

**Report of the Task Force on the Residential College Model**

**February 2016**

## Residential College Task Force Final Report

### 1. Introduction

The University's residential colleges have evolved significantly since the 2007 establishment of the current college system, in which three four-year residential colleges were paired with three two-year residential colleges. A number of the [goals put forth in developing the system](#) have been achieved, including providing enhanced academic advising for all undergraduates, creating a "director of student life" position within each college, establishing a Resident Graduate Student program, improving the dining options, creating opportunities for juniors and seniors to live in the colleges, and providing more robust programming and social options.

In recent years, the University has taken important steps to continue to improve the student experience. Campus task forces have focused on a number of aspects of residential life, including the [relationship between the University and the eating clubs](#); [campus social and residential life](#); [undergraduate women's leadership](#); and [diversity, equity and inclusion](#). Many of those task forces' recommendations have been implemented and have informed the current University-wide strategic planning process.

The Task Force on the Residential College Model embraced the University's commitment to provide its students with a vibrant residential experience that advances learning, enables interaction and meaningful engagement, and supports both personal growth and community development. The task force further intends its recommendations to realize a vision in which the residential colleges truly feel like home to our students. They should provide a place where they feel welcome and accepted, and where they come together to learn from their diverse experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds, and challenge and inspire one another. The colleges also provide an important nexus of academic and non-academic life.

Over the course of the 2014-15 academic year, the task force members engaged faculty, students, staff, and alumni, and considered how to leverage Princeton's distinctive context and culture to enhance residential life at the University. The task force dedicated special attention to how best to build community within the colleges among undergraduate students from all four class years, while honoring and preserving the powerful and important affiliation that students have with their class.

The strategic priorities and major recommendations for the colleges outlined in this report are intended to advance the University's educational mission and support its [broader campus life goals](#).

## **2. Charge and Process**

Charge: As part of the University-wide strategic planning process, the Task Force on the Residential College Model was formed in 2014 to explore a variety of questions pertaining to the residential college system. “To encourage the most robust and productive thinking around the University's college model, task force members [were] asked to review and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the University's current college model and engage in "blue-sky" thinking on several topics. In particular, the task force [was] asked to explore the following areas creatively: (1) the ideal size and composition of the residential colleges and (2) the best ways in which the residential colleges can provide students with social and intellectual community, engagement, support, advising and mentorship.” (*Charge to the Task Force on the Residential College Model, 2014*) (Appendix A)

Members: The Task Force membership included faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff (Appendix B).

Process: Between October 2014 and May 2015 the full task force met twelve times. The task force met with members of the college offices (i.e., deans, directors of studies, and directors of student life) and members of campus offices that collaborate with the colleges (i.e., The Graduate School, Office of Dean of Undergraduate Students). In addition, subsets of the task force met with representatives from the Task Force on Service and Civic Engagement, the Council of College Heads, and the campus planning team.

To respond productively to its charge, the task force formed three subcommittees (see membership list in Appendix B): (1) Size, Composition and Affiliation; (2) Intellectual Life, Faculty and Graduate Student Involvement in the Residential Colleges; and (3) Community Engagement, Service and Leadership. Each subcommittee met several times independently, assisted with a self-study of its area of responsibility, and identified preliminary recommendations and areas for further exploration. In addition, an ad hoc group was formed to focus extensively on campus climate and respect, well-being, and leadership in the residential colleges (see membership list in Appendix B). This ad hoc group interviewed directors and student fellows associated with campus life centers (i.e., the Carl A. Fields Center, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Center, and the Women's Center).

## **3. Self-study and Benchmarking**

In assessing the strengths of the University's current residential college system and identifying opportunities to enhance it, the task force considered a broad range of inputs, including:

- data from a variety of existing student surveys, including the addition of new survey items generated by the task force for the 2015 enrolled student survey, yielding quantitative and qualitative data from 2,962 students;
- student focus groups, which provided qualitative input from 88 students. Student participants were from a wide range of groups on campus, including residential college advisers (RCAs), members of College Councils, students in residential

- colleges across all four years, upperclass students who do not live in a college (non-affiliated housing), and students with shared meal plans (that allow them to dine in their college and their eating club);
- housing and dining patterns;
  - space analyses (in partnership with the campus planning team);
  - conversations with the Young Alumni Trustees and the trustee Committee on Student Life, Health and Athletics;
  - prior recommendations from University task forces, the extent to which they have been implemented and, if so, whether they have achieved the stated goals;
  - a review of college models at 14 peer institutions, including in-depth phone interviews with administrators at Cornell and Middlebury and site visits to Harvard, Yale and Rice;

Self-Study: A number of the [goals stated at the inception of the four-year college system](#) in 2007 have been realized. Survey data suggests that students in all colleges have comparably high levels of satisfaction with the overall undergraduate education experience, and that students living in the colleges indicate satisfaction with the sense of community and social activities in the colleges. All colleges provide robust programming as well as myriad opportunities for formal and informal interaction among students and, to a lesser extent, faculty and staff. By design, the residential college populations are diverse.

With a robust residential college system in place, the task force concluded that the University is positioned to build on recent successes and further enhance the residential college experience for the campus community. In particular and as described throughout this report, the task force identified important opportunities for the colleges to: enhance community-building and cross-class connections; support and enable student leaders; facilitate more interactions between faculty and students; and improve campus climate and support the University's broader goals for diversity, inclusion and equity. As the physical nature of the colleges is integral to their success, the task force also focused on space needs in current and future colleges.

Benchmarking: In addition to a detailed self-study, to better understand the strengths of our colleges and the challenges they face, and to ascertain what changes to our current college system might better serve our undergraduate population, we examined our model through the lens of how other colleges and universities, both domestic and abroad, have structured their residential college systems.

Princeton's distinctive undergraduate residential experience has many differences from those at peer institutions; as a result, it is not feasible or wise to implement some of the structures that help to create a strong sense of community and college affiliation at those universities. However, our conversations with students, faculty, and administrators at our peer institutions about their college systems were exceedingly useful and provided many ideas for innovation in our system. In particular, we think there are lessons to be learned from other institutions about orientation and the moment when students "imprint" on their college; the roles of the head of the

college, resident faculty and faculty fellows; the importance of physical spaces; and the potential for student governance.

