

Undergraduate Administration Task Force

Recommendation and Report

April 3, 2001

Membership of the Committee

Mark Aronoff (Chair)	Associate Provost
Leo Bachmair	Undergraduate Director, Computer Science
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After a short organizational meeting on December 21, the committee held four two-hour meetings early in the Spring semester: January 24, February 7, 14, and 21. At its January 24 meeting, two consultants were present: Susan Forman, Vice President for Undergraduate Education, Rutgers; and Susan Steele, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Instruction, University of Connecticut. Additionally, Mark Aronoff met individually in Albany with Susan Faerman, Associate Vice President and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, University at Albany.

Recommendation:

The committee recommends that the University institute a new position, Vice President for Undergraduate Education and Dean of University College. The Vice President for Undergraduate Education will be responsible for the coordination of all aspects of undergraduate education across the university and will report to the President and to the Provost. We envision four main units within the Vice President for Undergraduate Education office: academic success, educational communities, enrollment management, and University College.

Discussion:

In the last decade, having achieved pre-eminence as a research university, Stony Brook has begun to turn its attention to undergraduate education. The university has developed numerous excellent undergraduate programs, as witnessed most recently by our being named one of ten leadership institutions in the Association of American Colleges and Universities Greater Expectation Initiative, based on these programs. We have a strong record of innovation in undergraduate and pre-college education, especially in research-focussed programs.

In the last couple of years, we have invested a great deal in new programs for our incoming students and we have worked hard to improve the academic lives of our continuing students. But there is a widespread perception both within and without the university that all these programs, as much as we may have invested in them and as good as they may be individually, are not synergetic, let alone synergistic. They do not form a coherent whole, and sometimes they appear to be struggling against one another. Perhaps more to the point, our undergraduates are still very unhappy with their education, as compared with students at other SUNY institutions and nationwide (as evidenced by last spring's SUNY survey and the National Survey of Student Satisfaction), and the mismatch between our faculty and our undergraduates that has been a part of Stony Brook culture ever since the institution was founded has become more pronounced in many ways.

In order to remedy these problems, we need to ask and answer basic questions like:

- What kinds of undergraduate students do we want to attract?
- What undergraduate programs do we want to emphasize?
- What is the proper size of our undergraduate student body?
- How do we want to organize undergraduate education at Stony Brook?
- How can we incorporate successful programs such as the research focus into the wider undergraduate experience?

We also need to have one person whose job it is to develop answers to these questions and ensure that the answers will be acted on. In short, we need a Vice President for Undergraduate Education.

In making this recommendation it is important to stress that we are not advocating a reinstatement of the position of Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Studies. The system overseen by that position failed for structural, not personal reasons, most of all, the isolation of the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Studies outside the major channels of power within the university administration. (Indeed, the fact that some of the former Vice-Provosts have since risen to national prominence as academic administrators – most notably Graham Spanier, President of Penn State, and Ronald Douglas, Provost at Texas A&M – makes it difficult to attribute the previous system's failure to personnel at all.) Rather, our recommendation is heavily influenced by the remark of one of our consultants, namely, that the person in charge of undergraduate education must have a seat at the table where the decisions are being made and the money is being doled out. Even in a new climate, if we are to pay more than lip service to undergraduate education, unless the structural problem of isolation and consequent powerlessness of the position is addressed, no effort will succeed.

The committee therefore recommends that Stony Brook institute a new position, Vice President for Undergraduate Education, with institution-wide responsibility for the success of undergraduate education at Stony Brook. As a Vice President, the incumbent would be a member of the President's cabinet. The Vice President would report both to the Provost and to the President. We see Vice-Presidential status as crucial to the success of this office. It provides structural support for the declaration that Stony Brook is serious about undergraduate education and adds an additional voice for the academic enterprise at a table which is always in danger of becoming dominated by other interests.

A major factor behind our recommendation has been the success of the position of Vice President for Research. Until 1993, the research enterprise was overseen by the Dean of the Graduate School. With the growth in funded research, the university administration came to realize that someone had to represent the interests of Stony Brook research at the highest levels, both within the university and in Albany and Washington, and the position of Vice President for Research was created.

