

The 21st-century Penn Undergraduate Experience

Phase One

Report of the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education

I. Introduction

The Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education (PCUE) was charged by President Rodin to design a model for Penn's undergraduate experience in accordance with the principles outlined in the President's and Provost's statement, "Implementing a 21st Century Undergraduate Education" (*Almanac* October 25, 1994). PCUE met nine times during the spring semester; its members also attended a variety of campus events, panels, discussions with campus and external visiting bodies, and conversations with students that focused on undergraduate education and the nature and quality of the undergraduate experience. A flow chart of PCUE's planning process is attached as Appendix A.

From these meetings and sessions, PCUE refined its perception of the character of the 21st-century Penn undergraduate experience and identified a series of propositions for further consideration by nine subcommittees of faculty, students and staff. A list of the subcommittees and their members is attached as Appendix B. The work of the first six subcommittees can be viewed as addressing the nature, and that of the last three, as dealing with the process, of the undergraduate experience.

PCUE also discussed several models of organizing the co-curricular aspects of the undergraduate experience. It agreed to experiment with several of these models to test their effectiveness in providing a context in which to offer the total undergraduate experience.

During the latter part of the spring semester, PCUE also conducted a series of "conversations" with students and student groups about the nature of their undergraduate experiences. These informal anecdotal sessions were organized around student activity affiliations and thus were not intended to reflect a representative sampling of opinion of students in each school. A report on these conversations appears as Appendix C.

From these discussions and explorations, PCUE has concluded that Penn is a richly diverse environment, distinguished by its creativity in all areas of inquiry and filled with exciting opportunities for students to explore the boundaries of knowledge and extend the limits of understanding. Penn is uniquely able to provide many of these opportunities by virtue of its special character, its legacy, and the possibilities afforded by its location and the proximity of its schools. PCUE has attempted to identify experiences which draw upon the vast resources of this vibrant University and to place them within the educational context of the 21st-century undergraduate experience.

II. Character of the 21st-century Penn Undergraduate Experience

The Penn undergraduate experience of the 21st century should reflect the essence of Penn. Derived from the wisdom of its founder Benjamin Franklin and developed over centuries of growth and evolution, Penn's essence is its union of applied and theoretical knowledge, its emphasis on the useful, the fundamental and the aesthetic in its teaching, its research, and its contributions to society.

For Penn to embody the union of theory and practice means that instruction and research in the liberal arts and sciences is integrated with a wide range of professional study and research. Thus the Penn undergraduate will realize the benefits of studying and living in a community that encompasses the full

range of professions as well as arts and sciences and that offers opportunities across the boundaries of schools and disciplines. The union of theory and practice also means that as an institution Penn promotes engagement with the material, ethical and moral concerns of society and community defined broadly, globally, and also locally within Philadelphia.

For the undergraduate, the union of theory and practice is manifested in the relationship of theoretical and experiential learning. Each of these ways of learning is important by itself, yet together they reinforce and build upon one another. In this way, students come to understand that knowledge derived from analysis is only complete when tested in the crucible of experience and that for experience to be valuable, it must become the object of reflection.

Twenty-first century graduates of Penn should have acquired all of the attributes of the person educated for a complex, global, technological society marked by racial, ethnic, national and cultural distinctions. Penn students should reason analytically, solve problems creatively, read with sophistication and deep understanding of complex ideas, approach information with critical discernment, comprehend and use quantitative concepts and measures, communicate with clarity and persuasion, understand modern science and use technology in the acquisition of information and in communication. In keeping with Penn's tradition, they should gain knowledge through the experience of making and using knowledge. They should appreciate the role of knowledge and intellectual endeavors in the service of society. They should have an ethical and cultural perspective born of study and experience.

At the heart of the Penn undergraduate experience is the relationship between students and faculty as collaborators in the search for knowledge. For undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, the understanding of knowledge requires the experience of creating and using it for the benefit of society. The 21st-century Penn student will know through experience how to select and use knowledge in the world. The 21st-century undergraduate experience at Penn will promote the relationship between student and faculty member in a wide variety of settings within the schools, departments, and residential and non-residential communities in which students participate. It will link curricular with other forms of experience and support the goals of service and citizenship.

The 21st-century Penn undergraduate experience will achieve its purposes not only in the classroom but also within the University environment in which students undertake their education. The union of theory and practice in this context means that what students learn, they put into practice in their lives and in the multiple communities in which they live or to which they contribute their efforts. This model of "learn it" and then "live it" represents knowledge, absorbed and then utilized in activities involving cooperation, teamwork, and a real-world multi-disciplinary approach to issues and problems. Uniting intellectual and human values, the 21st-century undergraduate experience will provide opportunities for students to understand what it means to be active learners and active citizens. It will be an experience of learning, knowing and doing that will lead to the active involvement of students in the process of their education.

The distinctive character of the Penn undergraduate experience flows from this expectation of creative engagement of students and faculty with knowledge and its uses, with learning and living, for those who can master both aspects of this experience will be the intellectual and civic leaders and responsible citizens of the future.

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III. Aspects of the undergraduate experience

In its discussions, PCUE identified a series of propositions through which its vision of the 21st-century Penn undergraduate experience might be realized. A subcommittee was asked to consider each proposition and to make recommendations on whether and how the goals of the proposition could be achieved. The reports of these subcommittees, some of which will continue to work through next fall, address two important aspects of the undergraduate experience—its nature, expressed through a variety of curricular and co-curricular strategies and opportunities, and its process, expressed through the way Penn recruits and admits students and interacts with them once they matriculate.

PCUE received the subcommittee reports, both written and oral, but did not have time to give them the careful scrutiny they deserve. Such vetting will take place in the next phase of the work of the 21st Century Project. The following summary of the subcommittee reports provides only their essence.

A. Characterizing the nature of the undergraduate experience

1. “Students and faculty as collaborators in the search for knowledge...”

