

Students dissatisfied with curriculum

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Last week's series of three forums held by the Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience encouraged a variety of students to speak on issues such as curricular and faculty diversification efforts.

The Task Force held a general open forum last Wednesday, followed by Cultural Climate at Tufts Forums I and II on Thursday and Friday. The forums were intended to allow members of the Tufts community to voice their opinions on areas of student life in need of improvement.

Though many students seemed pleased that the Task Force was listening to their opinions, some students at the two cultural climate forums expressed dissatisfaction with how Tufts handles issues that they have raised in the past. Most of these complaints centered on Tufts' failure to act swiftly to create more classes in race and ethnic studies.

Students questioned the ability of the Task Force to address curricular diversification issues and said that representatives of the various culture groups had been sacrificing their academic success in order to devote significant time to lobbying for diversification. Some



Soren Burns/Tufts Daily

Students talk about the curriculum, housing, and community at forums last week.

said they were discouraged by the administration's failure to add an American Race and Cultures requirement although five years have passed since it was suggested in the 1997 Task Force on Race report.

At Friday's discussion, Dean of Colleges Charles

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Students say lobbying for changes not their responsibility

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Inouye remarked that students do not often approach University administrators when they see a need for improvement. "What strikes me is that I'm looking around this room and wondering how many times I've seen any of you in my office. I'm always there," he said. "You [students] don't know the system. You can play the game, but you need to know the system."

But a key sentiment expressed by students at the forums was that they should not have to fight for

curricular diversification. One student said tolerance "comes with the curriculum," and that she should not have to lobby for changes. "As a student...I have enough to worry about."

Sophomore Zekka Yeraswork, who has been an advocate of curriculum transformation, agreed. Advocating for changes to the curriculum "shouldn't be [students'] responsibility," she said at Thursday's forum.

Nevertheless, student advocacy for curriculum changes is not a new phenomenon. One student, a senior who has been a member of the Association of Latin

American Students (ALAS) for four years, said that she remembers seniors discussing the curriculum transformation during her freshman year.

"I realize that it's not the easiest thing to get together, but it shouldn't have to be an issue year after year after year," she said.

But some forum participants recognize that progress has been made. "While frustration is understandable, it's important to see the difference between no action and slow action," economics professor Gilbert Metcalf said.

Participants at the forums also discussed issues not related to curriculum development. Students raised concerns about the perceptions of the role of culture houses on campus, discussed how the dorms' set-up and programming affect the sense of community, and questioned how to increase integration and tolerance on campus.

Several participants at Friday's panel agreed that the culture houses create a "vicious cycle" that serves the purpose of providing

students with a comfortable haven while simultaneously segregating those students from the rest of the Tufts population.

"Once you step outside your house, you leave the safety you find inside," one woman said.

Though students expressed mild displeasure over the lack of action by Tufts on issues they are concerned about, many thought that the forums were productive.

Curriculum "is always going to be an issue," said Gabriela Calderon, the public relations representative of ALAS. "I would like to say that it has been somewhat successful." While Calderon felt the three forums held last week allowed students a chance for their voices to be heard, more frequent forums and better student participation would yield better results.

While students in attendance felt that their voices were heard, many students were unsure that the forums would lead to change. One student wondered how much would be accomplished "because

students failed to voice any possible plan of action."

A participant in Friday's forum voiced a similar sentiment. The "students should be more organized so that they are presenting possible solutions instead of just their problems," the student said.

Other students felt differently, and were confident that the forums would have tangible effects. The forums "encourage change because they allow students' needs to be heard by the Dean of Students and the Dean of Colleges, and because President Bacow specifically set up the task force for that reason," one participant said.

The forums also addressed issues such as housing, undergraduate curriculum requirements, and the need for community, security, unity, and a sense of belonging on campus. Discussion touched on the need for a coherent outlook on what the University seeks to accomplish and the reality of what it offers students.