The Dean of Livingston College’s View of the Future of Undergraduate Education

Continuous improvement should be a constant feature of every research university. Rutgers is no exception, with an impressive list of advancements in undergraduate education spanning the last three decades. The Task Force on Undergraduate Education is the most recent university-wide mechanism for conducting a broad review of undergraduate education with a goal of expanding the quality of the institution. Our geography and history make us unique and, coupled with the strong commitment of our faculty and academic staff, give Rutgers a unique opportunity to provide a rich and stimulating environment for undergraduates. Consequently, I believe that a collegiate model of small, focused learning centers is a highly effective means for organizing undergraduate education on the New Brunswick/Piscataway campus.

In spite of pressure from a variety of sources, the undergraduate learning experience should remain broad, with a liberal arts focus capped with specialized course work. The liberal arts degree is not vocational training; rather it is designed to expose students to the breadth and depth of the world of the mind. The undergraduate learning experience should develop critical thinkers, who are equipped with foundational knowledge, sound communication skills, and the ability to apply that knowledge as life-long learners.

The Task Force accurately identified areas of strength and concern with the current system of delivery of undergraduate education. I support the majority of its recommendations. However, there are a few recommendations that should be modified and some that I believe will not serve the university well in its efforts to create a strong, personalized learning environment for undergraduates.

The Report of the Task Force did an outstanding job of articulating a set of principles that should guide the University in its efforts to continue the advancement of undergraduate education. I support those principles that include:

- A core curriculum built around one set of expectations and that articulates a distinctive vision of how our undergraduate education is connected to the work of a major public research university.

- An admissions policy built around one set of standards for all arts and sciences applicants.

- A discussion of student experiences in New Brunswick built around one standard of service and access.
• A structure of undergraduate education that treats all students equally and gives all students equal access to the University’s resources, regardless of the campus on which they choose to live or with which they choose affiliate.

• Campus planning, for classrooms and student support facilities, that provides equity of resources available to students on all our campuses and a commitment to designing the university in ways that reflect its values as a research university.

While supporting these objectives, I believe that modifications to the Task Forces’ suggested approach will better achieve those objectives and will better serve the undergraduates of Rutgers University. When considering improvements for undergraduate education, the question must be asked “best for whom?” The first priority must be what is best for undergraduates. Believing that a stimulating and challenging intellectual environment should be the focus of undergraduate education, the program must be one that offers to all students a comprehensive learning experience that is thoughtful and deliberate in integrating learning inside and out of the classroom. It also means appropriate and personalized instruction and academic advising by knowledgeable faculty and academic staff. They should have an appropriate role in admission and curriculum development, as well as frequent and diverse opportunities to interact with motivated and engaged students. Administrative structures must allow administrators to provide students, faculty and staff with the tools and resources required to meet the teaching and learning objectives of students and faculty.

Therefore, I believe that the following outline for restructuring of undergraduate education in New Brunswick will meet a majority of the concerns raised by the Task Force in a manner that provides for the coherent delivery of high quality undergraduate education that is consistent with best practices, as well as the geography and history of Rutgers University.

A Organizational Plan for Rutgers-New Brunswick Undergraduate Education

I. In keeping with the recommendation of the Task Force, there should be established a single admissions standard for all the liberal arts colleges.
   A. The University should create a Rutgers School of Arts & Science which is the sole admitting unit for liberal arts students. Unlike the Task Force, I recommend that the unit be termed a School in keeping with the other undergraduate admitting units in New Brunswick.
   B. Once admitted, I suggest that students be given the option to affiliate with one of five college learning communities: Busch, Douglass
(for women only), Livingston, Queens and University (for adult learners only).

C. Affiliation should be fluid and easy until a student has earned 60 credits at which time transfer to other units should be possible, but regulated. Affiliation should not a barrier to students participating in extra- or co-curricular programs.

D. Each collegiate learning community must have access to adequate faculty and fiscal resources to develop enriching academic and co-curricular learning experiences for its undergraduates.

II. I recommend an administrative structure that establishes an effective administrative partnership between FAS & the undergraduate college learning communities. An administrative separation between the faculty and the undergraduate deans would repeat failings of the past. Faculty and deans responsible for the learning communities should be part of the same administrative structure. Therefore;

A. The College/Campus Deans should continue to report to the Executive Dean of FAS
   1. These Deans should become a part of the Executive Dean’s Senior Staff
   2. Also these Deans should be a part of any coordinating councils formed by the Vice President for Undergraduate Education or the Vice President for Student Affairs.

III. I support the creation of the Rutgers Generalized Academic Core Curriculum as recommended by the Task Force. However, the Core should include specific requirements for students to take mission or thematic courses.

IV. I further recommend establishing learning communities designed around academic themes. This should be the primary responsibility of College/Campus Deans, with cooperation from faculty bodies and the Vice President for Undergraduate Education. These themes should be an interrelated set of curricular and co-curricular experiences and include academic minors which will provide unique concentrations of study.

V. I recommend that the Vice President for Undergraduate Education be responsible for ensuring that all students enrolled in all Schools meet the Academic Core Curriculum, and that Rutgers academic opportunities and majors are more broadly available to all undergraduates. The Vice President should also be responsible for matters of academic integrity.

VI. I recommend that the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs have direct oversight for Housing, Dining, Health Services, Mental Health Services, Financial Services, Disabilities Services, and New Brunswick/Piscataway-wide Student Life Policies.

   College/Campus Deans should remain responsible for Residence Life, Student Centers, and Recreation Centers of their respective campus. Working
cooperatively, Undergraduate Deans and the Vice President for Student Affairs should develop uniform policies whenever practical.

VII. I recommend that each College/Campus have a Faculty Governance Committee. This committee will serve as a faculty resource for the Collegiate Campus:
   A. in the development of learning communities
   B. in faculty governance
   C. in the development of extensive off campus learning opportunities (field studies, internships and study aboard)
   D. in academic and co-curricular advise
   E. to provisionally approve mission courses or alterations to the curriculum of the college’s minors
   F. in the development of campus facilities.

VIII. I believe that these modifications to the Task Force recommendations will allow for enhanced learning opportunities for students, consistency of academic and student life policies, and provide a structure that will allow the College Deans to create vibrant, intellectually meaningful learning communities.

IX. Finally, there are a few key equity issues not addressed by Task Force that require consideration as the University examines how best to improve undergraduate education. They are:
   A. Academic opportunities
      1. Access to majors
         a) Business School - The current admission policies of the Business School are in direct opposition to the principles articulated by the Task Force.
         b) SCLIS, Mason Gross and The Bloustein School must be provided with the means to open significantly more of their courses to non-majors.
         c) The relationship of Cook College to the FAS and the other Colleges must be examined.
   B. Budgetary issues that require consideration include:
      1. Establishing adequate budgetary support for the “Undergraduate Collegiate Learning Centers.”
      2. The challenges of private and alumni fund raising that will be faced by the newly established “Undergraduate Collegiate Learning Centers.”