

**FINAL REPORT OF  
THE COMMITTEE ON IMPLEMENTATION**

**Of The Recommendations Made By**

**THE TASK FORCE ON ENHANCING THE  
UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE**

**Submitted to President Robert M. Gates**

**February 1, 2006**

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**BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

At a meeting with the Council of Deans on August 31, 2005, Dr. Robert M. Gates, President of Texas A&M University, conveyed his intention of appointing a committee that would examine the work product of the Task Force on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience. Specifically, the purpose of the new committee would be to determine the priority of implementation of the recommendations made by the Task Force in their report to the President, delivered in May of 2005. A subsequent meeting hosted by Dr. Gates was held on September 28, 2005, with the purpose of appointing the committee chair and members, as follows.

- Dr. Elsa A. Murano, Vice Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Chair of the Committee
- Dr. Thomas Regan, Dean of Architecture
- Dr. Bjorn Kjerfve, Dean of Geosciences
- Dr. Richard Adams, Dean of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (Dr. Evelyn Castiglioni and Dr. Debbie Kochevar, substitutes for Dr. Adams)
- Dr. Jane Conoley, Dean of Education
- Dr. Douglas Palmer, Executive Associate Dean of Education
- Dr. Douglas Slack, Speaker-elect of the Faculty Senate
- Dr. Mary Jo Richardson, Chair of Task Force on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience
- Dr. Robert Webb, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Research
- Dr. Jan Winniford, Associate VP for Student Affairs
- Mr. Nathan Wolfe, Student

Dr. Gates provided Dr. Murano with the charge for the committee: to “identify which recommendations of each (Task Force) working group we should move forward with, and determine the sequence of implementation, based on difficulty and cost”, with the deadline for receiving the committee’s report set for February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006.

## **PROCESS FOLLOWED**

The Committee on Implementation held its first meeting on October 31, 2005, at which time an overview of the Task Force’s report was presented by Dr. Richardson, who had served as Chair of that group. She provided an overview of the Task Force’s report and the recommendations and time frame for implementation of the recommendations that emerged as synergistic themes from the subcommittees. The subcommittees of the Task Force were:

1. Common-first year experience
2. Learning communities
3. Undergraduate research
4. Leadership education and development
5. Honors opportunities
6. Course delivery
7. Summer school
8. Core curriculum
9. In- and out-of-classroom learning experience
10. Progress towards degree

The Committee discussed the process it would utilize in accomplishing its charge. Members agreed to categorize each individual recommendation from the Task Force subcommittee as to whether its implementation would be easy (defined as having a low ratio of effort to impact, and a high probability of success), difficult (defined as having a high ratio of effort to impact, but with a relatively high probability of success), or should be eliminated from further consideration (defined as having a low probability of success). In order to do this, the Committee decided that it would need to define the criteria it would use to carry out such a categorization. The following criteria were chosen:

- \* **IMPACT:** Will it be a substantive and measurable enhancement to the undergraduate experience given internal and external forces and constraints?
- \* **PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS:** How complex, risky, and full of obstacles is it?
- \* **EFFORT:** How much work and resources will it take to implement?

The Committee was divided into three subcommittees, one for each of the criteria listed above. Each subcommittee was charged with determining the process it would use to analyze each of the 86 recommendations from the Task Force’s subcommittees, according to its particular criterion, and with providing a report to the full Committee after evaluating all recommendations using that process. The subcommittee on **Impact** was led by Dr. Richardson, the subcommittee on **Probability of Success** was led by Dr. Slack, and the subcommittee on **Effort** was led by Dr. Webb. It was also decided by the Committee that Impact would be the overarching criterion that would be used in ultimately assessing implementation.

