Year Three Progress Report
Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience

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February, 2006

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 implementation of the Task Force report and the status of these recommendations three years out.

Climate

1) Improve Oral Communications: Along with the staff from Academic Technology, the Director of the Academic Resource Center and I have been exploring different tools to better teach and assess oral communications. A web-based program that allows an instructor to comment on taped student talk as one might comment on a student paper was used on a trial basis in my political science course. The program was excellent and offered students an opportunity to view their performance and to have real-time commentary on both substance and style. Other on-line programs are being studied for cost, ease of use, and efficacy. We hope that a second pilot will take place this spring in an American Studies course. Ultimately, I aim to have 6-8 courses a semester with heavy speaking components, perhaps supplemented with student “rhetoric fellows” who would assist faculty much like they do in our Writing Fellows Program.

To see the pilot from Political Science 76, go to:
http://171.64.201.176/webdiver/webdiver_18/webdiver_home_v12.php and sign in as tuftsps76_guest1 (password 1234).

2) Four-Year Writing Program: This was one of the more ambitious proposals coming from the Task Force and it will require an infusion of resources that we presently do not have. Moreover, several major pedagogical and political issues must be worked out before this becomes a reality. Academic Technology is studying the possibility of each student having access to an “e-portfolio,” which may provide a platform for storing and displaying four years of writing content, but this is still in the very early stages of discussion and thought.

3) Tisch Library Café: “The Tower,” an intellectual café in the library, opened in September, 2004. The Tower, built in the Dranetz Tower on the first floor of the library, incorporated the ideas discussed in the Task Force report. Designed and constructed at some expense, the café is a “gem” on this campus, a centrally located place for faculty, staff, and students to come together over refreshments, a spot 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 the corridor adjacent to the café, there is an art gallery displaying student art 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 offers various spaces for different kinds of activities: quiet reading (books, journals, and magazines of some intellectual value), computing (the whole library is wireless), and meeting with study groups. Faculty often meet with students in the space. The SPIRIT Fund pays for every beverage consumed by a faculty member and a student meeting together in the café – there were 141 such meetings in fall, 2005. Students use the café from noon until it closes at midnight. The menu offers fair trade coffee and a variety of beverages and modest snacks.

The café has clearly been a major success. To give some sense of its popularity, in academic year 2004-2005, there were almost 84,000 transactions at the café register. Traffic into the library increased by 40,000 visitors. The success of the café did cut modestly into the business of other venues on campus, but the student-run kiosk in the campus center remained in the black (the students running the kiosk were the only voices against the new café when it was proposed).

4) Examination of Requirement Structure: Rather than a wholesale review of requirements, two parts of the requirement structure are under separate examination. The Educational Policy Committee is studying the writing requirement and the exemptions from it. In 2004-2005, an Ad Hoc Committee on Language and Culture reviewed, reformed, and reaffirmed the foreign language, culture option, and world civilization requirements. This committee, with representatives of many different groups on campus, was successful in coming to significant compromise on several controversial issues. The reforms to the language, culture, and world civilization requirements were approved by two faculty votes in spring, 2005.

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 third successful year. In the first two years, about 30 students participated in the program. In Summer, 2005, there were 47 summer scholarships funded (the provost increased the number available from 30 to 40, the University College and the Ross Initiative on Aging funded five and two additional opportunities respectively). The Summer Scholars program has provided a fabulous experience for many students and faculty and has led to conference participation, and even co-authored publications (we know of five publications, but there are certainly more as this is an old number). Summer Scholars have gone on to win Fulbright, Beinecke, Goldwater and Truman Scholarships. In fact, 2004-2005 was the best external scholarship year in the history of the university (record number of Fulbrights, our first Beinecke in five years, our first Truman in 11
years, and our first Goldwater in nine years). Of the 34 rising seniors in the summer program, 21 of them are writing senior honors theses.

Presently, seven of the summer scholarships have been endowed. Six of these 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. The Bendetson Summer Scholarship funds a student doing summer research internationally.

Demand has been steady and competition for the spots has been vigorous, with about 90 students each year putting in applications. In summer 2005, students worked with faculty in the Medical School (3), the Sackler School (4), the Veterinary School (1), the Nutrition School (3), the Fletcher School (1), and the affiliated hospitals (3). No collaborations occurred with faculty from the Dental School this past summer, though there have been collaborations in the past. On the Medford campus, scholars did summer work in the arts (3) and the humanities (4) this year, in addition to the sciences (9), engineering (4), math/computer science (2), and the social sciences (10). For the past two years, the program has created more community among the scholars by sponsoring a weekly barbeque.

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) Expanded Undergraduate Research Symposium: The Task Force recommended moving the symposium to a weekday “to underscore for faculty and students alike the central importance of undergraduate research.” This year, for the first time, the symposium will be held on a Friday (March 11, 2006). We hope this timing will lead to more student participation and faculty and student attendance.

