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Bacow forum frustrates senators

Many left wanting answers, greater access to Pres.

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Many Tufts Community Union (TCU) senators expressed disappointment Sunday after University President Larry Bacow addressed the Senate following a meeting between senators and his Task Force on Undergraduate Life.

Though senators were responsive to the Task Force's ongoing quest for facts and ideas, many felt that Bacow's good intentions were overshadowed by what they saw as his unfamiliarity with the workings of the Senate. Some senators said that his responses to questions were evasive and left them dissatisfied.

Topics ranged from the state of students' mental health to recent incidents of racist graffiti on the door of Capen House and senators' thoughts on the Task Force. At the meeting's open-



Emily Chasan/Tufts Daily

Senators listen to President Bacow pitch his newly created Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience.

ing, Bacow said he wanted to "address issues and resources necessary to implement recommendations" and to use the "information session" as an "opportunity to listen."

TCU Senate Vice President Melissa Carson said she felt that Bacow spent a disproportionate

amount of time discussing background information on issues that Senators were already familiar with. She added that she hoped the president and the students can find a better means for discussion.

see BACOW, page 11

Tommy Calvert: not enough students on Undergraduate Task Force

BACOW

continued from page 1

"I think he had good intentions and I think he has a lot of potential, but no students, especially student government, have figured out the right way to work with him," she said.

Despite senators' complaints, she said the meeting was productive. "We don't know how to work with him and he doesn't know how to work with us yet, but both sides are trying to make an effort and last night was a good first step."

Bacow told the *Daily* that he "thought the meeting was productive. It was good to hear views of student leaders on a variety of issues," he said.

Carson felt that both sides might have misunderstood the meeting's purpose. "I think that there has been some miscommunication with what each side wanted to get out of the meeting, or perhaps what each Senator wanted to get out of the meeting," she said.

Citing a nationwide increase in the stress level of college students and Bacow's efforts to deal with mental health issues while serving as MIT chancellor, freshman Senator Jon Gold asked the president if he would consider imple-

menting a mental health task force at Tufts. Bacow said he felt that he has not observed Tufts' overall mental health situation to be as problematic as that at MIT and therefore he did not feel a task force was necessary at this time.

But mental and community health remain very important issues, he said. "Modern drugs and therapy allow certain individuals to attend the elite institutions,

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and, overall, relative to 20 or 30 years ago, the campus community is more fragile."

Gold said he thought the meeting was productive for some, but that it left others unsatisfied. "I know people had a lot of questions for him and they have trouble getting a hold of him. It was productive to have him there to answer our questions," he said. "I know some would like greater access to him, and some were satisfied, but I guess it varies among different members."

Bacow discussed the recent ideological battle between campus liberals and conservatives and said that the "only way to change status quo is if students take the

incentive to pursue a more civil level of discourse on campus." Bacow feels that in the age of the Internet, when campus dialogues are cataloged in various places, these disputes could potentially misrepresent the University. "Tufts students are better than what's been thrown around lately," he said.

Carson said she thought Bacow's meeting with campus

leaders could have been more effective had he stayed to witness other portions of Senate business. "He didn't really get to see what we do. He declined the invitation to stay for the rest of the meeting when we talk about student concerns," Carson said. "Until he sees that, he's not going to respect us enough to work with us, and with us is the key."

Carson pointed to Dean of Students Bruce Reitman and Dean of Academic Affairs Kristine Dillon as administrators who have learned to work effectively with the Senate. She said Bacow still has a lot to learn about the Senate-Administration relationship.

When he turned down the invi-

tation to stay and hear more of the Senate's presentation, Carson felt that the president lost out on what the Senate is elected to do. "He declined to be that person [we present student concerns to], while he was already sitting at the table," she said.

Trustee representative Tommy Calvert said that Bacow's "honeymoon is over," and that he is going to have to make some serious

changes in his interactions with students to be able to work together effectively.

"Students are accustomed to being part of the agenda-forming process at this University," he said. "They feel that administrating is more than just shaking hands and making appearances. It's about working together to find consensus about campus issues."

Senators spent much of the meeting questioning the President about the Task Force venture. He believes that the Task Force will fundamentally change undergraduate life for the better. Senators, however, questioned whether the eight faculty members and the three permanent student members,

who are aided by a student advisory committee of indeterminate size, accurately represent students' vested interests.

Bacow said the Task Force will be responsible for creating a clear vision of the future that will attract donors by "getting them to buy into this vision." He said its primary purpose would be to answer the question, "What is the distinctive aspect of a education at Tufts?"

Calvert said it is important that the administration know that "people are looking for equality, not window dressing." He said the Task Force would not become unmanageable if it were expanded to include an equal number of students and faculty.

The Task Force, Bacow said, was meant to be "structured as a process open and as inclusive as possible." Some senators felt, however, that the contentious issue of diversity representation was largely ignored. Bacow said that the purpose of the structure will not be clear until the 13-month Task Force completes its term. "The proof of the pudding will be in the eating," he said.

Bacow told the *Daily* "the conversation was frank and candid" and said, "There are clearly a wide range of views represented on the Senate."