

The Upperclass Task Force Report: One Year Later Spring 2008

This report has been prepared to update the Trinity community on the progress made to date on **recommendations** of the 2006-2007 Upperclass Task Force. Notations have been made where there has been progress or where recommendations weren't approved. If there is no notation, the item remains active for future consideration.

Summary

The Task Force recommendations were focused in three areas: social/community, academic, and developmental:

- Creating a dynamic social environment for sophomores and more freedom for upperclass students was important.
- Taking advantage of our academic/residential campus climate (out of class debates during election times, discussions about global environmental issues, etc.).
- Tending to the developmental needs of students (dealing with independence, exploring identity, living in a diverse world, making plans for after college, etc.)

Many of the recommendations are inter-connected and build on one-another and are directed toward these three areas.

The first three recommendations (*Beginning the Year, Class Identity, and Housing Logistics*) have received the greatest amount of attention this year and are where there has been the most progress. The Sophomore College and Upperclass housing areas are being fully developed for 2008-2009. The pilot program of the Sophomore College showed some encouraging possibilities and the program has been extended as designed. A full report on a new Welcome Week has been designed. With these recommendations and the creation of class Senators, as voted on by students last spring, many of the ideas from the students and others on the task force will be fully implemented next year.

The fourth and fifth recommendations included faculty-related initiatives. Any program to “get the faculty” to the residence halls is ill-fated if there are not substantial reasons to invite them there. The Task Force supported identification of meaningful ways to best capitalize on the excellent faculty presence at Trinity as we try to create a seamless living environments in the residence halls. Faculty members are involved in a growing number of faculty-generated special interest housing initiatives, such as the entrepreneurial floor, the new sustainability floor connected to a new first year seminar, and in majors programs. Professors currently are involved in the Chinese language floor, the HUMA 1600 floor, and in many REAL LIFE first-year area programs. Developing these programs and relationships will continue to be a major focus of the Student Affairs and campus initiatives in the residence hall area.

Lastly, the remaining recommendations were focused on the kinds of programs – active (presentations, discussions, mixers) or passive (newsletters, bulletin board displays, web pages) relevant to the different housing areas. Many of the REAL LIFE programs in the first year area are about establishing independence and managing freedom. The sophomore programs will be aimed at sophomore needs: selecting majors, considering study abroad options, exploring identity. Junior and senior students will be given opportunities to explore career options, learn how to be engaged Alumni, and have an opportunity to have important freedoms and self-governance opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Beginning the Year

The Task Force feels that the marked difference for the return of upper-class students in August, compared to first year student arrival, continues to be pronounced. Some small-scale efforts were made to create more fanfare for the opening of the halls following the QSLTF recommendations in 2000 (welcome signs and sidewalk chalk). Nevertheless, the problem remains and the unintended message is clear: we appear indifferent to our returning students. This message can set a tone for all-things-upper-class in the weeks, months, and years that follow.

Goals

There is a general malaise in the upper-class area. The Task Force believes there need to be markers, rites of passage, and celebrations for students as they move ahead in their Trinity experience. In addition, we can utilize this time of year to talk anew with students about the liberal arts, the curriculum, and the residency requirement and reinforce the associated institutional values. For sophomores, we hope to start to help students on their journeys of focused exploration. We hope to help sophomores avoid the sophomore slump.

Specific recommendations

- Sponsor a “welcome week” that includes not just NSO, but events for others, particularly sophomores. Sponsor NSO concert as a welcome week concert. **In progress, with implementation scheduled for August 2008.**
- Schedule a sophomore move-in day and related activities, such as an opening address from a faculty member, a conference-style program, and social programs. Currently, all upperclass students can trickle in over a period of four days. Permit juniors to move-in the day following sophomore move-in, and seniors thereafter. **In progress.**
- Utilize sophomores to help welcome new students during their convocation and sponsor a related social activity. **In planning, being connected to class meal and convocation.**

- Sponsor class meals upon return: a sophomore brunch following move-in day; a junior lunch the following day; a senior dinner before school begins. **In progress.**

Implementation plan and timeline

- The Campus & Community Involvement and Residential Life staffs will explore the development of a comprehensive week of events for the fall of 2008. In fall 2007, Residential Life will coordinate a staggered move-in to work out logistical issues. **Plans are in place for a comprehensive welcome week (see full report). An ASR senator has been included on this planning committee.**

2. Class Identity

The Task Force discovered that the desired goal of class identity gets off to a good start in the first year and abruptly stops. While the Task Force believes that stronger class identity can create deeper, richer connections to other students and the institution, the goal is not to isolate students from different years from one another. Great care should be taken to nurture the blending of all students in the classrooms, in organizations, at campus-wide events, and in junior/senior housing.