The goal of bringing students and faculty together as “collaborators in the search for knowledge” was addressed by the subcommittee on research and scholarly engagement, chaired by Robert Rescorla. It considered the proposition:

The experience of every Penn undergraduate will include engagement with faculty and older students in a creative, scholarly endeavor that involves the student in the making or using of knowledge.

The subcommittee explored how Penn could better engage its undergraduates in creative and research experiences in order for them to learn about the ways in which knowledge is expanded. It identified goals and expectations for research and creative experiences and suggested the manner in which such experiences might be conducted.

Although the subcommittee recognized that many independent projects are offered by each of the undergraduate schools and that students also receive encouragement and support from a number of the honors programs, it recommended that more be done through better advertising and the expansion of research opportunities. Its many recommendations included increasing information about research opportunities through both published and electronic means and through activities that celebrate the accomplishment of undergraduate researchers, and expanding the availability of research opportunities at the departmental, University and residential level.

2. “Realizing opportunities across the boundaries of schools and disciplines...”

The research opportunities offered by the faculty of Penn’s graduate and professional schools will be more accessible to undergraduate students if study “across the boundaries of schools and disciplines” is facilitated. This issue was addressed by the subcommittee on promoting student access to faculty in the graduate and professional schools, chaired by Mary Naylor. It considered the proposition:

Penn is uniquely positioned among its peer institutions to engage faculty from professional and graduate schools in the intellectual development of undergraduate students. A major focal point of the 21st-century initiative should be to nurture and sustain existing opportunities for interaction between graduate and professional faculty and undergraduate students in creative, scholarly endeavors as well as to foster additional opportunities where needed.

To realize this proposition, the subcommittee identified strategies that included assessing existing opportunities and their effects on the intellectual development of undergraduate students, promoting current efforts through high visibility in campus media, and developing new initiatives that emphasized interdisciplinary learning experiences, residentially-based learning experiences, sustained research experiences, and courses taught by graduate and professional school faculty. The subcommittee also pointed out that existing programs such as General Honors offer models that work and should be studied for wider application.

3. “An experience of learning, knowing, and doing...”

The goal of the 21st-century undergraduate experience as one of

“learning, knowing, and doing” was addressed by the subcommittee on community service/service learning, chaired by Oscar Gandy. It considered the proposition:

Every student will have the opportunity of working in a small cohort or team with other students in at least one academically based community service learning project.

The subcommittee identified the goals of community service learning, discussed the attributes of a program of high quality and identified constraints and opportunities for further development. The subcommittee recognized that Penn has already established “a position of leadership” in the field of community service learning through the work of the Center for Community Partnerships, the Program for Student-Community Involvement, and residentially-based community service activities, through the number of existing service-learning courses, and through Penn’s strong tradition of student volunteerism. However, to achieve the goals of the proposition, the subcommittee identified additional steps to support the programs already in place. These steps included developing a data base of information about projects, providing incentives for increased faculty involvement, and creating different levels of coordination for community service learning projects across the University.

4. “A cultural perspective born of study and experience...”

The goal of providing “a cultural perspective born of study and experience” was addressed by the subcommittee on intercultural experiences, chaired by Valerie Swain-Cade McCoullum. It considered the proposition:

Every Penn undergraduate will have the opportunity, and be strongly encouraged, to participate in an academic experience with a culture other than her or his own.

The subcommittee reviewed many previous reports, identified effective strategies for achieving the goals of the proposition, and recommended some pilots and programs. The subcommittee noted that Penn’s diversity is an enormous strength and offers community members a place to test their ability to thrive as contributing and respectful members of society in what will be an increasingly interdependent 21st-century world.

In addition to noting the activities of various student groups working on intercultural issues, the subcommittee made many recommendations ranging from the provision of intercultural information and opportunities to students and the development of an intercultural residential community to the development of curricular opportunities for non-language courses taught in foreign languages and “international certificate” programs that can be offered in conjunction with any major. Assuring a “cultural perspective borne of study and experience” will also require the consideration of opportunities that link intercultural and international academic opportunities with the non-academic aspects of campus life.

5. “Putting learning into practice...”

The goal of encouraging undergraduates to put “learning into practice” was addressed by the subcommittee on peer educational experiences, chaired by Satya Patel. It considered the proposition:

Every student should have the opportunity to engage with peers around educational issues outside of the classroom.

Defining “peer education” as occurring when students and members of the University community collegially share or participate “in common experiences with the ultimate goal of maturing intellectually, socially and/or personally,” the subcommittee identified the many forms of experiences that occur in departmental, extracurricular and residential settings in which peers play an educational role. The subcommittee chose to focus on three issues: faculty involvement in extracurricular activities, peer advising, and teaching assistants. Its recommendations in these three areas focused on providing more information to students, providing more incentives for faculty involvement, expanding programs and recognition, and developing additional training and means of support.

6. “Education for a complex global, technological society...”

To explore the need to educate students for a “complex global, technological society,” PCUE created the subcommittee on state-of-the-art technologies, chaired by Greg Farrington. It considered the proposition:

Every student will be proficient in using state-of-the-art technologies to access knowledge and information. The undergraduate experience will use new information technologies to enable more effective teaching and learning, enhance personal interaction and communication, connect students with faculty and simplify administrative functions.

This subcommittee focused on what is, in effect, “unexplored territory”; the educational uses of state-of-the-art technology have to be invented. The tools are identifiable and require a comprehensive communications system, home pages that can be placed on the Web, and some committed faculty advocates who are willing to transform individual departments to take advantage of the opportunities. How these possibilities affect advising and learning remains to be considered; indeed the question of how students best learn through technology is an area for exploration. Use of the new technologies has the effect of breaking the bounds of traditional academic schedules and raises the question of how one manages time in what can be a “total immersion” experience. Use of these technologies also recasts the definition of an international experience when connections can be made internationally and globally in real time. Specific tactics for developing projects have yet to be recommended but will be considered in future work.

