The Structure of Undergraduate Education in New Brunswick/Piscataway: 
An Alternative Proposal by Martha A. Cotter

I. Background
As a member of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education and the Co-Chair of its Working Group on Admissions and Recruitment, I have the utmost respect for the work of the Task Force and am enthusiastic about the large majority of its recommendations. I cannot, however, support several of the recommendations of the Structure Working Group concerning the arts and sciences colleges.

Before delineating what I see as the problems with the Task Force recommendations and proposing alternatives, let me make clear that I agree with most of the “structural” recommendations of the report. In particular, I fully support the recommendations to:

- abolish the fellows system at the four arts and sciences colleges and give the Faculty of Arts and Sciences control over and responsibility for all curricular matters for arts and sciences students in New Brunswick – whatever their “campus” or “college” of affiliation.
- institute common admissions standards for all traditional-age arts and sciences applicants, appropriately modified for transfer and non-traditional-age applicants.
- have the same graduation requirements and the same available majors and minors for all arts and sciences students.
- have a single set of general education requirements for all undergraduates in New Brunswick.
- form one New Brunswick-wide honors program, encompassing professional school as well as arts and sciences students, with smaller honors communities located on each “campus”.
- eliminate current inequities by instituting uniform guidelines, standards, and policies with respect to the formation of student clubs and organizations, use of student centers, allocation of student fees, provision of services on the various campuses, job descriptions and pay scales for residence and student life staff, etc.
- reconfigure the position of Vice-President for Undergraduate Education to make it a powerful position with a seat on the President’s Cabinet.

In the remainder of this proposal, I describe what I believe are the major problems with the Task Force recommendations and suggest ways to correct them in order to produce an undergraduate structure that would better facilitate achieving the goals so eloquently expressed in the introduction to the Task Force Report. Although I’ve called this document an alternative proposal, my recommended changes are largely refinements of the Task Force proposals.

II. Major Problems

Barriers to Connecting Students and Faculty
Perhaps the most serious problem with the structural model proposed by the Task Force is that it is not conducive to achieving the central goal of reconnecting faculty with students outside their academic departments. The proposed structure would certainly make it easier for faculty to provide general advising for students, but would not provide any incentives for them to do so. (In fact, the report envisions that general advising be done by professional staff members on the various campuses.) The chief means proposed for getting faculty more involved with students outside the classroom is through the establishment of learning communities located on the residential campuses.
and organized by the “campus deans.” But the campus deans would report to the Vice-President for Undergraduate Education and have no reporting or other connection to the College of Arts and Sciences, the unit with the large majority of the faculty. Thus the College of Arts and Sciences would have no responsibility for co-curricular programs and faculty members would have little incentive to take part in learning communities or other programs or activities organized by the campus deans. In fact, the proposed strict separation between the curricular (the province of the schools and the College of Arts and Sciences) and the co-curricular (the province of the campuses) would erect a substantial barrier to faculty involvement in learning communities or other co-curricular offerings. From a more global perspective, the proposed almost hermetic separation between academic matters, on one hand, and co-curricular and extra-curricular programs and activities, on the other hand, would amount to exchanging one strange structure for another strange structure.

**Barriers to Building Strong Campus Communities**

Likewise, I believe that the structure for undergraduate education proposed by the Task Force could not achieve the central goal of eliminating the problems resulting from the present structure while preserving and even strengthening its best features. While the recommended structure would correct many of the problems with the current structure, it would not preserve what is best in the arts and sciences colleges; i.e., the strong sense of connectedness and community that students appreciate so much at the smaller colleges and the excellent co-curricular and student-life programs offered by some of the colleges.

The proposed “campuses” would be largely places for students to live, moving freely – and possibly often – among them, and locations where various services would be delivered. The task of turning the campuses into cohesive intellectual communities within the larger New Brunswick community would fall to the campus deans. Yet the position of campus dean, as outlined in the Task Force report, is a position without the wherewithal to accomplish very much of anything. The campus dean would have little power and very little control over the campus staff: the academic affairs staff would report to FAS (with a dotted line relationship to the dean), the residence life staff and student-center staff would report to the Vice-President for Student Affairs, and it is not clear who, if anyone, would report directly to the dean. Moreover, the campus dean would have no reporting or other direct relationship to either the College of Arts and Sciences or to any of the professional schools, making it even harder than at present for the dean to get faculty involved in the life of the campus community. In short, the campus deans would be relegated to being little more than campus service coordinators and would clearly be unable to build the vibrant campus communities envisioned by the Task Force.

