

Special Committee on the Colleges Interim Report, Spring 2003

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

The Special Committee on the Colleges was established to review the academic role of the colleges at UCSC and raise issues for consideration by the Academic Senate. The resolution establishing the committee required submission of an interim report. The committee has met several times during the academic year and considered a series of issues. This report summarizes some of our discussions for the purpose of initiating broader input from the Academic Senate membership.

Academic role of the colleges in undergraduate education

The colleges play an important role in the initial academic experience of undergraduate students. We continue to see the primary role of the colleges in the first-year experience and academic advising of students outside their majors. The colleges track the academic standing of undergraduate students and oversee their academic progress.

The core course has been the subject of several reviews over the years, and we are concerned that it should not be the subject of perpetual review. In our view, the core course provides an important writing experience for students in their first-year that needs to be retained in the graduation requirements. The core course is effectively the second writing course required of first-year students, matching the two-course requirement of the other seven undergraduate campuses of the University. The core course is also considered to be a community-building experience in the colleges that is attractive to students. The sections of the core course are typically taught by non-ladder-rank faculty. It is not practical to redirect faculty resources to these courses, and the instructors of the core courses have expertise in writing pedagogy and first-year education. The new discovery seminars now allow first-year students to have contact with ladder-rank faculty in small classes.

We suggest that the content and structure of the core course, and its role in the first-year academic experience, be reviewed by the Provosts in consultation with college faculty. We are aware that the possibilities of revising or moving the core course out of the colleges have been discussed on campus. In our view, removing the core course would effectively end the role of the colleges as academic units. We recommend involvement of the Senate in these discussions through the College Provosts or the Committee on Educational Policy. Enrollments in the core course count in the allocation of resources across units. Perhaps, the allocation should be reviewed by the appropriate parties.

Undergraduate advising is an important role of the colleges. The colleges are able to advise a manageable number of students and track their academic progress through their entire career at UCSC. Other universities have recently decentralized undergraduate advising to the same purpose. It is our opinion that advising is done well by the colleges at UCSC, even though improvement may be possible, and should continue to be a responsibility of the provosts.

Involvement of the faculty in the colleges

Two primary issues of concern of the Administrative Taskforce on the Academic Role of the Colleges were the involvement of the faculty in the colleges and the governance of the colleges. We do not see that involvement of the faculty in the colleges necessarily benefits undergraduate

education or the campus, or that it should be sought as a goal in itself. Faculty involvement in the colleges comes at the cost of faculty involvement in undergraduate education in other ways. Ladder-rank faculty members play essential roles in formal classroom teaching and major advising. It could be counterproductive to replace effort in these activities with a more active role in the colleges.

The faculty of a college has responsibility of academic oversight for the college, and this role of the faculty has largely been ignored. The Faculty of the College consists of those Fellows of the College who are members of the Academic Senate (inclusive of Lecturers SOE). Typical bylaws of the colleges allow delegation of the authority of the Faculty of the College to an Executive Committee of the Faculty. The provost of each college should assure that the college faculty oversees curriculum as prescribed by the bylaws of the college or delegates authority to the provost for the academic role of the college.

We have reviewed the bylaws of each college and found that some revision may be desirable. We recommend that the Provosts revisit the bylaws of each college and consider whether revision is desirable, whether the procedures for faculty oversight of their academic role are being followed and whether the responsibilities of the Faculty of the College are being met.

Many of the academic activities of the colleges are delegated to staff that are not members of the Academic Senate by the Provost. We think that it is appropriate for the Provost to be granted this responsibility and authority by the Faculty of the College. This should be a decision made by the college faculty. Further, it is essential that the administration appoint members of the Academic Senate to provost positions.

The campus administration has aired concerns about faculty participation in the colleges. Notably, three searches for new provosts failed this year. We recommend the administration begin its recruitment for anticipated provost vacancies early in the next academic year. Other recommendations may be a premature response to the experience of a single year. However, we understand that the compensation to departments for the loss of a faculty member to a provost position has been cut by about 2/3rds in the last year or so without prior notice. Faced with such disincentives, departments are unlikely to encourage their members to accept provost positions.

The committee discussed the procedures for affiliating faculty with colleges. We conclude that faculty affiliation with a college should be voluntary (and, further, not linked to office location when a faculty member's department occupies offices in a college). We also encourage the provosts to think about, and formalize, the procedures by which someone is named a fellow. We also agree that faculty members might want, and should be able, to become a fellow of more than one college.

Other issues

One issue that our committee was asked to address is whether colleges should be administered by the academic divisions. We believe that additional colleges should not be placed under divisional administration while the experiment of Colleges Nine and Ten is in progress. However, we have not seen any significant differences or benefits to date. We are concerned that the colleges would naturally face competition for resources with the academic and research programs of the division and its departments, particularly in times of stress, and come out on the short end.

Another issue suggested to the committee by the Administrative Taskforce on the Academic Role of the Colleges was whether it would be desirable to create a graduate college. We do not see a substantive academic role for such a college in the tradition of the Colleges at UCSC. Its primary purposes would be to create a community and housing for graduate students. While these are important goals, they are not academic issues. Graduate curriculum is best provided within the disciplines in our view. Nevertheless, we would like to stress that every effort should be made to provide more housing for graduate students directly, which is critical to the future health of our graduate program.

Interim summary

The current primary role of the colleges at UCSC is in enhancing the first-year experience of undergraduates, providing pre-major advising and administering academic standing regulations. The role of the Academic Senate in college governance should be greater to the extent that oversight of the academic role of the colleges needs to be exercised as specified in the more recent bylaws of the colleges. We do not think that the colleges are “in crisis” or in great need of repair.

An invitation

The committee is beginning to consider what additional academic roles the colleges might serve. In addition to finding ways to expand its contributions beyond the first-year experience, colleges might serve as administrative homes for undergraduate interdisciplinary programs that do not find a natural home with a department or a single division or, where appropriate and mutually agreed upon, the integration of college faculty research initiatives and centers into the general academic culture of the college or colleges. In addition, as a unique institutional structure, the colleges may serve as laboratory for the development of new academic programs. Finally, there may be roles for the college to play in fostering a stronger intellectual community between faculty members that should be explored.

We invite the members of the Academic Senate to offer suggestions (preferably via email to senate@ucsc.edu placing “Colleges” in the subject header) for future academic roles of the colleges, modest or immodest. We would also appreciate reading views on the topics raised here.

Respectfully submitted,

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE COLLEGES

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