#### **4. Goals for the Residential Colleges**

The task force proposed the following goals for the residential colleges:

- a. Serve as a nexus of intellectual and social life on campus; provide environments where undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff can interact both formally and informally.
- b. Create environments that foster a sense of community and enable meaningful interactions among members of the college community; provide a sense of belonging for all students in an environment where different backgrounds and viewpoints are represented, respected and welcomed, and where students are able to engage the full spectrum of diversity at the University.
- c. Create healthy environments that support individual health and well-being and enable social, intellectual and personal growth, including opportunities and space to reflect on service and leadership in meaningful ways.
- d. Offer resources and support during various transitions that students encounter, including, for example, the transition to college, the transition from consuming knowledge to producing knowledge in independent research, and the transition from college to post-university life.

These goals -- and the recommendations put forth to help advance them -- were informed by several guiding principles:

- “Sense of home” – The residential colleges serve as a student home. Whatever other communities students belong to on campus, the college should be a place where they can return at the end of the day and be accepted as members of a respectful and healthy community.
- Equity of experience – In general, the University strives to create a context in which there is equity of experience for all students. Therefore, it is important to strive to provide a residential college experience that is equitable for all students regardless of the college in which they reside, especially given that students are randomly assigned to colleges as incoming freshmen. Equity of experience in our view entails comparable opportunities, resources, programming and advising, while also affirming each college’s special character and individual facilities.
- Diversity and inclusion – The University is committed to cultivating “a campus climate that encourages constructive exchange among people with differing perspectives and experiences” (President Eisgruber’s response to the May 2015 report of the Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). Given that students are randomly assigned to a college, the residential colleges ensure a space that is made up of people with different perspectives and experiences. Indeed, outside of the classroom the colleges are one of the few places on campus where difference can be

encountered and engaged with on a regular and meaningful basis. The professional staff and all faculty and students in advising/mentoring roles in the colleges should help students engage with this diversity in a thoughtful and respectful manner. The task force believes this opportunity should be capitalized upon in the colleges for it will likely have beneficial consequences for the rest of campus life.

- Continuity of college identity across years – Princeton students take on many identities while on campus. One of these is their college identity, which they embrace from the onset in their freshman year. Indeed, when they first arrive at Princeton, with the help of their RCAs, students connect with their residential colleges. The imprinting of the freshman year becomes a meaningful and lasting bond that can shape college identity and loyalty. While the task force does not believe the college identity should be the sole or even the primary identity for all students -- the task force recognizes and supports the strong, lifelong connection that students feel with their class -- there was consensus among the task force members and the students we spoke to that it is an important identity for students to maintain across the four years because of the benefits associated with a close-knit community, diversity, well-being and leadership opportunities.
- Connections across years – The colleges should provide the opportunity for students to form long-lasting bonds and learn from their peers across the four class years. These connections across years benefit freshmen and sophomores by making more visible examples of individuals who have utilized University resources and who have successfully coped with challenges and adversity. In addition, the benefit to upperclass students is that, by helping or mentoring younger students, they themselves feel more included in the community and less like transient visitors.
- Growth of the whole person through transitions – Students’ needs change across the four years of college. The residential colleges should help students negotiate the transitions they experience during college, encouraging them to make healthy choices along the way.

## **5. Strategic Priorities and Major Recommendations**

Below we offer four broad strategic priorities as well as a set of specific recommendations to advance each priority. The priorities and recommendations are presented in rank order of importance, and are made in light of the growing complexity of Princeton as an institution and the role of the residential colleges in this context. We provide a list of potential illustrative tactics in Appendix C that could be used to implement these recommendations.

### *Strategic Priority #1: Strengthen Community by Changing College Composition, Enhancing Affiliation, and Limiting Size*

A major goal for the residential college system is to create healthy environments that foster a sense of community and enable meaningful interactions among members of each college community. The following recommendations, taken together, offer a three-pronged approach to strengthening community within the colleges.

Create a True Four-Year College System: We recommend that all residential colleges be “four-year colleges,” in which students have the option to reside in their originally assigned college throughout their undergraduate experience. As with our current model, all freshmen and sophomores should reside in a residential college. Juniors and seniors should have the option to reside in their college, should they wish to do so, and they should be enabled to maintain strong affiliation with their college through programming, dining, and advising, even if they choose to live outside the college in non-affiliated housing. As described below, the implementation of this recommendation would provide an opportunity for all undergraduates who wish to remain in their college in their juniors and seniors to do so, facilitate connection across the four class years, help create healthy individuals during transitions, and support many of the University’s broader goals for the academic and residential student experience.

Our message to freshmen is that the colleges are students’ homes from the moment they come to campus. However, our current hybrid model of three two-year colleges and three four-year colleges is such that only approximately half of our freshmen class has the option to continue living in their “home” for junior and senior year, thereby creating different experiences for students assigned to two-year colleges compared to those assigned to four-year colleges. This jeopardizes the equity of experience for students.

For many students their Princeton career may be seen as divided into two parts: their “childhood” in the colleges and their “adulthood” in non-affiliated housing. A number of students reported significant disjunction between the first and second halves of their undergraduate experience. This bifurcation does not fully leverage the residential colleges’ support of the University’s commitments to creating community, enabling meaningful engagement, and providing opportunities for cross-class bonding and connection.

The numerous decisions, both academic (for A.B. students, “What should I concentrate in?”) and social (“Should I join an eating club or co-op?”), that students face in the spring semester of the sophomore year can be distracting and nerve-wracking, which may not create the healthiest transition period for individuals or communities. The University could contribute to a healthier campus climate by eliminating the forced “choice” of finding a new home that approximately half of the student body (those who were originally assigned to two-year colleges) must face in their sophomore year. While students who wished to live outside their college could certainly still continue to do so, those students who prefer to remain in their college community would be welcome to stay.

Our recommendation for a four-year college model is consonant with the recommendation described in the May 2015 report of the Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion that we “consider making every college a four-year environment, which can counteract the social disruption for juniors and seniors that can occur for students as they transition to eating clubs, independent dining status, and upperclass residence halls.” In addition, input from students, both through focus group conversations and anonymous surveys, confirmed the need for and value of a transition to a four-year model.