We see the rationale for a Vice President for Undergraduate Education as parallel. The public evaluates the stature of a university in terms of the perceived excellence of its undergraduate experience. Until we focus the university's energies on undergraduate education in the same way as we have so successfully focussed on research, only our fellow academics will ever view Stony Brook as a great university, no matter how good we really are. Only a dramatic shift will allow us to change both the culture and the external perception of Stony Brook.

We also see the relation between the Vice President for Undergraduate Education and the Provost as equivalent to that between the Vice President for Research and the Provost. As Executive Vice President, the Provost ranks above all other Vice Presidents; as Chief Academic Officer (within SUNY nomenclature), the Provost oversees all academic activity at the university, most prominently Research and Undergraduate Education.

A variety of factors speak to the university-wide nature of undergraduate education:

- Undergraduate education now spans the entire university, especially with the growth of undergraduate enrollment in engineering, business, and the health sciences. The impending institutionalization of the new College of Business will place yet more undergraduates outside the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Many of the most innovative developments in undergraduate education are coming from outside the traditional arts and sciences disciplines. We need to be able to take advantage of these developments.
- Just as in the case of research, we will dissipate our efforts if the responsibility for undergraduate education does not extend to all schools and colleges in which undergraduate degrees are offered, including those in the health sciences.
- Stony Brook must become a national player in undergraduate education, just as it has in research. Someone must be identified as speaking for undergraduate education university-wide.

For these reasons and more, the central responsibility for undergraduate education cannot remain within a single college, where it currently resides, but must span the university, so that whoever represents Stony Brook on the national scene and at the state level in undergraduate education truly represents the entire university.

The committee has looked at a number of models of functional responsibilities lying within the purview of the Vice President for Undergraduate Education or equivalent at other institutions. They range from Rutgers, where, in part because of the university's unique tradition of highly autonomous colleges, the Vice President for Undergraduate Education's responsibilities are more loosely defined and programmatic, to the University of Connecticut, where a number of central administrative units report to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, including enrollment management.

Given that the greatest need at Stony Brook is for coordination, direction, and leadership in undergraduate education, we propose bringing together within the office of the Vice President for Undergraduate Education the major functions of undergraduate education, grouped under four broad categories: academic success, educational communities, enrollment management, and the university college (a new unit).

Academic success encompasses those offices whose primary purpose is to enhance academic success and whose scope extends or should extend beyond the colleges.

Educational communities encompasses all extra-departmental undergraduate educational communities.

Enrollment and retention management encompasses most of the offices now reporting to the Associate Provost for Enrollment and Retention Management.

University College will be the academic home for students who, within the current structure, are academically homeless, because they have not yet declared or been accepted into a major, or because their major spans a number of departments. University-wide curriculum and assessment will also be housed within this unit.

The list below describes the broad functions assigned to each category.

Academic Success

1. Academic standing within all colleges, which will be administered centrally, with appeals handled locally
2. Academic judiciary for all colleges, including Engineering, Business, and HSC units
3. External scholarships
4. Pre-professional advising
5. EOP/AIM

Educational Communities

1. Honors College
2. WISE Program
3. Honors Programs (e.g. Presidential Scholars, University Scholars)
4. All learning communities, including living/learning centers
5. Undergraduate and pre-college research programs

Enrollment and Retention Management

1. Admissions, including transfers
2. Financial aid and student employment, including scholarships
3. Registrar and records
4. HSC student services

5. Student data systems
6. Summer session

University College

We envision university college as constituting the academic home for all first-year students not admitted directly to professional programs, as well as for students beyond the first year who have not yet declared a major or who have declared an inter-departmental major. The Directors of Undergraduate Studies will be advisory to the Dean of University College.

1. The first-year experience, including orientation and USB 101
2. Advising and achievement support, especially for undeclared majors
3. University curriculum and general education Educational assessment
4. Multidisciplinary programs, including the Humanities and possibly the Social Science Interdisciplinary majors, as well as BSHS students until they migrate to HTM

We believe firmly that conceiving the responsibility for undergraduate education broadly and giving the responsible person a seat at the highest table in the university will lead to noticeable improvement in the education of Stony Brook undergraduates. Joining these four major functions under one individual will allow for coordination and planning across the entire university of all matters pertaining to undergraduate education. Finally, no reorganization can be effective in addressing real issues of student experience and retention unless the university commits itself to providing resources from central funds sufficient to support the enterprise.

