TWO PROPOSALS TO MODIFY
THE REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION
Amy Cohen, September 29, 2005

SOME UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

The New Brunswick/Piscataway campus of Rutgers is the flagship component of the State University of New Jersey. It has obligations to the state and nation in the areas of research, teaching, and service. To meet its educational obligations, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, it must attract the best possible students and faculty and must also provide well-considered and well-supported instructional programs which not only allow, but also encourage, students to maximize their academic achievements. To do all this, the faculty must be engaged in the governance of its educational enterprise as well as in classroom instruction, advising, and co-curricular activities for students such as subject-matter clubs and research activities for undergraduates.

For these reasons I believe that there should be a single unit for both faculty and students in the arts and sciences. In parallel with other units in RU-NB/P, it should be called the School of Arts and Sciences of RU-NB/P. The open issue is the relationship of this unit to the clusters of physical and human resources that serve students in the various geographical parts of RU-NB/P.

Proposal I: Colleges/Campuses/Clusters/Communities

RU-NB/P for inescapable historical reasons has several geographically separate clusters of resources (human and physical) to serve its undergraduate student population. These clusters currently are denoted “colleges”. Undergraduate students are enrolled in one of these colleges – often regardless of their intended or declared major and regardless of whether they live in dormitories or not. Thus these colleges cannot be truly “liberal arts colleges” since they serve students in professional tracks as well as in FAS majors. Indeed, it is a strength of our system that students have opportunities to share dormitories and activities with others with a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and goals.

University College, whose core mission is to serve students who have experienced an interruption in their formal education, adapts its practices and student activities to meet the needs of students who typically have full-time obligations to family and to employment. Few of its students live in dormitories, but it does have physical facilities, staff, and hours of operation adapted to its students needs. While many UC students are returning to (or beginning) college after a hiatus in education, others returned to a two-year college before transferring to RU.

Rutgers College, historically an elite liberal arts college, now provides residence life and recreational services to students in several professional schools – e.g.,
Engineering and Pharmacy which admit freshmen; SCILS and the School of Business that admit juniors. It houses its students on three geographically separate campuses – College Avenue Campus, Busch Campus, and Livingston Campus – too say nothing of its extensive populations living in fraternity/sorority houses and in “off campus” neighborhoods adjacent to CAC. Its 12,000 or more students and affiliates often have trouble gaining access to its overstressed staff.

Douglass College focuses its attentions on issues in women’s education and is in the often awkward position of developing attractive innovations which cannot be made widely enough available to women in RU-NB/P because of restrictions imposed by grants or donors. Female students in the School of Engineering often affiliate with Douglass.

Livingston College, sharing its campus with residences for Rutgers College students, has not the resources either on-campus or adjacent to campus to satisfy either its own students or its Rutgers College colony.

These “general purpose” colleges have different rules and requirements. Their budgets allow different levels of student services. The Task Force makes a convincing argument that there are inequities and confusions that call out for rationalization and improvement. However, its proposals for “Campuses” seems to threaten many readers because of lack of detail and lack of respect for the positive aspects of smaller more coherent organizations within a large public research university. What I try to do here is to propose some modifications of the re-structuring proposals that may meet some of these concerns.

A. There should be a single unit, as suggested by the Task Force, combining students and faculty in the Arts and Sciences. I suggest the name School of Arts and Sciences – New Brunswick/Piscataway in parallel with the names of all other units of RU-NB/P. This unit would set policies and standards for admissions, academic standing, and graduation. It would be the unit admitting undergraduates who (at least at the time of application) intend to major in the current FAS disciplines, in SCILS, in Business, and in the BA programs in MGSA, and as well as those who are undecided about majors.

B. Rutgers College, as the historical progenitor of Rutgers University, would accept the fact that “Rutgers” has now become the name and the “brand” for the University as a whole. Its national and international reputation has been co-opted by the university. As a result, I suggest that Rutgers College graciously accept its “victory” and surrender its name to its worthy successor institution. At the same time, I suggest that it divide itself into two smaller and more manageable units. Until we can find suitable naming opportunities, these could be called Old Queens College and Busch College.

