

September 16, 2005

To: Academic Council
Executive Committee of Academic Council

From: Ralph Putnam
Chair, University Committee on Academic Policy

Re: UCAP commentary on Residential College/School Report

The Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC) asked the University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP) to review and comment on the *Report of the Summer Task Force 2005 for the New Residential College/School*. UCAP discussed the report with Steve Esquith at our September 1, 2005, meeting, following a presentation of the work of the summer task force and its report by Professor Esquith. We also discussed the report at our September 15 meeting, after UCAP members had read the full report.

UCAP commends Professor Esquith and the summer task force for the outstanding work they have done to build on the work of previous working groups to continue developing a vision and curriculum for the new residential college or school. It was a pleasure to read such a thoughtful and clearly written report.

UCAP endorses the vision, structure, and plans for the Residential College laid out in the task force report, including the recommendation that it be created as an autonomous college. The plan holds great potential for creating a vibrant residential program that creates rich educational opportunities for its students while complementing other programs and activities across the MSU campus.

We hope that the new residential college envisioned in this task force report continues to develop. In our role of considering issues of undergraduate academic policy, we look forward to reviewing more detailed plans and policies as they are developed, to support the creation of a truly unique addition to the MSU academic community.

In that spirit, we share here a number of issues raised in UCAP's discussion of the task force report. These should be viewed as issues or tensions that we encourage faculty further developing plans for the new college to consider:

1. Continue to develop the college in ways that will enhance existing humanities and liberal arts colleges, programs, and activities, rather than drawing away existing resources from them. When reviewing the recommendations of a previous task force on a residential program (the predecessor of the current task force) UCAP urged consideration of a number of issues of the relationship with an autonomous college with existing programs and colleges. The current task force has clearly been mindful of these issues and we encourage future planners to continue in this spirit.
2. To make sense of a new institution, various players (e.g., students, faculty, the general public) may categorize, or "label," that institution and its purpose in varied ways. Already, one hears talk about this new residential college as "another James Madison", "a cultural studies" program, or a "liberal arts" program (with the varied meanings that term connotes for different individuals). We feel it is important that, as this new residential college develops, its developers and leaders be proactive in communicating and establishing the "shorthand" and images by which others describe and understand its vision and mission.
3. With the focus on developing proficiency in a foreign language, it is interesting to note the absence of any required basic coursework dealing with the more general issues of language, for example, the linguistic structure and history of languages, the acquisition of language, and the role of language in human communication, society and culture. Introductory courses that deal with these issues are Linguistics 200 (Introduction to Language) and 401 (Introduction to Linguistics). In addition, given the emphasis on both language and culture, it seems natural to consider a 'language and culture' elective pathway. We encourage those developing the curriculum for the new residential college to consider incorporating this sort of language content to further strengthen the goals of language proficiency and trans-cultural understanding.
4. The addition of required credits in the addendum to the task force report raised some concern that receiving a double major (encouraged in the spirit of the proposed college) may require more credits than is reasonable for four years of undergraduate study. We encourage careful consideration to achieve an appropriate number of required credits.

5. UCAP members lauded the inclusion of graduate students in the work and mentoring of the new college. UCAP members raised two questions related to graduate students:
 - a. Will graduate students (i.e., *special fellows*) be recruited to participate from a national and/or international pool?
 - b. What form of support will there be for graduate students in various short-term mentoring roles? (support as TAs? Course credit?)

We encourage involvement of a variety of graduate students through these activities and structures.

6. Admissions criteria are not explicitly addressed in the task force report, although it is UCAP's understanding that these would be the same as for other general undergraduate applicants. UCAP recommends that there be no minimum GPA requirements other than those already set by the University. This policy is important (a) to support the creation of a diverse student body in the new college and (b) to avoid creating a more selective program that could compete with other undergraduate programs for strong students.