

Rutgers University Senate Committee on Instruction, Curricula and Advising

Response to the Report of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education

The Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee focused on issues relating to advising, curricula, and learning communities, as well as issues relating to transfer, part-time and non-traditional students.

A. Review of Recommendations Relating to Advising (pp. 77-83)

Advising: General Advising: Structural Issues

A1. Provided that appropriate lines of communication to academic departments and schools are established, general advising should be handled primarily by professional staff.

- **There needs to be a structure for regular communication and discussion of issues between general purpose advisors and academic departments.**
- **There should also be a structure for regular communication and discussion of issues between the general purpose advisors and the faculty deans.**

There seem to be inconsistencies within the Undergraduate Task Force report as to exactly how general advising (first year and undeclared advising) should be structured in New Brunswick

- The Working Group on the Student Experience seems to be recommending that the university establish a centralized service with offices on each New Brunswick campus. (p.82).
- The Working Group on Structure states that “Deans of the respective schools admitting first-year students will be responsible for premajor academic advising, which will be conducted through their offices.” (p.141)

It is not clear what the latter organization would mean in terms of providing services on each campus. Would Mason Gross, for example, have to have an office on each of the six campuses?

If a goal in reorganizing general advising is the provision of a consistent level of service to Rutgers students, then having a centralized unit of professional advisors who would be responsible for working with and across schools would seem to be the preferred approach. The New Brunswick Faculty Council report also pointed out that it was “critical that advising policies and procedures...be coordinated and equitably implemented throughout the New Brunswick/Piscataway Campus....” (Section S2).

This will however clearly require a significant influx of resources and many more staff who would have advising as their primary responsibility than are currently available.

The most recent ACT National Survey on Academic Advising showed that the mean number of advisees assigned to each full-time advisor in four-year public colleges was 285/1.

<<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/advisorload.htm>> Based on an annual estimated population of 8600 first-year/transfer/undeclared students in New Brunswick, just conforming to the mean would require about 30 full-time professional advisors, plus the requisite support staff.

Advising: Pre-Major Advising

A2. Departments need to take some responsibility for advising pre-majors and those who wish to change majors.

General advisors need to have at hand a regularly updated list of faculty willing to consult with students who are considering majoring in a specific field, as well as a list of departmental web sites.

Advising: Major Advising

A3. Major advising is the responsibility of academic departments.

Rather than try and develop a single model for major advising, the onus to establish and maintain a viable advising program should be placed on departments rather than on individual faculty members.

Advising: Faculty Role in Advising

A4. For the Task Force goals of improving undergraduate education and services to be met, cultural, rather than structural, change is essential.

Reengaging the faculty in the undergraduate experience, including advising, is at the heart of the Task Force report; it's also the most problematic and least directly addressed issue.

We don't see in the proposal a confluence of structural and cultural change that would induce faculty to take a more active role in academic advising.

While academic advising is included as part of "Teaching" in University Regulations the University needs to show by its behavior that it actually values teaching and its components. While the discussion of rewards/consequences usually focuses on tenure and promotion, attitudes toward instruction are often communicated in other more subtle ways. For example, how many departments with Ph.D. programs actually offer a course on how to teach in their discipline?

Effective teaching and advising requires that faculty have some knowledge of how people learn.

While good instruction should be rewarded, there should also be consequences to not doing it well, or not doing it at all. Junior faculty should be expected to participate in major advising in their departments both to make it clear that this is a normal part of their teaching responsibilities and to provide a basis for evaluation. However they should be assigned a very limited number of advisees so as not to overwhelm them during this very critical period in their careers.

Advising: Advising Records

A5. We concur that it would be useful to both the general and departmental advisors to have student advising records available online (Task Force recommendation #2).

Advising management software such as AdvisorTrac (<http://www.advisortrac.net>) could do much to alleviate some of the frustrations currently experienced by both advisors and advisees.

Obviously the acquisition of such software would require the commitment of funds for both the software and the support staff necessary to implement and maintain the program.

B. Review of Undergraduate Task Force Recommendations Relating to the Core Curriculum (pp. 29-55)

Core Curriculum: Should there be a set of core requirements for all undergraduates regardless of school or college?

B1. The Committee agrees with the Task Force in that “Academic authority over admissions criteria, general education, scholastic standing, honors curricula, and degree certification should reside with the faculties of the respective schools admitting first-year students.” (*Report Summary* p. 15)

The acceptance of a common core curriculum would require a significant cultural change; in order for the faculty to buy into this concept all affected faculties would need to be involved in the discussion. The Task Force recommendations on a common core curriculum seem to have been made without the participation or input of a number of units that would potentially be affected (e.g., Engineering, Pharmacy, Mason Gross) by these proposals

The New Brunswick Faculty Council recommendations (C2 and C3) acknowledge the need for input and consensus from the professional schools in the development of a common core curricula, however it is still the Committee’s sense that the core should be appropriate to the mission of each degree-granting unit.

