

Tufts University



Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience

**Interim Report
to the Tufts Community**

Part II

January 21, 2003

Executive Summary

The Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience released an interim report to the Tufts community in early December 2002 that detailed proposals with regard to co-curricular and residential life at Tufts and posed several broad questions with regard to the curriculum. This report continues with more specific ideas to contribute to a climate of intellectual engagement on campus. We focus on initiatives to:

- improve writing and oral communication skills
- enhance research opportunities for students
- provide opportunities for culminating academic experiences
- enhance our intellectual community
- rethink our approach to curricular requirements

As with our December report, we put forth these ideas for the community's thoughtful and critical examination. We invite discussion, debate, and constructive criticism, as well as new and better ideas. The community's widespread participation in and contribution to this dialogue are the next steps in this process. Substantive feedback will not only help us meet the President's charge to "achieve a consensus for change," but also improve the final product so that the community can feel confident that it has formulated a plan that will build on and strengthen the extraordinary experience that is a Tufts education.

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Promoting Intellectual Engagement

In our December interim report, we noted that the three themes of *community*, *climate*, and *coherence* arose repeatedly and in various forms in our discussions. Those themes have helped to shape a series of potential initiatives that would contribute to the intellectual vitality of the campus. In that report, we presented a set of proposals to promote intellectual engagement and focused primarily on residential and co-curricular life. In this report, we put forward a number of possible initiatives to promote intellectual engagement in the classroom, in students' independent or group study activities, or in research opportunities that connect students with faculty. These initiatives focus on what might be termed the traditional activities of a college; we will use the term *engaged learning* to refer to this collection of initiatives.

The idea behind engaged learning is simple but powerful. We aim to engage students in the learning experience such that they become active creators and critical communicators of knowledge rather than passive receptors of unexamined information. We want our undergraduate students to take full advantage of Tufts' unique position as a liberal arts college embedded in a research university, both by connecting with faculty who are scholars as well as teachers and by exploring their own interest in and capacity for research and other academic activities. In short, we wish to provide an environment in which students will become enthusiastic life-long learners, creative producers of knowledge, and effective communicators. The richness of dialogue, instruction, experimentation, and experience that Tufts provides will enable our students to become leaders in the diverse and increasingly interconnected world they will inherit. This is an ambitious aspiration but the intellectual transformation of young adults is itself the ambitious enterprise at the heart of the mission of the university.

As noted in our December report, we have found it valuable to consider a developmental model to complement the model of breadth and depth embodied in a liberal arts education.¹ The chief purpose of the developmental model is to provide increased coherence in the intellectual formation of our students from the time they are accepted into the university until the time they become alumni. From their first meeting with their advisors until their graduation, we wish to provide our students with a sense of the institution's central focus on their continuous intellectual development and growth. Currently, Tufts, like many colleges and universities, embodies an *implicit* vision of the development that should occur during an individual's undergraduate years, but this vision is rarely articulated to the students by the University and is therefore often left to the students – fresh from high school – to discover on an ad hoc basis. In this context, it is more often than not the case that a student views distribution and foundation requirements, as well as the search for and completion of a major, as a series of items to be checked off a list. By articulating our educational goals for our students within a developmental framework, we hope to lend deeper meaning to these activities as developmental milestones in their intellectual lives rather than as empty or random obligations. Specifically, we not only wish to articulate a clearer vision of intellectual

¹ We recognize that the School of Engineering is not a liberal arts institution but note that it embodies many of the principles of a liberal arts education, including an emphasis on breadth and depth.

expectations across the four years at Tufts at every level of the University, but we also wish to suggest several ways that we can visibly mark and celebrate these milestones with year-specific annual events.

Within this model, we recognize that individual students learn in different ways and at varying paces. Therefore, we do not desire a prescriptive, lock-step path for students but rather a shared sense of intellectual growth across disciplines that is variously addressed and visibly provided for at every phase of our students' development. In so doing, we wish to ensure that every undergraduate at Tufts has encountered a series of intellectual milestones and academic experiences across the disciplines which will help to achieve the desired outcomes of a Tufts education as enumerated in our December report.

