

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS - URBANA-CHAMPAIGN CAMPUS

TO: CRUEL Staff Council ..

FROM: Richard Smock, Frank Duff, King Broadrick, and Roland Holmes

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The Board of Trustees of the State of Illinois has challenged us to improve the quality of instruction in our learning programs. We have been asked to develop a plan for the improvement of instruction. It is our belief that we are in the line for this project to lead a concerted drive to improve the quality of instruction for master students, especially at the graduate and postgraduate level. We do not believe that at this moment we can say that we are among the leading institutions in providing instruction for students and postgraduate of the highest quality level — the level to which we aspire in every aspect of our total academic program.

The challenge has a long history, but our response remains inadequate. It is true that there are a considerable number of important activities aimed at improving the educational situation of undergraduate students, but the concentration is too narrow, the efforts are uncoordinated, and the impact inadequate. We have not found ways to coordinate across disciplines boundaries for undergraduate programs as it has been the case in the past. We have a variety of fields that faculty on undergraduate curriculum. If we are to meet this challenge, a double-barreled approach is called for:

1. Create a structure within the university, capable of identifying and organizing the existing and potential activities among the faculty for dealing with undergraduate instructional needs.
2. Define the needs as they exist on this campus for undergraduate activities and channel the energies of those who are engaged in coping with our instructional problems.

A PROPOSAL TO ENCOURAGE UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS - URBANA-CHAMPAIGN CAMPUS

American universities, certainly including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, are being challenged to maintain and improve the quality of undergraduate education. The Long-Range Planning Committee on our campus has said, "Improvement in the quality of undergraduate education -- especially at the freshmen-sophomore level -- will have very high priority among the University's goals for the 1970's". The Board of Higher Education for the State of Illinois has challenged us to develop the capability of integrating a wide variety of learning resources specifically aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of learning programs through research and development activities. And as far back as 1967, Harold Howe II, the then U.S. Commissioner of Education, accused the academic world of taking an "inadequate and unreasonably inflexible" approach to the needs of undergraduate education. He charged that most teaching practices today are essentially the same as those of the 1930's and that there had been little, if any, change in "many of the assumptions about the relationship of the university to the students". More recently, Chancellor Peltason said in an open letter to the faculty ". . . I believe that now is the time for this campus to make a concerted drive to improve the quality of instruction for undergraduates, especially at the freshmen and sophomore level. I do not believe that at this moment we can say that we are among the leading institutions in providing instruction for freshmen and sophomores of the highest quality level -- the level to which we aspire in every aspect of our total academic program."

The challenge has a long history, but our response remains inadequate. It is true that there are a considerable number of fragmented activities aimed at improving the educational situation of undergraduate students, but the organization is too complex, the efforts too small, the impact inadequate. We have not found ways to creatively cross discipline boundaries for undergraduate programs or to put to use the expertise from a variety of fields that impinge on undergraduate curriculum. If rhetoric is to become action, a double-barreled approach is called for:

1. Create a structure within the university complex capable of attracting and organizing the expertise that already exists among the faculty for dealing with undergraduate instructional needs.
2. Define the needs as they exist on this campus to focus the activities and channel the energies of those who become engaged in coping with our undergraduate instructional problems.

We need not start from scratch; structural changes that reflect the high priority placed on undergraduate education have already been carefully considered, and recommendations made, by the Long-Range Planning Committee of this campus. In part their report said:

"The Urbana-Champaign campus shall become a laboratory for testing new approaches to undergraduate education, new curricula, and new courses . . . While the faculty must provide the student with an educational environment conducive to learning and experimentation, the faculty must be provided with the stimuli and means to effect required reform. An Associate Vice Chancellor will provide the focal point for encouraging, planning, developing and evaluating reform of the learning interface between teacher and student. This officer will head a development group whose sole objective shall be the reconstitution of personalized instruction."

We support the Long-Range Planning Committee's recommendation to establish an Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education. We would point out that simply appointing another Associate Vice Chancellor will not in and of itself guarantee the improvements needed. Success of the undertaking will depend on three things: First, on the energy and resourcefulness of the man appointed; second, on the support he is given by the central administration; and third, on the support and enthusiasm he and his developmental group are able to generate within the faculty. We believe that consideration should be given to reorganization within the Chancellor's Office in order to permit creation of the new position of Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education.