C. These five general purpose Undergraduate Colleges (Busch, Douglass, Livingston, Old Queens, and University) should provide and/or house coherent services and activities for their resident and non-resident affiliates. Leadership for these colleges should be vested in Deans reporting the Vice President for Undergraduate Education, with “dotted
line” responsibility to the V.P. for Student Affairs (or vice versa) and some kind of “dotted line” responsibility to the deans of the several Schools. These college deans should be charged with organizing advising, both personal and academic, and with supporting the usual range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and student organizations typical of American universities. Centralized university services (financial aid, housing, dining, transportation, etc.) should be charged with cooperating with these college deans on areas of mutual concern. College Deans should be charged to provide input to deans of Schools generally on current trends and innovations in undergraduate education, and particularly on individual student concerns relating to academic progress and opportunities. College deans should have appropriate budget and should be provided with authority to involve faculty as appropriate. Deans of Schools should be charged with making faculty available as appropriate and given the ways and means to reward that involvement.

This perspective on the general purpose colleges recognizes that students often change academic plans. Some move into professional tracks; others move out of them. The Task Force plan to put all academic advisers formerly on college staffs into the new Arts and Science unit misses the point that the college academic advising efforts often involve choices among various Schools. The Task Force plan also suggests a clear split between personal and academic advising which does not exist. Many students come to faculty for help with “academic” problems but present evidence of overwhelming personal problems that interfere with academic work. Decisions about academic standing (probation and dismissal) require input from both personal and academic advising staff.

C.i. A student’s affiliation with a College should be determined only after admission to a School in RU-NB/P and after payment of the deposit that confirms acceptance of admission and leads to classification as “admit-coming”. This process should apply to all undergraduates admitted to any of the degree-granting schools. Offering admission to “Rutgers College of Arts and Science” suggests a tie to the historical location of Rutgers College on CAC. Since most students in this unit will have to be affiliated with some other residential college, the name “Rutgers College of Arts and Sciences” amounts to an unseemly “bait and switch” scheme.

Students, after paying their deposit, should be asked for information relevant to assigning affiliation with a College. Some fraction of the spaces to be filled each admissions cycle in each College (I’d suggest at most 40%) should be filled on a “rolling” basis looking at preferences. After that quota is filled, the rest of the spaces should be allocated based on the educational benefits of diversity of background, interests, talents, and such. This inoculates each College with a substantial number of happy affiliates while also testifying to the commitment of the university to the equality of the colleges as to academic quality. It also allows the balance of these new-style colleges by SAT scores.

C.ii. Some of these colleges might have particular themes or focuses; others might not. In particular, University College should focus on returning students. (Now that residents of the U.S. reach legal majority at 18, virtually all our undergraduates are “adults” in the
legal sense and it no longer makes sense to speak only of UC students as “adult
students”). Douglass College should focus on women’s education. Busch College might
focus on science and technology. A student – male or female – interested in women’s
history or women in politics or such – might want to affiliate with Douglass. A student
planning a career in intellectual property law might want to affiliate with Busch even if
she or he plans to major in history. Undergraduates in the performing arts at Mason
Gross might appreciate the opportunity to live on Douglass.

C.iii. The residence halls on a College’s campus would primarily serve students
affiliated with that College. Most Douglass dorms would be single-sex dorms housing
women. Some might be co-ed facilities serving men and women who affiliate with
Douglass but who prefer co-ed housing options. This radical change in housing patterns
might make Douglass campus attractive to more students. It would also acknowledge the
facts that males can have serious intellectual interests in women’s issues and that some
women with such interests might want co-ed residence halls. Some residence halls on
other campuses should become single sex-dorms. In particular, there should be a
Bunting-Cobb-II on Busch to meet the needs of women in STEM fields who would prefer
to avoid co-ed living for personal, cultural and/or religious reasons. Indeed, as we have
seen recently at Yale, some religious males also prefer single-sex living arrangements.

