

Undergraduate Educational Foundations Committee

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Response from nearly all committee members to both meetings and to the questionnaire was quite positive and enthusiastic. Each committee member was provided with an executive summary of the College's 2004-2005 Coordinated Undergraduate Education Program in an effort to focus their attention on educational foundations for first year students. In accordance with the College's Strategic Plan and the University's Master Plan, the chair of the committee introduced the group to some of the CUE activities in 2004-2005. She informed the group that CUE centers on: enhancing academic excellence, enriching faculty development, strengthening co-curricular activities, student support services, and connecting the college with the community. By contributing to the improvement of student life and learning, CUE helps us increase enrollment and student persistence, as supported by recent increases in freshmen and new transfer registrations. CUE presents an over-arching strategy that coordinates and enriches instructional activities in order to increase enrollment, promote retention, and support institutional goals. The committee was informed of our efforts to track student performance in CPE, learning communities, Writing across the Curriculum projects, Gateway courses, and summer and immersion programs. They were also apprised that CUE encompasses Coordinated Freshman and Transfer Programs, Adult Education, and a

number of co-curricular activities such as digital supplemental instruction, pre-orientation workshops and advisement and that faculty development seminars relating to CUE goals were also launched.

We also addressed select objectives of the 2004-2005 University Performance Management Report to implement a college plan to strengthen undergraduate education and the target to demonstrate a comprehensive approach through CUE. Information on Brooklyn College's selection as one of 10 founding public institutions for the Foundations of Excellence project was submitted and it was emphasized that this project adds an important component to CUE goals. Both initiatives enable the College to conduct a rich and detailed examination of its environments and to connect finding to student-level input and outcomes data.

Individual responses from committee members, submitted after a review of CUE and other materials, are highlighted below.

Committee on Undergraduate Education
Questions for Subcommittees

Educational Foundations. What should a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of first and second year students, including transfers, look like?

It was agreed that, early in the educational process, it is crucial for students to make contact with faculty members. One recommendation was that every student who enters the college be required to declare a division of interest (social sciences, arts and humanities, etc.). This will force students to begin thinking about the connection between their experiences here at BC and their career after graduation. Students need to

be provided with the sense that they are not different from their peers in the need to orient to college; they need to understand its functions and benefits, and realistically assess its demands in both time and effort. They need to be oriented to higher education's concepts of discipline based learning and interdisciplinary approaches and they should have the capacity to understand the concept and value of the major and minor in the totality of the education process. Finally, they need to see that the "gateway" experience is not an insurmountable obstacle, but can address areas of learning, as well as kinds of learning that may require a great deal more introduction and assessment of timing than others.

We all agreed that first and second year students need to fully develop and explore options that will lead to self-satisfaction and begin by understanding themselves in relation to their academic interest and career goals. Self-knowledge is the foundation on which all other important decisions are made. For example, we need to do more self-exploration workshops, and encourage more students to avail themselves of career assessment tools.

How can we facilitate the transition to Brooklyn College for all new students? How can we most effectively communicate curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success?

Because expectations and resources vary so widely between disciplines, this has to be done within individual courses and departments. There simply is no "one size fits all" answer to this question. It might be productive to garner feedback on these issues from

graduating seniors, so that departments can more clearly identify problems in this area, which is crucial if we are to provide appropriate support systems for educational success.

In addition to maintaining and enhancing current CUE and Student Life activities, some other suggestions from the group included workshops on study skills, chances to meet faculty and staff in an informal atmosphere, mentoring with upper division students, Degreeworks seminars for students and faculty, etc. We also may want to launch some special outreach efforts as we implement the new Core, a key opportunity for the 2005-2010 strategic plan.

How can we elevate the experience of first and second year students to a high priority for the faculty? How can we productively involve senior faculty in teaching first and second year students?

Some faculty felt that the question assumed that introductory courses are not a high priority, and that senior faculty are disinterested in them. One faculty member mentioned that it is hard to speak to freshmen and upperclassmen in the same voice and that freshmen do not make the same connections that upper-class students do. One solution is to increase our learning communities; this will also introduce more interdisciplinary projects and themes into the curriculum of first and second year students.

A better question might center on what the college can do to provide resources for those interested in improving these courses. In some areas, resources already exist, such as the

CUE faculty development seminars, the outcomes assessment committees, the gateway to the major committee, information technology seminars, etc.

Finally, with the advent of the new Core, we will be revising learning communities in an effort to encourage more inter-disciplinary projects and curricular innovations among participating faculty. In addition to senior faculty, more efforts will be made to recruit junior faculty as well. The pairing of senior and junior faculty in learning communities should create a new dynamic and reform, particularly in the area of inter-disciplinary studies and technological instruction. We need to form cross departmental communities especially for junior faculty and allow faculty to self-select the disciplines they wish to collaborate with. Faculty should also be given recognition for their efforts in learning communities and have it so noted with promotion and tenure materials.

How can we best engage students, both in and out of the classroom, in order to develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission?

It was again stressed by the group that we need to require students to contact departmental faculty advisors early in their studies. Students can be effectively motivated by a clearer sense of the connection between their studies at Brooklyn College and their future careers. We need to show that if the faculty is engaged the students will see it.

Internships provide the incentives needed to engage larger numbers of students in the career development process earlier in their college careers. The career development programs make important—though sometimes indirect—contributions to retaining students during the insecure years (freshmen and sophomore). Notably, the career planning process helps students avoid inappropriate academic and career goals that can be barriers to student success. This process will also assist students in selecting work and internship experiences that will support their academic and career goals over those that will be distractions.

How can we ensure that all students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities?

Given the rich diversity of the student body, we agreed that probably the best solution is to make certain that students are engaged with each other. This tends to emerge naturally from coursework and extracurricular activities, though some students unfortunately cannot engage in this regard due to work and family commitments. Nevertheless, a focus on campus-wide events—cultural activities, campus presentations such as Science Day and Faculty day-- should continue. The only way that we can ensure the acquisition of anything that we want our students to experience is to give it to them. It is the same with all areas of learning: you must pick your battles wisely, and recognize that you cannot structure all learning experiences; some will of necessity have to be acquired by chance encounter. Experiences in comparative cultures and the diversity of outlooks and perceiving differences currently are provided in Core 9. We can no longer wait for such

experiences in upper division courses and must bring them into the early learning cycles of our students.

One other suggestion was for the institution of a capstone course/project that requires the integration of the liberal arts ideas, world views, etc. that they have encountered. The Common Readings project, the new Brooklyn On My Mind series and the SEEK department's cultural events are taking us in the right direction. We need more such initiatives which introduce our students en masse to different people and worlds. Learning about other's ideas and views has to be taken outside of the classroom as well.

From a career perspective, internships are also an ideal vehicle for integrating a range of career development activities with both the academic programs at the college and the world of work in the community beyond, often offering students the opportunity to become competitive and experienced members of the larger community. Internships can offer a variety of opportunities for students to learn how to relate to people of diverse backgrounds, and the opportunity to engage in cultural venues that will provide them with knowledge they may not be able to get elsewhere.

How can we promote students' understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and for society, and support the development of relevant personal goals?

The group felt that students frequently learn best from peers about their experiences. We do not take sufficient advantage of some of the student resources that we potentially have

available. This comes back to helping students gain an understanding of what a university is and why come to one. We cannot create engaged students out of this air, but if we can educate them on what it means to be a civil- minded student and university, students will develop these attitudes and behaviors of their own accord. There is a strong danger at a commuter college of students remaining disconnected. We must continue to instill concern and loyalty for this college.