Many students expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to interact and connect with students in other class years, especially across the freshman-sophomore/junior-senior “divide.” The two-year college model reinforces this divide where freshmen and sophomore

residents have limited interactions with upperclass students in the colleges. Moreover, upperclass students have limited formal opportunities to share their experience and knowledge with freshmen and sophomores, despite our increased emphasis on peer advising and mentoring in the colleges.

Student survey data from 2015 suggests that a four-year model could help to support community-building. For example, of the juniors and seniors who live in a residential college, those who were originally assigned to a four-year college feel a stronger connection with their college community and the campus community more broadly than those who were originally assigned to a two-year college. Current dining patterns also support the idea that a four-year college system could help to enhance community-building. Regardless of where they live, juniors and seniors who were originally assigned to a four-year college eat in the residential college dining halls more than twice as often as those originally assigned to a two-year college, and these students eat in their “home” dining hall nearly four times as often as students originally assigned to a two-year college. This may suggest that a four-year college model creates a lasting sense of community in which students return home to dine.

The task force recommends creating opportunities for a small number of juniors and seniors to begin living in the current “two-year colleges” as soon as possible to transform them into “four-year colleges.” This may mean that initial efforts to introduce upperclass residents into these colleges will not achieve the recommended “critical mass” as described in the 2002 Report of the Four-Year College Program Planning Committee. However, the task force recommends taking this initial step. The success of the “Pink House” in Forbes College, which provided a small number of rooms to upperclass Forbesians, suggests that such an approach may be successful and could generate insights to inform the best options for upperclass residences within the colleges.

Strengthen the Connections Students Have with their Colleges and College Communities: The 2002 Report of the Four-Year College Program Planning Committee stated that all juniors and seniors would remain affiliated with their college. The task force does not believe the colleges have effectively achieved this goal. While it is true that students remain “affiliated” with respect to how they are listed in the college directory, juniors and seniors who do not live in residential colleges usually do not *feel nor think of themselves as* affiliated with their college.

The task force believes this is in part, but by no means entirely, due to our current hybrid model. If some students must leave their college because they are “forced out” when they become juniors, then it may be hard for them to continue to feel connected to the college. They may be less likely to form strong bonds even while they are residents of the college, knowing they will need to leave at the end of two years. To paraphrase one student, “*Really, if it’s only going to last a short while, then why should I put my energy into it?*”

The task force hypothesized that if students can change college affiliation by moving to any of the four-year colleges as upperclassmen, they may be less inclined to feel connected to their home college from the beginning. This could also compromise one of the great strengths of our current model: continuity of advising. This might be particularly true for readmitted students who change colleges when they return to campus; some of them have struggled at Princeton, and



as they transition back to the University they have the added burden of getting to know an entirely new advising team.

We recommend that the University should carefully consider whether students should always be affiliated with the college to which they were originally assigned as incoming freshmen. This would mean that juniors or seniors who wished to reside in a college must remain in the college to which they were originally assigned for all four years, which may have unintended consequences to building community in the colleges in the extent to which it forces juniors and seniors to choose between residing in a college and living with friends who were originally assigned to another college. Students at peer institutions where students remain affiliated with the same college across all four years noted this was a major strength of their college model, but we recognize that implementing such a system here could be complicated because of the variability of the physical facilities in Princeton's residential colleges.

In addition, we recommend that colleges enhance programming to strengthen the connections that upperclass students (including both residents and non-residents) have with their college communities. While we believe it is important to provide the option for upperclass students to live in all the colleges (see previous recommendation), the spirit underlying this recommendation would be lost if students chose to live in the colleges simply for the sake of great real estate. We feel it is important for them to be meaningfully engaged in the college community to realize fully the vibrancy and diversity of intellectual and social life in the colleges.

In our conversations with students, many juniors and seniors said that their sense of connection to their residential college decreased after their first two years at Princeton—even if they chose to live in their originally assigned college or another four-year college. A number of students expressed a desire to have a stronger sense of affiliation and community as upperclass residents of a college as well as an interest in giving back to the community. The students indicated that the RCA “zee group” experience provided a strong home base and small, close-knit community in the first year—but zee group and college identity tends to dissipate as students move forward in their undergraduate careers. As one student said, in a sentiment echoed by many:

*“As a junior, I don’t feel like my residential college is for me anymore; it feels like it is mostly for freshmen and sophomores. I moved back to my freshman room, but the experience has been very different in terms of interactions with other people. The RCAs focus mainly on freshmen, a little bit on sophomores, but not on anyone else. So the college becomes just a place to live.”*

**Strengthen Community through College Size:** We recommend that the size of colleges be capped at approximately 500 students in residence. Currently, Princeton's colleges have approximately 850 students (~500 students in residence and ~350 living in non-affiliated housing). Our conversations with the college heads, professional staff, and students at our peer institutions left us believing that the ideal size of a residential college, including residents and nonresidents, is approximately 400 to 450 students with comparable numbers across the 4-years. This arrangement allows students to be a part of a close-knit community; they know most of the

community members (even those who are not in residence) without feeling as if there is not an opportunity to meet new people throughout the years, and the professional staff knows the students.

Our conversations with and survey data from Princeton students, however, suggest that students are relatively satisfied with the current size of the University's colleges. It is important to note that students' perception of the size of their college seems to change over time, and they define college affiliates as resident students – they do not consider the non-resident affiliates to be part of the college “head count.” To freshmen, largely because of the zee group experience, the colleges feel close-knit and comfortable. As students progress through the college years, however, the residential college begins to feel larger and larger. The following quotes from focus groups represent upperclass students' sentiment about the size of their colleges:

*“As a freshman, I loved walking around Butler and knowing people's faces [...] It is so weird not to know any faces around the dining hall now.”*

*“It is important that a college's size is not obvious. I had no idea that my college had 525 people; it seemed much smaller, due to the communal spaces – you see the same faces all the time.”*

*“Forbes felt like a good size when I was a freshman [...].”*

*“Whitman did a lottery for Book of Mormon – when I went on the trip, I realized I did not know most people on the bus. I was very sad; it was very weird – all of a sudden the college felt bigger.”*

Thus, the data suggest that the strength of our freshmen zee group program (likely enhanced by other residential programming targeted to freshmen and, to a lesser extent, sophomores) offsets our relatively large college size. Including more space for upperclass students and strengthening their affiliation will likely prevent the colleges from feeling too large for this group. Moreover, we have taken into consideration that smaller colleges might have negative consequences for other important institutional values, including our commitments to equity of experience, diversity and inclusion (some of our peer institutions have struggled to maintain diverse communities with markedly smaller college populations).