C.iv. A student’s diploma should have the words “Rutgers, the State University of
New Jersey” in large type and the student’s major(s) and the sponsoring School(s) in
smaller type. The name of the college should not appear on the diploma. While there
should be one vast and impressive University graduation/commencement ceremony, the
distribution of BA and BS diplomas should be in more intimate and manageable settings.
The various constituencies of RU-NB (students, faculty, administrators, and alumni
groups) should have ample opportunity to discuss the relative merits of diploma
ceremonies in Colleges and those in Departments. There are well-founded arguments for
each choice. If the University wishes to stress faculty involvement, one could follow the
model of some universities which schedule diploma and hooding ceremonies by
department including baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees. However, given the
number of inter-departmental graduate programs at Rutgers, I currently favor
undergraduate diploma ceremonies by college for the Arts and Science unit. Having
smaller colleges and diverting students with professional majors to their School’s
ceremonies would obviate the early departures of students and their families that have
recently demeaned Rutgers College commencements.

C.v. Alumni associations serving Schools and Colleges should cooperate. We have
already seen beginnings of cooperation among alumni from R.C., L.C., and U.C. This
cooperation could extend its umbrella to the graduates of the parts of the former Rutgers
College. It leaves the School of Arts and Sciences along with the School of Business and
SCILS to figure out how to share alumni loyalty and alumni giving with the colleges that
provided undergraduate living and advising services. The need for this sharing will
perhaps be one additional motivation for the faculty to become more closely engaged
with undergraduate life and undergraduate education.
Proposal II: Faculty involvement in undergraduate education and related topics

There is currently no faculty body in New Brunswick with official jurisdiction over matters of undergraduate education that affect departments in more than one School or Faculty. There needs to be one. The most natural body is the New Brunswick Faculty Council. This council should take its formal place in the University Regulations. With regard to undergraduate education, the charges to the Faculty Council should include activities at several scales.

A. Sponsorship of at least one open Undergraduate Education Conference each year. Conferences of this nature over the last eight years have attracted faculty from all units and have spurred many valuable discussion and suggestions. This broader group might be more effective than the suggestion of plenary sessions for an “augmented FAS” limited to faculty from FAS and departments offering majors to students in the new Arts and Science unit. Such an “augmented FAS” excludes Engineering, Pharmacy, and some departments from Cook—three units whose curricular interests and efforts overlap with those of the current FAS at levels at and beyond a “core curriculum”

B. Review of committee reports and recommendations to appropriate officers and units on regulations governing undergraduate education in areas that affect more than one School. One example is development and implementation of a “core curriculum”. Others might be requirements or practices of one School that affect the workload or effectiveness of another. Faculty Council, as a representative body, is neither too large nor too small to take on this role.

C. Working committees (standing or ad hoc) to generate proposals and to prepare reports for Faculty Council. As in the past, such working committee can draw membership from outside the membership of Faculty Council itself. These committees would be small enough to deal with collecting fact and opinion and formulating proposals for later debate in Faculty Council or referral to appropriate officers or units. Such committees might be a way to engage in periodic reviews of the coherence and effectiveness of departmental undergraduate programs, by which I mean the full run of course offerings and co-curricular offerings—not just the departmental major(s). A second set of topics might be the needs of students admitted to one School and transferring to another within RU-NB/P. Another topic might be ways for groupings of departments from more than one School to develop patterns for double majors and BA-MS tracks that might serve both students’ career interests and New Jersey employers’ workforce interests.

D. Someone, Faculty Council might discuss who, should arrange for systematic meetings between general academic advisors and Undergraduate Directors to ensure that everyone is up-to-date on issues and regulations and concerns. Similarly, someone needs to be responsible for facilitating appropriate communication between faculty and personal advising staff. Finally, someone needs to arrange for convenient ways to sponsor (or coordinate) student groups with disciplinary or interdisciplinary but academic focus—e.g., Pre-Med Clubs, Student Actuarial Society.