

The Curriculum at Forty



A Plan for Strengthening the College Experience at Brown

FINAL REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

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BROWN

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Foreword

A well known historian of education once described the college curriculum in America as a place for measuring the dimensions of our changing culture, a place where we have “told ourselves who we are.”¹ For Brown this definition proves unusually apt. The growth of the school over two centuries from Baptist college to modern university brought with it profound changes in the nature and style of instruction, reflecting broader shifts in the American cultural landscape. Francis Wayland, Brown’s fourth president, had such changes in mind when he proposed a “new system of collegiate education,” designed to reach a more diverse mercantile class through flexible, elective degree programs.² Other developments soon followed. In 1891 the University began offering a Bachelor of Science degree and in 1919 introduced a concentration requirement.³ A general curriculum was established for freshman in 1937, and reforms in 1947 took the matter further, requiring work in sixteen subjects for all students and comprehensive exams for seniors. The 1950s saw a shift toward more experimental programs, one in close reading (“Identification and Criticism of Ideas”) and another in cross-disciplinary studies (the “University Courses”). These were followed in the early 1960s by the so-called “permissive curriculum,” which offered more flexible

options and a relaxed residency requirement. But at the end of that same decade, in 1969, Brown embraced the most liberated approach to liberal education since the “new system” of Francis Wayland: it was called the New Curriculum. Redefining the college experience for a new generation of students, this curriculum has characterized “who we are” as an institution to the present day.

We now call it, simply, the Brown curriculum. Its most distinguishing feature as a curriculum has always had more to do with context than content, with the basic conditions for learning than the subjects learned. Like undergraduates at other American universities, Brown students are expected to gain perspective on a range of disciplines and to concentrate in one; to perfect their critical faculties and to hone their judgment. The difference lies in the freedom they have to shape this experience for themselves. While requirements for individual concentrations are determined by the faculty, Brown students control their general education. They are expected, in essence, to build their own “core” curricula and, from the evidence, they have been equal to the task. As Sheila Blumstein showed in 1990, most students completed two or more courses in the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences by the time of their graduation. The statistics today are very much the same.⁴

¹ Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 1.

² *Report to the Corporation of Brown University on Changes in the System of Collegiate Education. Read March 28, 1850* (Providence: George H. Whitney, 1850). A sketch of instructional change at Brown from the 19th to the 20th century can be found in the essay “Curriculum,” in Martha Mitchell, *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Library, 1993).

³ Brown’s expanded degree programs reflected the rapid growth of modern research universities in the U.S. between 1890 and 1910. Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz analyzed this growth in “The Shaping of Higher Education: The Formative Years in the United States, 1890 to 1940.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* XIII, 1 (Winter 1999). Such expansion was encouraged, they note, by “the scientific method, practically-oriented courses, the ‘lecture method’ of teaching, and specialization.” See also Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should be Learning More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Leon Botstein, “Some Thoughts on Curriculum and Change,” in *Rethinking Liberal Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴ Sheila E. Blumstein, *The Brown Curriculum Twenty Years Later: A Review of the Past and a Working Agenda for the Future* (January 1990). Appendices 16 and 17 show figures for students graduating in 1987 and 1989. According to Brown’s Office of Institutional Research, of the members of the class of 2007 who completed at least 22 courses at Brown, 82.2% took 2 or more courses in the sciences, 97.6% took 2 or more courses in the humanities, and 91.9% took 2 or more courses in the social sciences.

But distribution figures do not begin to address the deeper challenge posed by our curriculum. Brown students are expected not merely to sample a range of courses but to make connections between them, to use the perspective gained from one discipline as a window onto the next. They are expected, in short, to design meaningful and integrated courses of study that make a positive difference not only for themselves but for the world they live in. The most significant social, political, and moral issues of our time have long demanded the ability to navigate multiple points of view, and for nearly forty years Brown's open curriculum has been a place for students to develop exactly this rich and nuanced perspective.⁵

There are in fact many signs that our long-term experiment in liberal education has worked. The success of Brown graduates in professional degrees and in a wide range of careers, and the satisfaction of undergraduates as measured on frequent comparative surveys,⁶ attest to the vitality of the curriculum's underlying philosophy. Yet it is clear that we cannot rest on this success without an ongoing examination of our goals as a university in a new century. Can we be certain that our curriculum is preparing graduates adequately for lives in an increasingly global context? Are we convinced that our students are taking every advantage of the freedom they have, and that our courses are producing the proper learning outcomes? If the curriculum is a space for measuring the changing landscape of American culture, how should we adjust our offerings to reflect our current historical moment?

⁵ In "The University at the Millennium," the 1999 Glion Declaration, twenty university presidents and professors from around the world confirmed that while "traditional disciplines, with their deliberate concentration and abstraction, are powerful engines of scholarship," they also place "constraints on broader inquiry." The delegates argued that wedding disciplinary expertise with "the insights and skills of . . . other disciplines and professions" will offer the 21st century university "unusual promise in confronting broader public issues." For complete text see <http://www.glion.org/>.

⁶ According to our biennial surveys of graduating seniors, Brown students report gains in reading or speaking a foreign language, appreciating the arts, understanding the process of science and experimentation, and evaluating the role of science and technology in society. They also report gains in their ability to write effectively and communicate well orally, to learn independently and to think analytically, and to formulate creative and original ideas.

The Task

These are the broad questions that shaped a year-long discussion by Brown's Task Force on Undergraduate Education, a committee convened in March 2007 by the Provost and the Dean of the College to review the current state of the College and to make recommendations for the future. Four students, seven senior faculty members, and three deans met over several months to think broadly and critically about Brown's undergraduate curriculum.⁷ The work of the group coincided with two important reviews that began in 2007: the five-year reappraisal of Brown's Plan for Academic Enrichment,⁸ and the ten-year reaccreditation of Brown by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).⁹ The Plan for Academic Enrichment served as an obvious context for discussions, but the NEASC review was equally relevant, given that the College would be the focus of Brown's reaccreditation report. The Task Force provided a necessary grounding for that report by undertaking one of the first comprehensive reviews of the curriculum since 1990.¹⁰

Throughout the year, the committee's work was guided by a central concern: How should we define Brown's educational mission today, and what is required to ensure its continued success? The Task Force approached the question from four broad vantage points: liberal education in general, education in the concentrations, the role of advising, and the assessment of teaching and learning. Between April and December of 2007, the committee met, in whole or in part, nearly thirty times. A website kept students, faculty, and staff informed of the committee's progress. Meetings with the Faculty Executive Committee and with the Undergraduate Council of Students helped to clarify aims and ideas. Additional feedback came in the form of student focus groups, online surveys of the community and of alumni, and a campus forum. A draft report of initial

⁷ Biographies of Task Force members can be found in the Appendix on page 37.

⁸ *The Plan for Academic Enrichment*, Phase II (February 2008). <http://www.brown.edu/web/pae/PhaseII.html>

⁹ See Brown University's NEASC project website at <http://www.brown.edu/Project/NEASC/>.

¹⁰ The last comprehensive review was Blumstein's *The Brown Curriculum Twenty Years Later*.

findings was released in January 2008, stimulating further conversations on campus, and providing more useful feedback from students, faculty, administrators, and members of the Corporation.¹¹

Among the clearest messages that emerged from these discussions was the desire to nourish Brown's unique culture of learning, which has defined the undergraduate experience here for almost four decades. Many members of the community worried nonetheless that a general shift in the campus climate, and increased demands on faculty time, were making aspects of this curriculum difficult to sustain. Students expressed a yearning to have more frequent, informal, and engaged interactions with faculty. Faculty wondered whether undergraduates were developing the full range of their abilities in science and math, in languages, and in writing. Some feared that the values of liberal education were more generally on the decline and that much more support was needed to sustain Brown's culture of teaching and learning.

Liberal Studies and Contemporary Education

Such concerns about the state of liberal studies are actually not so new, nor are they unique to Brown. On this campus they go back at least as far as the era of Wayland, but the same concerns were echoed at other American colleges of the period. As it turns out, the "new system of collegiate instruction" that came into fashion in the 19th century affected teaching and learning at every major institution in the country. This system favored free electives over a set curriculum, and created the condition for a rapid growth of course offerings and of teaching faculties. It eventually led to polemics about a lack of depth in university education, a problem that was answered by the invention of the academic major, and the binary system of concentration and distribution still familiar at most universities today.¹² It was from this new structure that the complementary idea of "general education" first came into being.

¹¹ Notes from public meetings and summaries of survey responses have been compiled in a report, which can be found at http://brown.edu/college/tue/downloads/Feedback_Report.pdf.

¹² Yale adopted the new concentration-and-distribution structure in 1901, Cornell in 1905, Harvard in 1909, and Brown in 1919. Prior to that time, all three institutions had adopted the "free elective" system. See Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 227–229; and Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 17–18.

A persistent tension between the need for generalized knowledge and the urge to specialize has characterized national discourse on the liberal arts ever since, and has required universities to find new ways of reaffirming the purposes and principles of liberal learning. Brown is no different, but the return of the free elective system after 1969 changed the focus of the debate on our campus. How should one define a general education in the context of an open curriculum? The term "general education" usually refers to that portion of the curriculum shared by all students, but at Brown students do not "share" a prearranged set of courses; rather, they share a responsibility for arranging their own core programs. Such responsibility highlights a basic goal of liberal learning—creative and independent thought—but students also need guidance to ensure that they will develop their intellectual capacities to the fullest. The Task Force thus called for a clearer statement about the goals of liberal education at Brown, one that was explicit about the types of intellectual inquiry and critical thinking that students should be building into their programs of study.¹³ But the committee went further, arguing for an even broader vision of "general education" that acknowledges the importance of student learning experiences beyond the classroom. Real-world experiences anchor intellectual pursuits in practical knowledge and help students develop a greater sense of social and global responsibility, thus preparing them to lead future lives of "usefulness and reputation."

To support students in achieving these goals, the Task Force agreed that each academic department should regularly offer engaging courses for generalists, and that the University should provide more financial support for internships or other work beyond the standard course offerings. For similar reasons, the Task Force argued that concentrations themselves should be much more transparent about the broader areas of knowledge implied by their required courses. This is important for

¹³ The College Curriculum Council responded to the call in the spring by drafting a new statement of "Liberal Learning at Brown." It is included in the Appendix of this report on pages 39–41.

two reasons. The University currently supports a large number of concentration options, many of them straddling departmental or disciplinary boundaries. If only as a practical measure, a statement about the types of critical thinking, or modes of thought, that each concentration engages could help students navigate a daunting array of choices. On a more philosophical level, such a statement would also serve to “liberalize” the concentration, showing how its specialized curriculum actually contributes to liberal learning goals by both clarifying and completing a general course of study. The Task Force was especially concerned about this last point, recognizing that some students at Brown complete their degrees without having an appropriately conclusive or culminating intellectual experience (a “capstone” experience) in the concentration. The report thus argues that every program should be required to identify a range of these experiences and to make them available to senior concentrators. The College Curriculum Council will be charged with reviewing all programs to ensure that these objectives are met.

Not surprisingly, the larger discussion about liberal learning at Brown took on greater urgency in the face of the University’s more recent commitment to become a global university.¹⁴ The movement toward global education in the 21st century replicates in some ways the general education movement of the previous one, ensuring that graduates will have the intellectual flexibility to live and work in a complex world. Brown’s innovative answer to general education suggests that our approach to global teaching and learning should be equally distinctive. A properly articulated international curriculum has the potential to fulfill both of the objectives mentioned above: broadening the scope of liberal education, and liberalizing the concentrations. Experiences beyond the United States will of necessity extend the reach of the classroom, enlarging a student’s sense of intellectual and social responsibility. The Task Force thus urges the University to develop a much wider range of international work and study experiences for

undergraduates. Brown’s concentrations could serve as the natural site for such expansion, and we encourage existing programs to consider incorporating an international “track” that develops a global perspective on the discipline.

Advisors and Mentors

It is a distinctive strength of Brown’s open academic environment—with its greater flexibility—that the University can expect to develop these international initiatives quickly. Yet expanding the range of curricular options also puts pressure on the single aspect of Brown’s curriculum that has been subject to the most criticism over the years: academic advising. Any educational environment that promotes a student’s right to choose requires a robust system of academic support to ensure that students make informed choices. In this sense, advising at Brown represents a social contract between the University, the faculty, and its students, upholding and sustaining the ideal and the practice of the open curriculum. And yet we learned through feedback from students, faculty, and alumni, in campus forums, in online surveys, and in focus groups, that this contract has not always been honored. The Task Force thus devoted considerable time, both before and after the release of its draft report in January, discussing ways to improve advising at Brown.

Our recommendations related to advising fall into three categories: increased support for faculty advisors, new academic resources for students, and enhanced outreach to students in academic difficulty. First and foremost, the University must develop new faculty resources to strengthen and diversify its current cohort of academic advisors. An enhanced program of Faculty Advising Fellows, outlined by the Task Force and the Committee of Residential Experience,¹⁵ affirms the faculty’s responsibility for advising as well as the University’s responsibility for helping faculty fulfill this obligation. In the plan, Advising Fellows work in teams with residential Faculty Fellows to organize events for

¹⁴ See *The Plan for Academic Enrichment, Phase II*.