Equally important, it is extremely unlikely that the excellent co-curricular and student-life programs offered by the colleges could be maintained in the absence of the colleges that created them. The belief on the part of some Task Force members that these programs could be maintained and made available to all qualified students without some sort of minimal college structure and without alumni(ae) support amounts to wishful thinking. This is most certainly true of the oft-cited Douglass programs, which receive a major part of their funding from the Douglass alumnae.
**Unfortunate Nomenclature**

I believe that the decision to recommend calling the proposed arts and sciences degree-granting unit the “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences,” rather than the “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences,” as originally proposed, and to call the residential colleges “campuses” is a bad idea for several reasons. First of all, it has unleashed a predictable fire storm of protest among alumni and other friends of the colleges that threatens to overwhelm the discussion of all other important aspects of the Task Force recommendations. Secondly, the term “College of Arts and Sciences” is inconsistent with the terminology used everywhere else in the report, according to which degree-granting units should be called schools, and ignores the fact that there are Colleges of Arts and Sciences at Newark and Camden, which are also part of Rutgers. Finally, calling the residential colleges “campuses” adds to the confusion already surrounding the much-overworked word “campus” at Rutgers. We already have the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick Campuses and the College Avenue, Busch, Livingston, and Cook/Douglass Campuses within New Brunswick/Piscataway. Now it’s proposed to add a virtual “campus” for adult students, to have a Douglass Campus and a Cook Campus on the continuous Cook/Douglass Campus, and to use the word campus to mean both a physical location and the community of students based at that location.

**Elimination of Douglass College**

Finally, I believe that eliminating Douglass as a women’s college would be a great mistake for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Douglass continues to provide its students with many of the advantages of a traditional women’s college, despite not having its own faculty or being able to offer single-sex classes outside of *Shaping a Life* and Douglass honors seminars. This has been made very clear by the passionate outpouring of support for the college from current Douglass students, who are among the students most satisfied with their undergraduate experience at Rutgers, and from alumnae from the 1990’s and later, who experienced Douglass long after the reorganization of 1981-2 and essentially as it is today. Removing the option of attending a women’s college within Rutgers University would represent a narrowing of opportunities for young women and is contrary to the basic Task Force principle of “opening up” rather than “closing off” opportunities.

There are several additional reasons for preserving Douglass as a women’s college:

- Rutgers’ national reputation for Women’s Studies, for leadership and academic support programs for women, for hiring and nurturing female faculty and staff members, and for faculty activism on national and international women’s issues, would be seriously damaged by eliminating its women’s college, the only college for women within a major public research university. On the contrary, a smaller, more selective Douglass College could help Rutgers enhance its reputation as a national leader in women’s education.

- Douglass is an integral part of the Institute for Women’s Leadership and eliminating the college would endanger continued funding of the IWL’s Ford Foundation grant as well as make obtaining funding for other IWL projects dealing with women’s education more difficult.

- Douglass has a large, financially generous, loyal and passionate group of alumnae who will continue to contribute to Douglass special programs and their extension to other interested students provided that Douglass continues to exist as a recognizable women’s college.
Because of its many excellent co-curricular and student-life programs, Douglass is in many ways a model for the campus communities envisioned by the Task Force. It would be unwise to risk the future of those programs by eliminating the college.

For all these reasons, I believe it is important to find a way for Douglass to continue to offer young women the option of a woman-centered education within a major public research university without perpetuating the problems with the current college structure that the Task Force has so ably delineated.

III. A Proposed Alternative Structure

I would like to propose a somewhat modified structure which, I believe, would ameliorate the problems just enumerated while maintaining virtually all of the advantages of the structure proposed by the Task Force. My proposed structure differs from that of the Task Force in four principal respects:

1. The proposed new arts and sciences unit would be called the “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” and the units located on the residential college campuses would continue to be called “colleges”. The colleges would be part of the School of Arts and Sciences, but professional school students would continue to affiliate with one of the colleges for student life purposes.

