

Enhancing the Student Experience Task Force

Recommendation #1

Enhance the first year experience; assist students in making a strong academic and social transition, and in creating appropriate expectations about their undergraduate education

Implementation

- FRESHMAN SEMINAR FOR ALL: Establish a **required** series of freshman seminars that engages the campus community, providing students with a common integrated experience and exposure to leading educators.
- FOCUS ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES: Establish **cohort course scheduling** and institute changes that will foster the creation of **residence hall learning communities**.
- MAKE ALL FIRST-YEAR COURSES OUTSTANDING: Establish a culture wherein our **“best educators” are involved in freshman/introductory** courses and, tied to these courses, there is **substantive evaluation** of classroom instruction and learning outcomes assessment. (see recommendation 2).
- AOP BECOMES A FIRST DAY OF CLASS: Review and revise **all** recruitment, admission, AOP, and welcome week materials and events to insure a clear message that is consistent with and supports the **Liberal Learning Goals of MSU**. Have Freshman Seminars first meet at AOP (register for them prior).
- EVERY FRESHMAN TAKES PART IN SCHOLARSHIP: All students should **engage in research and creative activities** outside of the classroom. Exploring interests and engaging with mentors must begin with the freshman experience. Make freshman funding opportunities available so they can be a PA and explore their interests and engage with mentors.

Recommendation #2

Promote the improvement of and rewards for successful college teaching

Implementation

- ASSESS TEACHING: All Colleges/units must develop **criteria that will guide the assessment of teaching** in undergraduate and graduate courses. Criteria should differentiate between quality instruction and quality instruction grounded in research on teaching and learning and done in a scholarly way so as to advance our understanding of classroom pedagogy.
- EXPLICITLY REWARD EXCELLENCE: Establish a **substantive reward system** that recognizes quality and scholarly instruction through campus wide recognition, merit increases, and promotion.
- SUPPORT TEACHING SCHOLARSHIP: Provide expanded resources (financial and human) that focus on improving faculty understanding and application of the

knowledge and skills necessary for teaching and assessing learning and require faculty participation. Make available internal support to increase NSF EHR grants for research on teaching and learning, much like the support to increase the number of NIH grants for traditional disciplinary research.

- Establish several endowed **Distinguished Teaching Professorships**.

Explanatory Comments for recommendations 1 and 2:

The freshman experience is absolutely critical to establishing the foundation for undergraduate education. It is essential that students become actively engaged with MSU as the larger community of learners. We envision the freshman seminar series as a year long event required of all freshmen. The seminar could be developed in a variety of ways either credit bearing or not. The keys to the recommendation are a common experience which should help promote a feeling of community and multiple ways of engaging and reflecting on the experience. This would require engaging faculty (tenure track and fixed term), teaching specialist, advising and residence hall staff and mentors and likely include substantial changes in the ways we assist mentors in understanding their roles. We could envision this starting at AOP and continuing with the “One Book One Community” initiative. The seminars could also include inviting in prominent outside speakers. A structured first-year experience would also promote the development and academic values, like integrity and ethical action.

Topics would be carefully chosen to reflect the Liberal Learning goals of MSU. Importantly, education occurs both in and outside the classroom. MSU must work to engage all students in a meaningful research or creative experience. There is no one model for this, only a need to develop multiple ways that students can engage with their learning and their passion. We must make opportunities for them to meet and engage with individuals who can become mentors.

Beyond the freshman seminar, residence life and the classroom environment are absolutely essential in supporting students in their growing awareness of MSU as an engaged community of learners. The boldness of the initiatives listed above lies in the degree to which the Institution is willing to invest in meaningful ways to accomplish this. For example, the means for faculty to enhance their understanding of teaching and learning is currently available through the services of Faculty and Organizational Development. We would envision an approach in which faculty could be asked to obtain ongoing “Continuing Education Units” (CEUs) as a prerequisite to annual review. In addition, campus educators identified as having difficulty in the classroom would be required not only to take part in professional development but to also have their classroom instruction evaluated in order to achieve marked instructional improvement. We would also envision that every faculty appointment would make clear the University expectation for quality instruction and continuing improvement. We envision rewarding all faculty who make a substantive and unique contribution to the scholarship of classroom teaching and learning as determined by such things as student evaluation, learning outcomes assessment, and peer instructional review. We need to take seriously the promotion of quality college teaching and learning and recommend a focus

on research and practice in these areas. Finally, we see a clear need to elevate the status of quality and scholarly teaching through funds earmarked for a Distinguished Teaching Professorship.

Recommendation #3

Articulate, target and expand opportunities for undergraduate students to develop cultural competencies.