¹⁵ A schematic diagram of the program is included on page 42 of this report. See also the *Report of the Committee on the Residential Experience* (May 2008) at http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Campus_Life/documents/CRE_report_final.pdf.

faculty and students after hours in faculty homes, and to provide additional advising resources. Advising Fellows come from many disciplines in order to offer another “ear” for first-year or sophomore students seeking a different disciplinary perspective. They provide programming for students living off-campus, and for those returning from international experiences, thus helping to strengthen the student’s connection to the University. They also serve as a point of contact for faculty, and help build community among Brown’s larger cohort of regular academic advisors.¹⁶ In these ways, Advising Fellows expand the number of active and engaged advisors on campus and also create a more visible network of faculty to whom students can turn—and return—over their four years of study. In a similar way, the College needs to invest in its regular cohort of academic advisors to enhance the continuity between a student’s first and second year of study. Faculty need recognition for their service, and the College must find the means to retain faculty advisors for two-year intervals.

Along with faculty resources, new academic resources are needed to provide greater support for students in the concentrations. In this regard, the Task Force strongly endorses the recommendation of the 2007 Undergraduate Science Education Committee to create a new center to enhance advising and mentoring for students in math and science disciplines. Such a center would ideally bring under one roof all of Brown’s peer-advising and tutoring programs in the sciences, and would enhance opportunities for students to work with faculty on research and community outreach projects. But enhanced advising in the sciences would only go so far. There are many concentrations whose advising would benefit from new approaches designed to make it more consistent and focused. Concentrators in many fields could also be aided by the work of Departmental Undergraduate Groups. A greater degree of interaction between faculty and students in concentrations and among students themselves will ensure that students in the junior and senior years have the resources they need to succeed.

¹⁶The cohort for the academic year 2008-09 includes roughly 250 regular academic advisors, about 200 of whom are members of the faculty. In addition, fifteen new Faculty Advising Fellows were recruited in spring 2008, in preparation for launching the program this fall.

But resources alone will not solve all of the problems. The College must also create new methods to identify and reach out to students who either find themselves in academic difficulty, or who may need additional help acclimating to Brown’s culture or adjusting to the pressures of the academic year. And it must focus much more attention on advising for matters of life after graduation, including job and internship opportunities, and pathways to fellowships or professional schools. All these require more coordination between campus offices to reach a larger number of students effectively. The present report does not offer remedies for all these concerns, but by outlining the problems, it does suggest some places to begin building solutions.

Learning about Teaching

Students, of course, are not the only constituents on campus who can benefit from enhanced mentoring and feedback. Teachers need it, too, and the final section of this report considers the Brown curriculum from the perspective of those who teach it. In general, the report suggests that the University needs to do more to support the teaching mission of the faculty. This means, for one thing, supporting the growth of the curriculum itself. In its 2007 report, the Undergraduate Science Education Committee proposed that a pool of funds be established to support active, hands-on teaching in the sciences, and the Task Force also acknowledged, in a more general way, the need for increased funding in the College to stimulate course development.

The growth of the curriculum also implies the development of our present and future professoriate. Some young faculty members arrive at Brown with limited teaching experience and little or no experience in a liberal arts college. Graduate students, too, are often caught between scholarly pursuits and responsibilities to their students. How do we, as an institution, convey the central importance of the undergraduate teaching mission to our new faculty and graduate student TAs? The Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning offers

many useful seminars and other resources in this regard, but department chairs and colleagues also need to enter the conversation. Some faculty and graduate students require additional departmental support to become more effective teachers. Departments themselves need to develop more useful and consistent ways to evaluate the teaching of their faculty. The University can help in this area by creating a more user-friendly course evaluation tool, and also by insisting on thorough and consistent departmental evaluation as part of the tenure and promotion process.

The question of how our teachers are teaching leads, however, to another more pointed question, one that has sparked a more widespread national debate on the expectations of higher education: Can we say with any certainty that we know what our students are learning?¹⁷ While individual faculty members usually have an idea about the types of skills acquired by students in their classes, it is a difficult question to answer on a departmental or institutional level. The Task Force acknowledged that more could—and should—be done at Brown to gauge our students' success in meeting the outcomes of our open curriculum. Currently the University has a number of indirect measures to suggest that our students are, in fact, achieving Brown's liberal learning goals.¹⁸ What we need are more direct measures of student learning at Brown. In developing such measures, we should continue to respect the spirit of openness and independent inquiry that is a hallmark of Brown's academic culture. The committee thus recommended that concentrations articulate more clearly the

kind of educational outcomes they expect of their graduates, and to collect samples of capstone projects or other meaningful work to evaluate the success of individual students in reaching these goals. The University can further the process by creating a digital platform where students can store work in all kinds of media. Collecting a range of student work over time would not only give departments a sense of their own success in developing the intellectual capacities of their undergraduates; it would also give the University as a whole the opportunity to say more precisely "who we are" as an academic community.

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This final report of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education reflects the richness and diversity of a collective conversation that endorsed the Brown curriculum and called for a recommitment to the principles that support it. Whereas the original charge to the committee (included here in the Appendix) outlined four broad areas of inquiry, the exposition that follows is organized into three: liberal education, advising, and teaching and learning. It seeks to summarize the range of issues considered by the Task Force and by the Brown community in each of these areas, both before and after the release of the draft report in January. Discussions among different subcommittees and focus groups often converged on the same issues, and so this report is less a chronicle of events than a compilation of ideas, capturing the nature of the broader conversation. A summary list of recommendations and a plan of action follows to conclude the report, offering some perspective on the work that has been accomplished so far, and the work that remains. Our hope is that this document will not be seen as an end but as a beginning. As we submit this report, we trust that the larger conversation about the undergraduate experience that it has stimulated will continue, leading to new ideas, new programs, and new practices that will enhance our curriculum and define what Brown can become for future generations.

¹⁷ The most aggressive statement appeared in September 2006, with the report of the commission chaired by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. The introduction to the report criticized what the commission saw as "the remarkable absence of accountability mechanisms to ensure that colleges succeed in educating students." See *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. (U.S. Department of Education: Washington, D.C., 2006). See also Lori Breslow et al., "How Do We Know If Students Are Learning?" *MIT Faculty Newsletter* (January/February 2008).

¹⁸ These indirect measures include exit interviews with graduates, rates of student participation in elective educational programs such as internships or study abroad, and admissions rates to selective professional schools. They also include statistics gleaned from our studies of course distribution among Brown graduates (including a study of enrollments in math and science courses), and from our biennial surveys of seniors and of all enrolled students at Brown.

Respectfully submitted,

Amit Basu, *Chemistry*

Jason Becker, '09

Katherine Bergeron, *Dean of the College (Chair)*

Sheila Blumstein, *Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences*

Barrymore Bogues, *Africana Studies*

Sheila Bonde, *Dean of the Graduate School*

Rakim Brooks, '09

Fiona Heckscher, '09

Kathleen McSharry, *Associate Dean of the College*

James Morone, *Political Science*

Michael Paradiso, *Neuroscience*

Hannah Pepper-Cunningham, '08

Jill Pipher, *Mathematics*

Arnold Weinstein, *Comparative Literature*

Liberal Education

Education is not easy to measure. A college experience implies many kinds of learning in many different places: in lectures and laboratories, at home and abroad, in the field and on stage; in libraries, living rooms, offices, dorms, and cafés. For nearly forty years, Brown's open curriculum has encouraged an expansive and diverse approach to learning, but even in this environment the college experience can involve more than we realize. The array of intellectual activities that flourish about this campus, far from representing scattered or competing interests, actually bears witness to a more inclusive concept of education—indeed, one so inclusive that conventional distinctions between general education and the concentrations, between the curricular and the extracurricular, even between classroom and community, need to be rethought.

Interconnected ventures are a signature intellectual characteristic of our institution, and students who are drawn to Brown today show a propensity for the kind of independent and integrative learning valued by the founders of the open curriculum. Brown students are constantly measuring and testing the real-world implications of what they learn. The programs produced by the Third World Center or the Swearer Center for Public Service; the work performed by Departmental Undergraduate Groups; the mentoring carried out by Writing Fellows, Meiklejohn peer advisors, Undergraduate Teaching Assistants, and Residential Peer Leaders; the sheer proliferation of student-run activities on campus ranging from journalism to discussion groups to conferences: all these reflect what we might call the “fuller life” of the classroom. It is essential to consider these ventures not simply as part of our curriculum, but as a key element of our mission and, indeed, our success.

This inclusive concept of liberal education may well be one of Brown's most distinctive assets, but it nonetheless remains difficult to define. How are we to characterize the ethos of liberal education for the current generation of Brown faculty and students? The Task Force saw a

pressing need to rearticulate the core values of the Brown curriculum for the larger campus community, and to clarify a vision of the kind of learning we believe can and should happen on this campus. If we are to produce global citizens capable of moral discernment, capable of “discharg[ing] the offices of life with usefulness and reputation” (as the Brown Charter has it), then we need a more holistic view of what we, as a university, actually teach about these capacities. What role does our inherently democratic curriculum play in helping to educate a democratic and engaged citizenry? What are students doing with the time they spend outside of class? To understand the real meaning of liberal learning at Brown we need to consider a fuller spectrum of student activity beyond the classroom, beyond the campus, and even beyond the United States.¹⁹

“Brown students,” we were told by a current senior on campus, “tend to see their classes not as ends in themselves but as launching pads for greater involvement in the community and the world.” This tendency toward activist involvement is another distinctive feature of Brown's educational culture. As a faculty member commented, it may not be amiss to characterize Brown's philosophy of liberal education as a system-wide response to E.M. Forster's literary dictum: *Only connect!*²⁰ The remarkable scope and vigor of student-initiated activities on and off campus serve both to complement and to complete the kind of learning that takes place in the classroom, connecting students with other students, with members of neighboring communities, and with the larger world beyond Brown. And that connection speaks to a type of civic engagement that can develop students' ethical or moral capacities. To those pessimistic critics of higher education who bemoan the lack of civics requirements in university curricula,²¹ the college experience at Brown should come as welcome news. It may also represent, we think, a very real and untold success story for this campus.

¹⁹ In our biennial senior survey, Brown students have reported a significantly higher level of participation than students at peer institutions in public service work, independent research for credit, international study, and involvement in political organizations.

²⁰ For another perspective on the same imperative, see William Cronon, “‘Only Connect...’: The Goals of a Liberal Education.” *The American Scholar* 67, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 73–81.

²¹ See, for example, Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 172–77.

This vision of engaged learning and the fuller life of the classroom led the Task Force to its first concrete proposal. We recommend that the Dean of the College and the College Curriculum Council produce a new statement about liberal education at Brown, one that gives proper due to the range of student-led activities taking place on and off this campus. Brown's earlier statement of educational goals, the "Guideline to Liberal Learning," was produced by Sheila Blumstein in her capacity as Dean of the College in 1990 and provides a useful starting point for expansion. The new statement should clarify the principle of "breadth" by articulating the areas of intellectual inquiry that all students are expected to build into their core programs. These areas include the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language; the capacity to understand histories and differences among cultures; the knowledge of scientific methods together with the quantitative skills necessary to imagine and solve complex problems; and the appreciation of forms of representation in many kinds of expressive media. Profiles of individual students should be provided to show the range of entrepreneurial and creative activity possible in our open academic environment. Above all, the statement should articulate the importance of including real-world experiences, and of collaborating with a full range of mentors and advisors, in order to acquire the diverse range of perspectives necessary not to make a living but, in the words of Alexander Meiklejohn, "to have a life worth living."²²

How are students to gain this intellectual breadth? Some members of the Task Force worried that our current course offerings may not provide students with sufficient opportunities for broad exploration of the disciplines, and so a second recommendation follows closely from this first one. We think departments and programs should be expected to create, each year, a regular roster of courses that introduce the ideas and discourses of their fields. Such courses would be designed to capture the spirit of a discipline: its assumptions, its methodologies, its ways of thinking. Some courses in Brown's First-Year Seminar Program already

fulfill this function for the entering class. What we are proposing is a variation on that theme, with additional courses designed not for first-years but for upperclass students. For interdisciplinary programs, such courses could be team-taught by faculty in different fields.

Departments may object that the goal is unrealistic, that students are unlikely to grasp the point of a discipline without some prior foundation. And yet we think that if faculty were to engage in this kind of thoughtful dialogue about their disciplines, the results could be very exciting. A few departments already feature courses like these in their curricula. We sense there is an audience of undergraduates hungry for more. In fact, we learned from speaking with individual students that it is often juniors and seniors who are looking for this kind of wider exposure as they enter the last phases of their education. We enjoin all academic departments, then, to construe their intellectual mission as a *double* mission: not only to craft concentrations that provide undergraduates with a solid grounding in their disciplines, but also to create courses that reflect on the significance, and the "fit," of these disciplines within the larger intellectual and social culture of Brown and beyond.

The question of what the concentrations themselves should be providing constituted the next major theme in Task Force discussions. Every concentration has a set of required and elective courses that together reflect the range of intellectual approaches that define their disciplines. Yet a review of web sites of current programs revealed that few concentrations take the time to explain these approaches or even present a rationale for the content and structure of their programs. For this reason, the Task Force asks each concentration to complete a self-study that would offer a clearly stated rationale for course offerings, showing how they relate to disciplinary learning objectives. The report would explain how the program's required courses fulfill the expectations of a given discipline, as well as how they serve to fulfill the broader learning goals of a liberal education. What, for example, does the concentration do to help students improve oral and written communication? What kinds

²² See pages 39–41 in the Appendix for the new statement, produced by the College Curriculum Council in spring 2008.

of critical thinking does it promote? Does it help to hone quantitative reasoning or statistical skills? Language skills? What about ethical or moral development? Concentrations could use the College's new statement on liberal learning, discussed above, as a basis for thinking about these questions. By stating such learning goals, departments would not only help students make better choices; they would also help students keep the full curriculum in view as they set out on their chosen paths.