7. The “union of theory and practice” across the curriculum

Since PCUE recognized that the responsibility for curriculum lies within the faculty and curriculum committees of the schools, it did not address curricular matters directly. However, curricular issues were raised in the course of its discussions, particularly with respect to academic programs that cross the boundaries of the undergraduate schools. Financial obstacles attributed to responsibility-centered budgeting were often cited as inhibiting the creation and sustenance of interschool and interdisciplinary programs and student exchange across schools.

Within this context, PCUE agreed to recommend to the schools the development of multi-school programs and exchanges that would promote the ability of students to take advantage of all of the resources of Penn. Examples of such programs include the University Minors Program proposed by SCUE, additional service-learning curricular options, intensive summer programs allowing students to “cross-over” into another school and certificate programs to provide exposure to course material that many students believe they need. PCUE encourages the cooperative work of the curriculum committees of the four undergraduate schools to diminish real and perceived barriers to cross-school programs and urges the curriculum committees to undertake a review of these matters individually and collectively and to report the result of this review to the campus community.

Many of the proposals considered by PCUE and its subcommittees deal with the creation of new programs. One issue discussed by PCUE concerned the alternatives of putting resources into fewer programs, thereby reducing students’ freedom by limiting choice, or retaining the flexibility for students to create their own programs in the *ad hoc* manner they do now. Members of PCUE did not view these as mutually exclusive alternatives but rather suggested that careful thought be given to developing optional curricular models for students while still allowing students to develop their own programs. There was recognition, however, that new programs need some level of institutional stability and oversight that can assure proper evaluation over time and that resources would be needed to support such activity in the future.

B. Characterizing the process of the undergraduate experience

In addition to considering aspects of the *nature* of the undergraduate experience, several PCUE subcommittees addressed aspects of the *process* of the undergraduate experience as it affects both current and prospective students. For current students, the process that is both most critical and most unsatisfactory is that of advising. Student complaints about advising cover a gamut of issues across all parts of the University ranging from lack of information needed to make informed choices to difficulty in identifying caring faculty to mentor and assist students through their education.

1. Advising and Information

To address concerns about advising, PCUE created a subcommittee on advising, chaired by David Pope. It considered the proposition:

In charting an intellectual path, every student will have access to faculty guidance and resources to make informed decisions about academic programs.

The subcommittee reviewed a great deal of available information that supported the view that students are largely dissatisfied with advising systems. The subcommittee noted the necessity of having a system to evaluate advising as well as the need to differentiate types of advising with appropriate expectations about who is best equipped to provide them. The work of this subcommittee will continue in the future; other questions to address include how to get freshmen into the advising system, how to bridge the gap in advising

between the freshman year and the declaration of a major in the sophomore year, issues about access to student transcripts, and the central issue of what shall be the role of the faculty member in the advising process.

To address the question of making certain kinds of information more accessible to students, PCUE created the subcommittee on student information systems, chaired by Jim Laing, as a subset of the subcommittee on advising. It considered a proposition recommending that:

It shall be the policy of the University of Pennsylvania to employ modern information technology in order to provide user-friendly computer assistance for use by students, faculty, advisors, departments and schools in advising, planning, scheduling, and monitoring educational programs, understood in the broadest sense to include not only curricular activities but also all aspects of University life that are essential to the undergraduate experience.

The subcommittee strongly endorsed the recent report of the Faculty Senate Committee on Students and Educational Policy (SEP), recommending the implementation of a student information system. Specifically, the subcommittee recommended the development of several projects using World Wide Web technology that can be integrated in future into a single seamless system. It also recommended using e-mail and list server technology to facilitate advising and course communications and creating a relational database system and associated user-interface system for advising and mentoring.

2. Admissions and Publications

The subcommittee on admissions and publications, chaired by Bruce Allen, considered the goal of assisting prospective students and parents to make informed choices about the Penn undergraduate experience. It considered the proposition:

The University’s formulation of the character of the educational experience it offers should be clear and comprehensible to prospective students. Penn’s admissions process should ensure that Penn reaches all students whose educational goals and level of academic preparation enable them to benefit from the Penn educational experience while they contribute their individual talents to enrich the University community.

The subcommittee viewed its work as generic since the substance of the educational experience in question has not been fully identified. In its discussions, the subcommittee raised a series of questions as hypotheses to be tested. These included questions about overall philosophy of recruitment, data collection to support recruitment and marketing strategies, and benchmarking and competitive positioning. These questions will form the basis for further work over this next several months.

IV. A context in which to offer the Penn undergraduate experience

The four undergraduate schools, both individually and cooperatively, provide the core of the Penn undergraduate experience and will continue to do so in the 21st century. The schools cannot, however, achieve all of the goals of the 21st Century Project on the Undergraduate Experience. In particular, the achievement of the goals of integrating residential life and the provision of student services with the academic programs, expanding opportunities for faculty-student interaction, improving non-discipline-based advising, and enhancing opportunities for community service, student leadership and self-governance appear to require the development of institutional arrangements and settings distinct from but related to the schools. These arrangements should support and reinforce the schools’ efforts to achieve the goals of the 21st-century Penn undergraduate experience.

PCUE discussed such arrangements at length, based on several proposals for collegiate and college house structures made by various faculty and Senate bodies. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the Council reached consensus on any one model, many of its members expressed strong support for experimentation with these kinds of faculty-student communities. The Council is more clear about possible goals of the communities than about their exact form. Indeed, it believes that several different forms might achieve the goals. Through most of its discussion of these organizational arrangements, the Council used the term “collegiate” to describe and define them, and that term is used here.

PCUE agreed that the next step should be to turn these ideas over to a faculty-student committee to plan two collegiate organizations of different sizes and configurations. Planning and some activities for these organiza-

tions should begin in 1995-96 with more substantial implementation of the plans taking place in 1996-97. In addition, the committee should plan other small pilot projects to test various possibilities for the collegiate model(s). Among the questions to be studied might be the affiliation of off-campus and high rise residents, the expansion of roles of faculty and students in existing residential facilities, and the physical needs of such communities (college hub facilities, dining facilities, residential space and organization, etc.).

What follows are the starting points for the work of such a committee.