Goals

Greater class unity will help students feel a sense of connection within a specific cohort that is sizeable enough to find others with similarities, yet large enough to be exposed to those who are different.

To add to the sense of investment or knowledge of the operations of the University, the Task Force is intrigued by the model at other institutions which allows students and faculty representatives as voting members of the Board of Trustees. Such a program would give students a sense of investment and aspirations to represent their classmates as they achieve higher class status.

Specific Recommendations

- Assign a staff and faculty member “marshal” to each incoming class. These people will be primarily ceremonial figures, but may assume important roles: speaking briefly at opening convocation, the last great reception, class meals, and commencement; sending letters of greetings and updates in the summers; and participating in other functions as developed (perhaps becoming “virtual” house masters). **In progress. Faculty senate is considering selection criteria.**
- Develop ceremonies or events for sophomores, juniors, and seniors that mark their movement into new stages of their Trinity experience.
- Involve Alumni in hosting dinners or marshaling classes. **Designated role will be included in class marshal program.**
- Utilize local young alumni to mentor juniors and seniors. Mentoring for internship and job opportunities is happening. **An additional structured role will be in place through the class marshal program.**
- Consider assigning Association of Student Representatives (ASR) Senators by class. This would ensure that the needs of each class are being met and gives each class a voice for issues specific to them. **Completed. Students voted their approval to this change as a referendum to the ASR constitution in last year’s election.**
- Each class should have the opportunity of identifying an off-campus speaker of their choice and arranging for a campus-wide speaker of their choice.
- Develop a College Bowl for seniors, faculty, administration, alumni, and community where seniors compete against other constituents. Consider this as a tradition that unifies the campus and allows seniors to show pride in their education. **Campus & Community Involvement conducted a preliminary pilot of the College Bowl in February, 2008, and will extend it in the future, ultimately to create a tradition based on class competition.**
- Consider inviting juniors and seniors to sit on the Board of Trustees, with the caveat that there also is faculty representation. **Proposal not adopted.**

Implementation plan and timeline

Have Academic Affairs and the faculty senate develop criteria for the selection of class marshals to begin roles with the first year class in fall 2007. Develop a similar process with the Student Affairs staff and Alumni Office to determine roles and selection criteria for fall 2007. **See Welcome Week report.**

Have ASR study the benefits of class representation in their organization and in context of the recommendations in this report. **Completed in the Spring of 2007.**

Students will select a speaker of their choice, perhaps coordinating with the Presidents Office and faculty committees. Request the President’s Office to consider adding student representatives to the Board of Trustees (perhaps from among junior and senior class ASR senators).

Campus & Community Involvement and student committees will develop a College Bowl program (for the spring of 2008) and other ceremonial events with the faculty. **Completed.**

3. Housing Logistics

Early in our discussions the Task Force considered the possibilities created by housing all sophomore students together. Students report greater satisfaction and community in the first year area and often cite the drastic difference as they are dispersed into the upper-class halls living in small clusters within juniors and seniors who are already very engaged in life beyond the residence halls.

The Task Force wishes to emphasize that while the sophomore housing area could be an excellent extension of the first year area, great care should be taken to not have it feel like a continuation of the first year, but rather a different, more mature experience.

Since we are a residential campus, we have an opportunity for that to mean something for our students beyond their first year. The Task Force is very enthusiastic about injecting more meaning into our residential mission.

Goals

Housing sophomores together will allow us to maintain the momentum and community of the first year area and further develop class identity (see recommendation number two). Juniors and seniors will be afforded greater autonomy.

In addition, the kinds of social, developmental, and educational issues facing sophomores (choice of major, identity, values, involvement) can be more easily addressed through programs, staffing, bulletin board postings, and advising when the students are housed together.