Here again the focus is on connection. The conventional view of a divided curriculum—with the concentration on one side and “everything else” on the other—is, we think, profoundly misleading. Not only is the undergraduate expectation of four years and at least thirty courses larger than any concentration requirement, but the commitment to diverse areas of inquiry and knowledge must also be seen as the main event, not the leftovers, of the college experience. If, as one student eloquently argued, the real “core” of the Brown curriculum lay in the connections students make between their courses and their activities, then we should see the concentration as part of that network rather than separate from it. We must insist, in other words, on a fully integral view of the concentration.

Certainly, the proliferation of concentration programs at Brown in the last four decades—from about forty in 1969 to nearly a hundred today—offers a clue about the integrative potential of Brown's curriculum, especially when one realizes that more than half of these programs cross departmental lines. Brown's culture of intellectual freedom, combined with disciplinary strength and the intimate size of our community, has made for some excellent programs over the years. But not every program has achieved its full potential. Some interdisciplinary concentrations are unable to provide students with opportunities to work with faculty advisors, design independent studies, or complete senior capstones. Some are not always able to offer required courses on a year-to-year basis. If we are to take seriously our commitment to student choice and intellectual freedom, then we must also be willing to do something about

those concentration programs—especially those that lie beyond departmental control—which fail to offer a viable path for our undergraduates.

The problem of under-resourced concentrations was mentioned at nearly every focus group or campus forum held by the Task Force. The Task Force itself spent considerable time on the topic and determined that the College Curriculum Council needs to exercise leadership in this area. Our recommendation is that the CCC, as part of its general review of all concentrations, undertake a close and systematic review of interdisciplinary programs. Such reviews should consider whether required courses are available on a yearly basis, whether independent study and research is encouraged as part of the concentration, and whether faculty are available to serve as teachers and advisors. In cases where the CCC notes a lack of interest on the part of students, or insufficient support from faculty, it may recommend closing a concentration. In situations where faculty and student interest is high, but resources are lacking, the Dean of the College should work closely with the Provost and the Dean of the Faculty to find additional resources to ensure the academic integrity of the programs.

Since the early days of the New Curriculum, independent concentrations have exemplified the venturesome spirit of our student body. Records show that the number of students completing independent concentrations has declined. This is not a new trend: Sheila Blumstein noted in 1990 that independent concentrations had fallen from a high of 76 in 1975 to a low of 23 in 1988.²³ Twenty years later, the numbers are even lower.²⁴ The Task Force discussed the perception that students had to cross too many administrative hurdles in order to complete an independent concentration, and encouraged the College to streamline the process. But the committee also discussed how changes in the curriculum since 1975 may have altered the role of the independent concentration. The number of regular concentration options has more than doubled in that time, and so the need for independent concentrations may be less press-

²³ *The Brown Curriculum Twenty Years After: A Review of the Past and a Working Agenda for the Future*, January 1990, 49.

²⁴ In 2008, five students graduated with Independent Concentrations at Brown.

ing than before. The Task Force nonetheless agreed that independent learning experiences remain critical to the spirit of the Brown curriculum; indeed, many of our current interdepartmental concentration programs started life as independent concentrations. We therefore encourage the College to continue supporting such independent teaching and learning with appropriate curricular and advising resources.

All concentrations, of course, should be seen as places for probing more deeply into a discipline, for developing a closer relationship with a faculty member, and for trying one's hand at research. The committee felt strongly that all three of these goals needed to be clarified for students. Learning is enhanced, after all, when students become part of a community of scholars. A more extended conversation with faculty and students led to concerns about whether all of our concentrations were actually providing this kind of intellectual community. In biennial surveys, Brown students have reported a very high level of satisfaction with faculty availability in their academic programs—much higher, in fact, than students at peer institutions. And yet students told us that they wanted more.²⁵ This perception, coupled with our sense that deepening the intellectual purpose of the concentration is essential for improving the college experience overall, led the Task Force to a more pointed recommendation: We propose that all concentration programs be required to identify a range of meaningful and connective intellectual experiences for all concentrators.

A senior honors thesis is the most obvious example of this type of experience. We understand, though, that for many concentrations a senior thesis is neither desirable nor realistic, and so the nature of this culminating experience will have to vary from program to program. It could be a senior seminar in the discipline, for which the student is required to produce substantial independent research or creative work. It could be some form of collaborative research undertaken with a faculty

²⁵ According to Barrett Seaman, this phenomenon of students wanting more contact with faculty is widespread even at small, highly selective colleges. See his study *Binge: What Your College Student Won't Tell You* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley, 2005).

member. It could even be an internship followed by a piece of writing in which the student evaluates the experience and its relation to his or her learning goals. Rather than being paid for such an internship, the student could receive academic credit. The point of the recommendation is that every concentrator would have the opportunity—and the encouragement—to complete some kind of “capstone” project.

A few members of the committee hesitated over the architectural metaphor (a capstone refers to the stone at the top of a wall or a curved arch), recognizing that many such projects would not necessarily “cap off” a student's time at Brown. We know, in fact, that at least some Brown students manage to complete their concentration requirements in their junior, rather than senior, year. The point of the capstone project would be, then, not so much a chronological as an intellectual culmination. Concentration programs need to make these opportunities more visible in order to fulfill their primary role, which is to deepen a student's connection to a discipline.²⁶

Deepening the intellectual engagement of our undergraduates became a prominent theme in discussions with Brown's new Vice-President of International Affairs, David Kennedy, especially after February 2008, when the Brown Corporation ratified the plan to make Brown a “truly global university.” The implications of this commitment for undergraduate education are considerable, and are outlined in the updated Plan for Academic Enrichment.²⁷ Among other objectives, the University proposes expanding the depth and breadth of international experiences for Brown undergraduates, including short-term study abroad options and international internships. The Task Force endorsed these proposals, which have the potential to broaden the scope of a general education and to promote a greater sense of global awareness and responsibility on the part of our students. Further discussions with faculty members

²⁶ If such opportunities were clearly visible in the course offerings of every department and concentration (for example, by uniform course titles and numbers), students might be able to find them more easily.

²⁷ *The Plan for Academic Enrichment, Phase II* (February 2008). <http://www.brown.edu/web/pae/PhaseII.html>

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from various departments raised the intriguing possibility that some of Brown's concentration programs might become a natural platform for promoting such international education. This report thus urges departments to consider designing an international "track" for their existing programs, so that undergraduates might develop a global perspective on their disciplines.

We end the first part of this report with a few remarks on one of the most traditional goals of a liberal education: the ability to write effectively. All Brown students are expected to demonstrate an ability to write as a condition for graduation. While this expectation is clearly stated in our literature, it has not always been systematically reviewed or enforced, leading to frustration on the part of faculty, and skepticism on the part of students. The topic of writing competence thus emerged, not surprisingly, as a central concern in the feedback we received after the release of the draft report in January 2008. The Task Force organized a meeting of interested faculty in March to discuss these concerns, and a consensus emerged that Brown needs a much more coherent approach to its writing requirement, one that defines exactly what we expect students to achieve, and how we plan to assess their progress. Some faculty wanted more guidance on incorporating effective writing assignments into their courses. Others acknowledged that Brown's existing writing programs, while serving some of our undergraduates well, required much more support to address the full range of student needs. On the last point it was recommended that the College undertake a complete review of Brown's various writing programs and support services as a way of responding to these concerns.²⁸

²⁸An external review has been scheduled for September 2008.

The question of assessing our students' abilities, and pointing them toward the right resources, inevitably opened onto a larger discussion about the need for effective advising in the College. This was perhaps the most difficult topic taken up by the Task Force, and that, too, is no surprise: In his recent study of American higher education, even former Harvard President Derek Bok admitted that "good advising with conscientious faculty . . . is a goal that has eluded most colleges."²⁹ At Brown, the situation may not be quite so elusive. We have a large number of conscientious faculty advisors, and students surveys report that the advising we offer is about on par with that of our peer institutions.³⁰ But the Brown curriculum requires that we do much more. An educational environment based on student choice must provide strong, integrated systems of support so that students can make informed choices and take advantage of available academic resources. Engaged faculty advisors are a key element of that support and a sign of the University's commitment to our distinctive philosophy of education. The Task Force thus saw advising as the most critical dimension of the undergraduate experience at Brown.

Over the years, Brown has developed programs to address the needs of many types of undergraduates at many points in their careers. First-year students benefit from faculty in our Academic Advising Program, our Curricular Advising Program, and our University-Community Academic Advising Program.³¹ Sophomores can

²⁹Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 260.

³⁰Sources include biennial surveys of graduating seniors, annual surveys of first-year students, and surveys of students ten years after graduation. In all of these sources, students at Brown and elsewhere tend to corroborate Bok's point, reporting a less-than-satisfactory experience with advising.

³¹Brown's Academic Advising Program comprises a large cohort of faculty members who are recruited annually and matched with first-year students to help direct their courses of study. The Curricular Advising Program is a variation on this theme, placing a group of first-year students in a faculty member's course so that students and faculty can interact more easily and informally over the course of a semester. The University-Community Academic Advising Program is a more specialized program run out of Brown's Swearer Center for Public Service. UCAAP pairs incoming students who have prior community service experience with like-minded faculty members, who counsel them on issues of social responsibility and help them become involved in the greater Providence community. All of these programs reflect the expectation that Brown faculty assume responsibility for the advising of our undergraduates.

turn to Randall Counselors for help in choosing courses, declaring concentrations, and applying for internships and independent research.³² Juniors and seniors rely on concentration advisors to help them craft programs that will enhance their knowledge of a field and its methods of inquiry. Reinforcing these relationships is another network of colleagues and mentors, including Meiklejohn Peer Advisors³³ and students involved in Department Undergraduate Groups; staff in the Dean of the College Office, the Office of Student Life, the Swearer Center for Public Service, and the Third World Center; and, of course, all the professors with whom a student may have studied or pursued an independent project. It is this whole web of connections that has been called, at Brown, the “advising partnership.”

Advising partners share a common ideal: to motivate students to imagine a broader vision for their education, one shaped by creative experiences both in and out of the classroom. If the college experience at Brown is meant to prepare students for meaningful lives in an increasingly interconnected world, then students need meaningful forms of support, support that will help them ask relevant questions about, and explore possible solutions to, complex problems. This goal implies integrated advising networks that extend over a student’s entire career at Brown.

Of course, networks can break down. And the most frequently heard complaints about advising at Brown have to do, naturally, with such failed connections. Our first-year programs receive fairly strong reviews, for they do provide the structured academic guidance our students expect. But all too often our undergraduates find themselves adrift, unable to access the help they need. This has been particularly true for our sophomores who, like sophomores at many other institutions, report lower levels of satisfaction with advising than first-year students. The same institutional surveys tell us that advising in our concentrations is highly uneven.

³² Randall Counselors are a small group of faculty members who make themselves available to any student in the sophomore class who seeks advising. They supplement the work of regular sophomore advisors.

³³ Brown students participate in a robust peer advising program named after the progressive educator and civil rights activist (and former Brown Dean of the College) Alexander Meiklejohn. In 2008, over 300 students will serve as Meiklejohn peer advisors to our first-year students.

And, from still other sources, we know that our international students and transfer students need much more help adjusting to Brown academically and socially. Add to this the fact that a number of our web and print materials require continual updating, and the situation becomes more urgent.

No wonder one student on the Task Force described the situation of advising at Brown as “the 800-pound gorilla in the room.” For just as we have a long list of advising programs designed to support the open curriculum, so do we also have a large (and unavoidable) body of evidence to suggest that our advising programs are not working as well as we, or our students, would like. The Task Force did not spend much time speculating about the reasons, although it could be said that increased external pressures on the University have made the whole system more vulnerable than it used to be. Faculty members feel increased strain about balancing their obligations to teaching and scholarship. At the same time, today’s students require more interaction with faculty mentors, not less. Students expect their advisors to know more about available resources both on campus and off. They also want faculty to know more about their lives, and to support what they are doing outside the classroom, if only by showing up.

The Faculty Rules have long confirmed that academic advising is central to the University’s educational mission, and the Rules explicitly state that advising is “primarily the Faculty’s responsibility.” The Task Force upholds this view. Indeed, given the importance of the undergraduate curriculum in defining the ethos of the University, we are aware that such advising should not be seen merely as a “service” function at Brown. It is, rather, integral to the faculty’s teaching mission. At present, about 200 faculty members (or about 30% of our roster) are serving as academic advisors for the first-year class. Many of these same faculty are also working in some capacity with sophomores. Another

group of faculty serve as concentration advisors, or as Directors of Graduate Study (DGS) in their departments, but, again, some of them may also be working with our first-year and sophomore students. In other words, while we know there are many faculty currently involved in advising, we also know that this group could and should be larger. This is especially the case if we are to improve the advising of our first-years and sophomores. With more faculty involvement, the volume of students assigned to each advisor could be reduced, making the relationships potentially more satisfying for all.

Faculty, moreover, should feel supported and recognized in this work, and there was much discussion, both before and after the release of the draft report, about the best way to acknowledge faculty who advise our first-year and sophomore students. Many agreed that a small research or travel grant might signal the importance of such advising to the undergraduate mission of the University. To improve continuity of advising into the sophomore year, we thus encourage the Dean of the College to find ways to retain faculty advisors for two-year intervals, and to recognize these advisors appropriately for their work.