Although all of our colleges are approximately the same size, the balance of freshmen and sophomores differs between two-year and four-year colleges. For example, Wilson (2-year) has 262 freshmen out of 523 students, whereas Butler (4-year) has 192 freshmen out of 539 students (2014-15 academic year). This difference has a number of implications for the student experience, including, for example, the ability for students to get know members of their class as well as the types of interactions between students and college staff members. We recommend that, in addition to capping the number of residents at approximately 500 residents, all colleges have as comparable numbers as possible of freshmen and sophomores and there should be a critical mass of upperclass students (~ 150 as recommended in the previous report on the four-year college program).

The committee recognizes there are competing pressures to optimize college affiliation and composition (representation from all four classes) while limiting the size of the colleges.

Specifically, to both add a critical mass of juniors and seniors into all of the colleges and align the numbers of freshmen and sophomores would in today's model require either an increase in college size or addition of another college (program and staff, but not bed spaces). We recommend future implementation committees work closely with the colleges and housing to identify creative and cost-effective options to ensure a critical mass of juniors and seniors can reside in the college, while trying to honor the overall size recommendations in this report.

Provide Alternative Dining Options: We recommend that a future campus working group assess whether the current dining options for juniors and seniors support the residential college goals and propose new options, if appropriate. Dining is a central means by which community is established in the colleges. It was noted in the 2002 Report of the Four-Year College Program that "we must provide a flexible dining environment that supports our aspirations for building community in the residential setting." While we agree with this goal in principle, we question if we have created too much flexibility in dining, undermining the community that we hope dining would help create. Perhaps it is this flexibility in dining that has resulted in some upperclass students, particularly those originally assigned to two-year colleges, not wanting to eat in the residential colleges because they do not see any familiar faces when they enter the dining hall, as reported by students in the focus groups and open-ended text on the student surveys. Thus, it is essential to find the happy medium between flexibility and building community. We offer some broad suggestions that might inform a future working group's explorations in Appendix C.

### *Strategic Priority #2: Invest in Physical Infrastructure*

The most significant college-related investments that would advance many of the strategic priorities listed here are concerned with space. Our highest priorities for space pertain to student spaces. Recommendations for teaching spaces and faculty residential spaces are included in the faculty engagement and intellectual life portion of the report.

Renovate Outdated, Poorly Functioning Spaces: We recommend that the University renovate outdated, poorly functioning spaces in the colleges. One consistent theme that emerged from our discussions with students in focus groups, conversations with Young Alumni Trustees, and empirical data from student surveys is that renovation of the Forbes College Annex and Addition as well as most of Wilson College is essential. In many conversations with students, the condition of certain physical spaces came up repeatedly no matter what question was posed. Similarly, in our open-ended question on the student survey about a sense of community in the colleges, a significant number of students referenced how space facilitates or hinders a sense of community. Moreover, almost unanimously, the students noted a need for large and attractive rooms and suites if the colleges are to be attractive options for upperclass students. In general, the recommended renovations would enhance equity of experience for students from all class years and support our recommendation of the four-year college model.

Provide More Communal Spaces in all Colleges: We recommend providing more common spaces within the residential colleges where students can congregate easily and casually. Indeed, to encourage and enable informal interactions, it is essential that all colleges have communal spaces, including common spaces for the entire college community as well as common spaces for zee groups.

Students compared colleges with limited common spaces unfavorably to colleges with more multi-use common spaces. In fact, students in the focus groups and those who responded to the open-ended questions about community in the colleges on the enrolled student survey were quite vehement about the community-building benefits of having spaces for small group discussions, studying and socializing. The zee group program is a major strength of our college model; it helps create a sense of community in a relatively large college. The RCAs in our focus groups consistently noted that it is important that each zee group has a common space that can be used for informal and formal events. Similarly, students said a sense of good community was dependent on the physical layout of their hall and college, including if common spaces were present or not. The best common spaces are ones that have a “cruise-by” arrangement (windows for peering into or general open space without restricting walls and doors), allowing students who are walking by to be able to check out what is happening and decide if they want to join or not, without feeling as if they have to commit by entering the space. This is important for new colleges and existing ones. Having communal spaces is especially important given that New Jersey law requires that students are required to keep their dorm room doors closed - having doors that automatically close and lock at all times hampers community.

The presence of more comfortable, welcoming common spaces within the colleges would also provide an environment to facilitate important and meaningful conversations, creating a physical place to support, encourage and facilitate student interest and engagement in larger University issues or national events by hosting smaller discussions within a more intimate college setting where students can engage honestly and openly with one another.

Create Spaces that Accommodate a Diverse Student Body: We recommend creating spaces in the colleges that will accommodate a diverse student body. As the student body becomes more diverse, the needs of our students change. If the University believes it is important for freshmen and sophomores to reside in a college (the task force endorses this requirement), then we need to offer spaces that can be adapted to a wide range of needs (i.e., medical needs). We also recommend providing furnishings in the common rooms of all dorm suites (not just common spaces beyond the dorm rooms) so that students would not have to negotiate with roommates about purchasing expensive items. (The renovations at one of our peer institutions have budgeted for furniture for all common spaces.) These recommendations would enhance equity of experience.

Think Carefully about the Location of Future Residential Colleges: The task force recommends that the campus planning process incorporate a variety of inputs and address several questions when considering options for the locations of any new residential colleges in the future.

First, the process should consider options whereby future colleges might be co-located (akin to the current physical relationship between Rocky and Mathey or Butler and Wilson). While our data suggests that some students believe that the current relatively distant location of Forbes from the rest of campus facilities a strong sense of community, the task force feels that there are ways to encourage strong community-building without isolating a college from other student residences. The task force recommends that the campus planning team explore the

potential to locate a new college next to Forbes, as well as whether there are sites where two future colleges might be constructed next to one another.

Second, the task force recommends that plans for future colleges be informed by the vision for future loci of academic and co-curricular activity. As more and more academic buildings and athletic fields have been constructed “down the hill,” Wilson and Butler dining halls have become overpopulated at lunch and dinner with students who choose to eat there in-between classes and/or athletic practices, undermining the goal of creating a “home-like,” small community environment for the residents in those colleges (indeed, at times residents can’t find a seat at a table).

