03-04, the faculty voted to make the interdisciplinary senior honors thesis an option for our students, in part, to make cross-school research possible.

12) Distinguished Lecture Series: The presidential lecture series idea, as proposed by the Task Force, was pitched to a donor last year. The happy result is the Richard E. Snyder Presidential Lecture Series, which will begin this fall. This series will bring to campus major intellectual figures who present provocative and perhaps controversial points of view, who challenge conventional wisdom, and who introduce and champion new ways of thinking. Speakers will include accomplished individuals from the fields of art, literature, science, medicine, philanthropy, politics, philosophy, and the social sciences. Our first speaker will be Dr. Leon Kass, a University of Chicago bioethicist and the chief bioethics advisor to President Bush, who will be appearing on campus this fall. In keeping with the Task Force's recommendations, the speakers will do more than just deliver lectures. Opportunities will be developed for students and faculty to meet in a smaller setting with each guest. Dr. Kass, for instance, will meet with students in Biomedical Engineering and Biology courses while on campus. His talk will be followed by a buffet dinner, where he will meet with 30-40 invited students and faculty.

13) Cultural Ticket to Boston: Nothing to report.

14) Internship Clearinghouse: Career Services has significantly improved its internship clearinghouse and is working with various departments that have heavy internship demands to coordinate internship information on the campus (thus far, communications and media studies; political science). The on-line clearinghouse enables students to search for internships in a large number of fields and in all parts of the country. Internship opportunities on the clearinghouse website are made available to students at Tufts and other universities. This allows Tufts students the chance to view opportunities

in other locations. The multi-university clearinghouse does allow opportunities to be limited to Tufts students (those made possible by a Tufts alumnus, for instance).

15) Gathering Spaces Throughout Campus: Five new outdoor gathering places have been created across campus: Terraces with tables and/or benches now exist outside Page Hall, outside Dowling Hall, between Carmichael and Wren Hall, between Eaton Hall and Tisch Library, and in the vicinity of the cannon. Indoor gathering spaces continue to be enhanced and planned, such as the Tower and the spaces being considered in the new residence hall design.

16) More Seminar Rooms: One new seminar room will be available for undergraduate and graduate courses starting this fall in 72 Professors Row. Two very small and undesirable lecture-style classrooms will be converted into much more desirable seminar rooms for the spring term. Both of these classrooms are in Eaton Hall.

17) Updating Classrooms: Two major classroom renovations have occurred in the past year: Pearson 104 and the ASEAN Auditorium in Cabot Hall. Some media updating is scheduled for Cohen Auditorium this upcoming year. Given the departure of Wayne Bouchard, additional classroom renovation and media updating is on hold.

Community

18) College System: Whether the university will reach the full-fledged vision of the Task Force is still not clear. But some of the most important steps toward the college system proposed by the Task Force are in the works. See discussion below on more first-year dormitories (proposal 21) and vertical deans (proposal 34).

19) Need-Blind Admissions: This remains a first priority for the administration in its fundraising.

20) More Support for Curricular Development in Areas of Diversity and Pedagogy: For a couple of years, the university's Diversity Fund has been fostering curricular projects that promote diversity in the form of lectures, forums, performances, and readings. This year, the fund also supported the BIAS Intervention Program through the Dean of Students office to help maintain a welcoming environment on campus. While not a specific response to the Task Force, the Diversity Fund has been an invaluable tool for promoting diversity on campus.

21) More First-Year Residence Halls: This proposal represents another step toward a College System, but it also stands by itself. Progress was made in 03-04 by converting Houston Hall into our second first-year dormitory. In Fall, 2005, Hill Hall will become the third first-year dormitory. This past year, the two first-year dormitories, Tilton Hall and Houston Hall, were the most highly rated dormitories on campus, this despite the fact that they provide the least deluxe accommodations. The number of incoming students requesting first-year residence halls has actually climbed and even with the conversion of Houston Hall, we will still have substantial excess demand.

22) Campus Center Phase III: Nothing to report.

23) Faculty Dining to Center of Campus: The faculty dining facility will be moving from Mugar Hall to Carmichael Hall. Though not any closer to the center of campus, the new facility is a significant upgrade and offers a larger and more flexible space for additional programming.

24) Central Mailbox Facility: Nothing to report.

25) Campus-Wide Competitions in Intellectual Realms: Nothing to report.

26) Community-Wide Forums: There have been several community conversations about issues of diversity, ethics, and building community organized by the Dean of Students office. More work will follow in this area.

27) More Tufts Traditions: Mostly, these traditions will need to come from student initiatives. As for those planned by the faculty and administration, there are plans afoot to put together a faculty/administration talent show. Both matriculation and the first-year candlelight procession have been enhanced to mirror the ceremonies that students will participate in at the end of their four years.

28) On-Line Calendar: The new Tufts Event Calendar provides a consolidated listing of official events taking place on all of our campuses, as well as off-campus locations. <http://events.tufts.edu/>

Coherence

29) Pre-Arrival Gift Book from Alumni Association: Nothing to report.

30) Majors Day: Nothing to report.

31) World Day/ Return to Campus Day: Nothing to report.

32) Tufts-in-Boston: Nothing to report.