As is the case with our earlier co-curricular and residential proposals, our curricular proposals are “cast in sand,” presented here to generate discussion. We offer our proposals, grouped into five categories, as *scenarios*, which simply means the ideas we have identified in each section should be understood neither as mutually exclusive nor as indivisible components of a larger unit. These proposals are intended to initiate the community dialogue necessary to enable the Task Force to produce a final set of recommendations at the end of the Spring term which the community has not only fully considered but also collectively endorsed.

Possible Initiatives For Discussion

I. Improving Communication Skills

Strong communication skills are integral to success in all arenas of life and therefore essential to a good education. During our outreach work last year, we heard these sentiments echoed repeatedly in the comments of members of the Tufts community. Nevertheless, overwhelming numbers of students and faculty alike reported to us that they believe that Tufts must do a better job in imparting both writing and oral communication skills to our students. The suggestions that follow are intended to address this concern.

A. Writing

Writing is a process. Learning to write well takes time, regular and consistent practice, disciplined attention, and critical feedback. Extraordinary papers require multiple drafts; one should never expect to write an excellent paper in a single draft. The process of writing, after all, is inextricably linked with the development of one's thinking: a theme a student is just beginning to identify in a first draft becomes more and more clearly articulated in each successive draft, enabling, in the end, a more powerful and sophisticated organizational structure not apparent at the outset.

Similarly, good writing cannot be taught in a single course. To learn to write well, one must sustain the practice of writing *over time* as well as receive quality

feedback on one's writing with some regularity. It is for these reasons that the Task Force proposes that Tufts institute a four-year writing program. Such a program would have benefits beyond improving writing skills. There is no surer way to improve our students' capacity to think clearly than by improving their ability to write with precision.

Before outlining our various ideas for such a program, we wish to underscore the integral importance of each of our existing writing programs to our vision for an expanded, four-year writing program. We view these existing programs as successful at their specific goals: English 1 and 2 teaches first year students how to write grammatically correct, well-constructed arguments with clear thesis statements; Writing Across the Curriculum helps students learn to use writing as a tool to explore and sharpen their thinking on a particular subject; and the Writing Fellows Program as well as all of the writing resources offered by the Academic Resource Center gives students the individualized attention they need to improve their own writing process. We believe that the widespread dissatisfaction reported by faculty and students alike with the quality of Tufts students' writing can in no way be blamed on any one of these programs. Rather, it is the lack of a systematic and sustained attention to writing throughout the four years of undergraduate education that explains why our students' quality of writing fails to meet our expectations for such bright and accomplished individuals.

There are of course several important issues to consider with regard to any writing initiatives, which we note before turning to the initiatives themselves. First, both writing and the teaching of writing are labor-intensive and time-consuming endeavors. Instructors of writing must read and provide feedback on multiple drafts for all of their students. Most faculty, however, do not have the time or inclination to read more than one or two drafts of a student's paper, and, moreover, the comments they make usually address the content rather than the writing itself.² Second, many faculty do not feel it is their job to teach writing. They may say, "that's why we have English 1 and 2." For students, however, English 1 and 2 only begin the process of learning to write at Tufts. Despite the fact that students may subsequently take several of Tufts' many writing-intensive courses, it is usually the content or subject matter of students' written work – and not the writing itself – which receives the most attention. Third, even of those faculty members who are themselves gifted writers, not all will be effective teachers of writing. The existence of the field of writing pedagogy underscores the knowledge and skill involved in teaching writing well. Finally, attention paid to writing in coursework comes either at the expense of course material or requires additional meeting time on the part of students and faculty. The former is unappealing given the already short semester and the latter is an unacceptable burden for faculty already stretched thin by other responsibilities.

With all of these issues in mind, we offer below several ideas for ways to support a four-year writing program that builds upon our existing programs. In an appendix to this document, we provide two examples of possible ways in which a four-year writing program could be structured.

² There are obvious exceptions to this generality. We heard many comments from students about particular examples of excellent writing instruction beyond the formal writing programs discussed above.