### *Strategic Priority #3: Enhance Co-Curricular Programming and Residential Life*

Co-curricular programming should support community-building, enhance student well-being, and help to advance the University’s broader goals for campus life and the overall undergraduate experience. The task force strongly believes that the colleges should feel like a home to students. It is difficult to create this home-like environment when the colleges not only offer their unique programs but also must serve other institutional needs. The colleges are the communities that the majority of other groups and centers on campus come to when they want to reach students. Similarly, the colleges are often asked to support and take on the agendas of other communities on campus. The more the colleges are asked to take on, the less it feels like a home for students, but rather as another place for them to get (over)involved with activities. Moreover, we were quite impressed with our peer institutions’ decision to make the colleges a home and a place for students to relax and recharge their batteries, rather than a site for additional programming and activity that could contribute to striving, competition or stress. This is supportive of our goal to create healthy environments.

We believe that, if executed carefully and thoughtfully, the set of recommendations below will provide the important and necessary opportunities for students to unwind and regroup in their college homes while also advancing other goals for the residential colleges and the undergraduate experience more broadly. These recommendations will provide an important opportunity for the colleges to serve as the literal and metaphorical places where students come together to share, reflect on and learn from their experiences.

Strengthen Support and Enhance Resources for Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: We believe that the residential colleges provide a distinctive venue and extraordinary community to advance the University’s goals for diversity, inclusion and equity. We recommend that that Dean of the College and the Vice President for Campus Life lead an effort to explore how best to advance the work of the Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within the colleges. We endorse the recommendation made by the Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to increase the diversity training opportunities for faculty and student advisers.

As the task force examined co-curricular programming, it considered if there were holes in the tapestry of our community that the colleges could fill; in particular, if colleges should become theme-oriented, drawing students with interests in a particular area (e.g., the arts, languages) or identity. The task force concluded that one of the wonderful aspects of our college model is the diverse interests of students in the colleges, but the idea of how we might allow for

some flexibility in facilitating smaller residential communities within the colleges, as we already do with the Edwards Collective, is an intriguing one that does not automatically undermine the overarching diversity of our colleges. The task force recommends that the group considering questions around affinity housing continue to explore this question carefully.

Establish a Student “Leadership Team” in the Colleges: We recommend the establishment of student “leadership teams” within the colleges. These teams would not create additional programming, but rather coordinate and leverage existing programs for peer advisers and ambassadors from a number of campus offices and organizations. In partnership with the Service and Civic Engagement Self-Study Task Force, we recommend that “service ambassadors” from the Pace Center for Service and Civic Engagement participate in the life of each residential college. In addition to Pace Center Ambassadors, the leadership team would also include Residential College Advisers (RCAs), Peer Academic Advisers (PAAs), Resident Graduate Students (RGSs), Peer Health Advisers (PHAs), LGBT Peer Educators, Carl A. Fields Center Fellows, and SHARE Peer Advisers, among other student leaders. Many of these groups, particularly RCAs, are aware of what the other peer advisers do, but the different adviser and ambassador programs typically have limited connection with one another.

We believe a leadership team would provide opportunities for more collaboration among these groups and present them as an integrated set of resources. The leadership team within each college would meet on a regular basis to discuss important issues, participate in joint training, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. By integrating important efforts and conversations taking place across campus, the team would be well-positioned to identify needs and opportunities to use the colleges as places where students come together to engage with and reflect on important University and world issues. Student team members would have an opportunity to cultivate and practice leadership skills by developing and implementing programs and initiatives that are responsive to student needs and interests.

This ongoing collaboration among different student leader groups would also increase leadership team members’ familiarity with the wide range of peer advisers, ambassadors and student leaders on campus, making referrals easier and helping to promote a greater utilization of these resources by the broader student population. This model also increases the diversity of backgrounds and interests among the student leaders in the colleges and it has the potential to more effectively reach a wider range of student residents, helping them to feel more at home in and connected to their college.

Promote Health and Well-being in the Colleges: We recommend that the University make deliberate and stronger efforts to convey the importance of health and well-being, in addition to academic success, and to make students aware of existing resources to support well-being. Students in the focus groups consistently placed the highest value on academic achievement—even at the cost of their health and well-being. The University should identify and seize opportunities to reinforce the importance of self-care and personal and community well-being. For example, there may be opportunities to use the recommended student leadership team in the colleges to make students aware of the range of resources available to them. The

team might also help identify and, if necessary, change aspects of college culture to support and enhance mental, physical and social well-being through various types of programming.

Enhance College Council Governance: We recommend that the University consider how to enhance opportunities for students to participate in college governance. Although students recognize the College Council positions as opportunities to cultivate leadership skills in the college, they do not see the councils as playing “true” college governance roles. We were impressed by the level of student governance and autonomy at the institutions we studied as part of our benchmarking process. College Councils could be a primary way of integrating juniors and seniors into the colleges.

#### *Strategic Priority #4: Strengthen Faculty Engagement and Intellectual Life*

Each residential college has a college head who oversees the faculty fellows program, which is the principle way in which faculty become involved in the social and intellectual life of the college. Faculty members also interact with students in the colleges through teaching, primarily freshmen seminars, and advising. The advising of all AB freshmen and sophomores, as well as the general advising for all four classes takes place in the colleges. The colleges also provide peer academic advising support for freshmen and sophomores and an increasing amount of academic support for affiliated upperclass students. (Juniors and seniors increasingly see the colleges as a source of support for independent work, thanks to the highly successful boot camp initiatives for independent work held during break weeks.) In addition to the faculty fellows and advising program, there is a “resident faculty” member who is expected to contribute to college life in return for subsidized housing and dining.

Based on our review, we offer recommendations that will: (1) Enhance programs and spaces that support *informal* faculty and student interaction; and (2) Enhance the teaching and advising work that already takes place within the colleges. These recommendations are crucial to fully realizing the goal of the residential college serving as a “nexus for intellectual and social life” on campus.

