

Senate Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee Report on the Recommendations of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education

Charge to the Committee (A-0503ASRA): Consider and make recommendations concerning the proposals on admissions and recruitment and on special student populations of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education, as well as alternative proposals submitted by members of the university community. Include advice on the potential benefits and drawbacks for recruitment of the structure and nomenclature proposed in the Task Force Report and in alternative proposals. As time permits, consider other aspects of the Task Force recommendations that are of particular concern to members of the Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee. Provide an interim report to the Executive Committee by November 2, 2005 and a final report and recommendations by February 1, 2006.

ASRAC considered, at least briefly, the recommendations of the Task Force Admissions and Recruitment Working Group, the recommendations of the Special Student Populations Subgroup of the Curriculum Working Group, other recommendations related to admissions and recruitment found elsewhere in the Task Force Report, and relevant recommendations in the various alternative proposals. The Committee then decided to focus on the following major issues:

- structure and nomenclature (as they relate to recruiting)
- the admissions process for arts and sciences students
- undergraduate recruiting materials
- admission and support of transfer students
- recruitment and admissions of honors students
- recruitment of out-of-state students
- faculty role in admissions.

Structure and Nomenclature

ASRAC began by discussing the implications for undergraduate recruitment of the arts and sciences collegiate structure and nomenclature proposed by the Task Force. There was widespread agreement that the current structure of four arts and sciences colleges with a single faculty but different minimum admissions standards, general education requirements, graduation requirements, and available majors and minors, creates confusion among prospective students and their families and impedes efforts to recruit the best New Jersey high school graduates to Rutgers-New Brunswick. We therefore strongly support the Task Force recommendation to form a single degree-granting arts and sciences undergraduate unit on the New Brunswick Campus.

There was considerably less agreement concerning the best name for the new arts and sciences unit and for the successors to the present arts and sciences colleges. Some committee members initially supported the Task Force recommendation that the names should be “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences” and “Campuses.” They argued that most universities have a College of Arts and Sciences, that “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences” takes advantage of the strong reputation or “brand” of Rutgers College, and that the successors to the degree-granting arts and sciences colleges should not be called “Colleges” because that would perpetuate the confusion caused by the current collegiate structure and make it difficult for external constituencies to realize that we are making a

fundamental change. Others initially supported the names “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” and “Colleges.” They argued that “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” is consistent with the terminology used everywhere else in the Task Force Report, by which degree-granting undergraduate units are called “Schools”; that “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences” would be inappropriate since the appropriate name for a college of arts and sciences at New Brunswick would be the “New Brunswick College of Arts and Sciences,” consistent with the Camden College of Arts and Sciences and the Newark College of Arts and Sciences; and that “College”, which is used in a variety of ways at other universities, would be a more accurate name than “Campus” for the centers for academic services, learning communities, and co-curricular and student-life programs that we wish the campus communities to be. ASRAC members finally agreed to recommend calling the successors to the arts and sciences colleges “residential colleges” and to call the new degree-granting unit the “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences.” We believe that “residential college” is about the best one can do in terms of truth in advertising and that keeping the word “college” indicates the co-curricular and student-life aspects of the current colleges we wish to retain while adding “residential” indicates that a fundamental change has been made. We believe that retaining the college designation, which should decrease the unhappiness of many alumni/ae of the arts and sciences colleges, should not have negative consequences for recruiting if our admissions process and recruiting materials are redesigned appropriately. This brings us to our first formal recommendation:

Recommendation 1: *We strongly support the Task Force proposal to merge the current arts and sciences colleges into a single degree-granting arts and sciences undergraduate unit in New Brunswick/Piscataway. However, in agreement with the New Brunswick Faculty Council, we recommend that the new unit be called the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences and that the successors to the current arts and sciences colleges be called residential colleges.*

The Admission Process for Arts and Sciences Students

ASRAC enthusiastically agrees with the goals for undergraduate admissions set out in the Task Force Report:

- To ensure that the admissions process serves the New Brunswick Campus by attracting an excellent body of students prepared to use the resources of a research university.
- To ensure that the diversity that is so central a hallmark of the Campus is maintained.