Supporting advisors also means providing better information. The College currently publishes handbooks and organizes annual orientation programs for advisors of first-year students, but what Brown lacks is a more comprehensive plan to help faculty develop their understanding about the open curriculum, about academic rules and regulations, and about student issues outside the classroom. Faculty would also like to know more about departments and course offerings outside their own areas of expertise. But just as faculty advisors need to know more, so do our students. If we believe our students are in a true “partnership” with their advisors, then they have their own responsibilities to fulfill in shaping their educational plans. And this suggests that we should give students access to the same kind of information we give their advisors, not only in the form of written materials but also in structured forums that encourage their active role in the advising process.

To this end, we suggest that new faculty regularly learn

about advising during their orientation to the University. The open curriculum and the Brown student culture should be discussed in faculty orientation and Sheridan Center programming. Additional information about resources, opportunities, courses, and concentration requirements should be available on newly developed (and centrally located) web pages. Most importantly, a more clearly structured advising calendar should be developed to make expectations transparent for both faculty and students in all four classes. All this information needs to be disseminated to students and faculty in a systematic and effective way—on the web, in podcasts, or in traditional pamphlets and letters—on a regular, yearly cycle.

While such information is important for all students, it is of special importance to students from historically underrepresented minority groups, students from under-resourced or under-performing secondary schools, students with high financial need, and first-generation students. In order for Brown to serve an increasingly diverse student body, we must develop and implement more nuanced advising strategies responsive to these evolving student demographics. We propose better matching of advisors and advisees in the first years, according to mutual talents and interests. We also suggest beginning the advising dialogue before students arrive on campus, providing them with a schedule of advising meetings for each semester, and creating opportunities for additional, ongoing advising during and subsequent to their first year.

International and transfer students can also face significant challenges in acculturating to Brown’s learning environment. Advising and orientation programs for both populations should be expanded. Transfer students should be matched with faculty advisors on their entry to Brown. And we recommend that our orientation programs for international students include focused sessions and written materials on the open curriculum, the role of the academic advisor, and educational resources at Brown.

Improving our orientation programs in this way should not be difficult. In fact, the Offices of the Dean of the

College and Student Life have already been making strides in this area. But an orientation can only go so far. The best way for students to feel supported is by having more people available throughout the year to support them. The Task Force considered several ways to strengthen our cohort of faculty advisors. Recognizing the work of academic advisors, and retaining them for two years is one such plan, and has been discussed earlier in this report. But we believe the University can do even more. We thus recommend creating a second cohort of faculty advisors to augment and enhance our current academic advising programs. This cohort would be known as the Faculty Advising Fellows.

The Faculty Advising Fellows (FAFs) would work in teams with our Faculty Fellows in Residence (FIRs), who currently live in five houses on campus and who open their homes weekly to students in the residence halls. We imagine a program that might eventually include as many as twenty-five Fellows, so that each house would have up to five Fellows on the team. They would know the culture of the College and its full range of advising support systems. They would also be attuned to student life outside the classroom; highly skilled at listening to and responding to students; and willing to collaborate with a wide range of deans, directors, and other staff to provide coherent systems of support for students.

With their enhanced expertise and experience, these Faculty Advising Fellows might assist with the orientation of our hundreds of regular academic advisors, offering perspective from their own experience, and providing advice and support throughout the year. They would be in a position to offer our students a range of services above and beyond the normal advising relationship. Such extended services might take the form of intensive one-on-one counseling with sophomores and more robust advising for incoming transfer students, international students, and those who have resumed their undergraduate education (so-called RUE students).

Importantly, Faculty Advising Fellows could be re-sources for those students who find themselves paired with an academic advisor whose disciplinary expertise does not match their own interests. We can also imagine the Fellows playing a role in the College's assessment of student learning, a topic discussed in the final section of this report. We would expect the faculty members to receive additional compensation for their work, in the form of a yearly research stipend or salary supplement. We would also expect their terms of service to be limited, so that the program could be continually renewed and energized.³⁴

To help this program run more smoothly, and to connect the work of the faculty fellows with broader networks on campus, we recommend creating an additional small cohort of trained staff to support the program. These staff members would coordinate work between the Office of the Dean of the College and the Office of Student Life, and would help faculty and students in different ways, extending the academic relationship into students' lives outside the classroom. Their offices could be housed in spaces closer to where students spend their time, such as the Third World Center, the Swearer Center, or the new student services center in J. Walter Wilson. They might also live near where students themselves live—in housing owned by the University adjacent to campus residential units and off-campus rentals. In any case, these staff would be responsible for supporting the Faculty Advising Fellows, and developing programs (such as seminars, lectures, special dinners, and social activities) that bring faculty and students together. They might also assist in bringing existing programs around fellowships, post-baccalaureate opportunities, international experiences, and other kinds of career advising into Faculty Fellow homes. We believe that, if properly staffed and run, this new program could bring a whole new dimension to the Advising Partnership at Brown, and we recommend that the College and the Office of Student Life work swiftly and strategically to realize its full potential.

³⁴ A diagram of the program with the names of the new fellows is included in the Appendix on page 42. A group of 15 Advising Fellows has been recruited to launch the program as of August 2008.

Just as we would like to augment our faculty resources, so too would we like to enhance our academic support for students. In 2006 the Provost and the Dean of the College appointed a committee to look into the broad question of undergraduate education in the sciences. The committee's top priority was the creation of a resource center that would bring together faculty and students in math and science. The Task Force endorses this proposal and views the center, among other things, as a valuable advising resource. Ideally, it would bring together all of our peer-advising, tutoring, and other academic support programs for math and science, programs that are currently housed in separate departments, or across academic divisions. It would also serve to augment concentration advising in math and science, by offering broader based and cross-disciplinary support for students in these fields. And it would provide a forum for showcasing many of our successful student-led programs, such as Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE), the National Society of Black Engineers, or the New Scientist Program.

The Task Force discussed more generally how Brown might improve our peer advising programs across the University. We are rightly proud of our Meiklejohn Peer Advisors, who share their knowledge and experience with incoming students in order to acculturate them to the life of the College. The Task Force recommends that the Meiklejohn program be more fully supported. We would like to see additional training for students in the program about academic options across the campus, so that peer advisors have access to good information about departments and course options. Focused training on the curriculum would enable Meiklejohns to provide guidance on a range of curricular issues (for example, English courses that are appropriate for students at various skill levels, placement in basic chemistry and mathematics courses, ways of preparing for medical school while concentrating in a discipline not related to the life sciences, and resources for inexperienced writers). Faculty from relevant departments could participate in Meiklejohn training to impart this information.

To enhance peer advising through all four years, and to extend that support into the concentrations, the Task Force also recommends that every department be required to support an active Departmental Undergraduate Group. DUGs are designed to serve as resources for students in departments and in concentrations; they also function to increase the kinds of interaction with faculty that students consistently report that they want. The Task Force thus encourages the Dean of the College to work with departments to improve DUG programming and strengthen faculty-student relationships.

Advising in the concentrations is of course primarily the responsibility of the faculty. Some departments provide excellent advising to their concentrators; we know this from our student surveys.³⁵ The same surveys show that many students do not find the advising support they need in their final years at Brown. Of particular concern is the support offered to students in interdisciplinary concentrations. Too often, advisors in such concentrations are simply not available in sufficient numbers. Inadequate advising limits our students' ability to have the integrated, in-depth experience the concentration is designed to provide. Improving the availability and consistency of advising in the concentrations should therefore be an immediate University priority. Our recommendation, made earlier in this report, that the College Curriculum Council review all concentrations would help toward realizing this goal. Gathering information about how concentration advising is conducted across departments and generating a set of "best practices" could be a useful step. We also suggest that some larger concentrations consider deploying clusters of concentrations advisors, rather than just one or two, so that students can exercise more choice, or at least have the chance to consult with faculty who have similar disciplinary interests.

Finally, we would like to see a strengthened connection between advising in the concentrations and advising for life after Brown. Students should be thinking about

³⁵ The biennial survey of graduating seniors contains, for example, an analysis of satisfaction with concentrations. Similar questions are asked in our periodic survey of all enrolled students and in our surveys of alumni ten years after graduation.

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post-baccalaureate opportunities such as fellowships and professional schools, and other international opportunities such as study-abroad and internships, even before they declare the concentration. Much more coordination is needed between campus offices to encourage this kind of advance planning.

Good advising is, in the end, central to good education. At Brown, we want this crucial element to be a meaningful piece of all students' experience—from their very first academic decision to their senior capstone. In order to strengthen the college experience at Brown, we need first to reinforce the network of advising support. And that means not only re-imagining the advising relationship in terms of the changing experience of students over all four years, but also creating multiple, overlapping relationships that provide students with the information, mentoring, and support they need to succeed.

What we envision for the future, then, is a more coherent set of advising paths: we want first-year students to maintain a relationship with faculty advisors into the sophomore year; and we want concentration advisors to know more about their advisees' academic experiences and aspirations as they have developed over time. A more meaningful concentration declaration process for sophomores might serve to strengthen our students' understanding of their academic goals in the context of the larger curriculum.³⁶ But more important than processes are the people who enact them. By increasing the number of faculty involved in advising, and by broadening the range of relationships these advisors represent, we hope to improve the kind of contact students can expect to have with faculty members over the course of their Brown career. It is only when we extend and deepen the network of advising partners—and when advising becomes true mentorship—that we will fulfill the ideal and the promise of the Brown curriculum.

The last section of this report shifts the focus from student needs in order to consider the Brown curriculum from the perspective of its teachers. As an institution, Brown has long upheld the value of a professoriate committed to both undergraduate teaching and to graduate-level research. Brown professors are expected not only to excel in their disciplines but also to participate regularly in the life of the College. One of the most direct ways faculty members become involved with undergraduates, and thereby contribute to the college experience, is through their work in undergraduate courses. There, a special kind of relationship can develop as students and faculty exchange ideas and learn new ways of thinking about each other and the world. The classroom can and should be seen as a microcosm of the curriculum itself, where an "open" approach to teaching fosters the opening of minds, and better learning for both teacher and student. The Task Force embraced this view, while recognizing that there is much work to do to ensure the excellence of undergraduate teaching across all courses, concentrations, and departments.

Brown undergraduates, as it turns out, report high degrees of satisfaction with the quality of instruction they receive.³⁷ Anecdotal information suggests, however, that some Brown courses are poorly taught, and do not facilitate student learning. It would be useful to know more, but at the moment the University lacks a systematic feedback mechanism that would allow comprehensive study of teaching effectiveness. It is probably fair to say that certain areas of the curriculum require a closer look, and that Brown faculty and graduate student teachers could use more support in fulfilling their responsibilities. Our recommendations related to teaching and learning thus have two objectives: they seek to enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching at Brown, and to improve our ability to demonstrate that our students have achieved all that we say they have achieved.

Effective teaching should be the norm across all courses, from introductory to advanced. Particular care

³⁶The process of declaring a concentration at Brown is already quite meaningful, because it involves writing a reflective essay on one's academic goals. The Task Force would like to see more support for this process so that students and faculty advisors across the curriculum approach it with equal seriousness.

³⁷This information comes from the biennial senior survey.

is needed, though, when introducing students to new fields of study.³⁸ Thoughtfully constructed and effectively taught introductory courses are essential for future concentrators, whose success in a field rests upon their understanding of the concepts and questions raised early on in their study. But let us not forget that such courses also serve all Brown students, regardless of their concentrations, since we expect our students to explore many different disciplines in their core programs.

Student feedback about their experiences in introductory courses is, however, mixed. Some are known to be well taught (and attract students in large numbers), but large lectures can often fail to sustain a student's interest. Not surprisingly, students have expressed a desire for more innovative teaching in such courses. The Task Force endorses the Undergraduate Science Education Committee's recommendation that introductory courses in science and math, for example, provide more opportunities for students to engage in active, hands-on, multidisciplinary learning. We also support the Committee's recommendation that a pool of resources be created to support curricular development in the sciences. Indeed, such resources should be available to develop introductory courses in *all* departments. The Dean of the College's initiative to expand the First-Year Seminar Program in 2007 is one example of how curricular development grants can make a difference.³⁹ We thus urge the University to create additional resources to enhance instruction in entry-level courses across the University.

Pedagogical concerns about introductory courses also led the Task Force to discuss the work of graduate student instructors at Brown. We affirm that strong graduate programs can enhance the undergraduate learning experience if the University accepts its responsibility for developing the teaching abilities of the future professoriate. Supporting the professional development of

graduate student teaching assistants begins during their orientation to Brown, when they should be provided with structured opportunities to learn about Brown's educational philosophy and distinctive student culture. Orientation programs on the purposes of liberal education are especially important for our international graduate student instructors, who often arrive at Brown with little knowledge of American institutions of higher education.

The Graduate School has already begun to address this need: Plans are underway to implement an extended summer program that will help orient international graduate student TAs to Brown's educational culture.⁴⁰ This program will also include language preparation for those TAs whose first language is not English. What else should Brown offer our graduate TAs? We know that the Sheridan Center provides a range of excellent programs on constructing syllabi, communicating standards of achievement, and improving student writing. We also know that some departments offer additional training for incoming graduate students, but the University can do much more for students across all programs. The Dean of the Graduate School has already shown critical leadership in this area, and the Task Force encourages the Graduate School to continue assessing the state of graduate student teacher-training, to identify best practices in departments, and to help all departments implement appropriate methods of preparing their graduate students to teach effectively.