In our review of literature and peer programs the Task Force learned of many programs that offer small programs for self-selected students. We wish to offer a program that is comprehensive and affects all students, rather than a few.

Specific Recommendations

- House sophomore students in sophomore buildings referred to as “sophomore colleges.”
- House juniors and seniors together in other buildings to be determined. **Completed. The most popular halls for upperclass students were retained. These include Lightner, South, Isabel, and fourth floor of McLean. (Note that Sophomore College halls selected were done so because Prassel and Thomas, in particular, lend themselves to creating dynamic communities by virtue of their size.)**
- Integrate Community Initiative floors into the program so they are in proximity to sophomore housing. **This has been done for 2008-2009, particularly in Murchison Hall.**
- Assign staff to work specifically with Community Initiative floors to ensure that sophomores in all housing areas are exposed to the same quality programs. **The Residential Life Coordinator for the upperclass halls will coordinate this program. (Note, the program may extinguish itself as the Sophomore College takes hold. This year, community applications decreased by half from last year.)**
- Consider a scaled-back student staff position (perhaps mostly administrative) in the junior and senior areas to create a greater sense of autonomy for our older students. **The Hall Manager position has been developed, with staff in place for 2008-2009.**
- The Residential Life staff will continue to encourage and assist with upper-class learning communities, such as language floors and others being proposed (Entrepreneurship, McNair, for example). **Floors continue to be added, including first-year seminar-related sustainability floor, in the upperclass and first year areas.**

Implementation plan and timeline

The Residential Life staff will identify a working group, including student staff and students from the ASR in the spring of 2007 to develop a plan for a pilot program for fall 2007. The full sophomore housing area will be implemented in fall, 2008, to coincide with the welcome week activities. **Program implementation for these changes is in process. The pilot program for Sophomore College produced promising feedback that the goals of the Sophomore College could be reasonably attained.**

Resources needed

The Residential Life staff continues to be under-staffed in the upper-class area, where one professional oversees nine buildings and over 1,100 students. To be effective in managing a sophomore housing area we would need one additional Residential Life Coordinator to help assist the Assistant Director of Residential Education and manage the day-to-day operations of this living area. In addition, the Residential Life programming fee would need to be increased to accommodate the additional programs in the halls. **Approved for 2008-2009.**

4. Advising

Advising was a focus of the QSLTF in 2000 and continues to be an important campus issue as expressed by students and faculty on the Task Force. While some students are most appreciative of the advising that they have received, other students are concerned about being shepherded through a registration process with little attention to their long-term goals and development.

The Upperclass Task Force fully acknowledges the time constraints facing faculty members, the lack of formal support/compensation for managing these important functions, and the unevenness of advising loads. Because of the strong reputation of the faculty, Task Force members value the importance of a faculty-student connection for all students. Likewise, students need to approach the advising system as a special opportunity to develop a crucial advising relationship – and set an important course – for their educational experiences.

Goals

Advising students holistically gives students an opportunity to look at how their changing goals and values mesh with plans to consider activities, internships, and studying abroad. Currently faculty advisors are often relied on primarily to assist students through the technical and logistical maze of fulfilling requirements and registering for courses.

The Task Force supports the many discussions and efforts of the faculty, Academic Affairs, and several committees exploring important advising issues.

Specific Recommendations

- Working with the Senate, the UCC, the Chairs, and the UCC-and ultimately the faculty as a whole, develop an advising model that helps students explore educational, extracurricular, career, graduate study, and life goals.
- Explore resources and compensation for advisors.

Implementation plan and timeline

The Task Force strongly asks that the University comprehensively explore the advising system. **No action taken as a specific result of this report. A full advising review had taken place concurrent to the Task Force. Some recommendations are still under consideration.**

5. Faculty Involvement

Our graduates almost always stress that the most important and meaningful part of their education at Trinity is the opportunity to work closely with faculty. While these relationships are fostered on the upper campus, Trinity has not yet found ways to foster the sorts of faculty-student interaction that have traditionally been central to the liberal arts experience. Even our campus ecology – with an academic upper campus and residential lower campus – tends to create an artificial division between residential and academic life. Yet, as Trinity aspires to become one of the leading schools with a liberal arts emphasis nationally, it is critical that we find ways to bridge the gap between the upper and lower campus, identifying ways to encourage greater faculty participation in the lives of our students beyond the classroom.