We also agree with the Task Force’s assertion that the current substantial difference in admissions standards between Rutgers College and the other arts and sciences colleges (and Cook) is harmful because it leads to confusion among prospective students and their families, makes some students at other New Brunswick colleges feel like second-class citizens, and leads some applicants to choose not to attend Rutgers because they are not admitted to Rutgers College. We therefore strongly support the Task Force recommendation that these differences in admission standards should be eliminated.

Recommendation 2: We strongly support the Task Force recommendation that there be a single minimum standard for regular admission for all traditional-age arts and sciences applicants to Rutgers-New Brunswick, regardless of the residential college with which the student wishes to affiliate; this minimum standard should be modified appropriately for transfer, EOF, and non-traditional-age students, as well as for students with special skills.

We also strongly agree with the Task Force that efforts to improve the profile of entering students must protect and, if possible, enhance the wonderful diversity of our undergraduate student body. We believe that recommendation AR2 of the “New Brunswick Faculty Council Report and Recommendations on the Proposals of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education” makes this point in a particularly felicitous manner.

Recommendation 3: We strongly support the New Brunswick Faculty Council recommendation that “the criteria used in admission decisions should be sufficiently flexible to maintain the diversity of the student body and not exclude talented applicants whose potential is not adequately measured by standard test scores.”

In order to eliminate the harmful confusion resulting from the present collegiate structure in New Brunswick, we believe it is necessary to overhaul the undergraduate admissions process in addition to merging the arts and sciences colleges into a single degree-granting unit. Moreover, it is not enough, in our opinion, just to have a single admission standard and a single set of general education and graduation requirements for all arts and sciences students; there also needs to be a single, internally non-competitive admissions process, in which all prospective students interested in arts and sciences disciplines apply and are admitted to the School of Arts and Sciences and then choose or are assigned to a residential college. This is the basis of our fourth recommendation.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that there be a single New Brunswick arts and sciences admissions process in which all applicants apply to and, if successful, are admitted to the School of Arts and Sciences and admit-coming students are then assigned to a residential college based on an appropriate combination of their preferences and the need to ensure that each residential college has a reasonably representative mixture of students in terms of demographic characteristics and academic background and interests.

We believe it is particularly important that the process by which entering students are distributed among the residential colleges be tailored to avoid carrying into the future the unfortunate stereotypes that have arisen from past practice.

We acknowledge that how the assignment of new students to the residential colleges is done is an important matter which could have a substantial impact on admission yield and that the best process for making the assignments is not obvious. We believe, therefore, that experts need to be involved in designing an effective plan for filling the beds on all the campuses without driving away admitted students. We emphasize, however, that in order for us to fully realize our admissions goals, the facilities at Livingston and, to a lesser extent, Cook and Douglass need to be brought up to par with those on College Ave. and Busch. At the same time, we think that having strong learning communities and certificate programs based at the residential colleges will help to induce arts and sciences students to be willing to live on campuses other than College Avenue.

Finally, we strongly agree with the Task Force that the Rutgers undergraduate application should give an accurate idea of what we expect of our students and of the rigor of our academic programs. While the Rutgers “easy-to-complete” application is easy to process (an important consideration given the large numbers of applicants) and encourages students to apply, the student members of ASRAC argued very forcefully that the lack of effort and intellectual challenge involved in completing the application gives the erroneous impression that Rutgers is a school with low academic standards.

Recommendation 5: We strongly support the Task Force Admissions and Recruitment recommendation 12; namely, that the “Rutgers undergraduate application must indicate our expectations for our students; it should ask about special academic work (e.g., honors, AP, etc.); it should ask about extra-curricular participation; and it should require a writing sample.”