The **Impact** subcommittee provided an analysis to the Committee with the Task Force’s subcommittee recommendations being categorized as true recommendations, with others deemed to be supporting actions, i.e., implementation strategies, resource needs, or management instructions. This subcommittee then assessed the impact of the true recommendations, assigning numerical values according to degree of impact that the specific recommendation would produce, as follows:

- \* High impact: 1-2
- \* Medium impact: 3
- \* Low impact: 4-5

The **Probability of Success** subcommittee assigned three numbers to each recommendation. The first number reflected the complexity of the recommendation, the second number reflected the risk of implementation, and the third number reflected the number of obstacles to accomplish implementation, and these were assigned as follows:

- \* Complexity: High = 5; Low = 1
- \* Risk: High = 5; Low = 1
- \* Number of obstacles: High = 5; Low = 1

The three numbers (complexity, risk, obstacles) were then averaged to yield one number. This number was assigned a degree of **Probability of Success**, as follows:

- \* High Probability of Success: 1-2
- \* Medium Probability of Success: 3
- \* Low Probability of Success: 4-5

The **Effort** subcommittee assigned five numbers to each recommendation. The first number reflected the cost required for implementation, the second number reflected the human resources required for implementation, the third number reflected the number of procedures that would have to be developed or changed for implementation, the fourth number reflected the amount of training that would be required for implementation, and the fifth number reflected the cost of rewarding implementation, and these were assigned as follows:

- \* Cost of implementation: High = 3; Low = 1
- \* Human resources required: High = 3; Low = 1
- \* Number of new/revised procedures: High = 3; Low = 1
- \* Amount of training required: High = 3; Low = 1
- \* Cost of rewarding implementation: High = 3; Low = 1

The five numbers (cost of implementation, human resources required, number of procedures, amount of training, and cost of rewarding implementation) were then averaged to yield one number. This number was assigned a degree of **Effort**, as follows:

- \* Great effort: 2.1 or higher
- \* Medium effort: 1.6 to 2.0
- \* Minimal effort: 1 to 1.5

The Committee then met as a whole on various occasions to review and discuss the deliberations from the three subcommittees. First, consensus was arrived regarding which of the

individual recommendations were deemed to be concrete recommendations, and which were supporting actions, such as corollaries, processes or implementation strategies, management directives, or resource needs/rewards, as assessed by the subcommittee on **Impact**. Second, the Committee discussed the findings of each subcommittee regarding Impact, Probability of Success, and Effort, arriving at a consensus, and making several changes to the wording of various recommendations in order to better reflect the opinions of the entire Committee. Third, the Committee then analyzed each of the true recommendations regarding when each one should be implemented, according to the following scheme:

- Implement **NOW**: To be implemented during 2006.
- Implement **LONGER-TERM**: To be started in 2006, but completed over time.
- **NO GO**: Should not be implemented at all.

The above designations were determined as follows: First, any recommendation that was deemed to have a high Impact and either a high or medium Probability of Success, would be implemented in 2006, regardless of the effort required. Second, any recommendation that was deemed to have a high Impact but low Probability of Success, or that was deemed to have medium Impact, its implementation would begin in 2006 but would probably not be completed until 2008, regardless of the Effort required. Third, any recommendation that was deemed to have a low Impact would not be implemented at all, regardless of the Probability of Success or Effort required. The results of this work were compiled into a table that is included in this report as part of the Appendix.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following Table summarizes the implementation designation for the recommendations made by the Task Force subcommittees on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience that were deemed to be true recommendations. As stated above, most of the original recommendations were deemed to be supporting actions, such as corollaries, implementation strategies, management instructions, or resource needs/rewards, and not true recommendations. A complete listing of all recommendations and their individual final scores for impact, probability of success, and effort can be found in Appendix A of this report.