2. The role of the college deans would be strengthened so that they would have the necessary means to create college communities that preserve what is best in the present colleges, without perpetuating the inequities resulting from the current structure.

3. The college deans would report to the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences in order to remove the barrier between the curricular and the co-curricular created by the Task Force’s structural model and to encourage faculty members’ becoming involved in learning communities and other co-curricular programs on the college campuses.

4. Douglass would be an integral part of the School of Arts and Sciences and a resource for all undergraduate women in New Brunswick, while preserving its role as a women’s college.

Let me elaborate on these differences.

The School of Arts and Sciences and the Residential Colleges

The proposed new arts and sciences unit would be called the “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” and, initially at least, would have six colleges, tentatively to be called Busch College, Cook College, Douglass College, Livingston College, Queens\(^1\) College, and University College. Busch, Cook, Livingston, and Queens would be co-ed residential colleges; University College would be a co-ed, non-residential unit for non-traditional-age students; and Douglass would be a residential college. All arts and sciences students, commuters as well as on-campus residents, would be required to affiliate with one of the colleges, but would be free to change their affiliation at any time, subject only to availability of space at the college they wished to join. Let me reiterate, however, that

\(^1\) Despite its historical significance, I don’t think that Queens is a particularly felicitous name for a 21st century residential college at Rutgers. Since the new arts and sciences unit would be called the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, one possibility would be to continue to call the residential college on the College Avenue Campus Rutgers College. Another possible name would be Voorhees College.
the college fellows would be abolished and the faculty of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences would have control over and responsibility for all curricular and other academic affairs for all arts and sciences students – just as in the Task Force recommendations.

The name “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” is consistent with the terminology proposed by the Task Force and with the terminology in use today, by which units that offer graduate as well as undergraduate degrees are called schools. In fact, it is untenable to call Engineering, Pharmacy, SCILS, etc. “Schools” while calling the largest, most prestigious unit of the university a “College.” “Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences” exploits the Rutgers “brand”, distinguishes the New Brunswick arts and sciences unit from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences in Camden and Newark, and signals that a major change in undergraduate education has taken place in New Brunswick. It seems far more honest than the name “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences”, with its strong implication that Rutgers College has simply swallowed all of the “lesser” arts and sciences colleges. While it is true that most research universities have a College of Arts and Sciences, there are a growing number of prestigious public and private universities that have smaller residential communities called “colleges.”

The change from “College of Arts and Sciences” and “campuses” to “School of Arts and Sciences” and residential “colleges” represents more than a change in nomenclature. While the Task Force viewed the “campuses” as cutting across the arts and sciences unit and the professional schools, I propose that the residential colleges be part of the School of Arts and Sciences, which would then bear responsibility for the co-curricular as well as the curricular part of the undergraduate experience of arts and sciences students. Professional school students would continue to affiliate with the residential college of their choice.

The College Deans and Reporting Relations

In my proposed structure, the college deans would report to the dean of the School of Arts and Sciences through a designated vice-dean. Each college dean would have responsibility for

- advising and other academic services
- learning communities and other co-curricular programs and activities
- residence-life and student-life programming

on his or her college campus, including provision of residence- and student-life programs for professional school students affiliated with the college. The dean would control his or her academic affairs staff, under the supervision of the designated vice-dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and would also have a student-life staff reporting to him or her. However, residence-life and other student-life programs would be provided under uniform guidelines established by the Vice-President for Student Affairs, who would be responsible for ensuring that the same policies and procedures regarding formation of student organizations, assessment of student fees, use of campus facilities, etc. would be followed at all the colleges; that staff job descriptions, job titles, and salary scales would be the same across the colleges; and that funding for the full range of services and student-life programming would be allocated in an equitable manner. The college dean would no longer have control over student centers, recreation centers, or counseling services, which would be administered centrally, as are housing, dining services, health centers, etc. at present. The dean would, however, be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the various centralized services and serving as an advocate for students on his or her campus.
In this structure, the college deans would no longer directly report to the Vice-President for Undergraduate Education (VPUE), but only indirectly through the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. The VPUE would, however, be responsible for (i) ensuring that all the schools offering degree programs to undergraduates provide incentives for their faculty to be involved in learning communities and other co-curricular activities on the college campuses; (ii) ensuring that the college deans work with the deans of the professional schools to provide appropriate co-curricular and student-life programs for professional school students affiliated with the particular colleges; and (iii) providing the college deans with funding to support learning communities, co-curricular programs and student-life programming.