A. Goals of collegiate communities

The primary goal of the collegiate communities would be to provide a human-scaled institutional framework for the integration of academic and non-academic aspects of the undergraduate experience. The communities should include resident and non-resident students, should include members of all classes, should be led by faculty and governed by faculty and student committees, and should offer some student services that are best provided in a distributed model. The collegiate communities would provide students with an additional structure of support at Penn, which may be particularly helpful for groups, such as sophomores, for whom there is no currently defined structure of affiliation. Affiliation with these collegiate communities could improve both students' experience and their academic performance.

In addition, the collegiate communities could:

- 1) help the faculty from the schools to achieve the goals of the Penn undergraduate experience by providing an institutional framework in which to interact with students from across the schools.
- 2) provide students with properly scaled academic communities that promote opportunities for interaction with faculty and older students, as well as for leadership, advising, and common or shared experiences.
- 3) create opportunities for undergraduates to work and communicate with faculty and students from the professional schools.
- 4) provide small-scaled opportunities for faculty and students to carry out programs that would not work in the larger community and to experiment with academic programs.
- 5) support the University's strategy of involvement in West Philadelphia and provide avenues for involvement in the whole Philadelphia community.

B. Form of the collegiate communities

While the optimal size and character of these collegiate organizations may vary depending upon physical setting and program, they should all be supported by a collegiate center or hub, with appropriate facilities, including electronic connections, to support a community of on- and off-campus residents, faculty and staff.

C. Strategies for achieving goals

A great many strategies could be identified to accomplish the goals of the collegiate organizations. Some sample strategies, derived from PCUE's own discussions, are listed below as possibilities to be tested.

- 1) Academic Choices and Shared Experiences
 - a) Co-curricular activities of the colleges might be organized around themes or the common interests of students and faculty.

- b) The colleges might use the University Reading Project to develop semester-long seminars that involve faculty and upper-division students in teaching freshmen. These seminars might double as the first writing courses for new students. Co-curricular activities—lectures, workshops on ethical issues, etc.—might build on the reading projects and subsequent courses and might differ from college to college.

- 2) Each college would have faculty and graduate student fellows recruited from many of Penn's schools. These faculty and graduate students could advise undergraduates and help them become members of research and other creative teams.

- 3) Colleges could reach out to academic departments to assist in the formation of study groups and laboratories, such as MAPLE.

- 4) Colleges could develop multifaceted community projects for their students and faculty.

- 5) Colleges could offer seminars developed by seniors and graduate students under the supervision of faculty, providing advanced students with a creative, capstone educational experience.

- 6) Colleges could serve as the setting for an organized social life aimed at personal development for the individual participant.

- 7) Colleges could organize intramural teams in many sports and help to increase student participation in recreational athletics.

- 8) Colleges could offer advising and counseling services.

- 9) Colleges could provide students with significant responsibility in the planning, design and implementation of activities and programs.

- 10) Colleges could create affiliations with selected alumni(ae) who could offer job mentoring opportunities for students.

V. Implementing the 21st-century undergraduate experience: Phase Two

This report brings to an end the work of the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education, which is the first phase of planning the design of the 21st-century Penn undergraduate experience. The second phase will be managed by the Council of Undergraduate Deans (CUD), chaired by the Provost. The CUD will organize and monitor the progress of a group of committees, some of them direct successors of the subcommittees organized under PCUE. The committees will report regularly to the CUD, which will both consider the issues raised by the work of the committees and communicate with the University as a whole.

CUD will become the steering committee for the 21st Century Project. Its first task will be to consider the recommendations of PCUE's subcommittees and to organize a comprehensive workplan for development of programs and pilot projects.

In concluding, PCUE offers special thanks to the many students, faculty, and staff who have participated in the various phases and aspects of its activities this spring. Their efforts have contributed a great deal to the work of the council.

Please see also the appendices, past insert:

- A. Planning process for PCUE
- B. List of subcommittees and their members
- C. Report on conversations with students and student groups.

Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education

Bruce Allen, Vice Dean and Director,
Wharton Undergraduate Division

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Associate Professor of Nursing

Stanley Chodorow, Provost

Gregory Farrington, Dean,
School of Engineering and Applied Science

Oscar Gandy,
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report continued past insert

APPENDICES

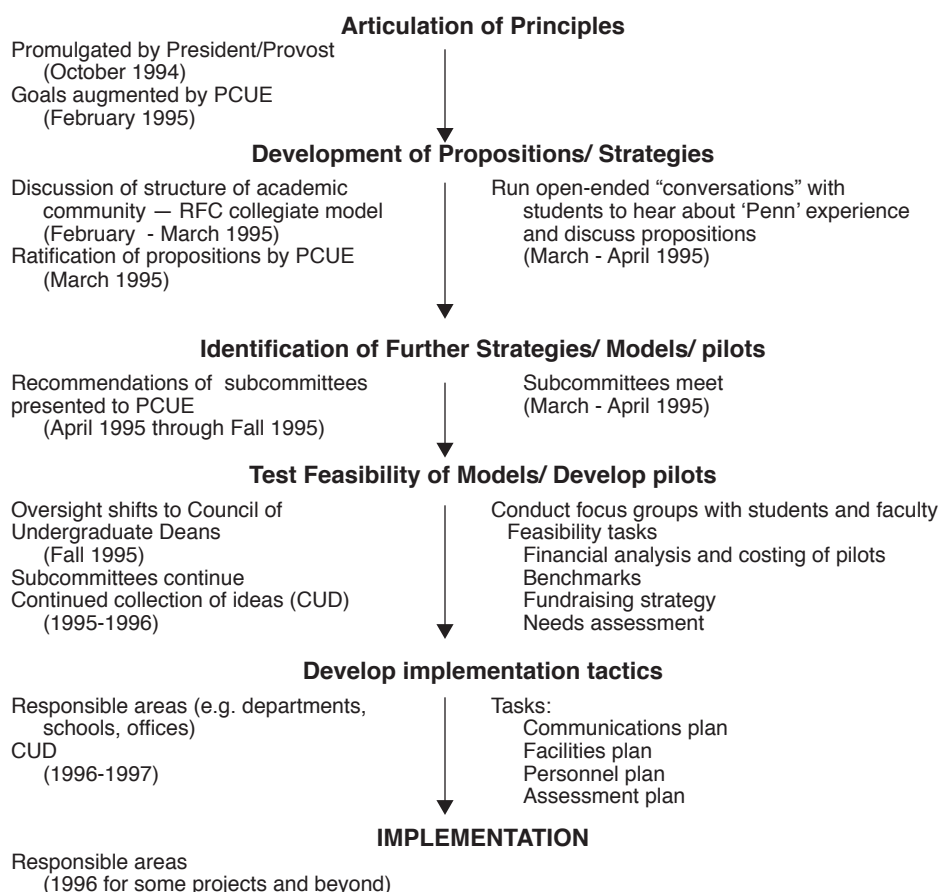
to the Report of the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education