**Implementation Designations for Task Force Recommendations and Supporting Actions.**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUPPORTING ACTIONS (in italics)</b>	<b>NOW/LONGER-TERM/NO GO</b>
Common First-year Experience	<p><b>1 (All incoming students enroll in one small class)</b>  <i>2 (corollary)</i>  <i>3 (corollary)</i></p> <p><b>4 (Uniform high quality of advising is ensured)</b></p>	NOW  NOW
Learning Communities	<p><b>5 (Create or expand learning communities)</b>  <i>6 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>7 (rewards)</i>  <i>8 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>9 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>10 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>11 (resources)</i>  <i>12 (rewards)</i>  <i>13 (implementation strategy)</i></p>	NOW
Undergraduate Research	<p><b>14 (Make inquiry/research learning the standard)</b>  <i>15 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>16 (implementation strategy)</i></p> <p><b>17 (All undergraduates have a summary research experience)</b>  <i>18 (resources)</i></p>	LONGER-TERM  NOW
Leadership Education and Development	<p><b>19 (Minor in leadership)</b>  <i>20 (corollary)</i>  <i>21 (corollary)</i>  <i>22 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>23 (corollary)</i>  <i>24 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>25 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>26 (corollary)</i></p>	NOW
Honors Opportunities	<p><b>26.5 (Strengthen and enhance honors experience)</b>  <i>27 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>28 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>29 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>30 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>31 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>32 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>33 (management)</i>  <i>34 (implementation strategy/rewards)</i>  <i>35 (resources)</i>  <i>36 (implementation strategy)</i>  <i>37 (implementation strategy)</i></p>	NOW

	<p>38 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p><b>38.5 (Create honors college)</b></p> <p>39 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>40 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>41 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>42 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>43 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>44 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>45 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>46 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>47 (<i>implementation strategy/resources</i>)</p> <p>48 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p>	LONGER-TERM
Course Delivery	<p><b>56 (Course delivery plans from all depts. &amp; colleges)</b></p> <p>49 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>50 (<i>corollary</i>)</p> <p>51 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>52 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>53 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>54 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>55 (<i>implementation strategy</i>)</p> <p>57 (<i>rewards</i>)</p> <p>58 (<i>resources</i>)</p> <p>59 (<i>resources</i>)</p> <p>60 (<i>resources</i>)</p> <p>61 (<i>rewards</i>)</p> <p>62 (<i>implementation strategy/resources</i>)</p>	NOW
Summer School	<p><b>63 (Encourage summer school attendance)</b></p> <p><b>66 (Appoint Dean of Summer School)</b></p> <p><b>66.5 (Additional academic opportunities during summer school sessions)</b></p> <p>64 (<i>management strategy</i>)</p> <p>65 (<i>resources</i>)</p> <p><b>67 (Expansion of distance education and on-line instruction during Summer Sessions)</b></p> <p><b>68 (Explore options for establishing trimesters)</b></p> <p><b>69 (Establish 5-week CORE summer classes)</b></p> <p><b>70 (Require value-added experiences)</b></p>	<p>LONGER-TERM</p> <p>NO-GO</p> <p>LONGER-TERM</p> <p>NOW</p> <p>NO GO</p> <p>NO GO</p> <p>NOW</p>
Core Curriculum	<b>72 (Implement recommendations of previous task forces)</b>	NOW

	<i>71 (management strategy)</i> <i>73 (implementation strategy)</i> <i>75 (management strategy)</i> <i>76 (implementation strategy)</i> <i>77 (implementation strategy)</i>  <b>74 (Work to enact a reduction of HIST/POLS State requirements)</b>  <b>78 (Limit core curriculum courses to lower division)</b>	  NOW  NOW
In-Out Classroom Learning Experiences	<b>79 (Promote integration of in/out classroom experiences)</b> <i>80 (implementation strategy)</i> <i>81 (corollary)</i> <i>82 (implementation strategy)</i> <i>83 (implementation strategy)</i>	NOW
Progress Towards Degree	<b>85 (Create university complete enrollment management plan)</b> <i>84 (implementation strategy)</i> <i>85 (implementation strategy)</i>	NOW

Based on the above information, only 18 of the original 86 recommendations of the Task Force subcommittees were deemed to be true recommendations. The committee decided to add three recommendations that were not explicitly stated as such in the Task Force Report, but which would clarify the original intentions of the Task Force. These “new” recommendations were numbered #26.5, #38.5, and #66.5, for a total of 21 recommendations. The Committee recommends that 15 of the 21 recommendations be implemented within 2006, and 3 be implemented by beginning the process now, and completing implementation over a longer term, such as by 2008. The Committee further recommends that three recommendations made by the Task Force subcommittees should not be implemented at all (#66, #68, and #69). Thus, the Committee recommends a total of 18 recommendations to be implemented.