- *External Review:* Before designing this program, we suggest carrying out an external review of our overall efforts to teach undergraduate writing. This initiative would look comprehensively at our writing pedagogy rather than focus on particular components of our writing program. This comprehensive review would help in sharpening the design of a four-year writing program.
- *Writing Portfolio:* Require students to construct a four-year writing portfolio. A number of papers meeting certain criteria (e.g. length, subject matter, disciplinary breadth and depth) would be added to the portfolio over the four year period. The portfolio might be used, for example, to determine suitability for graduation *summa cum laude*.
- *Augment Pool of Writing Fellows:* Significantly increase the number of graduate and undergraduate Writing Fellows. We note that writing fellows make possible multiple draft assignments that are critically important in developing effective writing habits. We also note that studies show that the experience not only benefits the student writing the paper, but also the student assisting them. The writing program examples in the appendix place a heavy reliance on these fellows.

B. Oral Communication

Despite the fact that our alumni continue to stress how important it is for students to be well-trained in public speaking, Tufts currently has no formal requirement for oral communication. The School of Engineering requires project presentations, where teams of students use Power Point to articulate to others the work they have done. We encourage the faculty to consider how students across Arts, Sciences, and Engineering might learn effective oral communication skills. Here are some possible initiatives:

- *Presentations:* Encourage more in-class presentations. This is feasible in small classes or in small sections of large classes. For students to learn from these presentations, it is important to have the capability to tape presentations to provide feedback to students. Thus we suggest that adequate A/V equipment and support be available for this purpose.
- *Public Speaking:* We urge departments to seek out ways to add a public speaking component to existing classes and urge the curriculum committees to consider the benefits of offering classes in public speaking and rhetoric. Advanced seminars, drama classes, or an Ex-College class on leadership, for example, are possible arenas for public speaking instruction.
- *Assessing Oral Communication:* We encourage all faculty to talk with their students not just about their written work, but also about their oral expression.
- *Debate Society:* We encourage departments and programs to work with the debate society to develop traditions and contests that promote public speaking.

- *Public Discourse:* We encourage lively and articulate debate in the Tufts community about the full complexity of controversial issues so that students will not simply "take positions," but also will develop the capacity to persuade others or to move them toward greater understanding. We hope to foster a climate in which differences are not treated with repressive tolerance but are engaged as a valuable source of intellectual energy and an important opportunity for communal dialogue.
- *Presentation Support:* Provide more support for students to present their research at the Undergraduate Research Symposium and other events. This would also include support for students who are presenting papers at academic conferences and symposia outside of Tufts.
- *Campus-wide Speaking Competition:* Institute a campus-wide speaking competition modeled on the Wendell Philips Award. Such a competition could be organized with teams from each of the colleges and might become a trademark event in the calendar of Tufts experiences.

II. Promoting Research Opportunities

Emphasizing research opportunities for undergraduates has become increasingly important since the Boyer Report (1998) identified the need to “reinvent undergraduate education” by paying more attention to undergraduate research. As a liberal arts college embedded within a research university, Tufts is particularly well placed to provide such opportunities, especially when we consider our tradition of being a place where faculty are equally dedicated scholars and teachers. The presence of graduate students in Arts, Sciences, and Engineering also provides opportunities to develop programs to support research and scholarship between graduate and undergraduate students. Undergraduates can benefit from the interaction with graduate students and graduate students can benefit from the opportunities for mentoring. This combination of factors is a strength upon which we would like to build.

We propose a program that would encourage and support undergraduate engagement in research and other kinds of engaged learning as informed by the developmental model. Experiential and immersive in method, engaged learning includes an emphasis on research in the widest sense of the word. In many disciplines research will involve experimentation, empirical observation, or data collection; in others it might center on solitary work in the library or the artist's studio. We do not want research to be construed in any narrowly defined disciplinary sense, but to be understood as applying equally to the different types of work produced in the arts, humanities, sciences, social sciences, and technological fields. Engaging in research can help students attain all of the educational goals set forth in the December interim report. Working on their own research or on the research of faculty, students are brought into closer contact with faculty, thereby helping them to make the transition from passive consumers of knowledge to active participants in its creation. Our students can learn leadership skills and become members of an intellectual community by understanding the faculty’s profile

as scholar-teachers and by internalizing this understanding of how to learn and how to communicate what they have learned to others. We wish to acknowledge the great passion that many students bring to extra-curricular activities and that these activities can serve as the starting point for individual research projects. We discuss this further below.

