

UCAP Response to Request for Input on the Proposed Residential College

UCAP was asked to provide advice and commentary on four issues concerning the proposed residential college. Those issues, along with the advice and commentary, follow.

1. Optimum time for admitting a first cohort of students to a new residential college program in the liberal and creative arts and sciences.

We believe that the inaugural class should matriculate in Fall 2007. This will allow for thoughtful, thorough processes in terms of curricular development, faculty development, facilities development, and student recruitment. In order to be fully included in student recruitment for the recruitment cycle for those who will matriculate in Fall 2006, recruitment materials for this residential college would need to be available as early as mid-Spring 2005 when high school juniors start to visit campus as they consider applying for Fall 2006 admission (many of them will apply as early as September or October 2005). The planning process will not be far enough along to make the materials meaningful in this short a time frame. Although the new residential college could draw from those who would have applied to MSU, regardless of the new college, this is not the best way in which to recruit an inaugural class. Ideally, those who enroll in the new residential college will be students who are specifically drawn toward the experiences that a residential college provides. This is especially true, as the inaugural class will be the first to engage in the college curriculum and will be important in providing feedback during a particularly dynamic and important period in the development of the college.

2. Advantages and disadvantages of a class-admitted initially to engage in a curriculum already framed by the faculty versus a small inaugural class admitted as a working cohort of students to participate with faculty in developing the more fulsome curriculum.

Students should have a voice in the development of the curriculum of the new residential college. However, we believe that the initial voice of students should come from those already at MSU who are in related degree programs as well as those who are engaged in the current residential colleges, ROIAL, and Bailey Scholars. Incoming freshman students can not be expected to know about the range of academic programs on campus or about the possible scholarly relationships between those programs. As a result, their voice would not be as meaningful as the voice of those students who are already engaged in such programs and have experience as a university student. Curricular development is a dynamic and on-going process. The voice of the inaugural class would be essential in the on-going process of curriculum development during the first several years of the new residential college, which will constitute a particularly dynamic period in the development of this specific learning community. They would have a chance to reshape the initial program that has been designed by faculty and current MSU students.

In summary, we see no advantages to having the inaugural class play a major role in framing the curriculum once they arrive on campus. The disadvantages would be these students entering an undeveloped program without having the background or knowledge to frame the program in a

meaningful way and putting themselves at risk by matriculating in a program for which there is no developed curriculum.

Having the program framed by students and faculty before the inaugural class arrives has several advantages. Students could be recruited more meaningfully to a program with a clear structure and vision. Entering students will be able to engage in their programs immediately with an understanding of what is needed in order to complete their degrees, which is essential to many students in eliminating feelings of uncertainty. Students can also play a significant role in shaping the curriculum through an ongoing, dynamic curriculum revision process without putting themselves at risk by matriculating in an undeveloped program.

3. Elements that should be considered in making a recommendation for an autonomous residential college versus an affiliated residential program imbedded in a host college.

Several elements should be considered when deciding whether the residential college should be autonomous or affiliated with a host college. First and foremost should be the elements that are at the heart of the residential college experience: the need for excellence in undergraduate teaching, innovative curricular models, interdisciplinary scholarship, and development of a community of learners. These are best facilitated through an autonomous structure that is unencumbered by the administrative complexity of a large college. In an autonomous college, the criteria for promotion and tenure, which would be more centered more on teaching than those of the rest of the college if the residential college were to be affiliated, could be more uniform and clear for the faculty within the administrative unit. The rewards for excellence in undergraduate teaching and interdisciplinary scholarship would be clearer and would be central to the evaluation processes of all positions in the unit. As a result, faculty recruitment would be easier and it would be easier to retain a high quality faculty. Curricular innovation would not be held back by having to engage in a vetting process with a college curriculum committee, whose faculty may feel that the residential college is competing with them for students and in terms of offerings. An autonomous status would facilitate opportunities to work with multiple colleges to maximize access to programmatic development. Fewer governance/administrative committees would make wise use of faculty time and effort. Also, being a stand-alone college would facilitate developing a more cohesive community of learners, resulting in better retention over the four years.

There are, however, also potential advantages of having the residential college affiliated with a host college. Affiliation would allow for more meaningful connections to graduate programs. It might also allow for more student flexibility in moving out of the residential college to pursue degree programs in the host college. However, History's move to the College of Social Sciences and other possible restructuring initiatives weaken these advantages.