**Future Role of Douglass College**

In my proposal, Douglass would be both a part of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences and a women’s college. It would also serve, to a substantially greater extent than it now does, as a resource for the whole Rutgers New Brunswick/Piscataway community.

Douglass would be an integral part of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences: its faculty would be the Faculty of Arts and Sciences; its dean would report to the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences; its students would be subject to the same admission and graduation requirements, go through the same admission process, and have access to the same set of possible majors and minors as all other arts and sciences students in New Brunswick. Although the dean would have an advisory committee of interested faculty members, that committee would have no legislative power over academic matters.

On the other hand, Douglass would continue to be a women’s college by offering its students a woman-centered curricular, co-curricular, and student-life experience that would be unique to Douglass but consistent with the common New Brunswick general education requirements, with the graduation requirements of the School of Arts and Sciences, and with the common guidelines for student-life programs, residence-life programs, etc.

A number of co-curricular and student-life elements of this woman-centered experience are already in place, including

- co-curricular programs such as the Douglass Project for Rutgers Women in Math, Science, and Engineering, the Emerging Leaders Program, and PLEN (the Public Leadership Education Network)
- living-learning communities including the Douglass language houses and the Human Rights House
- the externship program (provided by the Associate Alumnae of Douglass) and a variety of internships with the member units of the Institute for Women’s Leadership.
- single-sex student government and a limited number of single-sex student organizations
- peer advising and mentoring.

Compared to the other arts and sciences colleges, Douglass is clearly farther along the path to providing its students the rich variety of co-curricular opportunities the Task Force envisions. Moreover, the Douglass Strategic Plan commits the college to continue to increase the number of learning communities, co-curricular programs, internships, etc. in cooperation with academic
departments, centers and institutes on the Douglass Campus and elsewhere in New Brunswick/Piscataway.

The Douglass woman-centered experience also needs to have a curricular component. I propose that this would consist, initially, of the single-sex and/or woman-focused part of the present Douglass curricular requirements; i.e.,

- *Shaping a Life*, which would continue to be required
- single-sex interdisciplinary honors seminars (as one option for Douglass students in the New Brunswick-wide honors program)
- a requirement that students take one additional course dealing with women’s issues/scholarship on women and gender/feminist theory, either as part of their major or minor or as one of the courses taken to satisfy the general education requirements.

Changes in these requirements would have to be approved by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

In addition, Douglass would enhance its service to the entire New Brunswick/Piscataway community by further opening its co-curricular programs to other Rutgers women students and making its staff expertise available to other units seeking to establish support programs for women. Making the full range of Douglass special programs available to all interested and qualified students would require a good deal of additional funding; some of this would need to come from the university, but Douglass would also commit itself to seek external funding to increase the number of non-Douglass students who would be able to participate in its programs. Thus Douglass would contribute to women’s education at Rutgers in two ways: by providing many of the benefits of a traditional women’s college to a “core” student body of women and by providing co-curricular programs to a much larger group of interested students. Douglass Dean Carmen Ambar and Associate Dean Marc Manganaro have written a detailed proposal for one way all this might be achieved entitled *Douglass College and Douglass Campus: A Model for a 21st Century Women’s College at Rutgers University*. While I do not agree with everything in that proposal, I believe it should be the starting point for much-needed negotiations with the Douglass community about the future of the college.