Below we list possible initiatives for consideration. The proposals focus on student participation in research activities. We also feel that an increase in the resources available to support faculty research is important. Increased resources for faculty research can enhance the undergraduate experience by providing additional opportunities for student participation in faculty research. As with other initiatives in this report, we put these initiatives forward to spark discussion and elicit suggestions from the community:

- *Augmented Undergraduate Research Fund:* Currently, the Dean of the Colleges has a modest budget to support undergraduate research. An expansion of this fund would allow faculty to receive support to hire students to work on faculty research projects, and to allow students to engage in more ambitious (and expensive) research activities whether here or abroad. An adequately financed internal research fund is particularly important for fields in which there are inadequate external funding opportunities. Internal funding for undergraduate research should be sensitive to the opportunities available to faculty for obtaining external funding to, among other things, support undergraduate participation in their research.
- *Summer Scholars Program:* The need to earn money in the summer is a considerable barrier for many students who might otherwise wish to work in labs, in the field, or in the library on faculty or student research. We encourage the providing of funding to pay summer stipends for students working on research projects, whether here or abroad. A fund could be established patterned on the model of the International Relations Scholars Program, where undergraduates compete for resources that would allow them to devote their energies to research, perhaps leading to a senior thesis.
- *Research Funding for Students at the Professional Schools:* An augmented research fund could pay for students to serve as research assistants on projects at Tufts' professional schools. This would have the additional benefit of contributing to the knitting together of the various schools within Tufts.
- *Research Clearinghouse:* A research clearinghouse overseen by the Dean of the Colleges could facilitate matching faculty with students and overseeing a support structure for student research. Many faculty on the Medford campus hire students on research projects out of classes they teach. This is not possible for faculty at other Tufts schools or on other campuses, particularly faculty in the downtown medical or dental schools. A research clearinghouse might be particularly effective at placing students in our professional schools as well as on the Medford campus. The research clearinghouse could also sponsor events that bring faculty from the professional

schools to the Medford campus to interact with undergraduates and expose them to the research opportunities elsewhere within the university.

- *Undergraduate Research Symposium:* We propose an expansion of this event to include all disciplines and to celebrate its importance for student development. Opportunities should be given to undergraduates who are doing research to present their work to their peers and mentors. In addition to break-out sessions, a community dinner could be held, with both student and invited speakers, supported by the President's Office. We also encourage consideration of merging the undergraduate and graduate research symposia into a joint event. We also pose the possibility of moving the symposium from its Saturday location to a day during the week. Changing the day, and perhaps canceling courses on that Undergraduate Research Day, would raise the profile of the symposium, encourage more student and faculty participation and make a statement that undergraduate research is important here. The cost of making this change would be an additional day of instruction tacked on to the end of the semester.
- *Endowed Fund for Culminating Academic Experiences:* A special fund might be developed to support senior theses and other culminating academic experiences. Awards from this fund could be designed in a way to honor particularly deserving juniors. A Ballou Thesis Prize of, for example, \$5,000 would be a distinct honor and would free students from the need to take work-study or other jobs to focus on their research. Such a prize could be awarded in the annual Honors Award Ceremony.

III. Providing Opportunities for Senior-year Culminating Academic Experiences

We have touched on the topic of senior theses and other culminating experiences in the section above. These experiences are powerful vehicles to engage students intellectually in hard questions and issues. Sometimes real breakthroughs emerge as a result of these projects. Other times students may simply come to a deeper understanding of the complexity of the world and the lack of simple, clear-cut answers. As we have thought about these opportunities for more sustained research, we have come to appreciate the many different ways that students can carry out a senior thesis or comparable project. For many, research will still involve hours of solitary splendor in the basement of Tisch Library; for others, it might involve writing and mounting a play, composing a musical piece, or designing and implementing a laboratory experiment. But there are other possibilities. Critical analysis of major endeavors in the co-curricular spheres (e.g., editing student publications, serving as an athletic team captain, running a performance group, undertaking a community service project) could serve as the basis of a senior thesis with approval of the sponsoring department. What matters in the development of such a thesis is the rigorous intellectual framing of the project and the connection of what is experiential to what is more broadly theoretical or generalizable.

