Mr. Geoffrey Stone
Provost

April 12, 1996

Dear Geof,

I am pleased to forward to you the final report of the Task Force on the Quality of Student Experience. Our aim has been to summarize the quality of experience today as well as to present suggestions for improvement. This effort has not been without its ups and downs, but overall it has been an extremely positive and educational experience. I am very grateful to the other members of the Task Force, who have been extraordinarily generous of their time and thought in this work, including the prolonged phase of finalizing the tone and content of the report itself. The goodwill of students, staff, and administrators has also been critical, especially in the process of information gathering. I know that everyone on the Task Force already feels a certain degree of accomplishment from our contributions to changes initiated in the past 18 months. We urge you and the President to place a high priority on student issues as outlined in this report in future deliberations.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this critical evaluation of the University.

Sincerely yours,

Susan M. Kidwell
Chair of Task Force
Professor, Geophysical Sciences

Report of Task Force on the Quality of Student Experience

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I. Introduction

The Task Force on the Quality of Student Experience is a group of faculty, staff, students, and trustees appointed in Autumn 1994 by the President and Provost to conduct a broad evaluation of student experience outside the classroom. As a complement to the concurrent Task Forces on Undergraduate Education and Graduate Education, we were asked to identify weaknesses as well as strengths in the overall student experience at Chicago, considering in particular the ways in which these influence current student satisfaction and, concomitantly, student recruitment and alumni satisfaction. The University has not experienced any downturn in these latter areas — in fact, applications among prospective undergraduate and graduate students have continued to increase, and the University enjoys a higher percentage of alumni giving than does the vast majority of its peer institutions. However, in the Chicago tradition of critical self-examination, the new administration sought to take stock of student satisfaction in the broadest sense: to identify what works well and is valued, warranting preservation or even enhancement and expansion; what does not work well, requiring modification or elimination; and what is missing, prompting implementation. The experience of undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students were to be examined, as was the full range of factors contributing to the student life, including academic atmosphere, extracurricular opportunities and other aspects of social life, relations with the community, preparation for life after graduation, and the quality of administrative services rendered to students.

This is an extraordinarily broad array of issues. Fortunately, however, our investigation has been only one of several concurrent studies of student experience at the University. Those efforts include the other two Task Forces, the Abbott survey of undergraduate concentrations, the Taub survey of undergraduate quality of life, the McKinsey study of student recruitment issues, the Richman Task Force on voluntarism, and the work of a variety of *ad hoc* and standing faculty and administrative committees. Multiple jurisdictions and diverse deadlines have made it virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of all these issues at this time. Indeed, some important issues relating to student life that are merely introduced in this report, such as minority and gender issues, require further evaluation by a body with requisite expertise and resources. For the remaining issues, however, especially those concerning undergraduate students (where this Task Force applied most of its energy), we summarize existing data, provide additional information, and present strategic goals and recommendations for improvement. We hope this report will provide a general framework for further discussion and action on issues of student experience, and that the snapshot description we provide of student experience at the University today will provide a baseline for measuring future improvements.

A. Organization of Task Force Effort

The Task Force on Quality of Student Experience (hereafter referred to as the Task Force) was not charged with conducting formal surveys of students and alumni: recently completed and in-progress surveys along with records from various administrative offices were expected to provide sufficient quantitative data [Table 1]. Our work focused instead on (1) synthesizing this available data and (2) testing and expanding upon it through open-ended interviews with students and with staff and faculty closely concerned with student life. In the interview process, small focus groups, townhall gatherings, staff, and others were asked to (a) describe what they saw as present or past problem areas in the overall student experience and to rank their relative importance, (b) suggest how these problems might be addressed, and (c) identify aspects of the student experience that were especially positive. Individuals also had the opportunity to contribute their views by means of a suggestion box at Regenstein Library and a Task Force email address.

Through informal interim meeting with and reports to elected faculty groups, the Alumni Association, Student Government, and various administrators over the past 18 months, the Task Force has received updated information and useful feedback. It also, as mandated, has insured that student life issues remain on the table during a period of financial exigency. The Task Force has had input into new initiatives and has served as a sounding board for efforts already underway to improve the quality of student life, for example renovation of the Reynolds Club, trial expansion of College orientation, re-evaluation of food services on campus, facilitation of community voluntarism, and the streamlining of student administrative services.

The President and Provost recognized that the recommendations of this Task Force may well cost money to implement. We were not asked to find short-term cost savings, but to focus instead on longer-term issues of student satisfaction, student recruitment, and alumni satisfaction. Consequently, we have attempted to identify the underlying causes of student dissatisfaction where they exist so that recommended changes might have lasting effect. Because of our mission — critical self-evaluation of the University — and the high standards our institution strives for, this report necessarily emphasizes areas for improvement rather than details its many strengths.