A. Master Planning Process. The 21st Century Project for the Undergraduate Experience

B. Subcommittees of the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education

C. Report on Conversations with students and with student groups

APPENDIX A: The Master Planning Process



APPENDIX B: Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education Subcommittees

Subcommittee on Research and Scholarly Engagement

Robert Rescorla (SAS), *chair*
Warren Seider (SEAS)
Phoebe Leboy (DENT)
David Brownlee (SAS)
Terri Weaver (NUR)
Cedar LaLime (NUR '96)
Erin Branning (SAS '96)
Linda Wiedmann (Gen. Honors)

Access to Faculty in the Graduate and Professional Schools

Mary Naylor (NUR), *chair*
Harvey Rubin (MED)
Ralph Amado (SAS)
Herman Beavers (SAS)
Richard Miselis (VET)
Eric Stock (SAS '95)
Kim Vessey (SEAS '96)
Bob Schoenberg (SW) (Program for
Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Community)

Subcommittee on Community Service/Service Learning

Oscar Gandy (ANN), *chair*
Jane Isaacs Lowe (SW)
Larry Gladney (SAS)
Richard Shell (WH)
Julie Fairman (NUR)
Danny Gerber (SAS '96)
Ella Kim (WH '96)
Ira Harkavy (Center for
Community Partnerships)
David Grossman (Program for Student-
Community Involvement)

Subcommittee on Intercultural Experiences

Valarie Swain-Cade McCoullum (VPUL),
chair
Helen C. Davies (MED)
Sarah Kagan (NUR)
Samuel Z. Klausner (SAS)
Libby Paskin (WH-SAS '98)
Jamil Smith (SAS '97)
Madeleine Lopez (SAS '96)
Erick Santos (SEAS-MED '96)
Ann Kuhlman (International Programs)
Larry Burnley (Greenfield Intercultural Ctr)
Terry Conn (VPUL)

Subcommittee on Peer Educational Experiences

Satya Patel (WH/SAS '96), *chair*
Linda Brown (NUR)
Jan Van der Spiegel (SEAS)
Peter Petraitis (SAS)
Michele Richman (SAS)
Kelly Hauth (NUR '97)
Jason Wesbecher (WH '97)
Chuck Roe (SEAS '99)
Tricia Phaup (Fraternity-Sorority Affairs)

Subcommittee on State-of-the-Art Technologies

Greg Farrington (SEAS), *chair*
Mimi Mahon (NUR)
Al Filreis (SAS)
Jim O'Donnell (SAS)
Jordana Horn (SAS '95)
Meng Weng Wong (SEAS '96)
Carter Page (SEAS '96)
Patricia Renfro (Library)
Michael Eleey (DCCS)

Subcommittee on Advising

David Pope (SEAS), *chair*
Jim Laing (WH)
Kathleen McCauley (NUR)
Ben Nelson (WH '97)
Tara Dea (NUR '96)
Jane Havsy (SAS '96)
Pat Rose (Career Planning & Placement)
Diane Frey (SAS)

Subcommittee on Student Information Systems

Jim Laing (WH), *chair*
John Keenan (SEAS)
David Williams (SAS)
Dennis DeTurck (SAS)
Bob Stine (WH)
Steven O. Kimbrough (WH)
Alfred Wang (SAS '97)
Abeer Hoque (WH '95)
Dan Shapiro (Planning Analysis)
Ron Sanders (Registrar)
Katherine Becht (SEAS)

Subcommittee on Admissions and Publications

Bruce Allen (WH), *chair*
Bob Giegengack (SAS)
Carol Ladden (NUR)
Vicky Choy (SEAS '96)
Timothy Durkin (SAS '97)
Eugene Huang (SEAS/WH/SAS '97)
Eric Kaplan (Admissions)

APPENDIX C: Report on conversations with students and student groups

Introduction

During the month of April, staff from the 21st Century Project for the Undergraduate Experience, joined occasionally by members of the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education, met with student groups and individual students who wished to discuss their experiences at Penn. Staff conducted 13 of these "conversations," interviewing a total of 88 students; sessions lasted an average of two to three hours. During the sessions, students were asked to discuss what drew them to Penn as an institution of choice, their expectations of the University, and the experiences, both positive and negative that reflected whether or not those expectations had been fulfilled. Students were also asked to identify three things which they considered necessary for a student graduating in 2005 which the University might have some ability to influence.

Characteristics of the students

The 88 students were assembled on the basis of primary activity affiliation although the students in each group represented a broad-based cross-section of activities. The students were spread across all classes with a somewhat heavier representation of juniors and seniors. The overwhelming majority of students were enrolled in the College, although all the undergraduate schools had some degree of participation. Students identified a total of 213 activities and affiliations to which they considered themselves committed, including athletic teams, community service activities, Greek organizations, minority student organizations, peer education organizations, political organizations, and service learning classes. In other words, these were highly active and engaged students, who considered themselves visible "self starters" and among the most active students at Penn.