Implementation

- Communicate consistently to students from their introduction to MSU through their graduation why MSU values intercultural competencies through several means: modeling through action, making opportunities to develop skills salient, and positively recognizing those who engage in the process of developing competencies.
- Arrange environments so that students can work, study, and interact socially with people from diverse background more frequently and with greater depth and consistency.
- Focus attention on curricular and extra curricular experiences that assist students to develop a global consciousness, to include seeing oneself as a citizen of the world and learning to act in ways that improve the human condition. Developing awareness, fostering appreciation and understanding historical and contemporary issues facing disadvantaged individuals and communities in the U.S. Reducing the practice of stereotyping “others” to efficiently categorize them while challenging oneself to genuinely learn about histories, cultures, and religions different from one’s own.
- Infuse opportunities into Study Abroad and International Internships that connect students to the communities where they study and serve.
- Target the living learning environment from the beginning of the undergraduate experience to foster interactional diversity. This includes upholding nurturing and safe environments for distinct communities while simultaneously encouraging genuine interaction across groups.
- Establish a world language exit requirement for students.

Recommendation #4

Promote and integrate more active and applied learning in undergraduate education

Active learning: “involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison 1991)

- Expand the practice of engaging in active learning in the classroom
- Engage faculty in retention efforts.
- Expand opportunities for faculty-mentored research and scholarly activities

- Create “peer teaching” (undergraduate teaching) program which allows undergraduates to do instruction-related work, but allows closer interaction with faculty members
- Encourage/expand out-of-class interaction between students and faculty
- Better integrate career planning, earlier
- Link alumni to curriculum/internships/recruitment and retention efforts
- Connect students to professionals in their fields sooner
- Demonstrate to students the “value added” of an MSU degree by highlighting the distinctive features of MSU such as study abroad, diversity in the academic community, and active learning
- Encourage students to engage in at least one learning experience outside the classroom such as study abroad, internships, service learning, campus club leadership, etc.
- Establish a world language exit requirement for students.

Anticipated Results (How will the undergraduate experience be different?)

There are research studies that suggest we would see on the part of students...

- improved class attendance
- improved comprehension
- improved critical thinking
- improved grades
- decreased time to graduation
- increased degree completion rate (particularly among non-traditional, minority, and first-generation students)

Recommendation #5

Modify the undergraduate curriculum and related policies so that our goals for undergraduate liberal learning are met

The BbD Task Force joins the Working Group on Improving Undergraduate Education and the Writing, Quantitative Literacies, and Integrative Studies Task Forces in asserting the importance of graduating students who not only possess “knowing how to learn” skills, but who are analytical, insightful, intuitive, and creative; whose solid social skills prepare them to be good teammates and collaborators; whose communication skills allow them to move flexibly between multiple modalities (oral, written, visual) and media (texts, films, slides); and whose civic and moral stances prepare them to behave honestly and responsibly.

These are students who not only reflect the outcomes suggested by the AAC&U (2004)¹:

- (1) analytical, communication, quantitative, and information processing skills;
- (2) understanding inquiry practices of the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts;
- (3) intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills;
- (4) proactive sense of responsibility for individual, civic, and social choices; and
- (5) habits of minds that foster integrative thinking and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another.

They also possess these knowledge/skills/dispositions suggested by enGauge²:

- (6) Digital-Age Literacies: Basic scientific, economic and technological literacies; Visual and information literacies; Multi-cultural literacy and global awareness
- (7) Inventive Thinking: Adaptability, managing complexity, self-direction; Curiosity, creativity, risk taking; Higher order thinking and sound reasoning
- (8) Effective Communication: Teaming, collaboration and interpersonal skills; Personal, social and civic responsibility; Interactive communication

We believe that students are most apt to develop these knowledges, skills, and/or dispositions when they have opportunities to blur the lines between professional, liberal, and community-based education. That is, we believe that when students have repeated opportunities to delve into the literatures of various fields and disciplines, to apply a wide range of methods of inquiry to address problems with consequences that are not merely academic, to make productive use of newer technologies; and to create products that matter to them and others, they are more likely to become engaged learners, to immerse themselves in their studies, and, in the process, to learn to view education as potentially transformative, and an occupation and preoccupation worthy of their attention and investment.