Graduate TAs are not alone in needing structured programs that help them adjust to Brown's educational culture. New and junior faculty members, whose reappointment, promotion, and tenure rest in part on successful teaching, also need special support to function effectively in Brown's open learning environment. New faculty orientation should include sessions on Brown's curricular philosophy and on Brown's distinctive stu-

³⁸ This point was addressed by the Undergraduate Science Education Committee in their report, "Improving Undergraduate Education in STEM Fields at Brown: Recommendations from the Undergraduate Science Education Committee," June 8, 2007, 5.

³⁹ A call to faculty in fall 2007 generated a large number of new proposals, and the number of seminar offerings rose from 56 courses in 2007 to 76 in 2008, an increase of over 35 per cent.

⁴⁰ See Final Report of the Working Group on Graduate Education (May 2008): http://gradschool.brown.edu/resources/working-group_1210176706.pdf.

dent culture. New and junior faculty members should also be provided with a faculty mentor of their own choosing, not necessarily in their own department. This mentoring relationship should be framed as a collaborative and mutually beneficial one, in which both junior and senior faculty members have the opportunity to enhance their teaching, by observing another's pedagogy.

While enhanced orientation, mentoring, and professional development programs would clearly help new faculty and graduate students, the Task Force believes that all faculty—including senior faculty—would benefit from a more systematic approach to improving pedagogy. Given Brown's institutional commitment to undergraduate education, every academic department bears responsibility for foregrounding teaching as a primary duty of the faculty. Yet it is too often the case that issues related to pedagogy take a back seat to other pressing departmental concerns. Carving out a space for extended, collegial conversations about teaching and learning will be a challenge, but it is, we feel, necessary if Brown is to maintain its reputation for teaching excellence.

The Task Force thus recommends that each department develop a plan to support, assess, and improve the teaching of its faculty. Articulating learning objectives for the concentration, as discussed above, could serve as one benchmark for measuring teaching effectiveness. Faculty should also have regular access to professional development opportunities related to teaching. Departments may even wish to involve their own faculty in regular peer review of classroom effectiveness. Best practices could be shared among departments through workshops and conversations sponsored by the Sheridan Center and other units on campus. Most importantly, though, faculty should be made aware of how teaching is assessed in their own departments, and how it is weighted in decisions about promotion and tenure.

A discussion of pedagogy at Brown would not be complete without some consideration of the many types of

innovative teaching made possible by our open learning environment. What kinds of teaching can and should a Brown student expect? And how should students themselves become involved in the teaching process? These two questions led the Task Force into a rich set of conversations about team teaching, independent learning experiences, and peer-directed learning. Team teaching across disciplines is, of course, an integrative educational experience, valuable for both students and faculty. It can sometimes be unsettling for undergraduates, for it displays the actual pluralism and even discordance of the real intellectual world, as opposed to the artificial "harmony" sometimes displayed in the traditional one-teacher classroom. Team teaching can also be arduous for faculty, but it fosters conversations across departments that may lead to further collaboration among faculty from different disciplines, thus creating a greater sense of community. If we expect our students to cross borders and to find either common ground or useful contrasts by doing so, then we should provide appropriate encouragement and support for faculty engaged in similar activities. And so we recommend that additional resources be made available specifically to support team teaching.

Just as team teaching extends faculty beyond the confines of their departments, so do independent learning experiences break through traditional classroom structures. Many Brown surveys testify to the transformative impact of independent learning experiences outside of conventional classroom settings. Graduating seniors at Brown report a higher degree of satisfaction with opportunities for independent learning than do students at peer institutions. Brown alumni point to Group Independent Study Projects (GISPs), independent concentrations, undergraduate research in the lab and in the field, and other creative projects as the most significant—and innovative—learning they experienced at Brown.⁴¹ The Task Force thus calls on the University to renew its commitment to support independent learning experiences. We recommend, specifically, that additional funds be raised to support undergraduate

⁴¹ The Task Force sent out a survey to Brown alumni in October 2007, and received feedback from almost 2000 alumni that offered clear evidence on this point.

research opportunities, as well as undergraduate internships. We are keenly aware of the need for funds to support international research and internships, and we advise the Office of International Programs (OIP) to work together with the Vice President of International Affairs in order to expand its range of programs with more flexible and short-term study options. We also recommend that OIP partner with Brown's Curricular Resource Center to come up with ways to support students who seek non-credit-bearing international opportunities abroad.

Independent learning exemplifies Brown's commitment to a flexible, open curriculum that invites—even expects—students to shape their own educational experiences. The same philosophy is expressed in Brown's long-standing support for peer-directed learning. Brown undergraduates participate in an array of teaching activities that extend their education to the larger community at Brown and outside the University. Department Undergraduate Groups, Writing Fellows, Meiklejohn Peer Advisors, undergraduate Teaching Assistantships, and peer tutors in the Curricular Resource Center are directly connected to the curriculum and represent the kind of student-to-student learning that we consider a hallmark of a Brown education.

The Task Force thus recommends that each department identify current opportunities for peer-directed learning and consider ways to expand such opportunities in its discipline. Special attention should be paid to increasing peer-to-peer learning opportunities in science and math disciplines. The Science Resource Center recommended above could be staffed in part with undergraduate math and science fellows. Another possibility is to replicate the Writing Fellows Program in science and math courses. The Task Force also recommends extending the reach of our undergraduate TA programs, especially in courses where a role for undergraduate assistants makes good sense. If such TA assignments were conceived as true apprenticeships, as structured opportunities for mentoring and reflection on teaching, they could easily be offered for course credit. If they included some kind of pedagogic research component, they might also constitute a capstone experience. Train-

ing, however, is an urgent necessity for our undergraduate TAs, and so departments should work with the College in teaching these students about teaching. The College should, in turn, assess the current situation of undergraduate teaching assistantships at Brown, in order to determine what additional support or compensation may be necessary as we seek to expand these programs.

Brown's approach to learning demands not only that students and faculty share responsibility for the open curriculum; it also requires that we measure how well our teachers promote student learning. Student feedback through course evaluations provides one such measure. But there is no need to wait until semester's end to solicit student feedback about a course. Several students and faculty on the Task Force described how mid-term feedback, or feedback even earlier in the semester, significantly improved student satisfaction with the quality of teaching in a course. The Task Force thus recommends that all faculty consider implementing such a process in their courses. Early feedback from students allows instructors to assess their initial effectiveness in working toward course goals and to modify their approach if necessary. It also sends the message that student perspectives are valued. In a similar way, faculty should ensure they have adequate knowledge of student progress before the midpoint of the semester, which means assigning one or more papers or exams by that time, and providing students with timely assessment of their work.

The most comprehensive source of student feedback is, of course, the end-of-semester course evaluation. Course instructors can use evaluations at the end of the semester to improve their teaching, departments can compare evaluations to assess faculty or programs, and the University can rely on evaluations as one measure of Brown's ability to fulfill its mission. Current course evaluation methods at Brown, however, do not always allow for such assessment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students do not believe that the evaluations are actually used by departments; it is therefore not surprising that at least some students do not take the evaluation process seriously. A second problem is

the wide range of course evaluation methods used. In its 2006 review of such methods, the College Curriculum Council concluded that a lack of consistency in format—and, to some extent, content—limited Brown's ability to gather and disseminate student feedback. The CCC made significant progress in creating a course evaluation tool that would provide individual departments with the type of feedback most useful to them. Implementing a centralized, online course evaluation system could improve our ability to assess teaching effectiveness across all departments.

Universities that have moved to an online system report dramatic increases in the number of students who complete evaluations, along with an increase in the quality (and length) of responses. Of course, we recognize that such an evaluation system at Brown would have to be flexible, in order to reflect the wide range of teaching practices in our departments. The system, in other words, would have to allow for some questions to be generated by departments, while also containing a common set of questions about such issues as course content and quality of instruction. This on-line form could be linked to Banner so that students would be prompted to fill out a course evaluation or to "sign" electronically before viewing their grades. The Task Force recommends that the University gather feedback from those departments at Brown that currently use online forms, and then pilot such an evaluation in those that do not, in order to assess its potential value for students and faculty.

These conversations about course evaluations quickly led to the thornier question of evaluating student learning. How do we know that students in our concentrations and in our degree programs are meeting the goals that we have set for them and that they have set for themselves? All institutions of higher learning in the U.S. have been under increased federal pressure to give a clear answer to this question through their regional accrediting agencies.⁴² Brown, too, must think seriously about the issue and begin to identify ways of assessing the kind of

learning that takes place in our open academic environment. We conclude this section of the report, then, with a few remarks about what we can do to begin.

Historically, the University has had numerous indirect ways to measure student success, but relatively few direct measures. Indirect measures include enrolled student surveys, alumni surveys, and exit interviews or surveys with seniors; statistics on scholarships and fellowships; and admission rates to selective graduate, medical, law, and business schools. It is appropriate and preferable that Brown develop its own direct assessment methods rather than follow some generalized prescription. The wide range of courses and concentrations at Brown suggests that both flexibility and considerable care are needed when attempting to measure student learning. The Task Force thus recommends that each department develop periodic, systematic plans for evaluating their students' success in meeting departmental learning outcomes and Brown's liberal learning goals. Assessment plans should enable departments to see problem areas and identify strategies for improvement. And they will no doubt differ across disciplines and across the four major divisions of the College. But whatever approaches a department adopts, they should be designed to be repeatable on a regular cycle.

The first step in constructing an assessment plan involves identifying learning objectives for students in individual courses and concentrations. Some instructors and departments do articulate their expectations for student learning, but student feedback suggests that this practice is far from universal. Given the wide range of instructional and assessment practices at Brown, it is essential that syllabi for all courses include clear statements of course objectives and expectations about student performance. Standards of achievement for required assignments and information on the relative importance of assignments should also be provided. Departments should publish statements of concentration learning goals and explain how the required courses relate to those goals. And, for those depart-

⁴²The most recent call came in 2006 with the report of the commission of the U.S. Secretary of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (see note 17 above). Brown's accrediting agency is the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

ments or programs that require a senior thesis, a statement about the intended purpose of the thesis, and the standards by which it is judged worthy, should be published on departmental or program websites.

When individual instructors and departments are explicit about their learning goals, their standards of achievement, and their methods for assessing student learning, students are in a much better position to engage in meaningful reflection about their own learning. Such reflection should precede students' matriculation to Brown and should be structured into each year of study. After much discussion, the Task Force concluded that on-line portfolios are perhaps the best vehicle for encouraging students to take a longer view of their educational experiences. These e-portfolios would house the kind of documents that our students are already producing during their undergraduate years: concentration declaration essays, capstone documents, papers from courses, and media from creative works. They would also store students' written reflections about their goals before coming to Brown, before declaring the concentration, and before commencement. Because learning experiences at Brown take many forms, often extending beyond the classroom into the community, students should be encouraged to develop a reflective practice around those experiences as well, and to include information about any significant work undertaken during a leave from Brown.

Online portfolios could also facilitate faculty's ability to advise students. Students could use them to reflect on what they expect of their advising relationship, or to write about their academic and professional goals and how these goals might have changed during their time at Brown. Such reflection is especially important as students prepare to declare a concentration. The portfolio could also facilitate communication between students and many different kinds of advisors. First-year and sophomore advisors would be able to read their advisees' files online at any time; multiple concentration advisors could read and comment on a student's con-

centration plans; and capstone projects could be read by a number of concentration faculty. Seniors could even be encouraged to produce a concluding statement about their learning as part of their concentration requirements.

If all students were asked to include a small set of such documents, the portfolios might ultimately prove useful in academic program assessment. Departments could periodically review a sample of student portfolios to see how students were measuring up against the faculty's expectations and the broader learning goals of the Brown curriculum. Reviews of departmental concentrations by the College Curriculum Council could also incorporate student e-portfolios. Each department could be asked to submit a sample of student portfolios along with other departmental materials to be reviewed by a faculty committee. To facilitate comparative assessments with peer institutions, the committee could include a faculty member from another institution.

Our discussions about portfolios ended in a consensus that this approach could be extremely useful for both students and advisors at Brown, and may be the only way the University can demonstrate that our students learn as much (or more) than they might at other highly selective institutions.⁴³ The alternative to a portfolio approach is a standardized test such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment or the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress. Such tests not only run counter to Brown's educational philosophy; they also fail to capture the full range of our students' educational experiences. We look forward, then, to the development of an appropriate and useful portfolio environment for Brown, which will assist the University in demonstrating the actual effects of the undergraduate experience, and the "fuller life of the classroom" that has made Brown such a rich community of student and faculty learning.

⁴³ A study conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., on behalf of The Association of Colleges and Universities has shown that some employers prefer electronic portfolios to conventional transcripts in evaluating applicants. See *How Should Colleges Assess and Improve Student Learning? Employers' Views on the Accountability Challenge*. Washington, DC: Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2008.

