

Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience Status Report: September 2002

Executive Summary: The Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience was commissioned by President Bacow shortly after the beginning of his presidency in order to consider future directions for the undergraduate experience at Tufts. The Task Force spent the summer studying and discussing information gathered during Spring Semester 2002. We invite further input over the next month from individuals or groups that were unable to meet with the Task Force last spring. We plan to release an interim report later in the semester for the community's review and feedback, which will contain a number of scenarios for discussion and consideration as well as a framework for evaluating the various elements of the scenarios.

Review of our Activities: Last Spring, the Task Force engaged in a number of activities to gather information relevant to our charge (the charge to the Task Force is included in Appendix A). We held a series of meetings to discuss the charge to the Task Force and to solicit ideas for our consideration. Nearly 500 faculty, students, staff, trustees, and alumni attended over thirty meetings and engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of issues relating to the undergraduate experience at Tufts (Appendix B lists the meetings held last Spring). Our website (<http://ugtaskforce.tufts.edu>) provided another vehicle for gathering input, and we received over 100 email comments, inquiries, and suggestions in this fashion.

In addition to our community outreach meetings, we conducted a survey of our full and part time faculty.¹ The survey complements the existing surveys of students conducted by the Office of Institutional Research which the Task Force has studied. Finally, we engaged in a benchmarking project in which we collected information from roughly thirty other colleges and universities -- including many institutions with which Tufts competes for students -- who have engaged in a range of similar efforts to evaluate various elements of the undergraduate experience at their institution.

In our many outreach efforts with students, faculty, and staff, the themes of community, climate, and coherence came up repeatedly in a variety of forms. We elaborate briefly below.

Community: Students and faculty and staff alike value community significantly. While critical for its contribution to the intellectual and educational mission of our university, community is important in a broader sense. Time and again, people have told us how important it is for them to feel a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves, whether through their affiliation with various groups on campus or within the larger community of Tufts as a whole. While it is easy to see that there are innumerable groups at Tufts to make this first kind of community relatively accessible, it is not as clear how

¹ We'd like to express our appreciation to the Office of Institutional Research for their help in conducting the survey.

to enhance the sense of an overarching community that embraces and unites all groups and individuals. How can we maintain the smaller communities that contribute such significant meaning to individuals' lives and identities while also providing the opportunities people are seeking to experience the broader community of which we are all a part?

Climate: Many people with whom we spoke noted the important role that climate (whether intellectual, co-curricular, or social) plays in the undergraduate educational experience. We heard many expressions of a desire to foster a climate that encourages curiosity, excitement, and engagement in students in all the facets of their Tufts experience, whether it be in the classroom, in dorm discussions, over dinner conversations, or during co-curricular activities. How can we cultivate a climate that facilitates these kinds of experiences?

Coherence: Tufts is a unique institution that combines high quality teaching and research. The ability to synthesize our research and teaching activities provides unparalleled opportunities for our students. At the same time, our unique identity poses a significant challenge: how can we help students take advantage of the plentiful opportunities available at Tufts without either spreading anyone too thin or losing a sense of coherence. Coherence does not mean rigid rules or set learning paths but rather opportunities to strengthen the connections between curricular and co-curricular life at Tufts. Activities outside the classroom can reinforce and enrich the intellectual experience of the classroom while curricular pursuits can bring deeper meaning and purpose to many co-curricular activities. How can we enable students to gain more from the range of experiences they will have as students here?

Finally, the Task Force is pleased to announce that Dean of Students Bruce Reitman has joined the Task Force as Co-Chair replacing Dean Kristine Dillon. Dean Reitman brings to the Task Force his extensive expertise in and familiarity with a variety of issues of concern to students. We would also like to express our appreciation to Kristine Dillon for her service to the Task Force as Co-Chair and for her many substantial contributions to the project until her departure from Tufts in August 2002 to become the President of the Consortium on Financing Higher Education.