We have attached to this recommendation a document prepared by Associate Provost Manuel London, which deals with the state of undergraduate education at Stony Brook. It summarizes our successes and our current situation and puts forward some suggestions for what we might do under the new structure. The task force does not specifically endorse these suggestions, but the document will help to stimulate further discussion on central issues in undergraduate education and on the scope of the responsibilities of the office.



REMARKS ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

In thinking about restructuring undergraduate education at Stony Brook, we should examine current conditions, identify gaps, establish goals, and consider possible actions to achieve these goals. The following provides some ideas in each of these areas:

Current Conditions

- We now have a series of separate student service offices (Orientation, USB 101, Advising, Student Employment) and programs (Honors, Living Learning Centers, Federated Learning Communities, Learning Communities, WISE, AMP, EOP/AIM, RAIRE). These are all within the Provost’s area.

- There are other niches for students to connect to the university, including athletics, fraternities and sororities, the Golden Key Honor Society, student government, and more than 300 clubs.
- The residence halls and the Commuter Student Office are additional sources of social support and identification for students, but do not have a strong academic link.
- New support programs are under development (e.g., the Student Leadership Institute, University Scholars, the Office of Community Service).
- The Career Center under Student Affairs has been upgraded during the last five years, and currently offers state-of-the-art career counseling, internship placement, and job placement.
- We work closely with Student Affairs to coordinate Orientation and Opening Week ("Experience Stony Brook"). Orientation has been strengthened during the past two years, and plans are underway to strengthen it further during the next several years:
 - an improved summer orientation as a socialization experience, not as the first chance to fail
 - a more structured first-time registration with fewer options and a course plan that better matches students' readiness
 - a welcome convocation with an introduction to academic expectations; and memorable shared experience, such as a common reading
 - attention to the first year experience in freshmen seminars--USB 101 and Learning Community linking seminars.
- More than 850 undergraduates are involved in research activity with faculty.

Gaps

- Departments vary in the attention they pay to their undergraduate majors. Faculty engagement in advising majors is limited; undergraduates do not have a strong link to their major department. In part, this may be a function of resources. Another reason is that in some departments, there is an imbalance between the number of faculty and the number of undergraduate majors. Some departments have very few faculty and large numbers of majors (business, SSI) while other departments (those with strong research or service missions) have few majors (physics, languages).
- Undecided students do not have an academic home.
- We lack common goals for undergraduate education that provide focus and require cooperation. Programs take on a life of their own. They have disparate goals, and they compete for resources.
- Programs for high achieving students are tied to scholarships, and scholarship dollars are limited.
- Scholarship programs are coordinated as students enter (e.g., a student may be in WISE, Honors, and Presidential Scholars), but the programmatic links end there.
- We have trouble attracting high achieving students. Other universities have large honors programs (honors scholarships without an academic component).

- Students' initial ambitions are unrealistic; they learn the hard way that their abilities do not match program requirements. Many students are demoralized by their own poor performance. Academic performance is low and course difficulty extends to most disciplinary areas—not just math and sciences; 20% of students are on academic warning or probation.
- Opening Week is a cattle call with little room for the student to feel part of an identifiable group.
- Commuter students have weak ties to campus; residential students are close to home and maintain friendships and family commitments on the weekends.
- Students are less satisfied with their educational and student life experiences than students at other SUNY Centers.
- Students complain that some faculty are self-centered and not responsive to their needs.
- Classroom scheduling is difficult.
- Classroom quality is mixed.
- Unmet demand seems to be growing, especially for popular, gatekeeper courses
- Faculty program directors (e.g., for LLCs) are hard to recruit.