9) Promoting honors theses: While the Task Force’s suggestion to link honors theses to Latin honors is not likely to be heeded, there are several departmental initiatives now underway to promote more and better honors theses. In the History Department and the International Relations Program, students interested in doing theses are encouraged to join a “thesis exchange,” an informal study group with faculty guidance. American Studies and Political Science now require students to apply to write a thesis in their junior year and then take a course senior year covering various research and writing issues. The course leads to more serious preparation for the project, gives students additional guidance and structure, and has the added virtue of breaking down the isolation many thesis writers feel during the process. Once the results from this pilot program are in, other departments will be encouraged to initiate their own honors thesis projects. The Academic Resource Center and the Tisch librarians also offer research workshops and

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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.
one-on-one sessions for students, mostly from smaller departments. These initiatives, plus the Summer Scholars Program, appear to be making a difference. This year, 113 students are working on a thesis, up from an average of 88 over the past three years.

10) Initiatives that Deepen the Connection between the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering: While the two schools have become more separate administratively in the past couple of years, the provost reorganized the administration in 2004-2005 to protect the idea that undergraduates in the two schools will still share much of the same experience. Thus while the deans of the two schools have become more autonomous and empowered, the common functions (Undergraduate Education, Student Services, Student Affairs, and Athletics grouped under “Undergraduate Education”) have been administratively consolidated, assuring academic control of these units, efficiency in the delivery of services to students, and important interactions between students in the two schools. The placement of several staff who report directly to the Dean of Engineering, and indirectly to the Dean of Undergraduate Education assures that some of the specialized requirements of engineering students (in the offices of Undergraduate Education and Career Services) are accommodated in Dowling Hall.

In its very earliest stages, the Integrated Lab Complex, which will host departments and scholars from both schools, is another initiative that the administration hopes will create greater synergy between scholars – and, as a byproduct, students – in the two schools.

11) Distinguished Lecture Series: The Richard E. Snyder Presidential Lecture Series, initiated in fall, 2004, brings 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. Visiting speakers have included Leon Kass (bioethics advisor to President Bush), Daniel Kahneman (social psychologist awarded the Nobel Prize for his influence on economics), and author Salman Rushdie. In keeping with the Task Force’s recommendations, the speakers do more than just deliver lectures. They also are expected to meet with students and faculty in a smaller setting.

12) Cultural Ticket to Boston: This is still very much in the early stages, but the concept has evolved somewhat since the Task Force suggested it. Conversation has begun on the establishment of a website that will link students to discounted tickets to plays, concerts, etc. Unlike the original proposal, which had an office in Student Activities collecting these tickets and then redistributing them to students, an interesting but unworkable idea, the website will connect students directly to the cultural opportunity and leave it to students to acquire the tickets.

Boston is a wonderful asset to Tufts, particularly as we compete for students (and faculty). Also capitalizing on our proximity to Boston is the Weekend Bus Service that shuttles students to and from the city on weekend evenings. Initiated by the student
senate and supported by Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, the senate, and Dean Reitman’s Student Life Fund, the bus routinely fills to capacity.

13) **Fostering Internship Opportunities:** With the Omidyar Gift, a $100,000 fund has been created to support roughly 25 Tufts students undertaking summer internships in non-profits or the public sector. Some efforts are underway to raise some additional funds for high need students seeking internships in the private sector (5-6 will be funded in summer ’06).

Career Services has significantly improved its internship website and is working with various departments that have heavy internship demands to coordinate internship information on the campus. The website 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).

14) **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, such as the Tower and the “theatre” in the new Sophia Gordon Hall, also provide new locations for positive interactions.

15) **More Seminar Rooms:** One new seminar room has come on line in 72 Professors Row. Two very small and undesirable lecture-style classrooms have been converted into very desirable seminar rooms in Eaton Hall. One other new seminar room may be brought on line next year.

Additionally, we changed the block schedule to make it more efficient. One byproduct of this change is that the afternoon seminar blocks now only conflict with two rather than three regular blocks. This makes it more possible to schedule seminars in seminar rooms and not in rearranged lecture spaces.

16) **Updating Classrooms:** Two major classroom renovations have occurred in recent years: Pearson 104 and the ASEAN Auditorium in Cabot Hall. As more faculty become more technologically sophisticated in their pedagogy, classroom renovations will need to become a higher priority.

**Community**

17) **College System:** This is one Task Force recommendation that will not be realized, as the basic infrastructure and geography on the campus will not support it. 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 20) and the vertical deans (proposal 34).