Afterword

One hundred years ago, in June 1908, the *Brown Alumni Magazine* featured a review of a recently published survey of American colleges.⁴⁴ The book bore the snappy title, *Which College For the Boy?*, and attempted to account for the differences among prominent schools by resorting to a clever typology. Princeton was thus dubbed a “collegiate university,” Harvard a “Germanized university,” Cornell a “technical university,” Wisconsin a “utilitarian university,” and so on. The author of the review, Henry Thatcher Fowler, wondered why the book offered no suitable category for Brown, and so he took the opportunity to present his own reflections on where the school stood in the landscape of American higher education.⁴⁵

Brown, he wrote, “is not a typical New England college and it does not seem that she has ever been.” Unlike Harvard and Yale, in 1908 Brown had no separate law school, or medical school, or divinity school, or school of applied science. It did, however, boast a large graduate student body—in fact, the second largest in its cohort—a condition that also distinguished Brown from schools like Amherst and Williams.⁴⁶ College students at Brown communed with graduate students in seminars, learning to become, as Fowler put it, “truly independent thinkers.” “In few other institutions,” he went on, “does the scientific spirit so pervade undergraduate work.” This unique condition gave Brown its unique character, combining the progressive thinking of a university with the size and traditions of the liberal arts college. For these reasons, Fowler chose to call Brown a “university college.”

The term has stuck over the years, but the name itself is perhaps less important than the qualities it was originally meant to suggest. Today “university college” is often thought to refer to the work of our faculty, who are committed both to undergraduate teaching and to advanced research. But what Fowler was describing had more to do with the character of the College itself and of

its students, and much of what he said in 1908 remains true today. Brown is still considered distinctive in its approach to undergraduate learning; Brown’s undergraduates are still taking graduate courses in significant numbers⁴⁷; and Brown students are still characterized by a capacity for creative and independent thought.⁴⁸

It is this intellectual independence of the undergraduate student body that we must work to nurture and sustain as Brown enters a new century. The distinctive experiment in undergraduate education begun forty years ago was, after all, a reflection of an independent spirit that reaches back (beyond Fowler’s time) to the era of Francis Wayland, a spirit that prompted students at Brown to debate the true principles of a university education. What these students envisioned essentially redefined the relationship of the university to the college, infusing the same openness and progressive thinking into the totality of the institution and its educational structures. Brown’s open curriculum thus marks a significant achievement in the history of the University, and it continues to attract the most talented and engaged youth from around the world. To serve them well, Brown must invest in needed improvements to increase both the scope and depth of the undergraduate experience, and this report attempts to summarize some of the most pressing needs. In our current historical moment, as we witness the American university moving onto a world stage, such improvements are more critical than ever. The landscape of higher education is now of global proportions, and if Brown hopes to make a difference in this expanded sphere we must continue to examine the purposes—and the potential—of our open educational environment. With a renewed commitment to progressive education from the University, and renewed engagement from our students, we can expect to preserve for the future an ideal of learning that has unarguably been one of the most defining elements of excellence at Brown.

⁴⁴John Corbin, *Which College For the Boy? Leading Types in American Education* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908). The review was titled, “Which College for the Boy?”—Brown: A University College.” *Brown Alumni Magazine* XI/1 (June 1908).

⁴⁵Fowler had been educated at Yale, came to Brown in 1901, and served as the chair of the Department of Biblical Literature until 1932. See “Fowler, Henry T.,” in Martha Mitchell, *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Library, 1993).

⁴⁶Graduate students made up 20% of Harvard’s student body in 1908, and 17% of Brown’s. Princeton’s graduate population, by contrast, amounted to only 7%.

⁴⁷According to the Office of Institutional Research, 534 students (or about 10 per cent of the undergraduate student body) enrolled in 189 different graduate courses in 2006.

⁴⁸In our biennial survey of seniors, students at Brown continue to report higher gains than students at peer institutions in their ability to formulate original ideas and to acquire knowledge independently.

Summary of Recommendations

LIBERAL EDUCATION

Promote a culture of responsible and integrative learning

1. The Task Force recommends that the College Curriculum Council develop a revised set of principles and goals for liberal learning at Brown. These principles should clarify the meaning of breadth in the context of an open curriculum and acknowledge the critical importance of real-world experience and civic engagement in shaping lives of “usefulness and reputation.” The principles should also articulate the areas of intellectual inquiry—and the modes of thought—that students are expected to engage when developing and building their own core curricula. Such areas include the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language; the capacity to understand histories and differences among cultures; the knowledge of scientific methods together with the quantitative skills necessary to imagine and solve complex problems; and the appreciation of forms of representation in many kinds of expressive media. Profiles of individual students should be provided to suggest the kinds of educational programs undergraduates have designed for themselves. We recommend, moreover, that departments create a number of regular undergraduate offerings that introduce the spirit of their disciplines, thus encouraging students to explore the curriculum in the broadest possible way—not just in the first two years, but during all four years of study.
2. The Task Force calls for a full examination of Brown’s concentration programs to ensure integrity and consistency across the curriculum. To that end, we recommend that each concentration complete a self-study that will offer a clearly stated rationale for the concentration’s required courses and learning outcomes. The statement would explain not only how the program’s required courses fulfill the expectations of a given discipline, but also how they serve to fulfill the broader learning goals of a liberal education. Concentration programs must identify a number of meaningful and connective intellectual experiences (“capstone” experiences) that would be available to all concentrators. Departments are

urged, in addition, to develop periodic, systematic plans for assessing students’ success in fulfilling concentration outcomes.

In connection with this general review, the Task Force recommends that the College Curriculum Council take special care to review student enrollments and faculty resources in each concentration. In cases where the CCC sees that a program lacks sufficient interest or resources, it may decide to close down the concentration. In cases where interest is high, but resources are slim, the Dean of the College should work closely with the Provost and the Dean of the Faculty to provide what is necessary to ensure the program’s academic integrity.

3. The Task Force urges the College to work closely with the Office of International Affairs to make Brown a leader in innovative global education. We recommend that the University create new opportunities for in-depth international study connected to the concentrations, including flexible short-term study experiences, new international fellowships, and internships. In conjunction with the overall review of concentrations, departments are encouraged to consider designing an international track within their own concentration programs, with the appropriate language expectation.
4. We propose that the College develop an e-portfolio system to aid both students and faculty advisors in evaluating the shape and direction of a student’s liberal education. Students would be asked to write about their educational goals and development at key points in their Brown careers: before they matriculate, during their first year of study, prior to choosing a concentration, and during their senior year. These self-assessments would demonstrate students’ success in meeting concentration outcomes and Brown’s liberal learning objectives. E-portfolios could also serve as a component of the departmental assessment plans recommended above.
5. The Task Force recommends that Brown’s existing expectation for writing competency be strengthened.

We advise the College to undertake an external review of Brown's various writing programs and support services with the aim of enhancing opportunities for students to fulfill this expectation. The College should develop a clear statement about writing proficiency along with methods for assessing students' writing abilities prior to matriculation, during their first two years of study, and upon completion of the concentration. The e-portfolio recommended above would allow students to demonstrate growth in their writing abilities over time and thus could enable the College to provide direct evidence that students have met the writing requirement.

ADVISING

Improve advising and mentoring beyond the classroom and across the years

6. The Task Force recommends that the College work with the Office of Student Life to create an enhanced Faculty Advising Fellows Program that would provide more intensive and broader advising support than can be expected from Brown's regular contingent of academic advisors. Faculty Advising Fellows would work in teams with existing Fellows in Residence to help students connect their academic experiences to their lives outside the classroom. The Advising Fellows would organize and attend events at Fellow houses, provide enhanced advising for sophomores, reach out to students in academic difficulty, and offer training and support for other advisors. Additional resources are needed for staff who would work with Fellows and students to help plan events and facilitate communication.
7. The Task Force endorses the recommendation of the Undergraduate Science Education Committee that the University establish a resource center on campus to enhance the advising and mentoring of students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines. Ideally, this center would bring together, under one roof, Brown's many departmentally based peer-advising and tutoring networks in math and science, while also enhancing opportunities for students to work with faculty on research projects and community outreach activities.
8. The Task Force urges the Dean of the College Office to develop more nuanced measures to track student progress and to assure student success in Brown's open academic environment. In keeping with Brown's mission of diversity, we especially encourage the College to implement new advising strategies responsive to evolving student demographics. Careful attention should be paid to the needs of students from historically underrepresented minority groups, students from under-resourced or under-performing secondary schools, students with high financial need, first-generation students, and international students. We encourage new programs that would initiate the advising dialogue before students arrive on campus and strengthen advising support throughout the academic year.
9. The Dean of the College Office should develop additional measures to enhance the continuity of the advising experience over a student's four years. We recommend developing a more reliable means for retaining pre-concentration advisors for two-year intervals, and also recognizing them for their work. We suggest piloting the use of Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) for sophomore registration to ensure timely conversations between students and their advisors. And we recommend that the Dean of the College develop a simple online mechanism for advisors and advisees to communicate with each other about how the partnership is working.

We believe the student e-portfolio mentioned above should help facilitate conversation between sophomore advisors and concentration advisors, as students complete the concentration declaration. But we feel strongly that advising norms for concentrations must be clarified across the curriculum. In that spirit, the Task Force recommends that every concentration be required to foster an active Departmental Undergraduate Group (DUG). Concentration advisors and DUG leaders should work together to ensure continuity from year to year, and to sponsor a reasonable number of events per semester, one of which should be a spring meeting involving new concentrators.

10. From a broader perspective, the Task Force urges the College to assess the full range of student advising needs, especially toward the end of students' time at Brown. To prepare for life after college, all undergraduates should be advised about meaningful work experiences in the course of their undergraduate programs. We encourage the College to develop more internships and placement opportunities for students seeking employment in both the private and the public sector, along with strengthened advising programs to help students plan for post-baccalaureate fellowships and professional degrees.
13. In order to assess teaching and learning more effectively, the University is encouraged to develop a flexible, on-line course evaluation tool that would be made available to all departments. The online instrument could be modified by departments and would encourage students to provide more extensive feedback on their learning experiences. The Task Force also encourages faculty to solicit some form of midterm feedback from students in their courses. Such feedback allows faculty to assess their initial effectiveness in working toward course goals and to modify their approach if necessary.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Support curricular development, independent and peer-directed learning, and effective teaching

11. To encourage the continued growth of the open curriculum, the Task Force recommends that the College increase annual funding for new and innovative courses. We especially support the Undergraduate Science Committee's proposal that a pool of resources be created to support curricular innovation in the sciences. We also recommend that opportunities for team-teaching be expanded. By fostering conversations across departments, team-teaching can promote a greater sense of community among faculty while also developing a student's awareness of the pluralism and even dissonance of knowledge production.
 12. The Task Force recommends that the College increase funding for independent learning experiences, including undergraduate research opportunities and internships. Special efforts should be made to support more international Undergraduate Teaching and Research Awards (UTRAs) and internships. The Task Force also encourages the College to assess its peer-directed learning programs (e.g. the Meiklejohn Peer Advising program, undergraduate teaching assistant programs, and peer tutoring programs in the sciences) with the double aim of expanding the programs where appropriate and ensuring that all undergraduate teaching assistants and tutors receive the support and training they need.
 14. To help graduate student teaching assistants acclimate to Brown, the Task Force recommends that they be provided with opportunities to learn about Brown's educational philosophy before entering the classroom. The Graduate School should continue monitoring the state of graduate teacher-training in individual departments, identifying best practices and helping departments implement appropriate methods for preparing students to become effective teachers.
 15. New and junior faculty should also be provided with structured opportunities to learn about Brown's educational philosophy and distinctive student culture. We recommend that new faculty members work with departmental mentors of their own choosing who can help them learn more about Brown and about teaching in the discipline.
- Finally, in keeping with Brown's longstanding commitment to excellence in teaching, academic departments should develop clear plans to support, assess, and improve the teaching of *all* faculty. The development of improved course evaluation tools described above should be an integral part of such plans. But departments should also explore other forms of peer evaluation to improve departmental dialogues about teaching and ensure that faculty have what they need to achieve excellence.

Plan of Action

The following pages list the concrete actions necessary to implement recommendations made by the Task Force on Undergraduate Education. The table identifies progress already made and a timetable for completing the steps. Recommendations in the table are abbreviated. For the complete text of each recommendation, see pp. 24–26.