Next Steps: We hope to wrap up the initial information gathering in the next month, including additional outreach to groups whose voices have not been heard directly. Currently, we are reviewing a variety of initiatives with an eye towards drafting a set of scenarios to put before the community for discussion and consideration. Along with the scenarios, we are developing a framework for evaluating scenario elements. We plan to release this report later in the semester. We will then follow up with a series of community meetings to gather feedback and reactions to the scenarios. With this feedback, we can move to the next stage of developing a set of final recommendations for the community's review in early Spring so that we can meet the goal of presenting a report with broadbased community support to President Bacow by June 2003.

An Invitation for Further Input: We have been gratified by the effort faculty, students, and staff have made to share their ideas with us over the past seven months. We are concerned, however, that there are groups that have not yet had an opportunity to share their ideas with the Task Force. Some students, faculty, and staff have not yet had the opportunity to contribute to the process, whether they were off-campus last year, are new to Tufts this year, or simply have not yet been able to schedule time with the Task Force. Early Fall 2002 is the last phase of our initial outreach, and we will rely heavily on the community in these next few weeks to help us identify which perspectives we still need to hear.

Thus we encourage any groups interested in meeting with the Task Force to contact Lara Birk, our Project Coordinator, as soon as possible to set up a meeting. Lara's contact information is as follows:

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Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience
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Appendix A: Task Force Charge

The educational environment at Tufts University has changed substantially in the past three decades. Once an excellent regional university, we have now become a university of international prominence. By any measure, our students are stronger academically than ever before. Our students are also far more diverse, as are our faculty. Over the last decade, the number of international, Asian, and Hispanic students has doubled while the number of African American students has increased by one-third. The richness and cultural diversity of the student body creates both challenges and opportunities.

The environment outside of our university has also changed. Technology is evolving at breath-taking speed and has dramatically altered the way students communicate and learn. Advances in the life sciences are opening up whole new fields of discovery while also raising profound ethical and moral dilemmas. The increasing globalization of the world's economies emphasizes the importance of understanding other languages and cultures.

Given these and other changes, it is time for a comprehensive evaluation of undergraduate education and life at Tufts University. What is the overall educational experience that we wish a Tufts undergraduate to obtain? Do our curriculum and teaching methods effectively prepare students for the world they will encounter upon graduation? Are we meeting the intellectual expectations of our students? Can we anticipate how technology might further enhance the overall educational experience, in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and student support? How does the co-curricular and residential experience of our students complement their classroom education?

Now is an ideal time to explore how the Tufts undergraduate experience might be enhanced for the 21st century. We are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the college. We are preparing for our reaccreditation review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In the not too distant future we will also begin a major new fundraising effort. The work of the Task Force will help to shape the priorities for undergraduate education and life in this new capital campaign.

The Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience therefore is charged with the following:

- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum and pedagogy in the context of our educational mission and guiding principles. Describe how our curriculum and teaching methods might be strengthened to better prepare students for the world they will encounter upon graduation. Communicate these ideas to the established faculty committees charged with responsibility for the undergraduate curriculum.
- Assess the contribution of residential and co-curricular life to the overall Tufts undergraduate experience. How might a more intentional residential experience

strengthen undergraduate education? What role should faculty play in residential life?

- Evaluate how each year of the undergraduate experience contributes to a distinctive, coherent, and thoughtfully designed transformation of intellect and character, and to a significant on-going relationship between students and Tufts University.
- Identify the resources that are necessary to effect the changes recommended in the Task Force's report.

The Task Force should build on the work of the Higher Education Initiative. Through outreach, the Task Force should engage the community in evaluating and assessing different potential futures for undergraduate education. The work of the Task Force will not be complete until the Task Force has built a broad-based coalition in support of its recommendations. Members should work hard to achieve a consensus for change. Specific recommendations that involve changes to curriculum must respect the faculty governance process, and should be referred to the appropriate standing committee of the faculty for action.