#### Emergence of Six “Big Ideas”

After further examination of the 18 recommendations, the Committee grouped them into six thematic areas. These represent “big ideas” that could be used to communicate with the university community and with external constituencies to more easily convey how the University will seek to enhance the undergraduate experience for its students in the coming years.

The following is a list of the six “big ideas”, and the recommendations within each, specifying whether they should be implemented now or over a longer-term.

1. **Build faculty/student engagement through small classes.** All entering students will have one small-enrollment class applicable to their curriculum.
  - a. Recommendation #1 NOW  
All entering freshmen at Texas A&M University will have the opportunity to enroll in one small section of an academic class during their first semester, preferably in the student’s declared major or the core curriculum.
  
2. **Create an academic culture of communities of learners available to all students.** Learning communities will enhance student learning and success, building connections between students and faculty, and between in-class and out-of-class experiences. Sufficient numbers of learning communities must be available to allow access to all students. Cross-disciplinary communities will be encouraged.
  - a. Recommendation #5 NOW  
All entering freshmen at Texas A&M University will have the opportunity to be part of a learning community to aid in their successful transition to university academic expectations and to enhance their connections with a diverse group of individuals.
  
3. **Establish high quality value-added educational activities for all students.** These experiences include a minor in leadership, participation in professional internship/immersion experiences, international educational experiences, and rigorous academic opportunities in a newly established Honors College. Special attention will be given to increasing international educational opportunities for students, e.g., study abroad, research abroad, etc.
  - a. Recommendation #19 NOW  
A draft interdisciplinary minor in leadership was created by the original Task Force subcommittee. This document will enable academic units to expeditiously prepare the paperwork for approval through the university committees.
  
  - b. Recommendation #26.5 NOW  
Several implementation ideas were presented to strengthen the current university and college level honors programs to promote a community of scholars and continuity of offerings.
  
  - c. Recommendation #38.5 LONGER-TERM  
Creating an Honors College will require obtaining a substantial endowment for the establishment of the college itself, providing a suitable physical facility, and funding for faculty.

- d. Recommendation #66.5 LONGER-TERM  
Add to the academic offerings in the summer sessions by developing a high-quality and value-added educational experience, designed to attract prominent scholars to campus to offer students intellectually exciting mini-mester courses, special symposia, or thematic conferences with potential participation of faculty, graduate students and undergraduates.
- e. Recommendation #70 NOW  
Require value-added off-campus opportunities for all students, such as study abroad, internships, research experiences, and/or co-op work-study, that expose students to international experiences and culturally diverse environments.
- f. Recommendation #79 NOW  
Integration of in and out of classroom experiences will result in a holistic learning environment where students will dialogue with each other about learning and connect their in- and out- of classroom experiences. Overall learning will be improved as students master intellectual and practical skills to be successful.
4. **Complement Research I status with undergraduate research/inquiry activities.** One of the defining features of education at TAMU is the central role of research as a learning paradigm. Immersion in the conceptualization and conduct of research/inquiry will be integrated into undergraduate education programs for students in all majors.
- a. Recommendation #14 LONGER-TERM  
Make inquiry/research-based learning (i.e. problem-driven, experiential learning, active learning) the standard learning paradigm in lower division and upper division classes in every major.
- b. Recommendation #17 NOW  
Create “a summary experience” option for all undergraduate majors such as a capstone course/project, research-intensive experience, or senior thesis.
5. **Embrace innovative technology-mediated instruction and distance learning technologies.** The rapid development of technology supports learning and instruction. These instructional resources will support increased access and opportunities for students on and off campus.
- a. Recommendation #56 NOW  
Enhanced course delivery plans emanating from departments and colleges will be fostered and encouraged through necessary and appropriate funding.
- b. Recommendation #67 NOW  
Offer opportunities for degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking students for courses via distance education during the summer sessions. Upper-division course offerings should be considered. Costs of course offerings need to be competitive with comparable courses offered by others.