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed <i>Actual</i>	Date Completed <i>Projected</i>
1. <i>Work with CCC to develop principles of liberal learning at Brown, and develop other means to expand and integrate learning experiences beyond the classroom</i>	Meet with CCC to work on principles. Publish and distribute.	Send “Liberal Learning at Brown” to class of 2102, to advisors, and sophomores	April-August 2008	ongoing
	Collect student and faculty narratives to supplement document	Solicit student profiles and publish in matriculation materials sent to incoming students	May-June 2008	Spring 2009
	Develop new courses that include community service	Swearer Center announces call		ongoing
<i>Encourage departments to create undergraduate offerings in their field to promote exploration of the curriculum.</i>	Expand First-Year Seminar Program through curricular development grants	Number of FYS increases from 56 in 2007-08 to 76 in 2008-2009	Spring 2008	ongoing
	Develop plan to offer more seminars for sophomores, juniors, and seniors	Cogut Humanities Center announces new junior/senior seminars taught by visiting faculty, postdocs, and fellows	Spring 2008	
		Call for development of new sophomore/junior seminars		September 2009
2. <i>Conduct comprehensive review of Brown’s concentrations</i>	Notify departments that will be reviewed in 2008-2009	Contact Africana Studies, Cognitive Neuroscience, Comparative Lit, Education, Hispanic Studies, History, International Relations, Psychology, and Theater, Speech, and Dance	September 2008	
	Work with CCC to create calendar for review of all concentrations by 2011	Discuss plan with CCC Draft general plan	May 2008	Fall 2008
	Engage faculty in question of measuring student learning in all concentrations	Organize Wayland Collegium workshops to expand conversation with faculty		Fall 2008
	Develop methods to encourage and track senior capstone experiences	Send letters to juniors and seniors; hold junior class reception	Fall 2007 and Spring 2008	ongoing
		Design and create Portfolio environment (see #4 below)		Spring 2009

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed <i>Actual</i>	Date Completed <i>Projected</i>
3. Increase opportunities for international study through both short-term and long-term programs	Work with Office of International Affairs to develop scholarships for international study	Announce Brown International Scholars Program		September 2008
	Work with Office of International Programs, Summer and Continuing Studies, and Curricular Resource Center to reconceptualize existing international opportunities. Expand capacity and support for short-term international programs, internships, and non-credit options	Conduct initial planning meetings with OIP and SCS Announce new programs	July 2008	Spring 2009
Develop international options within concentrations and in other degree programs	Create initiatives for developing international curriculum	Announce, with V.P. for International Affairs, 2008–2009 “Year of International Curriculum”		September 2008
	Work with faculty groups to outline the components of a flexible international track in the concentrations	Meet with select departments Develop Wayland Collegium workshops to expand conversation with faculty (see #2 above)	May 2008	Fall 2008-Spring 2009
	Work with CCC and Graduate School to explore advanced degree programs centered on international experience			May 2009
4. Develop e-portfolio system to aid in the evaluation of student progress	Research software	Select software		September 2008
	Meet with Computing and Information Services, Library, IT Project Review Committee, and student focus groups to discuss options and resources	Form committee to implement system Complete testing		October 2008 Summer 2009
	Make portfolio environment available to incoming class	Launch portfolio		August 2009

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed Actual	Date Completed Projected
5. Strengthen Brown's expectation for student proficiency in writing and conduct review of Brown's existing writing programs	Establish faculty-student board	Convene Writing Advisory Board	September 2007	September 2008
	Engage outside reviewers	Conduct outside review		
	Develop assessment process	Assess incoming first-year students' writing	August 2007, 2008	
	Collect information about writing-based courses across the curriculum and establish new course designation (W)	Send preliminary survey to departments Send follow-up survey	September 2007	ongoing January 2009
6. Create enhanced program of Faculty Advising Fellows to increase opportunities for students and faculty to interact informally	Develop program with current Faculty Fellows and Committee on Residential Experience	Meet with Faculty Fellows and CRE	March–April 2008	
	Announce program and recruit new fellows; pair new FAFs with houses; meet with new fellows to plan fall activities; design websites for the five houses	Announce program to faculty	May 2008	
		Recruit 10 new Fellows; schedule summer meetings	July 2008	
		Design house websites	August 2008	
		Recruit 5 additional Fellows		March–May 2009
Develop new support staff to work with Fellows	Hire Director of Co-Curricular Advising in DOC and reconfigure support staff in ResLife	Advertise and fill position	July 2008	
		Complete staff reorganization in ResLife	August 2008	
7. Establish a new resource center to coordinate and expand advising and mentoring of students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics	Create Science Advisory Board	Hold Board meetings	January 2008	Ongoing
	Develop web presence for center	Launch provisional website	April 2008	
		Update website		Fall 2008
	Create new staff positions for Center	Advertise and fill Coordinator position	June 2008	
	Coordinate academic support services with Curricular Resource Center			Fall 2008
	Design space in Sci Li and fundraise			2009–2010
Hold grand opening	Create new fundraising materials and engage donors			September 2010

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed <i>Actual</i>	Date Completed <i>Projected</i>
<i>8. Develop more nuanced measures to track student progress during the semester</i>	Partner with Institutional Research to gather data on student populations	Create report template		Fall 2008
	Work with Director of Co-Curricular Advising to identify and support students in academic difficulty	Devise tracking method		Fall 2008 and ongoing
	Pilot Banner midterm grade reports	Announce midterm grade option to faculty		February 2009
	Identify and reach out to students whose course enrollment jeopardizes academic standing			October 2008
<i>Implement new advising strategies that are responsive to evolving student demographics</i>	Identify and address unmet student advising needs	Survey minority students	April 2008	
		Work with International Mentor Program to improve advising for international students	May 2008	Ongoing
	Increase academic deans' outreach to students	Hold dean's open hours in TWC	Spring 2008	
	Improve mentoring for students	Conduct meetings with Faculty Fellows		October 2008
	Develop summer bridge program	Pilot "Excellence at Brown" initiative	August 2008	Ongoing
<i>9. Enhance the continuity of the advising experience through small measures and larger ones</i>	Improve advising for transfer students	Publish new "Transfer Guide to Brown"	June 2008	
	Pilot PINs for sophomores	Write to faculty and sophomores about pilot		February 2009
	Provide research stipends to faculty who advise student cohorts for two years	Present advising resources needs to URC	October 2008	Spring 2009
		Announce plan to faculty		Fall 2008
	Improve concentration advising	Develop concentration advising guidelines		Spring 2009
		Distribute guidelines to departments		
	Create online advisor/advisee feedback report			January 2009

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed <i>Actual</i>	Date Completed <i>Projected</i>
<i>9. cont'd</i> <i>Create active undergraduate groups in every department to increase faculty-student interactions and sense of community among concentrators</i>	Work with UCS to collect information on DUG student leaders and activities	Send survey and collect data		November 2008
	Create guidelines for DUG activities and send to departments and concentration advisors	Send letter to concentration advisors Resend letter	March 2008	September 2008
	Work with PAUR to create “dugspaces” on all departmental home pages to advertise activities	Create template		February 2009
		Communicate with departments about template		March 2009
<i>10. Improve advising for lifelong learning and preparation for life after college</i>	Improve advising about socially responsible careers	Launch “Engaged Life Partnership” in Swearer Center		January 2009
	Increase use of alumni to educate students about concentrations and careers	Launch “Brown Degree Days”		March–April 2009
<i>11. Increase annual funding for the development of new courses</i> <i>Create pool of resources for curricular innovation in the sciences</i> <i>Expand opportunities for team-teaching</i>	Create annual funding initiatives to seed the curriculum with new courses in new areas	First-year seminar initiative funds 20 new seminars for 2008–2009	October 2007	
	Work with Wayland Collegium Board and Director to develop new teaching opportunities and discussion groups	Announce 2008–09 “Year of the International Curriculum” (see #3 above)		September 2008
		Partner with Brown’s ADVANCE grant to create new teaching support programs for women faculty in the sciences		Fall 2008
	Work with Wayland Collegium, Cogut Center, and Watson Institute to develop new team-teaching initiatives			Fall 2008

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed <i>Actual</i>	Date Completed <i>Projected</i>
<i>12. Increase funding for independent learning experiences, including UTRAs and internships</i>	Increase UTRA awards by 20% a year for the next 4 years	20% increase in 2007–08	August 2008	450 UTRAs by 2012
	Collect data on campus internships and create plan for increasing internships in public sector			Fall 2008
	Improve consistency and quality of undergraduate TA programs	Survey departments on undergraduate TA employment and “best practices”	August 2008	
<i>Assess peer-directed learning programs in order to expand and improve training for students</i>		Create TA “best practices” document and distribute to departments		January 2009
		Work with Sheridan Center to develop TA/Tutoring training		September 2009
		Implement TA/Tutoring training requirement		January 2010
	Expand training for Meiklejohn Peer Advising Program	Develop training modules on curriculum		February 2009
		Plan and implement faculty-student led trainings		April and August 2009
		Study feasibility of leadership development course for Meiklejohns		Fall 2009
<i>13. Develop flexible online course evaluation tool</i>	Create online course evaluation form	Collect forms from departments and draft new form	December 2006–April 2007	
		Design new form with CCC		
		Built and pilot online version in seven courses	April 2008	
		Modify form to include flexible questions and pilot in 4 departments		December 2008
<i>Encourage faculty to give and to solicit midterm feedback about their courses</i>	Increase faculty use of midterm feedback processes	Collect sample feedback tools currently in use		September 2008
		Send sample tools to faculty		October 2008

Recommendation	Related Action	Progress	Date Completed Actual	Date Completed Projected
<i>14. Create additional opportunities for graduate TAs to learn about Brown's culture and to improve their teaching effectiveness</i>	Work with Graduate school and Sheridan Center to develop new programs	Implement Early Start program proposed by Graduate School		October 2008
	Work with Graduate school to develop standards for graduate TA practices			Spring 2009
<i>15. Educate new faculty about Brown's educational philosophy</i>	Revise new faculty orientation to include segment on teaching from Dean of College and Dean of Graduate School	Plan new faculty orientation Hold new orientation sessions	August 2008	
<i>Establish mentoring system for new faculty</i>	Work with Dean of Faculty and Faculty Affairs Committee to create mentorship program			Fall 2009
<i>Develop plans for improving the quality of instruction in all departments</i>	Create guidelines with CCC Subcommittee on Undergraduate and Graduate Instruction			Fall 2010

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Appendix

CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

The Provost and the Dean of the College appointed a Task Force on Undergraduate Education in March 2007 to review the current state of the College and make recommendations for the future. The work of the Task Force will form the core of the reaccreditation report being prepared for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and will engage the following broad questions.

General Education—Are we offering Brown students the best education we can? What do we expect our students to know as educated women and men of the 21st century? What goals should we embrace in encouraging students to graduate with a more fully developed ability to write? to speak? to evaluate and critique information? to think quantitatively? to create? to understand other cultures and to communicate across them? to develop the capacity to reach nuanced moral and ethical judgments?

And how, in the end, do we convey and measure these or other competencies that we may identify? Are there better ways to integrate students' residential and extracurricular experiences with their academic programs to enable these learning outcomes?

The Concentrations—Are we clear about the place of the concentration within a student's overall educational experience? Do our concentrations provide appropriate depth, breadth, perspective, and rigor within their respective disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas? Can and should they do more to help students make choices beyond the disciplines? What role does the so-called capstone experience play in defining and developing the purpose of the concentration?

Advising—What is our philosophy of academic advising at Brown and how does this connect with the philosophy of education reflected in the curriculum itself? Are our advising methods as good as they can be in enabling students to reap the maximum benefit from the curricular freedom they enjoy? How might they be improved?

Pedagogy and Assessment—Brown is a university that places considerable emphasis on the excellence of its teaching. Is our pedagogy equal to what our educational mission requires? Does our teaching—the way we convey knowledge and skills and assess our students' success in mastering them—stand up to critical scrutiny? Does our evaluation of teaching help us to answer such questions?

The Task Force will confer broadly with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the Corporation to address these questions, in both public forums and private interviews. Their work will culminate in a report, to be released to the Brown community in spring 2008.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Amit Basu — Amit Basu is an Associate Professor of Chemistry. His research interests lie at the interface of chemistry, biology, and materials science, with emphases on glycobiology and nanomaterials. He teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses in organic chemistry and bioorganic chemistry. Basu is the Concentration Advisor for Chemistry and serves as a Faculty Advising Fellow.

Jason Becker '09 — Jason is a chemistry concentrator whose broad course of study at Brown exemplifies the promise of the open curriculum. Jason's curricular choices reflect his own interests and his willingness to explore unfamiliar academic terrain.

Katherine Bergeron (chair) — Katherine Bergeron is Dean of the College and Professor of Music. Before her appointment as Dean of the College, Bergeron chaired Brown's music department. Her research interests include French cultural history, musical modernism, the discipline of musicology, experimental music, song, opera, poetry, and film. Her newest book, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque*, will appear with Oxford University Press in 2009.

Sheila Blumstein — Sheila Blumstein is the Albert D. Mead Professor of Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences. A former Dean of the College at Brown, Blumstein has also served Brown as interim provost and interim presi-

dent. While Dean of the College, Blumstein authored the first—and to date, the only—comprehensive review of the open curriculum. This report to Brown’s President, titled “The Brown Curriculum Twenty Years Later: A Review of the Past and a Working Agenda for the Future,” was essential background reading for the Task Force.

Barrymore Bogues — Barrymore (Tony) Bogues was Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence (2004–2007). He is current chair of the Africana Studies Department and Harmon Family Professor of Africana Studies. He has received many awards and honors for his writing, teaching, and mentoring of students.

Sheila Bonde — Sheila Bonde is Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of History of Art and Architecture. She was named Royce Professor of Teaching Excellence from 2004 to 2007. Her research interests include the archaeology of medieval monasteries and the reuse and reoccupation of Roman architecture in southern France during the Middle Ages. Bonde is PI for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant called “The Virtual Monastery,” which presents digital resources for the study of monastery architecture and texts.

Rakim Brooks ’09 — Rakim is an Africana Studies concentrator from New York City. A member of Brown’s 2007 Mellon Mays cohort and the Institute for Responsible Citizenship, Rakim has interned at the Brookings Institution and Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer and Feld LLP. He chairs the Africana Studies Departmental Undergraduate Group and has served as Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Undergraduate Council of Students.

Fiona Heckscher ’09 — Fiona is a Public Policy and History concentrator. Her senior thesis will focus on Institutional Review Boards’ review processes and their effects on social science research at Brown and its peer institutions. Fiona is also a Writing Fellow and has worked with the Swearer Center.

Kathleen McSharry — Kathleen McSharry is Associate Dean of the College for Writing and Communication and Dean for Issues of Chemical Dependency. McSharry oversees the DOC’s renewed focus on Brown’s

writing competency requirement. Before coming to Brown, McSharry served as an associate dean of general education, and an English professor, at two other liberal arts institutions.