As a general principle, faculty members are heavily involved with students on upper campus and the student/faculty relationship is often cited by students as their favorite part of their educational experiences at Trinity. The Task Force proposes that faculty members are afforded better opportunities to grow those relationships further, outside the classroom (see “Goals”).

Goals

Because being a residential campus is essential to the University mission, the University should strive to enrich the lives of our students outside of the classroom and to reflect a truly blended academic and residential experience.

Classes on lower campus help the students understand that learning isn’t merely an upper campus phenomenon and bridges the upper/lower campus divide. It also helps faculty see the lower campus as accessible to them for other purposes, such as programs and meals.

Engaging with faculty members over meals can lead to a continuation of discussions started in the classroom or during office hours. Educational seminars or programs in informal settings can serve as a way to connect students with faculty who may not otherwise know of shared interests.

Specific recommendations

- Invite faculty to the residence halls to discuss majors. This will give faculty members a chance to discuss majors with students who are preparing to declare majors (or considering additional majors and minors) in the sophomore year. **A comprehensive brown-bag program is being developed for the lower campus. Faculty members and seniors will be invited as guests at Mabee Hall throughout the fall of 2008 to meet with interested sophomores and first-year students.**
- Invite faculty to make presentations to students on areas of interest such as on elections, global warming, social issues, and much more. **Ongoing, but not comprehensive as yet.**
- Continue to invite faculty members to teach in the residence halls and utilize advising and office space in the Witt Center which has been designed for faculty-student use. **Ongoing. The Witt Center is being renovated with an electronic classroom and advising and seminar offices are available and will continue to be offered.**
- Develop a common time (one to two hours) during the week that is available for faculty and students to meet and spend time together.
- Subsidize faculty dining in Mabee Hall and designate faculty parking at the curb in front of the dining hall for meal times. **Faculty Senate did not support such a program as proposed. However, in the TMN Dialogues on Race and Religion TMN specifically changed the timing, and location to 5:30-6:30, in Mabee Conference Room and faculty (and staff) are specifically invited to attend. TMN also buys dinner vouchers to subsidize meals for faculty and staff.**

- Explore a virtual college house system as a possible model to connect faculty to certain halls in exchange for a reduced teaching load.
- Support current faculty initiatives under the capital campaign: Interdisciplinary science, East Asian Studies, Spanish and Latin American Studies, Civic Engagement and Leadership, Urban Studies, and Entrepreneurship.

Implementation and Timeline

Establish a working group of faculty, Student Affairs staff, and Academic Affairs staff to explore these recommendations for implementation in fall 2008. **No formal progress to date. Discussions about meaningful ways to involve faculty in the residence halls (and create a seamless learning environment on campus) will be ongoing for some time as other recommendations take hold and the Student Affairs Strategic Plan is finalized.**

6. Program Emphases for Sophomores

Whereas the sophomore college housing area is designed, in part, to ease the delivery of programs to the intended audience, that area is meaningless without substantive program offerings for our students. In the sophomore year, students are expected to declare a major. There are many untapped possibilities for departments to host events in the residence halls with faculty members, senior majors, and local alumni to discuss majors and careers.

Goals

Through our review of literature there were a number of areas identified specifically with the sophomore slump. Offering programs, events, discussions, posting bulletin board information, and sending newsletters on any of these topics is important.

Many of our recommendations interrelate. In the programming area, for example, hosting religion and philosophy professors to the residence halls to lead programs on values clarification or finding meaning in life would be allow us to present meaningful programs AND involve the faculty in student learning outside the classroom.

The Task Force feels that the sophomore year is the best time to explore issues related to majors, to introduce community service into student life, and to prepare for study abroad experiences.