Creating an innovative, selective, residential liberal arts program will have implications for existing liberal arts programs on campus, regardless of whether the program is created as an autonomous residential college or a residential program in an existing college. There is a risk of a new college/program with "special" focus and status leading to a sense of "second-class" status for existing liberal arts degree programs. There is also, however, the potential of a residential college/program creating a healthy push for existing programs to consider and enhance their

strengths, e.g., opportunities for deeper focus in particular disciplines and domains. It is important to consider these potential impacts in both in deciding where the program will reside (autonomous college or affiliated program) and in how the program is developed.

Will creating an autonomous college with strong emphasis on undergraduate teaching in faculty recruitment, review, and promotion draw faculty with strong commitments to teaching excellence to the new program, thus diminishing the resources for and focus on excellence on excellence in teaching in existing liberal arts programs? Or will the strong focus on excellence in teaching “spill over” to existing programs? Embedding the new residential program in an existing host college might provide opportunities for synergy among faculty of different programs, but might also hamper the desired development of innovative programs because of the difficulty of change in existing college organization.

In the current economic environment, colleges and the university as a whole are under considerable pressure to generate revenue through external funding. Much of this revenue comes from grants for research, scholarship, and outreach efforts. Would an autonomous residential college, which will be “expensive” if it is to keep high-quality faculty and low student-faculty ratios, find itself under pressure to attract external funding through research and outreach efforts that might ultimately detract from its central mission of undergraduate teaching? Or would this pressure be greater for faculty in a residential program embedded in a host college?

4. Ideas on appointment and development of a faculty and appointment of acting dean.

Issues concerning process of faculty and administrative hiring and development are complicated in an emergent program. There is no single right way in which to approach the process. We believed that the levels of faculty involvement as articulated in the Residential College Draft are strong and would serve the residential college well. However, our discussion led us to several suggestions in terms of process.

First, the hiring and development of the core faculty and hiring of the acting dean should be driven by a faculty committee consisting of current MSU faculty with appropriate interests and expertise, in consultation with higher administration. (Robert Banks and Barbara Stiedle both have expertise in this area and could provide excellent consultation to the faculty committee.) This will result in development of a faculty who are invested in the success and development of the residential college. It would also allow for a smoother transition for these faculty members from their current positions to participation at some level in the residential college. This committee would have members who may eventually wish to be considered for core faculty positions in the residential college, but a desire to be a core faculty member in the residential college should not be required. Committee members should have an interest in participating in the residential college as at least an affiliate or cooperating faculty member. This faculty would probably be drawn primarily from the College of Arts and Letters, but might also include those departments identified in the Residential College Draft. Perhaps this initial committee could be formulated by asking for recommendations of appropriate faculty members from the deans and chairs or directors of those units lists in the Draft. In parallel, faculty should be given the opportunity to express their interest in participation. As participation in the residential college will eventually involve resource issues for colleges and units, deans and chairs should approve of

the participation of any faculty member's serving on the committee before that faculty member is asked to serve. It also should include several current MSU students from related degree programs and from ROIAL, Lyman Briggs, James Madison, or Bailey Scholars. These students could be identified by faculty members and/or student organizations.

Once appointed, this committee needs to more clearly articulate the vision of the residential college (No later than Spring 2005). Then they should embark upon the search first for an acting dean and then for several core faculty members (possibly 3-4). These positions would have their homes entirely in the residential college and should involve national searches, although those already within the MSU community could certainly apply. During this process, the faculty committee members might be given a small course reduction in their units to enable them to work with focus on the development of the new residential college. Once the first group of core faculty members have been identified (no later than end of Fall semester 2005), the curriculum for the college should be developed, involving the dean, the core faculty members, and members of the initial faculty committee who wish to continue service (to be in place no later than end of Spring 2006). Perhaps during this curriculum development process, core faculty members who were hired from outside of the MSU community could serve as sabbatical replacements, serve as temporary replacements for retirements or faculty who have left MSU, or teach additional courses in existing colleges. Obviously, this involves a substantial cost to MSU for a year, as MSU would be paying faculty salaries in a program that does not yet exist. Concurrently, student recruitment can begin and materials can be developed. In 2006-2007, additional core faculty members should be hired to begin their appointments in Fall 2007. The search criteria for these positions should include those below with the addition of more specifics regarding scholarly interests in order to create a balanced faculty within the college.

Following should be the criteria for hiring core faculty: (1) strong interest in undergraduate teaching (This must be clearly articulated in terms of its weight in the promotion and tenure process.), (2) interest and engagement in interdisciplinary scholarship within and between the liberal and creative arts (we are less convinced about inclusion of the sciences), (3) interest in and experience with residential college life, and (4) scholarly interests with and international/global focus, (5) interest and experience with service learning, outreach, and community engagement.

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