#### (1) Enhance programs and spaces that support *informal* faculty and student interaction

Create Opportunities for Informal Social Engagement with Faculty: We recommend that the colleges provide more opportunities for informal social engagement between students and faculty. Given that Princeton undergraduates are fully engaged in rigorous academic work and have access to many extra-curricular opportunities for intellectual enrichment organized by academic departments and programs, we do not think the colleges need more formal intellectual programming beyond the wide variety of programs already in place. Students expressed interest in getting to know faculty in informal settings in the colleges that would “make them seem more human,” as expressed by one student focus group member. There was consensus among students that they do not have significant interaction with faculty fellows (indeed, many students said they do not know who the fellows are). Students are interested in having more interactions with faculty, but need structures in place that normalize these informal interactions. Furthermore, students stressed that a faculty member’s experiences in general were often of greater interest than her research; they learn about the latter in the classroom. Students are not necessarily

interested in extending purely or primarily academic conversations into college spaces, but in having different kinds of conversations with faculty while in the physical space of the college. There was a resounding agreement with the student who indicated, *“I don’t want to have office hours in the dining hall!”* This resonates with the idea that the college is a home, and home is a place to rest and socialize rather than work.

Establish Future College Heads’ Residences in Close Proximity to the Colleges: While we acknowledge the physical constraints on the current system, we recommend that plans for additional colleges or the renovation of existing colleges should prioritize locating the college head’s house in close proximity to the college. We were struck on our site visits to peer institutions by the importance of the heads’ houses as a place of congregation for faculty, graduate students and undergraduates. At our peer institutions, the heads’ residences are contiguous or in very close proximity to undergraduate dining and dormitory spaces, allowing for more permeable boundaries between student space and faculty space. Moreover, some of our peer institutions provide heads with logistical support for entertainment, and the public spaces in the heads’ residences are in constant use, making the home a true community center. The head’s residency at Princeton is largely notional: some of the houses are not adjacent to their colleges (Wilson and Butler), and the required walk does not encourage students to use the house as a comfortable common space as they do at many peer institutions. Whitman College is without a head’s residence. The task force recommends that all new colleges should have a head’s house proximal to the college. In addition, the task force recommends establishing a head’s house for Whitman, and reconsidering the location of the Butler and Wilson heads’ houses to be closer to the colleges.

Use the Resident Faculty Program for Building Community: We recommend that the resident faculty program should focus on integrating faculty into the colleges. Faculty members on the task force were of the opinion that we do not do enough to attract tenure-track faculty to live in the colleges, and that we underestimate the interest in such a position, appropriately advertised and compensated. It was noted that our peer institutions have many faculty and staff in residence, which allows for greater integration of faculty and encourages a more fully integrated living and learning community experience. We recommend that the living quarters of the faculty in residence be enhanced to include accommodations appropriate for faculty with families (currently, children and pets are not allowed in the spaces). In return for more generous compensation, the faculty in residence would be given a larger role in the life of the college, including having programmatic responsibility for enabling and supporting informal interactions with faculty and undergraduates. The faculty in residence could also play a central role in building the faculty fellows program and the resident graduate student program. We recommend that a formal job description be created for this position and there be a widely advertised application process.

## (2) Enhance the teaching and advising work that already takes place within the colleges

The focus of advising has shifted from reliance on a single faculty adviser toward an “advising community,” emphasizing access to multiple sources of advice within the college, including resident graduate students (RGSs) and trained peer academic advisers (PAAs). Recently, several of the faculty members teaching freshman seminars have acted also as the



academic adviser for the students in their class. The students in these seminars seemed to benefit from the strong adviser-advisee relationship based upon a common academic experience, reporting an extremely high satisfaction rate with the advising experience. This freshman seminar advising pilot, which situates the advising relationship within a close academic community, is an example of one initiative that supports the integrated “community advising” model that has been deployed in the colleges over the last three years. We recommend building on this community-based approach to advising in the following ways.

Enhance the Integration of BSE and AB Advising: Because the BSE curriculum is very specialized and students declare their concentration at the end of freshman year, the core of BSE advising has been traditionally located within the School of Engineering and Applied Science. Given the dramatic rise in the proportion of the student body who elect to pursue a BSE degree, and given that our approach to advising freshmen has become more holistic as a response to the increasing diversity of the student body, we recommend that BSE advising become integrated with the rest of the advising in the colleges. This will allow BSE students to feel fully served by the advising community in the residential colleges. For example, peer advisers should be cross-trained in both curricula; there should be more opportunity for BSE and AB faculty advisers to work and train together.

Strengthen and Enhance the Resident Graduate Student (RGS) Program: We note that while the resident graduate student program is recognized for its success in integrating graduate students into college life, the responsibilities of the graduate students are sometimes ill-defined. We recommend creating a more structured set of expectations for their interaction with undergraduates, which should include but not be limited to academic mentorship. (This is consistent with the structure of graduate student positions in colleges at our peer institutions, and it has resulted in successful programs.) The resident graduate students have played an important role recently in the University’s very successful independent work “boot camps” set up for juniors and seniors, and in the lab match program designed by the office of Undergraduate Research. We encourage more initiatives such as these to simultaneously benefit undergraduate and graduate students. However, we caution against the creation of more formal programs to foster connections between undergraduates and graduate students, given the large amount of programming already taking place in the colleges and the broader campus community.

Increase Participation in the Freshman Seminar Advising Program: Survey data tell us that students who are advised by their freshman seminar instructor are the most satisfied with their advising experience. The program leverages the distinctive role of freshman seminars as a warm, supportive program designed to provide our first-year students with an early opportunity to form lasting connections with faculty and fellow students. There is ample opportunity for discussion with faculty both in a group setting and individually; in this context, advising becomes both more personal and more convenient. It has been a challenge to scale up this program—we can only draw from fall offerings because students need an adviser immediately, and faculty have to be interested in advising as well as teaching. In addition there are significant logistical complications— a freshman seminar draws students from all colleges, but the advising system is organized by college. Given the advantage to students within the program, and the added benefit that these seminars integrate BSE and AB students, we recommend finding a way to give every freshman the opportunity to be advised by a seminar instructor, either through the

freshman seminar program or the writing program.

Provide Attractive Teaching Spaces, Including Smart Classrooms, in the Colleges: We recommend that any new construction or renovation to existing colleges include classroom space. We noted with interest that the renovation plans for one of our peer institutions include the addition of smart classrooms. There is demand for smart classrooms and their inclusion in colleges would attract more faculty to teach in the colleges. We have seen from the success of the freshman seminar program that students benefit from the opportunity to extend classroom discussion into lunch or dinner conversation with their professors and classmates.