Most of the students were very positive about their Penn experience although many had particular concerns and complaints about specific aspects. Many of the students were admitted early decision; a few were transfer students. They came from a wide variety of geographic areas and a mix of urban, suburban, and occasionally rural environments.

Choice of Penn

Students overwhelmingly identified Penn's urban setting, its diversity of students and its academic reputation as important factors in their choice to matriculate. They cited as additional factors the strength and reputation of particular programs—Nursing, Wharton, Management and Technology—the "Ivy League" affiliation, the diversity of schools on one campus, and supportive comments about Penn from high school guidance counselors, high school friends who matriculated and family friends. Several students identified Penn's "academic flexibility" which would allow them to double or triple major or combine their degrees as a factor in their choice of Penn over other Ivy League institutions where they perceived such practices to be discouraged.

Students noted the unexpected beauty of the campus despite its urban setting. They also identified Ben Franklin and the "history of the place"

as important to them. Students also mentioned the appeal of Philadelphia's historical heritage and the age and architectural beauty of many of Penn's buildings, although some students pointed out that Penn's buildings lack the architectural unity of other campuses they visited.

Many students spoke about the "friendliness" of Penn students and staff as an impressive feature when they first visited campus. Students who had been hosted by a current Penn undergraduate were very positive about the experience and noted how "happy" people seemed to be at Penn. Students also spoke very favorably about their impressions of the racial and ethnic diversity of Penn's population. Students also identified the strength of particular communities to which they were drawn, noting specifically the Jewish community and the African American community in Du Bois College House.

Student Experiences

Students spoke about the successes and disappointments of their Penn experience. Their comments have been classified into four categories—academic, relating to their classroom experiences; advising, both general, major and peer-related; residential, both on and off-campus; and quality of life, relating to the general University community. Their comments, both positive and negative, are summarized below.

Academic experiences

Successes

Students spoke of the opportunities afforded by a rich academic community with well-respected researchers and scholars. They described their most powerful learning experiences as occurring most often in small seminars taught by an enthusiastic professor in which they can participate actively. (Psychology was cited as a department whose small upper-level seminars were particularly valuable.) Freshman seminars, honors courses, service-learning courses in a variety of departments, group projects and research experiences were cited most frequently as the best academic experiences for students. Students engaged in research experiences and independent studies described the "mind-opening" which occurs when working closely with faculty and graduate students. Students taking service learning courses in anthropology and urban studies eloquently described the way such courses integrated theory and practice and provided linkages between the classroom and the "real" world; many said such courses had built their confidence and given a sense of purpose to their education by providing the experience of active learning and problem-solving while developing leadership, presentation skills and a sense of communal responsibility. Nursing students also viewed their clinical work as linking theory and practice; describing the rigors and challenges of the nursing program, students suggested that a five-year option might be useful for some students. Wharton students also spoke positively about their access to liberal arts courses, which they chose primarily through word of mouth from other students.

Students view access to faculty, in both formal and informal settings, as an essential aspect of

their experience. Some students found faculty to be accessible and enthusiastic; they noted this was particularly important for large lecture courses. Students also identified faculty who had really made a difference by pushing them to develop their ideas as far as possible. Both history and urban studies were identified as departments (or programs) with faculty who are responsive to students (although other students also described history as a department where student access to faculty was difficult). Students also appreciated those faculty who host coffee hours and brown bag lunches and many cited their use of SCUE's "Take a Professor to Lunch" program. Faculty in residence, when available and open to interacting with students, were viewed as important role models.

Students also identified graduate students, particularly teaching assistants (TA's), as playing a central role in their experience. Students described the most helpful TA's as those who work closely with the professor, are well-prepared to lead sessions and make themselves available and approachable. The availability of the TA was described as especially important in large introductory courses and in those instances where language barriers may exist between the student and professor. Students also described the usefulness of the mentoring role graduate students can play; some students identified the philosophy department as encouraging such interaction between undergraduate and graduate students.

Disappointments

The chief disappointments described by students were the absence or inconsistency of the characteristics they described as strengths. In too many courses, students described faculty as unavailable, unenthusiastic or unable to communicate effectively. Such experiences, students suggested, led to student apathy and absence from class. Students suggested better training and "monitoring" of faculty as teachers with better support systems to improve those faculty who are not prepared to be good teachers. Similarly, students noted that TA's needed better guidance and monitoring by their faculty; some TA's were inadequately prepared to lead recitation sections. Students also mentioned difficulty with faculty who did not speak English very well. Students noted the need to be aggressive in seeking out faculty members; they described access to faculty as "difficult," particularly in certain departments. Students also believed that few students understand or value the general requirement.

Many students noted their disappointment over what they described as the "cutthroat competition" among students, particularly in science and other courses with grading done on a curve. Students noted that they felt at a disadvantage when fulfilling general requirements in these areas as a result of preprofessional competition. Pre-med classes were also described as too large and too competitive. Exams in these courses were described as too unrealistic; students noted that such tests needed to "reinforce learning," rather than create unhealthy burdens on students. Many students at Penn study "for grades" and not to learn, students noted.

Students also expressed their view that the tenure system does not reward faculty "who are

good teachers and are good for undergraduates.” Students also cited the need for more tenured women and minority faculty members. Students also noted that faculty did not get “credit” for doing independent studies with students, which made it more difficult for students to have independent research experiences.

Students noted that, where possible, they choose their courses on the basis of the perceived quality of the faculty members. Some students prefer to take courses in CGS because the class may be smaller and the preferred faculty member may teach in the evening. Most students thought it should be easier to take classes across schools than they had experienced.

Although students generally felt favorable about group projects in classes, some noted frustration that the relationships that were formed seemed to last only as long as the project itself. Some Wharton students described the “profit motive” as being the “A” in the course, while the friendships formed were secondary. Although Wharton students were generally positive about the Wharton 101 experience, those who participated in its initial year thought it lacked focus.