James Morone — James Morone is Professor of Political Science and Urban Studies at Brown. Morone has published books on politics, history, and social policy, and has written over 100 articles and essays. Among the awards he has received, Morone is most proud of the three Hazeltine citations for teachings, the APSA’s Kammerer Award for the Democratic Wish, and his Pulitzer nomination for *Hellfire Nation*.

Michael Paradiso — Michael Paradiso is Professor of Neuroscience. His research focuses on the relationship between neural activity in the brain and the perceptual world we experience. Current research topics include the neural basis of lightness and color perception, cortical mechanisms of selective visual attention, and temporal coding.

Hannah Pepper-Cunningham ’08 — Hannah was an Africana Studies concentrator who graduated from Brown in May 2008. During her four years at Brown, she explored many areas of the curriculum, and worked with a number of organizations both on campus and in the greater Providence community.

Jill Pipher — Jill Pipher is Professor of Math and Chair of the Math Department. Her research interests include harmonic analysis, elliptic PDE, and cryptography.

Arnold Weinstein — Arnold Weinstein is the Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature. He researches European and American narrative, Scandinavian literature, American fiction, literature and medicine, and the city theme in literature. He has published numerous books and has been awarded a multitude of teaching and research fellowships in the U.S. and Europe.

Liberal Learning at Brown

A liberal education implies breadth and depth: basic knowledge in a range of disciplines, focused by more concentrated work in one.⁴⁹ These goals are common to all liberal arts institutions, but at Brown they have a special context. Our open curriculum ensures you great freedom in directing the course of your education, but it also expects you to remain open—to people, ideas, and experiences that may be entirely new. By cultivating such openness, you will learn to make the most of the freedom you have, and to chart the broadest possible intellectual journey, not just during your first semesters but through your entire time at Brown.

What does it mean to be broadly educated? The first Western universities conceived of the liberal arts as seven distinct modes of thought, three based on language (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), and four on number (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). While this structure has changed over the centuries, the basic concept has endured. A modern liberal arts education is still defined in terms of a core curriculum comprised of several areas of knowledge. At Brown, rather than specifying these areas, we challenge you to develop your own core. Over four years you will sample courses in the humanities, the social sciences, the life sciences, and the physical sciences. But the real challenge is to make connections between those courses, using the perspective gained from one discipline as a window onto the next. The most significant social, political, and moral issues of our time require the ability to think from multiple vantage points, and Brown's curriculum affords you the opportunity to develop just this sort of nuanced perspective.

At the end of your sophomore year, you will choose an academic concentration, where you will develop that perspective in the context of one discipline or department. This is, in effect, what “concentration” means. Deepening your knowledge of a field implies understanding the range of ideas, and the methodological differences, that define it. All concentrations have requirements to ensure that students have covered the

basics. But you will of course bring your own perspective to that field through your independent projects, and all the other work you will do both inside and outside the classroom. A human biology concentrator who has taken several courses in anthropology will see things differently from one who is entirely focused on medicine; a mathematics concentrator will have a different perspective depending on whether he or she has spent time studying an instrument or teaching in the local public schools. The challenge, once again, is for you to make the connections. And that means striving above all to develop the full range of your intellectual capacities during your four years at Brown.

How should you go about expanding those capacities? Below are a few goals to keep in mind as you plan your course of study.

Work on your speaking and writing

Writing, speaking, and thinking are interdependent. Developing a command of one of them means sharpening another. Seek out courses, both in and out of your concentration, that will help you to improve your ability to communicate in English as well as in another language. Whether you concentrate in the sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities, your ability to speak and write clearly will help you succeed in your college coursework and in your life after Brown.

Understand differences among cultures

Your future success will also depend on your ability to live and work in a global context. And that means knowing as much about other cultures as you do about your own. Brown offers a wealth of courses and international experiences that will help you develop a more self-conscious and expansive sense of how different cultural groups define themselves through social, aesthetic, and political practices. Working with international students and teachers on the Brown campus can make you equally aware of the challenges of communicating across linguistic and cultural barriers. Fluency in a second language, coupled with time spent studying abroad, will sharpen your sensitivities, enlarge your

⁴⁹This statement was drafted by the College Curriculum Council in April 2008 in response to the Task Force's first recommendation. It is conceived as a planning guide for students and, as such, was included in two new guides created in the summer of 2008: one for the entering class, and another for sophomores.

sense of geography, and prepare you for leadership in an increasingly interconnected world.

Evaluate human behavior

Knowing how individuals are socialized and express their identities can lead to deeper insights about the nature of human organization, the sources of political power and authority, and the distribution of resources. The study of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion can help you think more deeply not only about yourself, but also about the social institutions that serve to define our very notions of self, together with the policies and institutions that maintain them.

Learn what it means to study the past

Understanding how people and institutions have changed over time is fundamental to a liberal education. Just as you should expand your cultural breadth, so should you also develop your historical depth. Coming to terms with history involves far more than learning names and dates and events. It means understanding the problematic nature of evidence, and of the distance that separates the present from the past. It also means thinking critically about how histories themselves are written and who has the power to write them.

Experience scientific inquiry

Evidence is also a central aspect of scientific inquiry. The interpretation of natural or material phenomena requires a unique combination of observation, creativity, and critical judgment that hones your inductive reasoning, sharpens your ability to ask questions, and encourages experimental thinking. Understanding the nature of scientific findings, along with their ethical, political, and social implications, is also critical to an informed citizenry. As you plan your course of study, look for opportunities to experience direct, hands-on research.

Develop a facility with symbolic languages

Symbolic languages make it possible to think abstractly across many disciplines. Linguistics, philosophy, computer science, mathematics, even music, are among the disciplines that have developed symbolic systems to make theoretical assertions about their objects of study, or to imagine alternative realities. Courses in these

areas will teach you what it means to conceptualize systems and structures that have the potential to reframe our notions of time and space.

Expand your reading skills

Studying written texts, interpreting graphs, and evaluating systems and codes are all forms of analysis that belong to the more general category of “reading.” Learning how to read closely makes you aware of the complex nature of expression itself, where the mode of expression is as important as what is expressed. Gaining experience with close reading—across many genres—may be one of the most important things you will learn to do in your four years at Brown.

Enhance your aesthetic sensibility

A liberal education implies developing not just new ways of reading but also of seeing, hearing, and feeling, based on exposure to a range of aesthetic experiences. Courses in the visual and performing arts, music, and literature will deepen your understanding of many kinds of expressive media, past and present, and the kinds of realities they aim to represent. Developing your own creative abilities in one or more art forms will deepen your self-understanding and enhance your ability to appreciate the work of others.

Embrace Diversity

Achieving excellence in liberal education requires a commitment to diversity in the broadest sense. This means embracing not only a range of intellectual perspectives, but also a diversity of people. Brown’s diverse educational environment offers you the opportunity to think broadly about the nature of complexity itself, and to learn how to participate productively in a pluralistic society. The Brown curriculum features hundreds of courses that offer you a chance to enlarge your perspectives in just this way. Seek experiences inside and outside the classroom that will challenge your assumptions, and allow you to develop a more open and inclusive view of the world and your place in it.

Collaborate fully

Learning never happens in isolation, and the quality of your experience at Brown will depend on your ability to collaborate fully with others: with teachers, with fellow students, with advisors and mentors of all kinds. The Advising Partnership is thus a necessary complement to the Brown curriculum. Be as bold in seeking guidance as you are in pursuing your educational aspirations. Begin developing your network of collaborators early, and work to stay connected with those teachers, advisors, and peers who have meant the most to you. Visit office hours not just to expand your understanding of course material, but to get to know your teachers as people. Reach out to faculty at other events, or over lunch or coffee. Work on research projects or independent studies with professors whose interests match your own. And make use of the many offices and centers that can support you in reaching your academic goals. By taking charge of your education in this way, you will enrich your teachers' and mentors' understanding as much as you will expand your own capacity to learn, not just here at Brown, but in many other environments, and for many years to come.

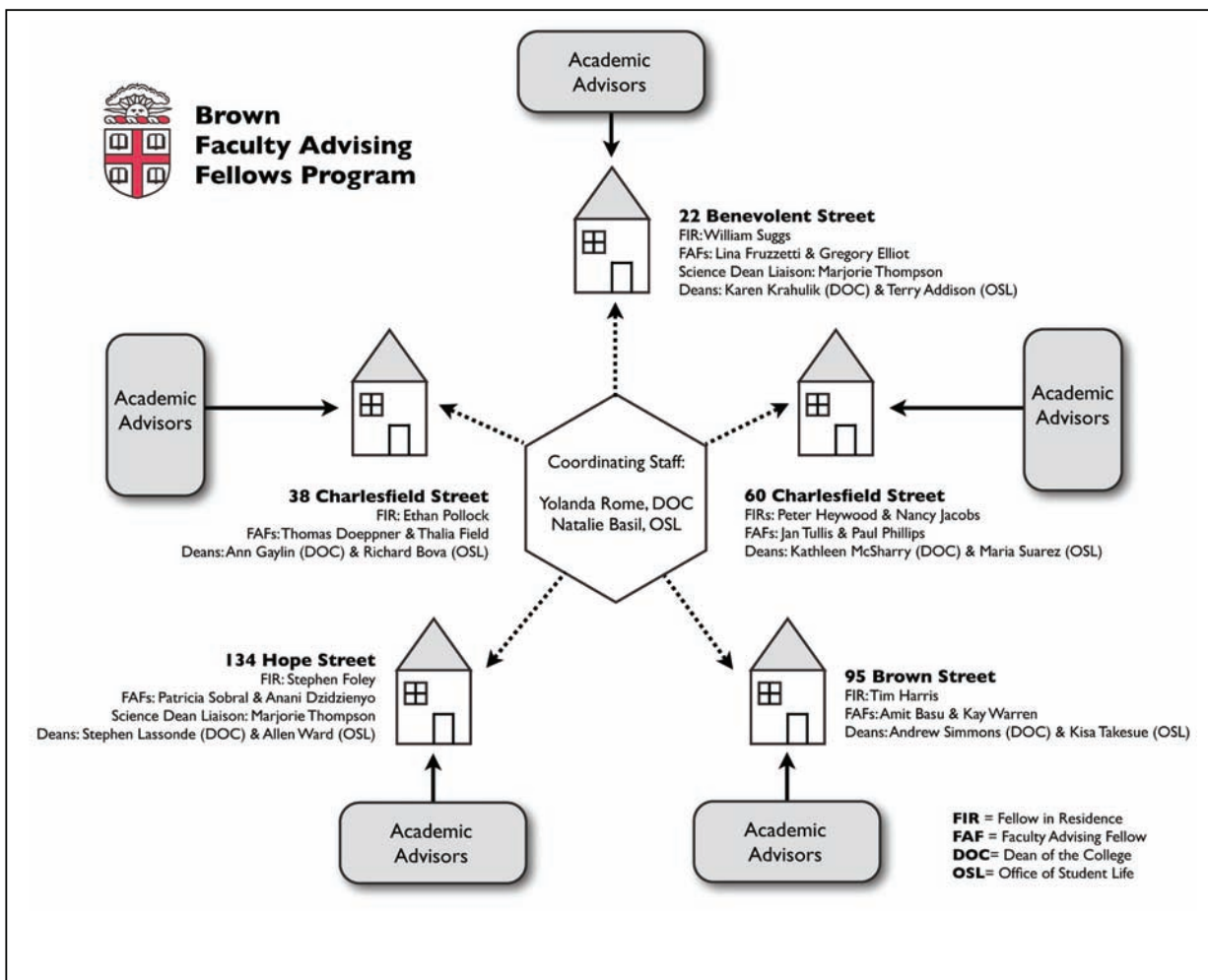
Apply what you have learned

Your general education at Brown will be enriched by the many kinds of work you do beyond the classroom. Real-world experiences anchor intellectual pursuits in practical knowledge and help you develop a sense of social and global responsibility. Internships, public service, and other community activities both on campus and beyond Brown not only have the potential to strengthen your core programs; they also can strengthen your moral core, by showing you how and why your liberal studies matter. Looking beyond the horizon of your immediate interests and sharing your knowledge and talents with others can expand intellectual and ethical capacities that will make it possible for you to lead a full and engaged life, or, in the words of the Brown charter, "a life of usefulness and reputation."

The Brown Faculty Advising Fellows Program, 2008–09

In response to recommendations by the Task Force and the Committee on the Residential Experience, Brown's Office of the Dean of the College and the Division of Campus Life and Student Services have launched a new Faculty Advising Fellows Program. The program is based around five Brown-owned houses and the Faculty Fellows who live in them. These Fellows in Residence (FIRs) open their homes about six times per month with programs and events designed to increase the informal interaction between students and faculty on campus, to connect the residential experience to the academic experience, and to build community. They are joined by non-residential Faculty Advising Fellows (FAFs), who serve for three-year terms, and work in a

team with the residential Fellows to design innovative programs and to increase the number of faculty available for mentoring and advising. Also associated with each house are Deans from the College, from the Division of Campus Life, and from the Division of Biology and Medicine, who attend events and advise Fellows on academic issues and policies. To foster an even greater sense of community, each house serves as a locus for about 50 of our regular cohort of academic advisors. New advisor orientation takes place in the houses, and academic advisors are invited to events at their affiliated house throughout the year. A diagram of the houses and the Fellows for 2008–09 is included below.



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