Having noted the possibilities, we acknowledge that there is no consensus among students and faculty on the extent to which seniors should undertake a senior thesis or other significant culminating research activity. At the risk of overly simplifying the

arguments on either side, we summarize the key issues as follows. A significant culminating activity, such as a senior thesis, can be a transformative learning experience for those students who are prepared to work independently. It may be the first time that a student has taken on a major task that requires the full engagement of his or her faculties over a sustained period of time. After completing such a project, even the most reluctant student can feel a sense of pride and accomplishment at having completed a significant piece of work. They may have forged meaningful relationships with members of the faculty, and will have gained a deeper appreciation for scholarship and teaching. Moreover, hitherto unimagined intellectual depths may be plumbed and new possibilities emerge for young adults as they begin their careers or contemplate additional years of graduate study. It is for reasons such as these that a number of schools require a senior thesis from all their students.

On the other hand, good student research requires close interaction with faculty. The burden of supervising a senior thesis for roughly 1,200 graduates would overwhelm many departments, particularly those with large numbers of majors. Currently some departments or programs strongly encourage a senior thesis or comprehensive paper, but students self-select into those majors understanding the commitment that they are making beforehand. With a universal requirement for a senior thesis, many students would be enormously resentful and make half-hearted efforts, all the while consuming valuable faculty time and energy. Beyond the logistical questions, those who are skeptical of culminating projects argue that in many cases students would be served better by participating in classes that would give them the chance to develop their ideas more effectively. They also argue that the model of a “culminating” experience responds to a paradigm more appropriate to some disciplines than to others.

The Task Force feels that, while there are some faculty and students who would support a requirement of a year-long thesis (or comparable project) of all our seniors, there is little support among the majority of faculty and students for such a requirement. Rather than continue the debate of whether there should or should not be such a requirement, we have considered initiatives that 1) make the senior thesis experience more rewarding for those students who wish to write a thesis, and 2) encourage our strongest students to take on this culminating educational project.

Many faculty members have expressed the two concerns that 1) not enough of our best students are writing senior theses, and 2) some of the students writing a senior honors theses do so primarily to obtain transcript notation of honors when Latin honors elude them. These students may not be well qualified in some cases or well motivated in others to write a thesis and can create a burden for faculty advisors. We would not argue that *only* students with a GPA above a certain threshold should be allowed to write a year-long senior thesis; but we would argue that the incentives should be designed to steer our best students to such projects. A secondary concern is that the co-existence of thesis honors and Latin honors can be confusing and potentially dilute the value of Latin honors. The following initiatives are an attempt to direct our best students to write a thesis and to eliminate inappropriate incentives to take on a thesis project:

- *Link Honors and Theses:* Require satisfactory completion of a senior thesis (or other significant research project) as a condition for graduation *summa cum laude*. The faculty would need to determine appropriate criteria for a senior thesis for graduation purposes.
- *Link Theses and Coursework:* Alternatively (or in addition), encourage departments and programs to develop strong screening mechanisms for potential thesis writers. For example, at least one department requires all students who wish to do a senior thesis to write a prospectus and submit it to the department. The entire department then reads and votes either to accept or to reject the proposal. The criteria for acceptance are 1) quality of the written proposal; 2) strength and feasibility of the research project; 3) strong support from those who have had the student in courses and who vouch for the student's ability to succeed in carrying this project to completion. Students who are not accepted for senior theses can then choose to do an independent study.
- *A Single Thesis Program:* Remove the transcript designation of thesis honors and simply record a letter grade for the course in which the student is enrolled for the purpose of writing a thesis. All theses would require enrolling in a senior thesis course for the fall and spring semesters of the senior year. What is currently a one semester senior thesis would be relabeled a senior independent project.

IV. Enhancing Our Intellectual Community

As reflected in our co-curricular proposals, we envision a life-long intellectual community that begins before our entering students matriculate and continues after they graduate. We aspire to construct a community that links our students across the class-years and knits together our strengths in internationalism and diversity with our commitment to public service and citizenship. The following initiatives are milestone events that reinforce the idea of developmental learning. That is, they are designed, first, to establish a "Tufts story" in which learning is continuous and, second, to reinforce that story at important junctures throughout our students' years here and in the future beyond Tufts. They share the common goals of enhancing community through intellectual pursuits and of providing visible coherence to the four years at Tufts.