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

As the Task Force Report notes in discussing need-blind admissions, “We wish to emphasize that it is not enough to simply bring together a diverse student body – we must make a commitment to retain our students once they have matriculated.” One major initiative taken toward improving retention of high need students is a fund to support financial aid for students to attend summer session. Up to now, students have not been able to receive any assistance toward summer school. With this fund, made possible by the generous Omidyar gift, roughly 25-30 students will receive waivers for summer session tuition. Summer session courses are shorter and more intensive, but are generally taken by themselves so that the student can focus solely on the topic at hand. Moreover, summer session classes are smaller, allowing struggling students to get more individual-level attention. The Summer Session Fund will allow high need students who are struggling in their courses to “get back on track.” While not a panacea, it is an additional tool to bring to the issue of retention.

The Center for Diversity and Inclusive Leadership in Engineering and Science (DILES), initiated by Dean Abriola in the past year, aims to support programs that promote success among women in engineering and the sciences as well as students and faculty from underrepresented groups. DILES is an umbrella organization that, among other things, will raise money to fund pedagogy and retention initiatives in engineering and science.

The Success in Science committee has been exploring issues of retention for the past several years. This group is pursuing the idea of an Introduction to Science course that would give students in all the various fields some basic groundwork that might be helpful as they set into the early science curricula.

19) More Support for Faculty and Curricular Development in the Areas of Diversity and Pedagogy: There are several initiatives now in place or coming on-line to promote faculty development around issues of pedagogy. The Dean of Undergraduate Education supervises the Program on Critical Thinking, run by Susan Rusinoff, which runs periodic seminars for faculty interested in infusing critical thinking into their courses. A grant program allows faculty to follow up on ideas developed in the seminar. The Dean of Undergraduate Education also hosts periodic Café Conversations, a program inviting a small group of faculty to come together in the Tower to discuss issues of pedagogy.

A mentoring program, initiated by Deans Dunn and Ernst, is now in its second year in Arts and Sciences. It aims to support new faculty as they integrate into our community. Dean Abriola is also working on reviving a dormant mentoring program in Engineering.

With the hiring of Robert Sternberg as Dean of Arts and Sciences, the PACE Center is relocating from Yale to Tufts. Under Dean Sternberg’s leadership, the PACE Center will
be promoting projects that help Tufts faculty learn to teach to diverse learning styles, as well as continuing to spearhead research projects to test what works and what does not. The PACE Center will be the home of a revived Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Additionally, Dean Sternberg, with the assistance of a Task Force on Teaching, will be promoting a faculty development program. The nascent thinking around this program is that faculty will receive a course release to participate in a semester-long pedagogy program.

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 Student Affairs 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.

20) 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. This year, Hill Hall became the third first-year dormitory. The first-year dormitories, Tilton Hall and Houston Hall, are 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 Hill Hall, we still have substantial excess demand.

21) Campus Center Phase III: Nothing to report.

22) Faculty Dining to Center of Campus: The faculty dining facility has moved 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.

23) Central Mailbox Facility: Nothing to report.

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

25) Community-Wide Forums: There have been several community conversations about issues of diversity, ethics, tolerance, and community building organized by the Dean of Student Affairs office. The Dean of Undergraduate Education and Dean of Student Affairs, together with staff from the University College, Hillel, and the Institute for Global Leadership applied for a grant on “Difficult Dialogues” from the Ford Foundation. The grant was not funded, but the proposal is now well developed and has actually been presented to some donors, who have expressed some interest. The basic premise of the proposal is to set up a series of campus conversations during orientation and the school year to promote dialogue and tolerance on a set of issues that often divide our community (see recommendation 28 below).
26) **More Tufts Traditions:** While some traditions need to grow up organically from the student experience, there are steps the administration can take to encourage their creation and/or continuation (planning, funding).

Both the matriculation ceremony 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.

Additionally, the First Night orientation extravaganza has been a lovely success. We know how important the first impression is and hope that this event leads first-year students to feel right away that they made the right choice in coming to Tufts. This tradition is certainly valued by the student performance groups, who see this as a way to display our cultural wealth.

Recent initiatives worked on by the Program Board of the student government and other student groups, alongside the Dean of Student Affairs office, include Fall Ball, Winter Bash, Culture Fest, and the Emerging Black Leaders Symposium. All have become annual events, planned by students and administrators and funded by the new Student Life Fund (a “superfund” to facilitate co-sponsorship of community events in the most efficient way). Fall Ball and Winter Bash are formal (student style) dances in the Gantcher Center that go well into the night. More than 20 different student organizations participate in Culture Fest, which showcases the food, dance, and music of the cultures they represent. Much like the EPIIC Symposium, a cherished Tufts event now in its third decade, the Emerging Black Leaders Symposium (EBLS) brings to campus judges, politicians, professors, authors and popular culture figures in a weekend-long series of lectures, discussions, and events about black issues in the United States and the world. The Second EBLS will take place this spring.