In this structural model, Douglass would clearly be different from the other residential colleges in that it would be single-sex and its “core” students would have to fulfill some (very modest) curricular requirements beyond the common requirements for all arts and sciences students in New Brunswick/Piscataway. Most students who initially chose Douglass would probably choose to remain there until graduation, although they would be free to change their mind and affiliate with one of the other colleges at any time. Those who remained at Douglass and satisfied its special requirements would receive a diploma with Douglass College, as well as the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, appearing on it. Thus Douglass would be somewhat more of a traditional college and less of a “campus” than the New Brunswick co-ed colleges.

As I envision it, the Douglass of the future would be smaller but stronger and more selective than at present and would better be able to provide its students with the benefits of a women’s college together with *all* the advantages of a major research university. The student body would be smaller².

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² Within the proposed structure, a smaller Douglass would not result in empty beds on the Cook/Douglass Campus, because Cook College, which would be co-ed and open to arts and sciences students as well as to students of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, could take over residence halls no longer needed by Douglass.
at least initially, because it would consist only of young women who want to attend a women’s college and would not be “filled out” with students who end up at Douglass because they don’t get into their first-choice Rutgers (co-ed) college. The full incorporation of Douglass into the School of Arts and Sciences would, I believe, strengthen the quality of the education students would receive by making the entire arts and sciences faculty in New Brunswick/Piscataway, not just a small group of faculty fellows, responsible for the education of Douglass students inside and outside the classroom.

IV. Concluding Comments

There appears to be a consensus among many faculty, staff, and administrators that there are some serious problems (as well as much to applaud) with undergraduate education on the New Brunswick Campus. The Task Force on Undergraduate Education has proposed a bold plan for fixing the problems and transforming undergraduate education in New Brunswick/Piscataway. I think there is wide agreement with the Task Force’s vision and goals, with its identification of the major problems, and with most of its major recommendations. The major controversy concerns its structural recommendations. A number of people have serious reservations about aspects of the structural model proposed by the Task Force and have written or are in the process of writing alternative proposals for the Rutgers community to consider along with the Task Force Report. There seems to be a good deal of common ground among these proposals and I hope that a consensus will emerge from the discussions now beginning.

My alternative proposal deals only with structural issues and presents a structural model for undergraduate education in New Brunswick/Piscataway which differs from the Task Force’s model in four major areas: nomenclature; the role of the college/campus deans; reporting relations among the campuses/colleges, the School or College of Arts and Sciences, and the Vice-President for Undergraduate Education; and the future of Douglass College. My modified structural model has a number of advantages over the original Task Force model; i.e., my model would

- give the college deans the authority, staff, and funding needed to build the vibrant campus communities envisioned by the Task Force.
- bring together in one academic unit the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, all arts and sciences students in New Brunswick/Piscataway, and the college deans and their staffs, making that unit responsible for all aspects of the academic and co-curricular lives of arts and sciences students and promoting engagement of faculty with students outside the classroom and major departments.
- permit Douglass to remain a women’s college, while being an integral part of the School of Arts and Sciences and a valuable resource for all women students in New Brunswick/Piscataway.

I believe that my model provides a way to correct many of the problems with the current structure of undergraduate education at Rutgers, New Brunswick while preserving what’s best in the historical arts and sciences colleges.

Finally, let me say a few more words about Douglass College. The passionate and eloquent support for the preservation of Douglass as a women’s college voiced by current Douglass students and recent alumnae is a tribute to the supportive college community that Douglass has been able to build since reorganization, despite the lack of its own faculty. Indeed the excellent learning
communities and support and leadership programs Douglass has developed make it a model for the campus communities envisioned by the Task Force. Not surprisingly, Douglass students and alumnae do not want to see their college become merely a residential option; they do not believe, despite assurances to the contrary, that the Douglass support and leadership programs could be preserved if the college were dissolved - an opinion that I and many other active Douglass fellows share. My alternative proposal would permit Douglass to continue to be a women’s college; to retain the support of its alumnae and friends; to preserve its many excellent co-curricular, support, and student-life programs; and to compete for funding to make those programs available to all qualified and interested students on the New Brunswick Campus. As someone who discovered Douglass rather late in my life at Rutgers and has enormous respect for what the College does, I hope that my proposal will help to resolve the present impasse over the future of Douglass College.