- *Pre-matriculation Summer Program:* Institute a summer program for those students whose preparation for college-level study needs augmentation prior to matriculation. We deliberately select for admission students who come from diverse backgrounds and have differing degrees of academic preparation. What we want to avoid is admitting students only to watch them fail. Toward that end we should make a preparatory program available to any student who feels that he or she will need it to take full advantage of the intellectual experience Tufts will provide.
- *Summer Reading Program:* Establish a program whereby our alumni give newly admitted students a book as a welcoming gift, inviting them to membership in the Tufts intellectual community. Different students might receive different books to

provide varying perspectives on enduring issues. An opportunity to discuss the reading should be provided, perhaps through the college system if implemented, or through the advising system if not.

- *Alumni Network:* Create a network for each department to allow alumni to receive information about the progress of the department and the achievement of the alumni. Inherent in this organization is a sense of responsibility to both entering freshmen and graduating seniors.
- *Majors Fair:* Hold a Majors Fair which is combined with the existing, already popular Club/Organization Fair.
- *World Day:* Hold an event to welcome back those students who have been abroad. Give them a collective opportunity to reflect on the diversity and richness of their experiences. As a way to address the problem of reverse culture shock, and to counter their feelings of disorientation and dislocation from Tufts, we should provide the opportunity for returning seniors to reconnect with each other, and to integrate their experiences into the larger context of their lives as soon-to-be Tufts alumni.
- *An Adaptation of World Day:* Broaden the concept of World Day to welcome all seniors back to campus: those who have been abroad as well as those who may have moved off campus locally, gone to Washington DC or some other community within the United States. The event would allow these returning seniors an opportunity to reflect on what they'd learned from their experiences, re-connect with Tufts community, and integrate their experiences into a larger context.
- *Commencement and Honors Award Night:* Offer a two-part commencement. The first part would be an all-university ceremony as currently occurs. The second part, with the awarding of diplomas, would then be done in a more intimate setting, perhaps through the departments or colleges. We might also move some of the Honors Award Night presentations to these more intimate commencement ceremonies.
- *Internships and an Internship Clearinghouse:* Currently, there is significant variation across academic programs as to the availability of credit for internship opportunities. Internships are an integral part of some programs while actively discouraged by other programs. We encourage the Educational Policy Committee to discuss and consider the benefits (and costs) of developing guidelines for greater uniformity across majors. We also urge consideration of the value of establishing an internship clearinghouse to assist students in finding and obtaining internships. This would supplement but not replace those well established program and department internship program support structures.
- *Internship Scholarship Fund:* Create a scholarship for those students who would like to do an unpaid internship for the benefit of the experience it would provide but who could not forgo the income their federal work-study or other job would provide.

- *Tufts in Boston*: Offer community service-based alternatives for those students who choose not to study abroad. There are currently several implementations of community service learning that could serve as models for student engagement in communities and cultures in the metropolitan Boston area rather than abroad. A Tufts course in Urban Citizenship, AMER 0192U, is an example of a course that asks students to engage in community work under supervision and provides them an academic context in which to learn about the community's background and to explore and discuss intellectual issues that arise in their work. The range of community-based projects highlighted in the recent UCCPS poster session suggests such experience may provide many of the benefits of study abroad for some students. These might include working in a language other than English, working in a community whose norms differ from those of the Tufts Medford campus, learning how to engage in a community in which one is an outsider or new arrival. In addition, such work can benefit not only the students but also the communities in which they serve.
- *Fitness and the Curriculum*: We encourage a closer integration of fitness and the curriculum. An example of such an initiative is the Tufts Personalized Performance Program. This program seeks to address the deterioration of nutrition, sleep, and exercise habits among undergraduates through a comprehensive educational program run through the Athletics Department, Health Services, Dining Services, and the School of Nutrition.