Advising experiences

Successes

Where advising was identified as successful, it was usually provided through some smaller setting where the advisor and student knew each other well. Thus, students described their best advising experiences as occurring in honors programs such as Benjamin Franklin Scholars, in PENNCAP where advisors were very supportive, or in the Athletics department where an advisor could reach students early if their athletic eligibility were threatened. Certain advisors in the College were also mentioned recurrently as “great.” In general, the peer advising programs were cited most often as worthwhile. The Freshman advisors, when consistent, were identified as positive; Wharton peer advising was also identified as helpful.

Disappointments

Overall, students were disappointed with advising at virtually all levels of the institution. Their comments noted the inadequacy of assistance for initial course selection as freshmen, the void that sophomore students drift into after the structured supports of the freshman year, the lack of faculty interest in general advising, the lack of continuity of advising in the College where students say they do not see the same person twice, the impersonality of faculty advising in Engineering, and the lack of cross-departmental communication among faculty. Students described their desire for a sense of connection with an advisor who would follow their academic career over four years and act as a “home base.” They also suggested that faculty advisors be affiliated with freshman residences. Some majors were described as “dead-ends” when it comes to advising; some departmental advising systems were described as assembly lines with one faculty advisor serving long lines of students. The peer advising system was described as weak and inconsistent, with peer advisors who don’t show up and inconsistent monitoring of the system. Students also described their frustrations with transferring credits and generally navigating the Penn system. Pre-health advisors also were categorized as too discouraging, too ready to

tell students to take a year off, and as sometimes “knowing less” than the students themselves. In general, students desired more contact with alumni for career advising and suggested brown bag lunches, lecture series, and e-mail connections.

Residential experiences

Successes

The Quad was generally viewed as a “great” first-year living experience, with some students assigned to other areas expressing initial disappointment in their living arrangement; some students with other first-year experiences chose to return to the Quad as Freshman advisors or RA’s. Some students described Hill House as an academically and socially supportive community; others described both Hill and Kings’ Court/English House as being totally self-contained. Students noted the strong e-mail bond among students in the science and technology wing of Kings’ Court/English House. High rise living was perceived to be the “natural progression” for second-year housing; although kitchens and bathrooms offer increased privacy and independence, students generally felt the high rises “cut them off” from meeting others. Students who lived in Kings’ Court/English House where they felt isolated their freshman year were most likely to express appreciation for the density of student population in the high rises. Students also suggested that living in doubles as opposed to triples should be encouraged; some noted that a greater degree of fighting occurs in triples, even among friends.

For other students, the selection of a college house or living-learning program met their individual needs. Students involved in community service described the Castle as a community center where their classes and activities such as WEPIC met. African American students described Du Bois College House as a “safe space” they can come “home” to, which is comfortable and supportive for people of color. Still other students noted that Stouffer and Ware College Houses had been “terrific” experiences, although one student described a “horrible” experience in Ware her first year. In general the college houses were seen as valuable and supportive communities where students have a high degree of control over their environment; in particular, the graduate fellows were singled out as invaluable, particularly at times of stress where they could serve as role models.

Students noted that good residential advisors can make a significant difference in the quality of a student’s experience and were particularly appreciative when they encountered an RA who helped them. They also remarked on the strong sense of community that pervaded the living learning programs in High Rise East and the orthodox Jewish community in High Rise North. Students also noted the existence of racial segregation, but were quick to point out that they did not perceive racial tension; several students were also very proud of their efforts to maintain racial and ethnically mixed living environments.

Several students also noted their satisfaction with living off-campus, noting the independence from involvement in University activities and services. Students who lived in Greek chapter houses also liked the smaller communities represented by their houses and the exposure to older students who could be helpful to them.

Disappointments

Students generally expressed the desire for more on-campus living options after the freshman year and noted the lack of widespread publicity about college house options. Many described the high rises as “shabby,” “isolating,” lacking privacy and having rooms that were too small; they also noted that it was financially more attractive to live off-campus. Students added that the choice of living off-campus was a factor in the segregation of students, since students chose to live with friends and often did not see other students. Segregation, some added, was generally “self-imposed, for all groups.”

Some felt support from RA’s was inconsistent and poorly monitored in terms of following protocol and programming requirements; others noted that RA’s simply had too many students to “police” which compromised the helpfulness of the role.

Quality of life experiences

Successes

Students uniformly felt that their involvement in smaller group activities and organizations was enormously valuable to them, providing them with skills and confidence they would need in the future.

Students involved in intercollegiate athletics spoke of the diversity of people who need to learn to work together on teams. Participating in sports, they noted, also requires that students structure their time to see that everything gets done in what is frequently a four-day week, when teams travel from Thursday to Sunday. For many, participation in sports built self-esteem and gave them a sense of school identity because of their representation of “Penn.” Student athletes also expressed a stronger view of Penn’s strengths in comparison to other institutions which they had visited during competitions.

Student members of fraternities and sororities described the strong networking aspect of Greek life, the collaborative experiences of working with the three main umbrella organizations — IFC, Panhellenic, and BigC — and the manner in which involvement in Greek chapters had led to other activities throughout the University. For many students, the Greek system has functioned as a kind of organizing principle through which they connect with the rest of Penn. Students also described the mentoring functions provided by older Greek students; for women, the sorority system was described as a strong “women’s support network.”

Students also described other important communities in their lives: the Castle was described as a permeable community where students live, eat, learn and have academic discussions. The Penn Band was noted as a great social, if not musical, experience that was both inviting and completely casual. The DP was described as a self-contained community which provided support to its members, even when they were in competition with each other.

Students described their activities as the part of college that prepared them for the real world, teaching them how to juggle, prioritize and extend themselves; many students were surprised that it was possible to be so involved and still manage their schoolwork effectively. Students also valued their extra-curricular advisors, particularly those who had helped them

to build bridges between their academic and other activities. In general, students described Penn as preparing them to be aggressive; getting through Penn "builds confidence and character," some noted. Most students believed that to be successful at Penn, one needed to be highly self-motivated.