6. **Ensure quality of academic experiences.** Assessment activities will be integrated with professional accreditation standards where appropriate and will include students' progress toward degree, core curriculum, advising, and assess to majors.
- a. Recommendation #4 NOW  
Surveys of students and advisors have shown that advising is generally of high quality. Some areas provide more personal, helpful, and accurate advising than others. Ensure consistently high quality advising throughout the university.
  - b. Recommendation #63 NOW  
Actively encourage students to attend summer school to further progress toward obtaining their degrees in a timely fashion.
  - c. Recommendation #72 NOW  
Implement the recommendations in the Core Curriculum Assessment Committee Report of November 2004. These recommendations include Faculty Senate assessment of the core curriculum, ongoing professional development through the Center for Teaching Excellence for faculty teaching core curriculum courses and the clear statement of learning outcomes in core curriculum courses.
  - d. Recommendation #74 NOW  
The 12-hour history/political science state law adds hours to the core curriculum and the overall curricula in the disciplines. Lowering the number of hours from the 12 required would enable reduction in total hours for a degree and thereby aid in increasing the number of students completing degree requirements to graduate in four years.
  - e. Recommendation #78 NOW  
Core curriculum courses should be limited to lower division courses, except in rare circumstances. Given the fundamental nature of the core curriculum all students should have the opportunity to experience core curriculum courses in relatively small classes.
  - f. Recommendation #85 NOW  
To effectively manage the complex issues facing the University associated with more students being qualified for admission to the University as freshmen than the University capacity to admit, the University must develop a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan. This plan will include access to majors and mechanisms for ensuring students' progress toward graduation.

#### Recommended Implementation Mechanism

Implementation of these six "big ideas" should not be delayed. The Committee strongly recommends that six interdisciplinary working groups be appointed by President Gates as soon

as possible to guide the implementation of the recommendations within the six areas. These groups should be composed of people who are “implementers”, and not just thinkers, so that implementation of the recommendations can be achieved in a timely manner.

It is worth noting that various members of the Committee had served in the original Task Force on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience. We found their involvement to be of great value in our ability to accomplish the charge given to us by Dr. Gates. Their participation ensured continuity of thought and helped clarify the meaning and intent of the recommendations made by the Task Force. This proved to be crucial in the Committee’s deliberations. Therefore, it is strongly advised that some of the people who served on the original Task Force should be appointed to serve in the six working groups.

It is also recommended that an individual be appointed to serve as overall coordinator of the implementation efforts of each working group. This individual would serve to report to Dr. Gates of the progress being made by each working group, and would also serve to ensure that connectivity exists in the implementation of those recommendations whose success depends on those being managed by other groups.

### Cost of Implementation

Implementation of these recommendations will require an intensive commitment of time, energy and effort by faculty, administration and staff. The Committee made an attempt at estimating the costs associated with each of the recommendations. First, we believe that to build faculty and student engagement through having all entering students enrolling in one small class will have a large cost implication, since it will require many programs to offer introductory courses in smaller class sections. However, it should be noted that the Committee did not suggest that every section of the first year program be presented in small class sections, only that each student enroll in at least one such course. Further, many programs are already offering their majors this type of course. The place where the cost is likely to be greatest will be in the programs with large numbers of majors. Adding small sections for these majors would correspond to opening up ~100 small class sections per semester.

Second, regarding the creation of an academic culture of communities of learners available to all students, the Committee acknowledges that many colleges already have begun establishing these communities. In order to reduce costs and build on existing structures, we recommend that

this initiative be combined with that of creating small classes for entering freshmen. To build such a community would require resources related to faculty time (partial teaching time credit, 10-20%) and one or more teaching assistants per course, to be replicated in each college.

