

Trustee meeting to take on new format

2/8/02

Board to reconnect with students and the 'undergraduate experience'

by **RUSSELL CAPONE**

Daily Editorial Board

Hoping to gain support for a comprehensive reexamination of Tufts' undergraduate experience, President Larry Bacow has asked the Board of Trustees, which hired him only nine months ago, to spend their weekend retreat touring the Medford campus. The drastic change from standard trustee procedure, which is expected to help trustees identify the school's academic strengths and weaknesses and student's concerns regarding campus life, has many at the University taking a look at Bacow's broader plans for reform.

The untraditional move was made by Bacow in conjunction with his recently formed Taskforce on Undergraduate Education, which has quickly become a major focus of the young president's agenda — and one which its chair, economics professor Gilbert Metcalf, said would mark Bacow's "signature effort in the undergraduate area."

In a Jan. 9 letter to Trustees, Bacow wrote that the weekend would be restructured in order to involve the University's governing body in establishing guidelines for the taskforce. "Groups will visit classrooms, laboratories and dormitories and meet at various places on campus," the president wrote. "The tone will be informal, and you will have ample time for good discussion and dialogue with your faculty,

student, and staff hosts."

Twenty-seven of the University's 35 trustees will be on hand for the weekend. Once dominated by schmoozing and private conferences, it will now be filled with campus tours and rare trustee interactions with students and faculty. Most trustee committee sessions — standard fare in years past for the February weekend — will not occur until May.

Instead, trustees will divide into three groups, each centered around one of the taskforce's objectives — "Teaching and Learning," "Student Life," and "Quality of Students." Student trustee representatives and faculty members will tour facilities — including classrooms and dormitories — with the trustees today, and convene tomorrow to discuss their experiences and work on a mandate for the taskforce.

Bacow's revisions to the trustee weekend have been hailed by administrators and faculty as comprehensive and insightful. Provost Sol Gittleman said the weekend's restructuring would further Bacow's taskforce objectives. "Larry is setting it up the way he wants, and that's great," Gittleman said. "He wants trustees to get a better sense of what student life is like. The closer you are to your constituency, the better off in life you are."

President Emeritus John

see TRUSTEES, page 4

Bacow will show Trustees undergrad life

TRUSTEES

continued from page 1

DiBiaggio, who also restructured the February meeting in his first year with the University, said Bacow's initiatives were "right on target."

"I think it's kind of interesting... he wants to get the Trustees very involved," DiBiaggio said. "Sort of like a mini-retreat in which they reflect upon what they want to do. He's made it very clear that his principle concern is the quality of student life. By doing this, he signals that this is indeed the case."

Student government leaders, however, are giving the new format and taskforce a lukewarm reception. Jesse Levey, a trustee representative who would normally deliver a formal presentation to trustees this weekend, said he would "reserve judgement" on the restructuring.

"I want to make sure that students are included and that our opportunity to give formal presentations to the trustees is not hampered by this process," Levey said. "I indicated to [Secretary to the Trustees] Linda Dixon, I requested that I be able to speak at the May meeting, and it remains to be seen whether I will be able to. I think it's great that students are included on the taskforce. I also applaud the president for thinking of engaging trustees on the dialogue. I just want to make sure students can voice on topics that they think are appropriate."

Trustee representative Tommy Calvert endorsed the taskforce but cautioned that its mandate include significant student input. Referring to the residence hall soon to be built, Calvert said that "the whole reason the issue is being pursued is because I started the process two years ago. Had a student not brought it up, it wouldn't be moving as it is. The students need to be involved in setting the agenda, not just the University. There are some issues they just can't get the pulse of."

Senator Pritesh Ghandi will speak at a luncheon for trustees and students on Saturday and address what he perceives as a lack of communication between students and administrators. Ghandi, who said he was disappointed in the relationship between president and student government, thinks the trustee representatives should be given the opportunity to deliver their formal presentations. "I don't think enough student concerns will be brought to the trustees," Ghandi said.

But while the role of trustee representatives has been reduced, Bacow maintains that his initiative is intended to involve students more intimately in the weekend. Three student representatives are situated on the taskforce, and its administrative members will interact with trustees throughout the course of the weekend in what Bacow said is an attempt to "engage the trustees more, as

opposed to just getting them together and talking at them."

Along those lines, Bacow has replaced the traditional Saturday luncheon at the Gifford House with lunch at the Dewick-MacPhie dining hall. The president asked that Dining Services prepare the traditional lunchtime fare, and students happening to be eating in Dewick at the time will get the opportunity to converse with trustees.

Joyce Barsam, a trustee and chair of the academic affairs committee, said she was encouraged by the taskforce. "It's always a good idea to try different approaches to information gathering, and the advent of a new president is an ideal time to try new models of meeting in order to improve our governance," she said. "I think we all agree that it's powerful to view realities firsthand, rather than by a third-party report, so this is an effort to see for ourselves the actualities at Tufts."

Barsam's committee is one of two that will meet for abbreviated sessions today. All non-pressing business will be handled in May, though updates on the progress of the new dormitory and an announcement regarding the University's commencement speaker are expected. Bacow has been tight-lipped about the speaker's identity since telling the *Daily* last month that one had been selected and had accepted an invitation.