Dining Services and the Dean of Student Affairs office have sponsored a new spring event, a pancake study break on the first night of the spring term final examination period. Somewhat reminiscent of the annual Faculty Waits on You Dinner, administrators work the buffet lines and commiserate with students as they prepare for or recover from their finals.

Spring Fling is a very popular student event with a long history. We have moved Tuftonia’s Day to the Friday before Spring Fling to make the weekend even more celebratory. The major Tuftonia’s Day event is a fireworks display on the quad. This spring, students from various drama groups are now planning a School Spoof, a play that will take place on Tuftonia’s Day on the stage set up for Spring Fling. The Dowling Deans will secure cameos from Tufts faculty and administration in what we hope will become a playful and memorable Tuftonia’s Day tradition.

Finally, President Bacow has initiated Senior Dinners at his home. These dinners are highlighted by student conversations with the president about their experiences at the university.
27) 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/](http://events.tufts.edu/)

**Coherence**

28) Pre-Arrival Gift Book from Alumni Association: In a recent unfunded grant application to encourage “Difficult Dialogues” on campus, we tweaked this idea a bit. Our request was for a pre-arrival dvd, a film that everyone would come to campus having seen that would serve as the basis for a community conversation (see above).

29) Majors Day: Nothing to report.

30) World Day/Return to Campus Day: Addressing the Task Force observation that our students from abroad need to be reintegrated into the community, the President now hosts a senior welcome-back reception on the first week of classes. The event socially reconnects those who have been studying abroad with those who have stayed on campus. Programs Abroad hosts a Welcome Back Dinner as well. The staff from Programs Abroad and a member of the counseling center discuss with students what it feels like to come back to the U.S. and back to Tufts. They also discuss how to continue and expand upon the experience of being abroad by taking advantage of culture houses and the international center. And they encourage students to bring pictures and to share their experiences. This event predates the Task Force, but there is now discussion on taking this event and expanding it to include those students who did not study abroad.

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

32) Making Commencement more Meaningful: With much effort and planning from the Commencement Committee and the Dowling staff, commencement has been completely revamped. As a result, students now receive their degrees in more meaningful, intimate and enjoyable ceremonies. Faculty attendance is much greater than in previous years, as faculty now play a much larger role in the proceedings. In most venues, diplomas are distributed during the ceremonies. Despite some concerns and complaints from some faculty and students during the planning of the event, the community’s response to this change has been overwhelmingly positive.

33) Vertical Deans: The Task Force recommended a reorganization of Dowling Hall, with a change in the responsibilities and orientation of the “class deans” and an administrative restructuring that would have them reporting to an academic dean responsible for undergraduate education (which occurred fall, 2003). This project does require a significant reallocation of duties among the class deans, and will affect others located in the Office of Undergraduate Education. The new dean structure likely will be in place in September ’06.
34) **Stronger Alumni Career Links to University:** In 2004, 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. Discussion is underway to establish a joint degree program with the Nutrition School.

35) **Creation of a Career Services Faculty Advisory Committee:** This committee was formed in 2004-2005 and is now operational.

36) **Closer Links Between Curriculum and Co-Curricular Life:** 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 couple of years, 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. They have assisted in the FIT Orientation Program guiding incoming students as they confront the challenges of living on their own for the first time. They have 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), and supported runners preparing for the President’s Marathon Challenge (with personal trainers and performance seminars). Together with Nutrition School Professor Christine Economos, they have collected data for the Longitudinal Health Study. In 02-03, its first year, 10 student trainers served 88 people in the program. Remarkably, in 04-05, 20 student trainers served almost 1300 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 last 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 continued to
integrate the co-curricular and curricular experiences of students. Building upon the success of Active Citizenship Summer, an Active Citizenship Fund offers both individual students and student organizations opportunities to engage in active citizenship work throughout the year. Coordinating with Residential Life, UCCPS also has been sponsoring significant programming in the residence halls.

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 spring, students will be able to add and drop courses on-line, a popular change with students and faculty. This follows on-line grading, registration, transfer of credit, room reservations (Resource 25), advisee tracking (My Advisees page), and class lists (with photographs so that faculty can identify their students more easily in class). 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. The next major project, which is well under way, is 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.

Evaluation

One notable finding of the Task Force is that many students were attributing their positive experience at Tufts to their own efforts and perhaps to their programs or department, but little to the university as a whole. As we implement the Task Force Report, it is important to trumpet its successes. Students should know that the university has very self-consciously sought to improve the undergraduate experience in myriad ways. We also should seek to evaluate the impact of the Task Force report. Will these changes make a difference in how students perceive their Tufts experience? In the next progress report, enough time will have passed to see if there has been an effect on general student satisfaction, as expressed on the Senior Survey (though, of course, there are many other variables at work) and on giving rates among graduated seniors (one year and several years out).