Goals and Challenges

- We have made progress in becoming a student centered research university. This needs to be enhanced further and projected as an image to prospective students.
- We need to expand the quality and image of programs in high demand areas (business, economics). These disciplines offer an opportunity to be more selective and bring in more students.
- We currently have a targeted marketing approach to student recruitment that focuses on high schools and student quality. We can extend this to focus on discipline and interest to recruit students in areas such as humanities, fine arts, and the physical sciences. Department involvement is needed here. We also should work on recruiting strong undecided students who want a solid arts and sciences background. In general, in order to be more selective in undergraduate recruiting, we need attractive programs that students want. Also, we need more dollars for academic merit scholarships. This will help us draw students from a wider area than Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk counties.
- Students need an academic home right from the start of their careers here.
- Programs can be created so that students apply their growing general and disciplinary-based knowledge to various applied experiences (internships, service learning, leadership, public policy).
- The Learning Communities foster collaborative learning, problem solving, and communication skills across the curriculum. This can be extended in different ways.
- Overall, we need a comprehensive, integrated approach to the student academic experience from orientation through to graduation. For example, we need orientation and registration that matches students' abilities. We need increased support for our early warning program. (This program identifies students who are having academic difficulty early in their first semester and provides needed supplemental instruction.) We need to provide a welcoming atmosphere from the start of a student's experience. Further, we need a comprehensive approach to the

entire first year experience, with special attention to the first six weeks during which students decide to stay or leave.

- We can institute a predictive model to classify new students at risk and provide needed support (study skills, academic guidance, social adjustment). Educational consulting firms sell instruments for implementing such a process. Our own Office of Institutional Research could do this for us (as they did in developing the predictive admissions model).
- Student identification and loyalty develops at the local level. We need to promote departmental activities for majors (sponsor undergraduate programming in departments).
- In general, we should increase forums for student involvement and debate.
- Our courses are tough relative to students' abilities. We need more options for supplemental instruction.

Need for Information

We need to study...

- models for organizing and delivering undergraduate education
- our students and enrollment trends and goals (student quantity and quality)
- our capacity to provide high quality instruction
- student attitudes about academic life (Baigent, Thomas, and London identified no fewer than 18 data sets and reports that already exist. These results need to be collated and tracked on a regular basis.)
- student success (grade distribution)

Possible Actions

- The undergraduate academic experience is heavily influenced by the student's major department. Academic departments should:
 - hold welcome and orientation programs for new majors
 - sponsor regular events (symposia, discussion groups, parties) for majors
 - support a student club for majors
 - assign each major to a faculty advisor and monitor the advising experience
 - offer special seminars for majors, coordinate the honors within the major
 - coordinate an Honors College-like group within the major
 - offer pre-major overview sessions several times a semester

Some departments already have strong programs for undergraduate majors. Others do not, and may need additional resources and encouragement.

- Other functions to support undergraduate education that can be coordinated by a central office. In particular, the office can:
 - provide orientation for new students who are undeclared
 - strengthen the pre-professional clubs in the health fields, law, and engineering, and expand them to other fields such as arts, humanities, and social sciences
 - manage placement so that students are in courses of study that match their abilities
 - manage the first year experience (coordinate departmentally-based USB 101s for majors, general USB 101s for undeclared students, USB 101 component of linking seminars for students in the Learning Communities, and LLC orientations)

- support undeclared students
- communicate regularly with them
- ensure they have advising services
- provide special programming through the career center to help them make a choice as early as possible in their academic careers
- ensure that students who want to change majors receive advice from the major they are leaving and the major they are thinking about entering
- coordinate first year experience activities
- enhance achievement support programs (mentor program, peer advisor program, early warning program now run by the Advising Center)
- coordinate a college-based orientation and first year experience programs
- coordinate with the Career Center and the Center for Community Service to expand internships and volunteer experiences and monitor learning assessment (when students earn credit for these experiences)
- foster joint programs (dual majors; and major/minor combinations) (e.g., business minors for majors in humanities, fine arts, and social sciences)
- establish enrollment goals, support discipline-oriented recruitment activities, and monitor registration services (classroom availability, course scheduling, unmet demand)
- assess academic programs, track retention, and identify factors that affect retention (joint effort with Institutional Research)
- maintain current functions of curriculum review for general education (DEC) and major requirements

Regardless of organization structure, disparate departments need to focus on common goals and need to cooperate to achieve these goals. These goals need to be made clear. Accountability needs to be assigned. Progress needs to be tracked.

Some Needed Resources

- Funding departments to support undergraduate educational programs
- Mini-grants program to support departmentally-based undergraduate initiatives
- Admissions support equivalent to other competitive schools
- Dramatic increase in academic merit scholarship dollars needed to match other universities
- Improved faculty stipends for undergraduate programs (general faculty advisors in orientation, LLC directors, rotating faculty in Advising Center)