## **6. Data**

The task force relied on a number of direct and indirect measures to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the college system, and to help shape its recommendations for the future. In pursuing its work, the task force deliberately chose to focus on comparisons between two-year and four-year colleges, rather than on differences among individual colleges. This level of analysis allowed the task force to be responsive to its charge and to put forth a set of broad strategic priorities and recommendations.

Given the differences among the six residential colleges, especially with regard to physical architecture and location on campus, the task force recommends that the administration should carefully explore the distinctions among individual colleges as it moves forward with plans to enhance the residential college system. There are likely meaningful lessons to be learned from individual colleges about how best to enhance the college system and advance the University's broader campus life goals.

In general, the task force identified a strong need for more focused student input about the colleges. To help address a number of specific questions, including those pertaining to the size and composition of the colleges, task force members worked with the vice provost for institutional research to incorporate college-specific questions into the annual Enrolled Student Survey.

The task force recommends that the offices of the Dean of the College and the Vice President for Campus Life should regularly review this survey data, along with other relevant institutional data, to monitor the success of the colleges and identify any gaps in information that would enable meaningful assessment. These offices should also partner with the Graduate School to gather pertinent input from graduate students, especially as pertains to the Resident Graduate Student program and the integration of graduate students into the broader campus community. These regular monitoring efforts will be especially important to evaluate and measure the success of any changes implemented in response to the recommendations of the task force.

The task force also recommends the establishment of a system to monitor and assess the demand among juniors and seniors for housing within the residential colleges. It will be important for data-gathering methods to be appropriately nuanced to help distinguish among the various factors that drive students' housing decisions.

Additionally, the task force recommends that the University should conduct targeted surveys of faculty fellows and college staff every few years to help evaluate and measure the success of the college system.

It is important to note that students' experiences within the residential colleges undoubtedly shape and inform their overall academic and co-curricular experiences at the University. In its regular assessment practices, Princeton should therefore be ever-vigilant of the need to consider and evaluate the ways in which the residential college system—and residential life more broadly—helps to support and advance the University's teaching and research mission.

## **7. Appendices**

Appendix A: Task Force on the Residential College Model Charge

Appendix B: Membership

Appendix C: Illustrative Tactics

## Appendix A – Task Force on the Residential College Model Charge

The University’s residential colleges serve as the nexus for the integration of academic and nonacademic life, offering an array of academic and social programs to enhance the undergraduate experience.

As the University plans for the future, including potential additions to the undergraduate student body, the Task Force on the Residential College Model is charged with exploring a variety of questions pertaining to the residential college system.

In 2007, with the opening of Whitman College, Princeton launched a four-year residential college system in which three four-year residential colleges are paired with three two-year colleges. Prior to this transition, five two-year residential colleges had been in place since 1982. The system of paired two- and four-year colleges was intended to support community-building and engagement by creating more interaction for freshman and sophomore undergraduates with upperclass students, graduate students and faculty. Additionally, the expansion of the college system was designed to provide enhanced academic advising for all students as well as more robust living and dining options for upperclass residential life.

To encourage the most robust and productive thinking around the University’s college model, Task Force members are asked to review and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the University’s current college model and engage in “blue-sky” thinking on several topics. In particular, the Task Force is asked to explore the following areas creatively: (1) the ideal size and composition of the residential colleges and (2) the best ways in which the residential colleges can provide students with social and intellectual community, engagement, support, advising and mentorship. To investigate these areas, the Task Force is asked to examine a variety of questions, including but not limited to:

- What are our goals for the residential college system, especially as our undergraduate student population becomes more diverse? How well are we achieving these goals?
- How can we ensure that the University’s residential college system supports the integration of the academic and non-academic aspects of student life to the fullest extent possible?
- How should residential colleges be sized and structured to develop a strong sense of community and engagement among undergraduates? How might they be used to encourage more connection between undergraduate and graduate students?
- What are our goals for upperclass affiliation with the residential colleges and how can we best achieve these goals?
- To what extent and how should the University encourage faculty engagement in the colleges?
- Are there opportunities to improve the residential college advising program?
- Are there opportunities to reallocate existing resources for residential colleges for high priority programs and initiatives?

- Is the paired two-year/four-year model accomplishing the stated goal of “taking fullest possible advantage of the diversity and educational opportunities at Princeton?” If not, what changes would enable the realization of this goal?
- How can the residential college model best provide students with residential and co-curricular experiences that support their career and life goals? How can the system best support and enhance the University’s culture of service? How can the colleges foster increased opportunities for student leadership?
- How best can the University evaluate and measure success as it aims to enhance the residential college model?

In conducting its work, the Task Force will be informed by the 2002 [Report of the Four-Year College Program Planning Committee](#) as well as the 2011 [Report of the Working Group on Campus Social and Residential Life](#). The Task Force will also consult with members of the campus community and assess the range of residential college systems at peer institutions. As input from undergraduate students will be especially important, the committee is asked to involve students early and throughout the process by convening focus groups. The final report of the Task Force is expected to include proposed guiding principles and priorities for the residential college system, a set of standards against which to test future proposed changes to the residential college model, and a suite of recommendations to enhance the University’s college system in the years to come.