Third, to establish high quality value-added educational activities for all students, the Committee believes that in some areas, the costs would be minimal. For example, establishing a minor in leadership could almost be done without cost, provided there was an interest by a particular academic program to offer it. Regarding strengthening the honors experience, the Committee believes that there are already a number of programs underway to accomplish this. What is needed is coordination of the activities in each college with the central honors program office. However, establishing an honors college is an entirely different matter. This effort will require significant resources through endowments to build facilities and support these activities, costing several million dollars. Adding to the summer school program, and requiring value-added off-campus opportunities, would require significant resources. It is estimated that the former would require \$200,000 annually, and the latter would require \$50,000 annually, mainly for coordination of activities across colleges.

Fourth, to require research or inquiry activities of all students, this will need to be carried out in stages, gradually adding or modifying current course offerings. Developing these courses will take faculty release time and teaching assistant support at the level of \$50,000 per course for brand-new courses, and approximately \$25,000 to modify an existing course. In addition, additional resources would likely be required to support equipment or special facilities for these courses. Regarding requiring a summary research experience, many programs already have begun heading in this direction. However, for programs with large populations of majors, special courses will need to be developed to provide such an opportunity in larger student groups rather than one-on-one interactions with a faculty mentor. The Committee estimates that for such programs, 15 sections of 20 students with a faculty mentor and a teaching assistant would be required. There are current activities in some colleges which could be used as models, and adapted to meet this need.

Fifth, to embrace innovative technology-mediated instruction and distance learning, the Committee believes that the costs would entail the human resources and time it would take to develop business plans. Some colleges may already be working on these, which would greatly reduce requirements for new resources. To expand distance education to the summer, there

would be a cost associated to support the necessary hardware and personnel to offer these courses. The good news is that once this initial investment is made, it would be possible to offer these courses at a reduced cost. As already noted in this report, previous task forces have made recommendations on the strategies that should be implemented to expand distance education. There are costs associated with this, such as in setting up an office on campus to keep track of these courses and to review them periodically. The Committee estimates annual costs of approximately \$100,000 for this activity.

Sixth, to ensure the quality of our academic programs, the costs would be related to training of advisors and of coordinating advising activities across colleges. Encouraging summer enrollment would entail offering upper division courses in some programs with small numbers of majors that would be attractive to upper division students. Reducing the history and political science requirement in order to reduce curriculum hours will require a coalition of state universities. The major cost would be in the time required to build such a coalition and to propose this suggestion to the legislature. The recommendation to have core curriculum courses become lower division only would have only a modest financial impact, except for the loss of income in those departments that currently use upper division courses as core courses to leverage their share of the subvention funds being distributed to their colleges. Finally, the cost of developing enrollment management plans would be limited to the time required by each college to develop these plans.

### Additional Observations

All courses, core curriculum changes, minors, and departmental curricula should be developed, revised and approved by the faculty through the appropriate existing committees, and not by new entities. Many of the recommendations presented in this report will require coordination of efforts among multiple units, working in tandem on several recommendations simultaneously. For example, recommendation #1 requires more small class offerings by the departments and coordination of the advising and registration of students so that all students have one small class. It is clear that few of the recommendations could be successful without full support of the President, as well as academic support and student affairs offices and personnel.

As noted above, changes to the legal requirement of 12 hours of American history and political science for all baccalaureate degrees will require alliances with other universities

seeking the same goals, with the university administration working together with their counterparts in other institutions to convince the Texas Legislature of the merit of this initiative. Similarly, creating a new Honors College will require involvement by the President in the form of seeking substantial new resources through an endowment.

For faculty and administrators to be engaged in these changes, fundamental recognition of faculty contributions to undergraduate education and the enhanced learning in small classes, learning communities, inquiry-guided learning, leadership development, and integration of curricular and co-curricular activities must be a part of the evaluation and merit-review recognition system of the university. As the recommendations are implemented, evaluation and assessment of the improvements of the undergraduate experience will need to be performed on a regular basis.