The Task Force will report directly to the President. Its membership will draw from distinguished faculty of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering as well as leaders within the student life arena, and current Tufts students. A report and recommendations are expected within 18 months from appointment.

Appendix B: Community Outreach Meetings Held in Spring 2002

- **Trustees** (2/ 8-9/02)
- **TCU Senate** (3/3/02)
- **Senior Leadership Corps I** (3/ 8/02)
- **Center for Interdisciplinary Studies** (3/13/02)
- **Class Deans and Academic Standing** (3/15/02)
- **Executive Committee** (3/25/02)
- **Chairs (A & S)** (3/25/02)
- **Dean of Students Senior Staff** (3/26/02)
- **Student Advisory Committee** (3/26/02)
- **Curricula Committee** (3/27/02)
- **University Committee on Teaching and Faculty Development** (3/29/02)
- **Senior Leadership Corps II** (3/29/02)
- **Policy Council** (4/2/02)
- **Young Alumni Group** (4/2/02)
- **Computer Facilities and Usage Committee** (4/4/02)
- **Educational Policy Committee** (4/5/02)
- **Equal Educational Opportunity Committee** (4/5/02)
- **Committee on Learning Disabilities** (4/10/02)
- **Career Services, Religious Services, Athletics, and Office of Student Activities** (4/22/02)
- **Open Student Forum** (4/23/02)
- **Budget and University Priorities Committee** (4/24/02)
- **Library Committee** (4/24/02)
- **Junior Faculty Luncheon** (4/26/02)
- **Center for Academic Excellence, Honors and Student Awards** (4/29/02)
- **Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee** (4/29/02)
- **UCCPS** (5/1/02)
- **EPIIC, Study Abroad, Foreign Programs Committee, et al** (5/6/02)
- **International Relations** (5/7/02)
- **Student Advisory Committee** (5/7/02)
- **Greek Life** (5/9/02)
- **Engineering Chairs** (5/13/02)
- **A & S Board of Overseers** (5/16/02)
- **Trustees** (5/18/02)

33 Outreach Meetings w/ approx. 505 non-T.F. Attendees
(182 Faculty, 126 Students, 94 Staff, 63 Trustees, and 40 Alumni)

Appendix C: Membership of Task Force and Student Advisory Committee

Task Force

Gilbert E. Metcalf	Task Force Chair; Professor and Chair of Economics
Charles Inouye	Task Force Co-Chair; Dean of the Undergraduate Colleges
Bruce Reitman*	Task Force Co-Chair; Dean of Students
James Blockwood	Student (Class of '04)
Francie Chew	Professor of Biology and American Studies
Lee Edelman	Professor of English
James Glaser	Professor and Chair of Political Science
Charline Han	Student (Class of '04)
Karen Panetta	Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
Rachel Rubenson	Student (Class of '03)
Maryanne Wolf	Professor of Child Development and Director of the Center for Reading and Language Research

Task Force Staff

Lara Birk	Project Coordinator
Jay Kim	Student Staff Assistant
Stephanie Chin	Student Web Consultant

Student Advisory Committee

James Blockwood	SAC Co-Chair; Class of '04
Charline Han	SAC Co-Chair; Class of '04
Rachel Rubenson	SAC Co-Chair; Class of '03
Alison Clarke	Class of '03
Eliza Drachman-Jones	Class of '05
Lauren Dunn	Class of '04
Jacob Gamerman	Class of '04
Laetitia Hirschy	Class of '03
Julia Karol	Class of '03
Nikoo Paydar	Class of '04
Danny Pierre	Class of '03
Jason Sangyoon Shin	Class of '03
Sarah Stroback	Class of '03
Elizabeth Sutton	Class of '05
Randi Wiggins	Class of '03

* as of August 2002. Dean Reitman replaced Dean Kristine Dillon as one of the co-chair's of the Task Force.