Specific recommendations

- Offer programs related to choosing majors, including the “majors fair” currently offered to first year students, receptions, and panels. **Planned for 2008-2009 as brown-bag lunch and dinner series.**
- Create a ceremony for students in declaring their majors, whether University-wide, through newsletters and postings, or within departments.
- Offer leadership training for sophomores before they rise to leadership positions on teams, in organizations, and in the work place. **Formal Strengths Quest program is under consideration.**
- Offer programs that assist students in their quest to learn who they are and what they value. Specifically, students often question their own faith and spirituality when they move away from home. The University can offer excellent reflection programs for students as they define their identity. **Programs tried in pilot of Sophomore College. Development of a variety of programs with developmental, academic, and social outcomes are being planned for 2008.**
- Offer programs for the students who intended to enter health professions, but either change their minds or struggle with the courses.

- Offer other programs: gender and relationships, politics, and adjusting to life as former athletes or performers.

Implementation and timeline

Many of these programs can be implemented when the sophomore residential college forms. Some prototype programs can be developed in 2007-2008. Some programs are already in place.

Staff and faculty from across campus and students in Residential Life are developing broad-based and targeted programs to meet the developmental and social needs of different class groups.

7. Service

Develop programs in the sophomore residential college to connect residence halls and service projects.

Goals

The Task Force recommends an emphasis on service in the sophomore year because that is when students are developmentally prepared and most available to learn to be engaged in the community. In addition, the experience should extend beyond voluntarism and include meaningful opportunities for reflection.

Specific Recommendations

- Develop a sophomore seminar led by juniors and seniors.
- Utilize the PARE model of Preparation Action Reflection Evaluation.

Implementation and Timeline

Refer to Campus & Community Involvement and Residential Life for study through the fall of 2007. Work specifically with the Service Coordinator and TUVAC leadership. **Various programs were piloted in the Sophomore College. Further development needed.**

8. Careers

It is important to the University and its students to develop broad and transferable skills that students can utilize not just in their initial post-Trinity experiences. The Task Force believes that the focus on careers should be a part of the entire Trinity experience, with a formal emphasis on the last three years.

Goals

Trinity students should view career management not just as a function of the senior year, but as a process that is interwoven with academic and extra-curricular experiences from the beginning of their Trinity experience. Our goal is to offer regular programs in the residence halls targeted at specific populations. For sophomores, part of the process may be to explore and declare majors. Other sophomores may be ready to learn how to best access and utilize on-line resources. That process and the identification of internships are important for juniors. Seniors should be preparing resumes, scheduling interviews, and practicing skills for the interview and job search process.

Specific Recommendations

- Utilize a three-year career model: sophomores explore majors; juniors explore careers; and seniors engage in graduate school or job search preparation.
- Offer many programs in the residence halls.
- Continue to place an emphasis on internships and experiential learning.
- Continue *Making Connections* programs, including by interest area.

- Continue reviewing Alumni Career Network and other on-line resources for juniors and seniors.
- Assist students not only in career development, but in the exploration of graduate study, service (Teach for America, Peace Corp, etc.), and callings in ministry and worship.

Implementation and Timeline

The Director of Career Services offers many residential programs, so much of this is already occurring. By formalizing a sophomore college, it will make it easier to streamline the number of programs offered and to target the residents based on specific needs. **Career Services is actively developing a plan with the residential Life staff for targeted programs for juniors and seniors related to career development.**

9. Study Abroad

The Task Force values the opportunity for our students to travel abroad. Most students going abroad do so in their junior year.

Goals

The study abroad experience should be presented as a routine and critical hallmark of a Trinity experience. The University continues to express the importance of global perspectives as stated in the curriculum and Student Affairs mission. The experience of applying classroom and life lessons in international settings and different cultures offers students rich life-changing opportunities.

Specific Recommendations

- Emphasize study abroad opportunities can be realized by many in their junior year.
- Tie-in programming more deliberately for sophomores: study abroad expos targeted to sophomores and programs by students returning from abroad to discuss their experiences.
- Sponsor re-entry programs by and for juniors and seniors to process their experiences for one another and to aid in reflection and discovery of commonalities.
- Offer opportunities for students in structured professional and pre-professional programs, perhaps in the summer.
- The Task Force supports the Quality Enhancement Plan that promotes international experiences for all students.