Undergraduate Recruiting Materials

We also believe that in order to eliminate confusion and send out a clear, positive, and accurate message about what it means to be an undergraduate at Rutgers-New Brunswick, it is necessary to redesign our undergraduate recruiting materials, both print and electronic. We agree with the general suggestions for improvement made in the Task Force Admissions and Recruitment recommendation 13 but wish to go further, particularly with regard to the arts and sciences colleges and Cook. We believe that the current competitive recruiting booklets for the arts and sciences colleges, which go to great lengths to make it sound as though Douglass, Livingston, and Rutgers Colleges were very different places, should be eliminated, not converted into residential college booklets, and all marketing of arts and sciences at Rutgers-New Brunswick focused on the School of Arts and Sciences. Likewise, Cook College, whatever it may be called, should no longer be able to bill its campus as “the science campus” in competition with science programs at Busch. We believe that these highly competitive recruiting materials need to be replaced by materials that primarily stress the many advantages that all undergraduates – arts and sciences students and professional-school students – enjoy at Rutgers-new Brunswick, particularly the quality of our faculty and academic programs, research opportunities, the core curriculum, the huge choice of majors and minors, living/learning communities, honors programs, internship and externship programs, the diversity of the Campus community, and the existence of the residential colleges as smaller residential and commuter communities within the larger New Brunswick Campus community. These suggestions are summarized in our sixth recommendation.

Recommendation 6: We support the recommendation of the Task Force, elaborated by the New Brunswick Faculty Council, that New Brunswick undergraduate recruiting materials, both print and online, be redesigned so that they

- ***define “public research university” in easily understood terms that make clear the advantages all undergraduates derive from attending a research university.***
- ***place primary emphasis on curricular, research, co-curricular, and student-life programs and opportunities available to all undergraduates in New Brunswick, particularly programs for first-year students.***
- ***portray all schools, colleges, campuses, and programs in a manner that removes all internal competitiveness and takes great care not to market one unit or program at the possible expense of others.***

Admission and Support of Transfer Students

ASRAC considered the recommendations concerning transfer students of both the Admissions and Recruitment Working Group and the Special Student Populations Subgroup of the Curriculum Working Group. While we agree with a number of the specific recommendations of both groups, we are not at all convinced that the Office of Transfer Student Affairs proposed by the Admissions and Recruitment Working Group is the best way to serve the needs of transfer students; nor are we convinced by the arguments of the Special Student Populations Subgroup that there are no serious problems with the academic performance or experience of transfer students at Rutgers-New Brunswick beyond the first semester. More generally, we believe that the Task Force did not consider the many issues concerning recruitment, admissions, and support of transfer students in a sufficiently comprehensive manner and that further consideration is needed, including consideration of the problems of students who transfer from one Rutgers unit to another. Since there is a significant amount of overlap between transfer students and non-traditional students, we suggest that the Task Force to be appointed to consider the latter also consider the former.

Recommendation 7: *Since we do not believe that the Task Force considered the many issues concerning recruitment, admission, retention, and support of transfer students in a sufficiently comprehensive manner, we second the recommendation of the New Brunswick Faculty Council that the new task force to be set up to consider how best to meet the needs of non-traditional students also be charged with considering how best to meet the needs of transfer students.*

Recruitment and Admission of Honors Students

We wholeheartedly agree with the Task Force that the quality and visibility of our honors programs are crucial to efforts to attract the highest-achieving students to Rutgers-New Brunswick. At present, each of the arts and sciences colleges and almost all of the professional schools have their own honors programs, with very different requirements, philosophies, funding, opportunities for research, etc. These college- and school-based honors programs have attracted many outstanding students and current honors students seem very happy with their programs, particularly with the sense of community, excellent advising, and opportunities for faculty contact they provide. However, the fragmentation and lack of coherence have given our honors programs less than optimal visibility and made it very difficult to advertise honors in New Brunswick in a way that allows us to compete effectively with the honors programs at a number of other public AAUs. We therefore support the Task Force recommendations for a New Brunswick-wide honors program but with local honors communities on the various campuses.