V. Rethinking Our Approach to Curricular Requirements

One far-reaching curricular proposal would be to change our requirements to more closely reflect our emphasis on the development of writing, speaking, and other intellectual competencies as articulated in Part I (see educational outcomes). We realize that any change to curricular requirements is controversial and difficult. Yet we feel compelled to urge the designated faculty committees to consider reformulating our present requirements so that they span competencies and modes of inquiry rather than simply expose students to a number of disciplines.

Many have noted the “check-list” mentality that prevails when undergraduates go about fulfilling curricular requirements. Also, many students have complained that certain courses are ineffective in fulfilling the purposes of curricular requirements. In order to renew our thinking about and our enthusiasm for breadth, depth, and personal development as parts of a Tufts education, we might consider a new approach to requirements that would provide incentives to encourage departments and faculty to infuse more courses with substantial writing, speaking, and critical thinking components. We also should direct students toward courses that encourage their grappling with complex problems and diverse ideas, viewpoints, and methodologies. We view a strong advising system as an important ingredient in helping to provide this direction. As discussed in the December report, we view the college system as a powerful institution for – among other things – supporting and improving faculty advising. Finally as in the

present system, this conception of requirements would compel students to be exposed to a variety of disciplines and areas of knowledge.

Although we realize the difficulties involved, the Task Force encourages a discussion of these issues. Should the Tufts community feel that this general idea has merit, we would be willing to develop this proposal in a more detailed fashion for the consideration of the appropriate faculty committees.

VI. Process and Next Steps

Here, then, are a number of initiatives grouped together into five categories, each with a specific emphasis: communication, research, culminating experiences, enhancement of the intellectual community, and a re-examination of our approach to breadth and depth. The specific organization of our ideas is reflective of our attempt to give order to our thoughts on improving undergraduate education at Tufts. Our grouping of initiatives therefore should not be understood as an indication either that each set of proposals must be accepted wholesale as a unit or that we would force the choice of any one initiative over another. Instead, we offer all of these ideas to be considered as separate and separable components with which to build a better Tufts. As a community, we must remember that we cannot possibly embrace every good idea set before us. We must establish priorities and make choices. These proposals are intended to initiate the widespread community dialogue necessary to the collective decision-making process at the heart of this ambitious endeavor.

As such, we ask that all members of the Tufts community take the time to reflect upon and critically consider both the diagnosis and the subsequent proposals we put forward in this and the first part of our interim report. The committee has already begun to organize several forums for community feedback; we encourage everyone to participate in these events and contribute his or her thoughts to the committee. It is the job of the Task Force to work with the community in this way to identify a powerful and transformative vision for the Tufts of the future, for it is with this vision that Tufts will launch its next capital campaign as well as initiate many of the improvements that can be put into practice today. Only with the community's active participation will we be able to complete our mission successfully.

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Appendix: Constructing a Four-Year Writing Program

These examples illustrate possible ways Tufts might develop a multi-year writing program. They are illustrative only and should not be viewed as Task Force proposals. If the Tufts community feels that a program that pays attention to writing in multiple years at Tufts would be beneficial, we would expect that the EPC in consultation with other appropriate committees in Arts, Sciences, and Engineering to develop a specific proposal in greater detail.

First Example: A Program With Writing in Each of the Four Years of Residence

Year 1: English 1 and 2 would be required, regardless of AP scores. Rather than exemptions, we might consider implementing advanced writing courses for qualified students.

Year 2: We might require sophomores to write two or three short papers (fewer than five double-spaced pages) describing why they wish to concentrate in a particular major or program. All papers would be read and graded by a writing fellow on a pass-fail basis, except the final paper, which would be read and graded (pass-fail) by the pre-major advisor and submitted to the department or program in which the student declares a major. The paper would become part of the student's file in the department or program and assist faculty in getting to know their majors. High standards for grammar, syntax, and argument construction would be required for a pass grade for all submissions. Transcript notation indicating successful completion of the sophomore writing requirement would be made.

Year 3: Juniors would identify a course in which a substantial amount of writing is required (hereafter known as the junior writing course). Students would submit multiple drafts to a writing fellow who could work with sections of students (thereby allowing for peer editing and other group work). The final draft(s) would be graded in the usual fashion by the course instructor. In addition, the instructor would file a form for all juniors who have designated this course as a junior writing course. On the form the instructor would check a box indicating whether the writing ability demonstrated by junior student in the class was excellent, proficient, satisfactory, or poor.

