

Transforming Undergraduate Education

President's Recommendations

Task Force on Undergraduate Education

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Task Force on Undergraduate Education Task Force Charge

President Richard L. McCormick's and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Philip Furmanski's Charge to the Task Force for Undergraduate Education
April 12, 2004

Dear Colleagues:

Over the past academic year, we have had numerous conversations with faculty, staff, and students across the New Brunswick campuses. What emerged from these discussions is a powerful consensus that the single area that requires sustained discussion and action is the academic and co-curricular lives of our undergraduates. The largest component of our educational program is the instruction of undergraduates. Their experiences at the State University's flagship campus often constitute the litmus test by which the State's citizens judge us and our contributions to New Jersey.

While recognizing the many excellent achievements of our academic programs and our student service offices, we must begin to reinvigorate the undergraduate experience at Rutgers, to create a more satisfying, more coherent, less frustrating, less confusing, and more rational academic environment for all students. Effecting significant, positive changes in this area will bring widespread and meaningful changes to the entire fabric of the University.

We have already begun a comprehensive review of undergraduate life at Rutgers under the general rubric, the "Initiative on Undergraduate Learning and Life." This initiative will focus on (1) student services, (2) student affairs, and (3) undergraduate academic life. In December 2003, we held a one-day retreat with student leaders from all of the colleges and with administrators and staff members from critical student service areas. (A follow-up meeting occurred on March 2nd.) We learned first-hand of the difficulties and frustrations that students face in dealing with University offices and functions, both academic and non-academic. We challenged those attending these retreats to evaluate the systems that serve our students and faculty and to determine a configuration that will ensure the most responsive and effective organization of basic services.

Concurrent with this review of student services, we began a search for a new Vice President for Student Affairs, one of whose mandates will be to ensure that our academic values are integrated into all aspects of a student's life at Rutgers.

The third part of this initiative will be the Task Force on Undergraduate Education. Professor Barry V. Qualls, Humanities Dean of FAS, who chaired two previous committees exploring undergraduate issues at Rutgers, has agreed to chair this group. We are writing to ask you to serve as a member of this important Task Force.

In reviewing the excellent reports on undergraduate education at Rutgers that were prepared during the 1990s, we find that the problems and issues encountered a decade ago continue to hinder the work of our faculty and students, and that the thoughtful recommendations contained in these reports were never implemented in a fully effective way. We are determined that undergraduate education is, and will be, a priority of discussion every year at Rutgers, not just when a committee has produced a report. Thus the recommendations of this Task Force on Undergraduate Education will receive the support required to produce concrete, positive changes in undergraduate education at Rutgers-New Brunswick. Furthermore, the recommendations will provide the foundation for continuing examination of undergraduate issues at the University, thus ensuring that programs remain vital, energetic, and properly organized.

The Task Force is charged to consider all areas of the undergraduate experience that concern the academic lives of our undergraduates.

- It will review general education requirements, focusing on the relationships between these and work in the major and in our professional schools.
- It will survey best practices, not only at Rutgers but also at our peer institutions, in areas such as mentoring, advising, admissions, enrollment planning, marketing, and all other functions that affect the college careers of our undergraduates.
- It will discuss the roles of the residential colleges, considering their traditional strengths in the context of a 21st century research university.
- It will review our honors programs, asking if they are organized effectively to provide the research resources of the University to our most intellectually adventurous students.
- It will review co-curricular activities, discussing the ways they are informed by the academic values of

Rutgers.

- It will engage in a dialogue with faculty and students about their expectations of the faculty's role in University life beyond the classroom and lab.

Essential to this undertaking is defining what it should mean to be a Rutgers graduate. What are the expectations of the faculty, the students and their parents, and the people of the State? What expectations should we have of a Rutgers graduate? What level of academic achievement should we demand? What is the nature of the educational experience that is most effective in ensuring a life-long commitment to learning? What administrative arrangements will enable Rutgers most effectively to commit the resources of a great public research university to our undergraduates? Which residential life/non-academic functions are best performed by colleges or by centralized services? What are the roles of the colleges, the professional schools, and FAS in making decisions affecting undergraduate education in curricular and co-curricular areas and in research areas?

The starting point for this consideration will be the Task Force's review of the previous reports on undergraduate education and a re-evaluation of their recommendations within the context of the University today. Once this review has occurred, the Task Force will divide into sub-committees, each charged to make recommendations for consideration by the Task Force on the questions and issues outlined above.

The first meeting of this Task Force will be on April 22, 2004, at 11:00 a.m. in the Assembly Room at Winants Hall, College Avenue Campus. We will be there to discuss the work of the task force and answer any questions you may have. Please contact Kathy Jo Cotterill (732- 932-8793 or Cotterill@oldqueens.rutgers.edu) to let us know if you will be able to participate in this task force and attend this initial meeting. Thank you. We hope to see you on April 22.

Sincerely Yours,

Richard L. McCormick
Philip Furmanski

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