Implementation and Timeline

Coordinate efforts between International Programs and Residential Life. Begin programs once sophomore pilot housing is set-up for fall 2007. **An information session for students wishing to study abroad was held in the Sophomore College in fall, 2007. As the housing areas are established, other programs as listed above will be introduced.**

10. Social Emphases

The Task Force values the importance of a vibrant social life in our residential community setting. While the University calendar is filled with activities including athletics, lectures, music performance, theater, and more, and the Residential Life staff offers programs in the residence halls, there is more to be done to satisfy students with social options, particularly on weekends.

Goals

Part of the development of our students involves connecting with other students in fun social settings. The Task Force would like to see more options on weekends for students that will give them attractive social alternatives. Examples include more events in the Tigers' Den, bands, dances, comedians, hypnotists, and other entertainment.

While the University enforces its alcohol and risk management policies, it also acknowledges that students will drink and Student Affairs continues to explore options that will allow for the lawful and responsible on campus consumption of alcohol. It is equally important to offer dynamic events and options for those who are not of legal drinking age, or who are not drinkers, and who wish to participate in exciting campus activities.

Specific Recommendations

- Offer more social options with alcohol for those in the junior and senior classes who are 21 or older. **Student-sponsored programs in Mabee Hall have included alcohol for those of age.**
- Offer more weekend programming options. **Under development by Campus & Community Involvement.**

Implementation and Timeline

Some steps have already been taken to enhance campus sponsored programming through the reassignment of responsibilities in the Campus & Community Involvement staff. **Led by Campus & Community Involvement, the Student Activity Fee and related programming structures are currently under review. Additionally, the Tigers' Den is being re-envisioned as a new social space.**

11. Greek Life

The Task Force sees potential advantages to shifting the timing of rush and new member orientation toward early in the sophomore year. On the other hand, for some students the Greek connection is deep and helps them find a cohort group, which improves their experience, keeps them engaged, and may assist with retention.

Goals

Sophomores have mastered the University somewhat, and are developmentally in a better position to stand-up to hazing. They are hopefully grounded academically. The current process disrupts relationships and community on first year residence hall floors. The goal of this shift would be to sustain first year community development, to keep new students focused on educational and developmental challenges associated with the first year, and to provide an exciting social outlet in the sophomore year, just as students are entering into the “slump” period.

Specific Recommendations

- The Task Force asks that the Greek Life staff members and Greek Council explore this issue in detail when the time is right. **The time is not right yet.**

Implementation and Timeline

A representative from the Task Force met with Greek Council and the Task Force respects the Council's wishes not to look at this issue in light of many changes occurring in campus Greek Life. The Task Force will ask the staff advising Greek Life to raise this issue sometime beginning the spring of 2008. **Not under consideration at this time.**

12. Health

Do healthy student lifestyles make a difference to the quality of campus life? The Task Force believes the environment on a residential campus demands that attention be paid to student health as students face choices related to sleep deprivation, diet, exercise, alcohol, drugs, and sexuality.

Goals

The University cares about education and development of our students. Our goal is to develop a culture of health in which students navigate through health-related choices, learn about healthy lifestyles, and develop habits they will carry with them for a lifetime.

Specific recommendations

- Work with ARAMARK, the campus food service provider to continue to offer healthy food options and reduce unhealthy choices. **In progress.**
- Explore expansion of the Body Image program sponsored by Dr. Carolyn Becker, Psychology.
- Expand the physical requirement in the curriculum be related more directly to student health than to recreation.
- Address more fully issues related to alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, and smoking.
- Offer educational programs on sexuality, and safer sex/contraception.
- Offer educational programs related to women's health issues.
- Offer education on sleep deprivation through Counseling Services.
- Assign a new staff member to oversee health issues.
- Continue the Student Health 101 publication. **Used in the Sophomore College, this on-line publication is being considered for more students in 2008-2009.**
- Offer personal services for students to design their own health and wellness regimens.

Implementation and Timeline

Set-up a Student Health Task Force through Student Affairs for spring and fall 2007 to include faculty from Physical Education, Health Care Administration, and Biology; staff from Counseling Services, Health Services, Residential Life, ARAMARK, and Athletics; and student athletes and others. Utilize the *Healthy Campus 2010: Making it Happen* guidelines presented by the American College Health Association. **Meetings took place with various recommendations, including fitness sessions (aerobics, yoga, for students). At this time there is no one area to take ownership of some of these recommendations. This will need to be addressed in the future.**