## **Appendix B – Membership**

### *Chair*

Nicole Shelton, *Professor of Psychology; Associate Chair, Department of Psychology; Head, Butler College*

### *Faculty members*

Margot Canaday, *Associate Professor of History*

Eric Gregory, *Professor of Religion*

Michael Hecht, *Professor of Chemistry; Head, Forbes College*

Clarence Rowley, *Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering*

### *Student members*

Jane Baldwin, *Graduate Student, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences*

Carlos Sotelo, *Class of 2017*

Megan Steffen, *Graduate Student, Anthropology*

Emmy Williams, *Class of 2015*

### *Staff members*

Kathleen Deignan, *Dean of Undergraduate Students*

Claire Fowler, *Senior Associate Dean of the College*

Mellisa Thompson, *Director of Student Life, Forbes College*

Rebecca Graves-Bayazitoglu, *Dean of Whitman College; Lecturer in English*

Chad Klaus, *Vice President, University Services*

Hilary Parker, *Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives (secretary)*

### **Membership of subcommittees**

- (1) Size, Composition and Affiliation: Gregory, Klaus, Shelton, Thompson, Williams
- (2) Faculty Involvement: Baldwin, Canaday, Fowler, Rowley, Sotelo
- (3) Community Engagement, Service and Leadership: Deignan, Graves-Bayazitoglu, Hecht, Parker, Steffen
- (4) Ad hoc committee: Deignan, Thompson, Hecht, Julie Luster, Tom Dunne

## Appendix C: Illustrative Tactics

### Community Building through Dining

- Dining Contracts: Freshmen should continue to have the full meal plan. However, sophomores, juniors and seniors residing in the colleges could select from a variety of options, including not having a meal plan at all but having their “free” meals restricted to their home college. Students from our focus groups indicated that due to the structure of eating club meal plans, upperclass students who currently do not live in the residential colleges view the dining plan as a deterrent for them to return to the colleges.
- Shared Meal Plans: Our current shared meal plan program with the eating clubs succeeds in increasing the number of club members who opt to draw back into the colleges, thereby forestalling a stark division between upperclass college residents and upperclass club residents. However, it does not have an appreciable effect on how many meals non-resident upperclass students in clubs opt to take in their home college. As a result, our very strong dining program is not as successful at strengthening upperclass affiliation or in creating cross-class relationships as it might be. Therefore, the dollars supporting the shared meal plan program should perhaps be repurposed for a program that gives all nonresident affiliates a certain number of meals in the dining hall per week. In order to buttress the fact that all students remain affiliated with their college no matter where they live, one option might be to restrict all or part of those meals to the student’s home college.
- Partnership with Eating Clubs: The colleges could have regular “college nights” where all students would eat in their home college and the eating clubs could limit operations or meals to save money.
- Flexibility in Dining Spaces: Given that the dining halls are key sites for students to engage with one another in large numbers, we believe it is essential that dining halls (not the servery) remain open after hours for students to study and engage in informal interactions with one another and faculty (this may require some modest reconfiguration of the spaces). Snacks and beverages should remain on display. We believe this could help strengthen the sense of a home environment that we think is important to maintain in the colleges as well as draw upperclass students back to the colleges because they will have a place to study and socialize with food.

### Messaging about Residential Colleges

- Nomenclature: Encourage professional staff and students to refer to what is currently considered “upperclass housing” to “non-affiliated housing” to breakdown the bifurcated experience students feel as their “childhood” being in the colleges” and “adulthood” being outside of the colleges.
- List goals on the College Websites: The residential college mission and goals should be listed on each college website so that students and their families understand the rationale underlying our model.

## General Community-Building Tactics

- Know Community Members: College office staff, including the heads and RGSs, use the flashcard program created by Tiger Card group to memorize freshmen names as is done at our peer institutions
- Expand the Zee Group: Communicate that the zee group does not just include freshmen by creating roles for upperclass residents to play in the zee group
- Space: Continue to review the strategic placement of RCA rooms so that students in zee groups need to walk past their RCA's door.
- Leadership Team: If the PAA lives in the college, then their room should be close to RCA rooms – zee groups benefit when resources are together.
- Encourage Community – During “study breaks,” place board games around in order to encourage students to engage socially beyond merely grabbing food and departing. One RCA offered that she had intentionally changed the name of her advisee gatherings to “Chill Sessions” in order to imply that students should not be studying at all times.
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## Enhancing the Co-curricular Programming and Residential Life

- Leadership Team Training: The needs of freshmen shift between the first semester when their questions and dilemmas are more logistical in nature and the second semester when their questions shift more to lifestyle choices and challenges. Providing the leadership team with additional training at the end of the first semester may prepare them better for this change. Also, continuing to improve and enhance training that enables them to effectively support a diverse community of advisees is essential.
- Messaging: Students indicated that the most positive and memorable discussions were when “real” or “authentic” stories were shared that connected them to larger community issues of health and well-being or diversity and inclusion. This allows the students to feel as though there truly is someone else who understands their perspective. Some highlights mentioned repeatedly were the Mathey “Collection of People’s Struggles” posted in the dining hall, “What’s Your Story?” at Wilson, and Butler’s Quilt Program. While we caution against over-programming, we recommend providing a forum that encourages conversation around difficult topics and, most importantly, helps to erode feelings of isolation among students who feel themselves to be on the fringes of the community.
- Centers’ Presence: Incorporating the centers into pre-freshmen activities as well as continuing to remind students of resources throughout their tenure at Princeton is necessary. Many students do not register the benefits until they need the assistance, and may not seek them out unless there is an established personal connection. Having Fields Center Fellows, LGBT Peer Educators and SHARE Peers, rather than RCAs alone, moderate conversations around specific topics may lead to a consistent dialogue across all colleges, as well as exposing Centers as resources beyond the



RCA. In addition, information on Centers should be presented in a memorable, provocative way (similar to the sexual health cartoon done by University Health Services).

- Institutionalizing Diversity: Princeton's job is to educate students, as well as faculty and staff, and provide them with the language to express their opinions while at the University. Suggestions ranged from making a Diversity Seminar similar to the Freshman Seminar, to requiring mandatory colloquiums throughout tenure at Princeton, to providing the same diversity training given to RCAs to all students. Exploring what role the colleges could play in these ideas, should any of them gain traction, would be important.
- Website Updates: Residential Colleges could all have a quick links section for making appointments at McCosh, Counseling & Psychological Services (CPS), and SHARE, to which RCAs could direct students. Additionally, other peer advisers should have equal presence to RCAs on Colleges' websites.
- College Open Houses: College Councils should hold monthly full body college meetings

Improving physical space:

- Strongly recommend horizontal hallway-layout rather than vertical entryway-layout
- Consider how to incorporate successful features in Butler as well as "slipper community" elements from Forbes and Whitman - students can go from their rooms to the common rooms and dining rooms without going outside much as they would go to living rooms and dining rooms at home.

Faculty involvement:

- Assign faculty fellows to a zee group and encourage them to do at least one event with the group per semester
- Faculty fellows host life skills workshop similar to the senior end-of-the-year class (e.g., how to find an apartment)
- Have zee groups invite faculty fellows to dinner