

**Report by the Upperclass Experience Task Force
January 18, 2007**

The Question

In May 2006, the Residential Life contract staff met for its annual retreat. At that meeting, the Residential Life Coordinator for the upperclass residence halls made this statement/posed this question: "It doesn't feel like we are a residential campus. We house upperclass students together, but that's it. What is our goal – to house friends together, to be developmental, or to foster education?"

That question led to the creation of the Sophomore-Junior-Senior (Upperclass) Experience Task Force.

The Charge

To assess the on-campus sophomore, junior, and senior year experiences and make recommendations for change. We will be considering intentional structural, educational, and social outcomes related to learning, community, retention, and satisfaction.

The Challenge

...to **think broadly, boldly, and courageously** about ways to transform the environment in the upper-class halls from a place where people simply 'hang their hats' to a setting that has a developmental living-learning dynamic. Think big: everything will be on the table for consideration.

The Student Affairs mission provided context for our discussions: "Our mission is to engage students in learning, help them answer the question, 'Who am I?' and guide them in understanding their place in the world."

History

In 2000-2001 Dr. Gage Paine, Vice President for Student Affairs chaired the Quality of Student Life Task Force (QSLTF). This Task Force presented 14 recommendations to President John Brazil. Five years later, a review of the recommendations, conducted by Dr. Paine, highlighted several recommendations that had not yet been fulfilled and that were raised anew in the Upperclass Task Force.

Recommendation #7

Develop services and programs to meet the specific needs of sophomores and juniors for implementation in 2002-2003.

The five-year review states: This continues to be an area of challenge and is our least successful effort.

Recommendation #8

Implement in 2002-2003 ways to address the residential needs of juniors and senior students living on campus.

The five-year review states: The Community Initiatives program was developed in part to address this recommendation.

The Trinity Matrix

To bring order to the many theories, concepts, programs, and outcomes associated with our work, the Task Force presents the following matrix:

	<i>Schaller Model</i>	<i>Chickering Model</i>	<i>Trinity Plan</i>
First Year	Random Exploration (Campus mastery)	Developing Competence Managing Emotions	First year housing Independence Successful transition to College
Second Year	Focused Exploration (Community mastery)	Moving from Autonomy to Interdependence Establishing Identity	Sophomore College Major selection Developing Relationships Involvement Clarify values Service
Third Year	Tentative Choices	Developing Purpose	Study Abroad World view Leadership Internships
Fourth Year	Commitment	Developing Integrity	Transitions to life after college (graduate study, professional schools, internships, careers) Becoming Alumni

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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- 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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Utilize sophomores to help welcome new students during their convocation and sponsor a related social activity.

- Sponsor class meals upon return: a sophomore brunch following move-in day; a junior lunch the following day; a senior dinner before school begins. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**

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). **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Develop ceremonies or events for sophomores, juniors, and seniors that mark their movement into new stages of their Trinity experience. **Ongoing: recognition of major declaration slated for 2009-2010; senior banquet...**
- Involve Alumni in hosting dinners or marshaling classes. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Utilize local young alumni to mentor juniors and seniors.
- 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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- 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. **Attempted and successful, but then the national College Bowl disbanded itself.**
- Consider inviting juniors and seniors to sit on the Board of Trustees, with the caveat that there also is faculty representation. **Rejected.**

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.” **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- House juniors and seniors together in other buildings to be determined. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Integrate Community Initiative floors into the program so they are in proximity to sophomore housing. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Assign staff to work specifically with Community Initiative floors to ensure that sophomores in all housing areas are exposed to the same quality programs.
- 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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- 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).

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. **Academic Affairs issue pending.**
- Explore resources and compensation for advisors. **Academic Affairs issue pending.**

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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year (Major meals).**
- Invite faculty to make presentations to students on areas of interest such as on elections, global warming, social issues, and much more. **Erratic.**

- 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, particularly with the development of the electronic classroom in the Witt reception Center.**
- 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. **Attempted but rejected by Faculty Senate.**
- 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.

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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Create a ceremony for students in declaring their majors, whether University-wide, through newsletters and postings, or within departments. **Proposed for 2009-2010.**
- Offer leadership training for sophomores before they rise to leadership positions on teams, in organizations, and in the work place.
- 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. **Program attempted with Chapel, but unsuccessful.**
- Offer programs for the students who intended to enter health professions, but either change their minds or struggle with the courses. **In faculty hands.**
- Offer other programs: gender and relationships, politics, and adjusting to life as former athletes or performers.

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. **No progress.**
- Utilize the PARE model of Preparation Action Reflection Evaluation. **Progress being made through CCI Alternative Spring Break trips and new Residential Life school partnerships.**

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. **Generally accomplished.**
- Offer many programs in the residence halls. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Continue to place an emphasis on internships and experiential learning. **Growing through Career Services.**
- Continue *Making Connections* programs, including by interest area. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Continue reviewing Alumni Career Network and other on-line resources for juniors and seniors. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Assist students not only in career development, but in the exploration of graduate study, service, and callings in ministry and worship.

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. **Accomplished, and currently in second 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. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- 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. **Plan not accepted.**

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. **Ongoing (senior banquet and upcoming wine and cheese mixers with faculty).**
- Offer more weekend programming options.

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 will never be right.**

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. **Ongoing.**
- 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. **Proposal for new course to be presented to the Curriculum Council in 2009.**
- 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. **Bulletin board campaign completed, should be ongoing.**
- Assign a new staff member to oversee health issues.
- Continue the Student Health 101 publication. **Accomplished, and currently in second year.**
- Offer personal services for students to design their own health and wellness regimens. **Ad hoc committee explored option. Exercise opportunities unfolding because of the new YMCA adjacent to campus.**