Recommendation 8: *We strongly endorse the following Task Force recommendations concerning honors programs:*

- *A single general honors program for all qualified undergraduate students at Rutgers- New Brunswick should be established in order to ensure that the full range of honors opportunities on the Campus are available to all honors students and to give our honors offerings the visibility and coherence that the current fragmented system of college and school honors programs lacks.*
- *Local honors communities should continue to exist on our various campuses to provide the local advising, mentoring, and co-curricular activities that students value so very highly in our current college and school honors programs.*

- *The New Brunswick general honors program should adopt the “requirements model,” with a strong emphasis on research, with uniform requirements for all arts and sciences honors students, and modified requirements, as necessary, for professional school students.*
- *The general honors program should have somewhat flexible admissions criteria; i.e., criteria not based solely on quantitative indicators, to allow students with diverse sets of talents and accomplishments to participate in the program.*
- *Faculty should be engaged in every aspect of the honors recruitment process and all honors students in New Brunswick should have a faculty mentor assigned soon after they indicate they will attend the University.*

We caution, however, that the honors program requirements need to be flexible enough to allow students to satisfy them in a large number of different ways. In addition, the requirements should not be so heavy that they discourage rather than attract potential honors students to Rutgers.

Recruitment of Out-of-State Students

As the Task Force noted, the Rutgers-New Brunswick student body is highly diverse in all respects except geographically. In fall 2003, the student body was 9.4% out-of-state by residence, well below the average of 21.5% among public AAUs. Moreover, most of the 9.4% were foreign students; only about 3% of the student body actually came from other US states. This very low fraction of out-of-state students gives our New Jersey students little opportunity to get to know students from other parts of the country, gives us a reputation as a very local institution, rather than a national one, and fails to tap the out-of-state tuition revenue source, which is used to great advantage by many of our peer institutions. Increasing our national reputation would also increase our reputation within New Jersey and recruiting high-achieving students from other states who want to attend college far away from home would help to compensate for the many New Jersey students who prefer and can afford to attend college in other parts of the country. For all these reasons, we support the Task Force recommendation to recruit more out-of-state students.

Recommendation 9: We strongly support the recommendation to develop a comprehensive plan to recruit and enroll more out-of-state students, particularly US students from outside the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions because we believe that increasing the percentage of out-of-state students in the Rutgers-New Brunswick student body will

- *increase the currently extremely low geographic diversity of the undergraduate student body and expose our students to worlds beyond New Jersey and nearby states.*
- *help to compensate for some of the flow of high-achieving students out of New Jersey to attend college in other parts of the country.*
- *increase the national visibility and reputation of Rutgers*
- *be financially advantageous to the university.*

Faculty Role in Admissions

ASRAC strongly supports the Task Force recommendation that faculty need to be much more involved in undergraduate admissions at the policy-making level. In particular, we support the recommendation that there should be an empowered faculty admissions committee at the School of Arts and Sciences and at each professional school and the recommendation that a New Brunswick-wide, primarily faculty admissions committee, reporting to the Vice-President for Undergraduate Education, should be established. These Task Force recommendations are completely consistent with the recommendations in the ASRAC report entitled “Faculty Role in Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment,” approved by the Senate on April 22, 2005. Hence, our recommendation is as follows.

Recommendation 10: We strongly support the Task Force Admissions and Recruitment recommendations that

- *faculty members should play a major collaborative role with the campus and central administrations in establishing admissions policies, determining standards for admission, and setting enrollment goals at the school and campus levels.*
- *there should be an active faculty admissions committee for the School of Arts and Sciences and for each professional school in New Brunswick; these committees should exercise the powers and responsibilities laid out in Admissions and Recruitment recommendation 4.*
- *a New Brunswick-wide primarily faculty Admissions Committee, reporting to the Vice-President for Undergraduate Education, should be established with roughly the composition and powers proposed in Admissions and Recruitment recommendation 5.*

Finally, although we did not discuss them in detail, the Committee is generally in agreement with the other recommendations of the Admissions and Recruitment Working Group; i.e., those involving the Rutgers website and faculty, student, and alumni roles in recruitment. In this regard, we strongly support the offering of first-year seminars, taught by senior faculty, to as many entering students as possible.