Successful completion of the junior writing course requirement would require both a passing grade from the writing fellow – based on the student's work at the draft stage – and a grade of satisfactory or better given by the course instructor. The pass requirement from the fellow ensures that students take seriously the requirement to work with the fellow in the writing of multiple drafts. Transcript notation indicating successful completion of the junior writing requirement (with grade) would be made separate from the course grade. The transcript notation for a student who received a grade from the instructor of proficient would read:

Junior Writing Requirement: Proficient

Year 4: A senior thesis could clearly be used to satisfy the fourth year writing requirement. For students not writing a senior thesis, a senior writing requirement similar to the junior writing course – such as a seminar paper – could be implemented with the additional requirement that the course be taken in the student's major department or program.

The virtue of this program is its explicit and continued attention to writing throughout a student's undergraduate career.

Second Example: A Program With Writing in the First Two Years of Residence for All Students and Continued Attention for Students Requiring Further Attention.

Pre-Matriculation: Identify before they arrive at Tufts those students whose test scores and writing backgrounds are weak and offer them access to summer session writing clinics before freshman year begins (these could be taught by trained graduate students in exchange for a summer stipend).

Year 1: Require English 1 and 2 for all students (with provisions as already exist for ESL student sections and equivalent courses for Eng. 2 – and perhaps with special sections for students who score 4 or 5 on the English Advanced Placement Test).

Year 2: Any student receiving a grade below B+ in English 2 would be required to take a Writing Intensive section of a course offered in her or his sophomore year. In addition, instructors would receive an evaluation card for each sophomore in any of their classes. The instructors would be required to check a box indicating whether the writing ability demonstrated by each sophomore in their classes was: excellent, proficient, satisfactory, poor, or not applicable. This last box would be for courses in which there was insufficient writing that would allow the instructor to judge the student's writing ability. These cards would be sent to the Dean of the Sophomore class (or college Director of Advising under the college model) as well as to the students' advisors.

Years 3 and 4: Those students whose writing in their sophomore year received more than 2 notations of satisfactory, poor, or not applicable would be identified as needing special work with tutors in the writing center.³ They would be

³ We include not applicable in this category for two reasons. First, students taking a large number of courses in which writing is not being done are unlikely to improve their writing skills. Second, the failure to include this category provides incentives for students with weak writing skills to avoid classes in which writing is required. This particular rule for identifying students in need of additional work might penalize majors in certain disciplines. We might modify the rule so that sophomores who receive no notation above satisfactory and two notations of satisfactory or poor would be identified as needing special work. Thus a student with strong writing skills who, in order to fast-track a major, takes a number of courses in which the

required to work with those tutors during the first semester of the junior year and submit to a committee of Writing Fellows a series of drafts and a final paper for one of their courses in the junior year.⁴ This committee would determine whether or not the student is making satisfactory progress on her or his writing. If, in its estimation, the student is not, they would notify the Dean of the Junior Class (or appropriate college Director of Advising), as well as the student's advisor. These students might then be required to take another writing intensive course, enroll in a special, newly created class in advanced expository writing, or work individually with a senior tutor at the writing center. Further remedial work could be required in the senior year as needed.

The virtues of this program include tracking the writing of all students through the sophomore year and being able to identify which students the faculty considers to have difficulty with their written expression. It also avoids the necessity of tracking beyond the sophomore year students whose writing has seemed excellent or good. It would require a minimal investment of money and it would introduce relatively few onerous burdens on the faculty. At the same time it would make all faculty responsible for attending to the quality of writing produced by the sophomores in their classes.

For any four-year writing requirement to be feasible given our constraints on faculty time, we would rely on a team of writing fellows supervised by a team of trained writing instructors. Juniors and seniors might be appropriate as writing fellows for the sophomore program while graduate students might be designated to work with juniors and seniors. As the School of Engineering's rigorous requirements leave little room for electives, any four-year writing requirement should take the particular curricular needs of Engineers into account.

instructor cannot judge the student's writing ability could still satisfy the writing requirement by taking one course in which he or she demonstrates proficient or better writing.

⁴ Juniors studying abroad could work with writing fellows through a distance learning style program.