Many students praised Penn's transitional programs for first year students, particularly PennQuest, which formed lasting friendships, and new student orientation which made it easy to meet new people. Other students noted the importance of the PreFreshman Program in their own transition. Some students suggested having "ongoing" programs throughout the year as a way to distribute necessary information beyond the first few days and to counter the view of some students that attending "help" programs the first week "wasn't a cool thing to do." The timing of information regarding services and programs appears crucial to assisting students in navigating their way to advisors, services and academic programs. Several students suggested the addition of training sessions on the use of e-mail and other technology.

Students liked the opportunities to take advantage of the city although many regretted that they had not done more. Students expressed concerns about safety while noting that they perceived safety to have improved. They also remarked that it was expensive to do things downtown and that transportation was a factor.

Students also expressed strong sentiments about the importance of Penn traditions in building school spirit and pride; some students noted the value of the history and traditions of the Palestra as a facility where they experience school spirit. In terms of social life, students were very positive about CHATS, but thought more bands, poets and other entertainment would improve it.

Students from SCUE and the Undergraduate Assembly also expressed pride in reports they had been involved in producing to improve the undergraduate experience. Although students did not uniformly believe that the Penn environment encouraged intellectual debate and discussion, most students viewed Penn as a place where much serious discussion occurs; students noted that most students at Penn have opinions and are not hesitant in expressing them.

Disappointments

For many students, what were perceived by some as successes were also disappointments. Penn was described by many as a "political" environment where everyone wants to be a leader. Although the campus is seen as diverse, students described groups as "not integrated." Students noted a need to find ways for people "to feel they belong to the whole community"; many students noted they did not identify with either Penn or the city of Philadelphia.

Students described Penn's bureaucracy as "daunting" and far more complicated than it needs to be; everything one does in areas such as academics, ethnic relations, advis-

ing requires a level of personal initiative that students often resent. Students noted that Penn can be overwhelming unless one becomes part of an organization which links younger and older students. Some students suggested that a certain type of student—uninvolved, easily bored, without seeking the illuminating academic experiences—will get nothing out of Penn and will leave a cynic. Students also described the difficulty of establishing relationships and new friendships after the first year.

Greek students were disappointed about delayed rush, describing the time commitments of pledging and rushing as little different from many other unmonitored student activities. Other students described the Greek presence on Locust Walk as too dominant and noted that Greek pledging absorbs many students from other University activities and that membership is exclusive and expensive.

Students also described particular difficulties they encountered: Student athletes noted the difficulty of studying abroad, depending upon the sport played and its season. Some students of color described Penn's environment as "tolerating" but not "appreciating" people. Other students noted that they were made to feel like failures if they needed to take a year off, and believed stronger support and encouragement should have been given to them. Students also described the high degree of *ad hominem* debate at Penn which they believed was perpetuated by the DP. Students also criticized student reliance on the DP as the source of information, noting that it was too often a shaper of student opinion about issues.

Students also described their dissatisfaction with a number of student services and student governance functions. Students identified the Student Health Service, in particular, as a source of poor experiences in diagnosis and bureaucracy, citing issues of competence, access and continuity of service. Student Financial Services was also cited for its inability to solve complaints quickly. Student peer education groups expressed concern over the cutbacks in funding for their activities, noting the economies achieved by the work they perform and their expectation that resources should be available to help students "expand their horizons." Students in the College expressed the view that Career Planning and Placement was too Wharton-focused.

Students also complained about the Student Activities Council's funding policies and practices, describing them as "unfair" and "inconsistent." Students described receiving mixed messages about funding that stress collaboration between groups and then diminish funding when collaboration occurs. Groups with a cultural focus, which depend heavily on the use of ethnic foods for their activities, believe SAC's restrictions on spending money for food to be unfair. Many students suggested that breaking SAC allocations into "bloc grants" to umbrella organizations for distribution would be a more equitable method. Students also complained about the bureaucracy and powerlessness of

the Undergraduate Assembly, describing it as a "front organization that gets little done." Other students complained that the NEC targets only certain groups of students to serve on campus committees.

Student views of the future

Students were remarkably similar in their views of what a 21st-century student would need. In terms of skills and competencies, they most often identified technological competence and interpersonal skills developed within the context of a multicultural, multiethnic community. Students also emphasized that the ability to express oneself effectively and persuasively in oral and written communication would be essential to furthering one's professional career and would demonstrate the highly developed analytical reasoning skills of a Penn graduate.

Students stressed the need for Penn to provide enhanced opportunities for faculty/student interaction through "hands-on" learning and opportunities for research and models of active learning. In addition to small group and team experiences, students identified the need for networks both within the institution and beyond, including enhanced affiliation with alumni and expanded internship opportunities. Such relationships were seen as providing the opportunity to connect with and feel connected to the community both at Penn and beyond. Students suggested such enhancements would also encourage "Penn pride."

Students also spoke of the need to improve the delivery of some services to Penn undergraduates. Students suggested the importance of developing a strong tie with at least one faculty member, advisor or activity. Within Student Health, for example, students suggested developing mechanisms to ensure continuity of services between providers and students with the aim of lessening perceived bureaucracy and stress. Students also suggested augmenting the service of CPPS to respond more broadly to the needs of students in the College.

Students spoke of Penn's need to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate intellectual independence while at the same time providing enhanced interaction among students, faculty, graduate students and community members. Experiences that promoted leadership, independent learning, decision-making, self-motivation, self-confidence and satisfaction were viewed as important ways for students to test themselves and learn the adaptive techniques they would need in the future. The opportunity to develop cultural competence and an understanding of the importance of each individual's unique contribution, heritage and culture was viewed by students as an important element of learning how to work within and manage a team and successfully fill future leadership roles. Students also emphasized that Penn should promote experiences that gave students an understanding of how each individual can make a difference in society.

Comment is welcome from all members of the University Community. It should be sent by September 15, 1995, to Dr. Robert F. Lucid or Dr. Kim Morrisson, Executive Directors of the 21st Century Project, at 200 Houston Hall/6306, or by e-mail to: rlucid@dept.english.upenn.edu or morrisrn@pobox.upenn.edu.