However we see no reason why appropriate **components** of an Arts and Sciences core curriculum could not be adopted by the professional schools.

Core Curriculum: Creation of a single general honors program

B2a. The Committee was not convinced that a single general honors program was necessarily in the best interest of an institution with a large, diverse student body. One size does not necessarily fit all.

While the proposal for a single general honors program certainly provides an interesting starting point for further discussion, this issue also seems to be one that faculty will not buy into unless they are involved in the initial discussions and decision-making.

And while the New Brunswick Faculty Council supports the formation of a single general honors program (Recommendation C1), they acknowledge that this “single” program would have to have “appropriate variation in requirements to meet the needs of the various professional schools as well as the School or College of Arts and Sciences.”

There is also some confusion as to what is meant by a “general honors program” and how that program relates to other honors opportunities at Rutgers. It needs to be clear that such a program is not intended to replace senior thesis scholars programs (e.g., Henry Rutgers Scholars) or departmental honors programs.

Core Curriculum: General Honors Program: Evening Students

B2b. If the goal is to give all students equal access to an honors program, provisions would have to be made to ensure that evening students, both ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional,’ would have full access to a general honors program.

85 percent of those students who take classes after 5:30 pm are nominally ‘traditional’ full-time day students. (See Appendix A).

There are certainly issues concerning general faculty willingness to teach honors courses in the evening and on weekends. The Committee strongly concurs with the New Brunswick Faculty Council statement (Recommendation C4) that “We believe that faculty should consider the teaching of evening courses as part of their normal responsibilities.”

Core Curriculum: Departmental Honors Programs

B3. The Committee endorses the Undergraduate Task Force recommendation: “The subcommittee recommends that every department or program in New Brunswick/Piscataway that offers an undergraduate major provide an honors option within the major.” [p.48].

As transfer students would obviously not be eligible for a general honors program, it’s particularly important that all department/programs that offer an undergraduate major have an honors option within the major.

Core Curriculum: Transfer Students

B4a. The Committee strongly supports the New Brunswick Faculty Council recommendation AR5: “We propose that a new task force be appointed to consider comprehensively the many issues regarding the recruitment, admission, needs, and support of non-traditional and transfer students,” and recommends that curricula and other issues be added to that committee’s charge.

This is a very complicated area that has not been, and perhaps could not be, adequately addressed in the Undergraduate Task Force report.

The proposed curricular changes would impact not only courses at the Rutgers New Brunswick units, but also the curriculum at the New Jersey 2-year institutions. Curricular changes of the magnitude proposed would require the rewriting of every articulation agreement that the University has with the New Jersey 2-year colleges. This is an especially sensitive area at the moment, since there is some pressure in the New Jersey Assembly to make acceptance of first 2 years automatic rather than continue to force the two-year schools to negotiate separately with each four-year institution.

Since the proposed changes would require changes in the University's articulation agreements, this is a University-wide, rather than just a New Brunswick, issue.

B4b. The internal transfer process (e.g., a Pharmacy, or Cook, or Engineering student transferring to a liberal arts college) has to be made less painful for students.

Unit curricular regulations need to be both sensitive and sensible; advising support for the process should be coordinated and available.

B4c. The issue of internal (between campuses/programs) course transfers needs to be addressed.

While the issue of what courses might be accepted for completion of a particular major must be defined by the department offering that major, a course taken as an elective at another Rutgers campus/program should automatically be accepted for credit towards graduation.

C. Recommendations Regarding Non-Traditional Students

C1. We do not believe that non-traditional students will be well served without the special knowledge and services currently provided by University College.

The Undergraduate Task Force report is inconsistent in its use of the term "non-traditional students." Some are indeed non-traditional age students; others are traditional age students who may be working full-time. These are distinct groups of students at different points in life and with different needs.

The non-traditional student population is not simply defined; it can include students who

- Have had interruptions in their formal education
- Are over 25
- Have obligations to both work and family
- Are pursuing a career change or have come back for a second degree
- Are international students

While the Undergraduate Task Force recommends the formation of a separate task force "on educating nontraditional age students...to provide a comprehensive report on the structures and organization of services that best support these students," it is hard to imagine how such a task

force could do a meaningful study if a decision to eliminate University College had already been made and implemented.

We do believe however that there are sufficient differences in the needs and issues of transfer students and non-traditional students to warrant two new Task Forces rather than the single Task Force recommended by the New Brunswick Faculty Council (Recommendation AR5).