33) Revamping Commencement: With much effort and planning from the Commencement Committee and the Dowling staff, the '04 commencement was completely revamped. The result was that students received their degrees in more meaningful, intimate and enjoyable ceremonies. Faculty attendance was much greater than in previous years, as faculty played a much larger role in the proceedings. In most venues, diplomas were distributed during the ceremonies. Next year, this distribution will happen in all the ceremonies. Despite some concerns and complaints from some faculty and students during the planning of the event, the community's response was overwhelmingly positive. Commencement 2004 was a major Task Force victory.

In addition, commencement participation was limited this year (by vote of the faculty). Only those students who had completed an overwhelming number of credits toward their degree were allowed to “march.” This had been a rule on the books for some time. The changes to commencement made its enforcement possible and brought integrity to the ceremony.

34) Vertical Deans: Significant discussion occurred this year on this proposal. It does require a significant reallocation of duties among the class deans, and affects others located in the Office of Undergraduate Education. The new dean structure likely will be in place in September '05.

35) Stronger Alumni Career Links to University: This past school year, Career Services hired Leslie Warner as Assistant Director of Alumni Career Services. In this position, she is charged both with enhancing career opportunities for Tufts alumni and with creating a stronger alumni career network for our students to take advantage of. Given these responsibilities, she is working to make a stronger connection between Career Services and the Alumni Association.

Joint degree programs also have great potential to cement relationships of alumni to the university through their professional lives. There are other ways to “knit our schools together,” but programs that allow early graduate admission to Tufts undergraduates have especially important benefits for the institution. Joint degree programs have existed for many years between A & S and the Fletcher School, the Dental School, the Medical School, and the program in Public Health. Joint degree programs between the Engineering School and both the Dental and the Medical Schools also have been in place for a few years. The joint degree program between A & S and the Veterinary School began in 03-04. Discussions are underway to establish these programs for the Nutrition School and the Boston School of Occupational Therapy.

36) Closer Links Between Curriculum and Co-Curricular Life: A major initiative underway is a new residence hall. Sophia Gordon Hall is still in a very early stage, but several of the concepts guiding the project at this point are very much informed by the Task Force’s recommendations.

A major initiative infusing learning opportunities into co-curricular life is the Tufts Personalized Performance Plan (TPPP). The TPPP, a joint effort of the Athletics Department, the Nutrition School, and Health Services, was in its infancy when cited by the Task Force as a program with great potential to create exciting linkages between learning, research, and student life. In the past year, TPPP has “taken off.” Students trained by the Athletic Department’s coordinator Mike Pimentel have: collaborated with Residential Life to bring health and fitness seminars and strength and aerobics courses into residence halls; assisted in the FIT Orientation Program guiding incoming students as they confront the challenges of living on their own for the first time; coordinated with Health Services to improve patient care; run health and fitness programs in the Strong Women Program spearheaded by Mim Nelson of the Nutrition School (50 women from the faculty and staff participated this past year); supported runners preparing for the

President's Marathon Challenge (with personal trainers and performance seminars); and collected data for the Longitudinal Health Study being conducted by Nutrition School Prof. Christine Economos. In 02-03, its first year, 10 student trainers served 88 people in the program. Remarkably, in 03-04, 20 student trainers served almost 600 people.

There have been several developments at the University College of Citizenship and Public Service (UCCPS) worth reporting. The Citizenship and Public Service Scholars curriculum was enhanced this past year, with new courses offered in the program and an overall academic program required of each scholar. UCCPS also initiated the Active Citizenship Summer Program, which offered 36 students a stipend to pursue a project connected with their prior curricular experiences. In 2004-2005, UCCPS will continue to integrate the co-curricular and curricular experiences of students. Building upon the success of Active Citizenship Summer, the Active Citizenship Fund will offer both individual students and student organizations opportunities to engage in active citizenship work throughout the year. Coordinating with Residential Life, UCCPS will sponsor significant programming in the residence halls. Senior Fellow Tom Birmingham will be leading a series of workshops connecting social issues with advocacy and politics. And UCCPS will be collaborating with Birmingham and the Political Science Department to offer programs focused on the presidential election and the political process (debate watches, brown bag lunches, and point-counterpoint dialogues).

Constraints

37) Focus Duties of Faculty: The Task Force, in considering how its report was to be implemented, expressed concern about placing too many demands upon faculty. The Task Force urged that the university seek "appropriate and imaginative responses to increased expectations." The continued automation of student services and the creation of new, more effective, systems is part of an effort to relieve faculty (and staff) of some of the administrative burden placed on them. This past year, the transfer-of-credit process was put on-line, streamlining that process significantly. This follows on-line grading, registration, room reservations (Resource 25), advisee tracking (My Advisees page), and class lists (with photographs). The development of Faculty Webcenter has allowed faculty and departmental staff access to more meaningful and accurate data on course enrollments, grading patterns, and declared majors. Dean Ernst and Dean Abriola have approved the funding of the next project -- on-line degree audit. With on-line degree audit, students and faculty will be able to easily track progress toward graduation. It will be an excellent advising tool for faculty advisors and a major time-saver at the time of graduation. Students will be able to select courses with more information. The migration of this function to the web will make the mundane advising tasks quicker and easier, and will make faculty more available for the kinds of advising discussions they should be having with students.