In addition to the sources already recognized, the experience of many persons at the Urbana-Champaign campus will testify to the undergraduate curricular needs that are related to the functioning of the proposed Associate Vice Chancellor:

1. There is a need for coordinated curriculum development, experimentation, evaluation, and research in undergraduate education. Often departments will restructure their curriculum without consulting other departments that may be affected. Often there is a lack of consideration of the allocation of a student's time during a semester or a year (e.g., the incompatibility of intensive or experiential courses with lecture courses in an individual student's planning for a semester's work). And often departments and colleges conduct only the most superficial curriculum review. Innovation and experimentation with courses must be related to other parts of the undergraduate curriculum, and all should be evaluated systematically.

2. There is a need for improved dissemination of alternative programs for both students and faculty. Academic advising is presently inadequate. Too many alternatives are known only to certain advisors or certain students, and official handbooks do not seem to alleviate the situation.

3. There is a need for a thorough and continuing re-examination of traditional credentialing and certifying processes, including the development of systems of evaluation that will allow us to certify for credit other types of educational experience than the traditional "course". Current procedures for the evaluation of student work cannot accurately reflect course diversity, 199 courses, or alternative patterns of education (interdisciplinary and independent study), nor do they provide for variable credits or competence-based certification. In fact, programs of evaluation for a wide variety of educational activities on this campus need to be instituted if we are to meet the requirements of effective and efficient instruction.

To meet these needs, a development group headed by an Associate Vice Chancellor would engage in activities of which the following list is illustrative rather than exhaustive:

1. Innovation and Development.
 - a. To sponsor and support quality innovation and development efforts in undergraduate curriculum (e.g., three year programs, Unit I, and the like), and to develop possibilities for external funding of experimental programs or innovations where that seems feasible.
 - b. To serve as a medium through which plans for the reallocation of resources for undergraduate education might be aired and implemented when such plans need the offices of more than one college.

2. Information Services.
 - a. To develop more effective advising systems for undergraduate students.
 - b. To identify and disseminate information to faculty, students and administrative officers related to:
 - (1) Educational research and development in higher education at this and other institutions.
 - (2) Alternative programs and interdisciplinary learning experiences currently available on this campus.

3. Evaluation and Research.

- a. To encourage and conduct research, both short term and longitudinal, in support of the efforts to develop new and improved programs and curricula.
- b. To sponsor and support evaluation research and methodology suitable to the improvement of instruction, especially including that associated with our systems of certifying the competency of students, and the effectiveness and efficiency of instructional programs.

It is imperative that this be a truly faculty-oriented, interdisciplinary program. In the letter to the faculty from Chancellor Peltason mentioned earlier, he said that ". . . it is difficult if not impossible to bring about changes in a university by administrative fiat. But when we talk about setting new priorities, about changing the educational directions, about innovation, we are talking about persuading, supporting, or encouraging faculty to do something different next year from what they are doing this year." We add that this must be more than moral persuasion and moral support. Reward systems powerful enough to attract and maintain the creative energies of faculty, through such mechanisms as joint or short term appointments to the development group operating with an Associate Vice Chancellor, need to be implemented. Experimental curricula, courses, and evaluation procedures must be planned and implemented by faculty representing the college and discipline directly involved with the cooperation of appropriate supporting disciplines and agencies to the end that a student's undergraduate education may be of the same high quality that characterize other efforts on our campus.

No budget is attached to this proposal. Instituting an Associate Vice Chancellor's position and charging that position with the responsibility of creating a development group to fulfill its function calls for a careful look at a possible reorganization of units presently funded and operating under a charge that has some relevance to our needs. To accomplish this we recommend that a committee of faculty, students, and administrators be appointed by the Chancellor to consider the matter of the reallocation of funds necessary to define the development group.

Any budget, in addition to providing for an Associate Vice Chancellor's salary, should have a major portion directed toward obtaining the services of members of the present faculty of the University, either through a split appointment between a department and the Associate Vice Chancellor's Office or a full time appointment for a restricted period of time.