C2. While the Task Force recommends against the spring admission of transfer students, it is important that accommodation be made for non-traditional students.

D. Recommendations Regarding Part-Time Students

D1. The Committee endorses the Undergraduate Task Force recommendation that “All matriculating colleges and schools should enroll both full-time and part-time students” (p.10).

Currently in New Brunswick Cook allows part-time students, Douglass allows them only via the Bunting program, and Rutgers College does not allow them at all.

However it must be understood that part-time students are not necessarily non-traditional age students who in the current proposal would be relegated to a ‘virtual’ UCNB campus.

E. Review of Undergraduate Task Force Recommendations Relating to Learning Communities (pp.67-73)

E1. The Committee concurs with the Undergraduate Task Force Recommendation that “The administration should initiate, plan, and develop the capacity, incentives and support systems (and provide the necessary resources) to create and sustain effective learning communities at Rutgers-New Brunswick/Piscataway.”(p.67)

The Committee believes that learning communities can significantly enhance the education of participating students. However there seem to be very different notions of what constitutes an effective learning community between the Student Experience Working Group, which seems to envision relatively small, intimate groups, and the Structure Working Group which recommends that they be “no larger than 600 students.” (p.142).

Creating learning communities of 600, or even 400 or 500, students would probably negate the benefits usually ascribed to Learning Communities. While the University of Maryland College Park Scholars Program alluded to in the Task Force report may indeed involve 1600 students, these students are actually part of twelve distinct learning communities.

E2. The Committee does not believe it realistic to think that learning communities can be implemented on a scale whereby they could, as the Undergraduate Task Force envisions, become the focus of campus life and thus provide the majority of students with the sense of identity currently provided by the colleges.

- While being a member of a learning community may be exciting, enriching, and rewarding, it also requires a lot of ‘extra’ work and time. Ultimately it is likely to be a relatively small proportion of the undergraduate population that actually chooses to be involved in a learning community.
- While the engagement of faculty in the learning communities is critical to their success, even with additional incentives it is likely that only a relatively small proportion of the faculty will choose to be involved in a learning community.
- Learning communities are expensive. Significant ongoing resources would need to be committed to sustain a large group of learning communities.
- Effective learning communities require careful planning and development. In the case of the College Park Scholars Program, for example, no community was begun without one or two years of planning. It’s not realistic to think that multiple learning communities can be created virtually overnight. This is a long-term process and not a short term solution. And even in the long run, while learning communities may significantly enhance the education of a relatively small self-selected segment of students, they will not affect the undergraduate experience of the majority of our students.

nxb 1/4/06

Appendix A

Enrollment Distribution in Evening Classes by College/School Affiliation-- Fall 2004										
Unit	New Brunswick Campus									
	LC	DC	CK	RC	UC	MGSA	EN	PH	Other	Total
Faculty of Arts & Sciences (FAS)	2729 16%	1852 11%	1323 8%	6790 41%	2446 15%	103 1%	801 5%	395 2%	162 1%	16601 100%
Sch of Comm, Info & Lib Serv (SCILS)	218 22%	147 15%	68 7%	419 42%	135 14%	2 0%	2 0%	5 1%	1 0%	997 100%
Mason Gross Sch of the Arts (MGSA)	55 6%	59 7%	66 8%	228 27%	44 5%	361 42%	35 4%	2 0%	5 1%	855 100%
Cook	2 0%	5 1%	471 92%	11 2%	15 3%	1 0%	2 0%		4 1%	511 100%
Rutgers Business School (RBS--NWK/NB)	139 11%	95 7%	23 2%	854 67%	162 13%		1 0%		2 0%	1276 100%
School of Mgmt & Labor (SMLR)	53 17%	44 14%	3 1%	51 17%	153 50%	1 0%	1 0%	1 0%	2 1%	309 100%
Bloustein School of Planning (SPPP)	42 21%	24 12%	27 14%	59 30%	37 19%		8 4%			197 100%
Total	3238 16%	2226 11%	1981 10%	8412 41%	2992 14%	468 2%	850 4%	403 2%	176 1%	20746 100%
Newark Campus										
	NCAS	UC	Nursing	Other	Total					
Rutgers Business School (RBS--NWK/NB)	845 76%	263 24%		4 0%	1112 100%					
University College	1795 64%	930 33%	51 2%	31 1%	2807 100%					
Total	2640 67%	1193 30%	51 1%	35 1%	3919 100%					

				Camden campus						
	CCAS	UC	SB	Other	Total					
Camden College of Arts & Sc (CCAS)	1087 68%	386 24%	107 7%	17 1%	1597 100%					
School of Business (SB)	73 10%	39 5%	648 85%	1 0%	761 100%					
Total	1160 49%	425 18%	755 32%	18 1%	2358 100%					