The goals for Liberal Learning are set forth in the Report of the Working Group on Improving Undergraduate Education. They include:

1. Integrated Judgment
2. Advanced Communication Skills (both writing and speaking)
3. Cultural Competence (addressed in recommendation 2)
4. Analytical Thinking
5. Literacy in Science and Mathematics
6. Effective Citizenship

We fully support the recommendations in the report and all efforts that are underway currently to implement the report. These include the Quantitative Literacy, Integrative Studies, and Writing Task Force recommendations. We recommend a broader and more expansive definition of “literacy” to include both

¹ AAC&U. 2004. Our students' best work: A framework for accountability worthy of our mission. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

² Metiri and Learning Point Associates . enGauge: 21st Century Skills.

the critical “reading” as well as “designing or constructing” persuasive and effective messages with multiple media. We further recommend the following:

- Promote educational experiences that enhance integrated judgment.
- Develop and implement a fully articulated communication curriculum that includes writing, speaking and designing effective and persuasive messages that apply to a variety of situations and audiences including the personal, professional, and public arenas. Emphasize style and content of multiple channels of communication and help students develop skills to express themselves and communicate their ideas using multiple media.
- Promote educational experiences that develop and enhance analytical and critical thinking. In particular to develop “information and media literacy” skills that allow students to collect, evaluate and critically examine information, from across a wide variety of media sources (journals, newspapers, internet, video, etc.).
- Promote educational experiences that leverage the strengths of different technologies for communication and dissemination
- Place stronger emphasis and resources on writing and the support of those doing Tier II courses. We define writing broadly to include the multimodal composing and construction of messages that include (individually and in combination) all communication modalities (written, oral, visual and temporal texts), many of which require familiarity and fluency with digital technologies.
- Review IS policies/courses for match with goals
- Review time-to-degree for majors
- Modify the repeat credits policy; allow 20 credits repeated no matter what original grade
- Review all current policies to see in what ways they enhance/inhibit undergraduates
- Consider an attendance policy to promote engagement in the classroom

Recommendation #6

Recommendation 6: Enhance the physical environment in ways that support learning for the students, faculty and staff at MSU

- **Make the entire housing system part of the learning process**
The current housing policy supports the Board of Trustees’ mission by “providing an educational environment which is maximally conducive to the learning process of students and is central to the student experience.” The on-campus housing system supports both current residential programs and the creation of new ones, as evidenced through key partnerships in the renovation of classroom and meeting space to include high-tech capabilities, the inclusion of wireless technology in residence halls, and the development of updated, comfortable meeting and study space for students.

To successfully navigate the transition through their freshman year, students require positive support and encouragement both socially and emotionally. Research has shown that students perform better academically when given the opportunity to be housed and enrolled in classes as a cohort. In general, freshmen students should be

required to select an academic focus, thus allowing assignment to a specific residence hall, similar to current residential programs. Placing students in close proximity to one another increases the chances of their academic success, provides opportunities for in-hall study groups, encourages networking, and increases retention and matriculation rates. The success of this program is dependent upon the expansion of out-of-class instruction and interaction with faculty through the development of faculty-in-residence programs and a strong residential life component.

- **Modify the MSU Union to more effectively serve as a “hub” for student life**

As stated in the role of the college union, “The Union fosters a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college.” Serving as the campus community center for over 80 years, the MSU Union currently offers an array of services for the University and its guests. Additionally, its location makes it an important link between MSU and the City of East Lansing. While the Union hosts a broad range of student-focused programming and entertainment events, food service venues and recreational facilities that embrace the core mission of a student activity center, the current facility is not viewed by students as a focal point of campus life. A recent assessment study proposed improvements to the MSU Union that include redesigned programming, meeting/conference space, enhanced retail and dining areas and expanded student activity space. Adoption of this extensive and long range plan would strengthen the Union’s mission, support an already strong, well organized University Activities Board, provide enhanced services for the University and East Lansing communities and return the facility to a dynamic campus life center.

- **Move on a Recreation facility to promote balanced student life**

Finally, while vigorous, challenging instruction is the core of achieving academic success in the classroom, it must be balanced with a strong health/wellness recreation program and facility for the students, faculty and staff of MSU. As seen nationally (and currently at numerous Big Ten institutions), a modern recreation facility can include an array of educational programs that promote healthy living, fitness equipment, sport courts and pools, running tracks, climbing walls, restaurant and vending opportunities with nutritional food and beverage options and other pertinent initiatives that incorporate health/fitness opportunities for all constituents. The recreation center will also be a "hub" for students on campus and will make a significant impact by enhancing the "quality of life" for the MSU community. This initiative will be a valuable component of "Team MSU and Boldness by Design" and will aid the institution in the recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff in addition to forging meaningful partnerships with multiple constituent groups across campus and in the community.

Recommendation #7

Recommendation 7: Continue the review of graduate programs and graduate teaching and the mentoring of graduate students.

While much of the discussion of the Task Force centered on enhancing the experience of undergraduate students, the committee endorses the continuing work led by The Graduate School and the full implementation of the Research Mentoring Task Force Report (2004). On going attention to the quality of graduate programs and the teaching

and mentoring in those programs will insure the enhancement of the graduate student experience.

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