This report also emphasizes undergraduates because of serious consideration being given to increasing College enrollment. In Section II (The Undergraduate Experience) we summarize findings on the magnitude of student dissatisfaction, identify the issues of greatest concern to students, and discuss current efforts and ways to further improve our performance on these key issues. Separate sections are devoted to graduate students (Section III) and several of the University's professional schools (Section IV). In Section V, we discuss the information we have gleaned on the minority student experience and on gender concerns and propose that a group be charged to examine these issues more closely. Strategic goals and recommendations are gathered

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into a single section (VI). The Task Force believes these improvements to be desirable even if the University were not considering increasing the size of the student body, but they are especially important if the University wishes to increase the yield of highly qualified applicants at the undergraduate level and to accommodate additional masters students within the graduate divisions.

B. Sources of Information

Quantitative information on the level of satisfaction among students is difficult to acquire because of the low response rates attained by most surveys [Table 1], especially when participation requires the effort of returning written comments by mail. The 1995 Taub Survey of current undergraduates, commissioned by John Boyer, Dean of the College, is a very notable exception, with a response rate of 65% (n = 718). A target 1100 students were selected randomly from the Registrar's lists for face-to-face interviews on a wide range of academic and quality of life issues. The Task Force was consulted during the design of the questions, and was also provided with early information from the results; however, because the analysis and report are not yet complete, we have relied on partial information.

For graduate students, surveys conducted by the Council on Teaching (recent alumni), the Graduate Affairs Office (current students), and the Dean's Council of the Biological Sciences Division (current divisional students in BSD) have lower response rates but strongly corroborate each other. The brief summary of student life as it relates to several professional schools was based primarily on conversations with current students and administrators in those units.

These data supplement the qualitative information acquired by the Task Force from undergraduate students who attended open town-hall meetings within residence halls; these were "listening visits" for Task Force members. Similar meetings were held with Residence Staff, College Advisers, departmental Administrative Assistants for Graduate Affairs, College Admissions staff, Deans of Students, and various advisory groups that had not been polled in surveys but had a wealth of relevant first-hand experience. Because information from these listening visits was highly consistent with survey results, we have a high degree of confidence in the relative importance of issues discussed in this report and in how the University's performance is perceived. These meetings had the advantages of (a) allowing participants to determine the issues raised (and the order in which they were raised, which we interpreted as an index of relative importance and/or magnitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction), and (b) giving participants maximum flexibility in the definition of terms and issues ("social life," for example, meant something far more encompassing to students than parties, organized groups, or romantic attachments). In reporting these interviews here, we have tried to retain the original phrasing of the participants as much as possible.

In interviews with self-selected (rather than individually invited) participants, we were concerned that there would be a bias toward negative comments. In the Council on Teaching survey of recent alumni of graduate divisions, for example, students scoring an aspect of experience as negative were more likely to provide additional long-hand comments than were students who scored the experience as positive. Our actual experience, however, was that participants were eager to discuss the issues in a critical yet balanced manner.

Unfortunately, very little reliable comparative information on quality of experience is available from other institutions. Exit surveys of our College seniors are conducted periodically by the Consortium on the Funding of Higher Education (COFHE), but the most recent survey had a response rate of approximately 20% on this campus, and so is of very questionable use. (We clearly need to improve the rate of return in future surveys so that senior opinions can be monitored more closely.) Interviews with undergraduate transfer students to Chicago also provided insights on programs that work elsewhere.

A final comment on procedure: the composition of this Task Force has changed somewhat over the past 18 months due to graduation, leaves of absence, etc., but has maintained a mixture of faculty, staff, students, and trustees as listed at the end of this report. These permanent members have brought a wealth of experience and perspectives, but they have all been faced with steep learning curves given the breadth of our assignment. This has had the positive effect of driving us to gather information rather than relying upon previously formed ideas or impressions. Information on specific issues (Campus Food Services, Geography of Residence System, Staffing and Aims of Housing, Community Relations, First-Year Undergraduate Programs and Follow-up, Life after Graduation) has been collected through a series of ad hoc subcommittees, in most instances augmented by additional student members.

II. The Undergraduate Experience

A. Level of student satisfaction

The Taub survey indicates that 85% of our College students describe themselves as personally happy with their lives in general. Seventy percent describe their College experience as having met their expectation, and about 65% describe themselves as happy or very happy with their overall College experience. Interestingly, while the Taub survey found that the College was not the first choice of half of our current students, sixty percent of *those* students are nonetheless happy to be here, corroborating residence staff and College Advisers' accounts that many of the students who matriculate somewhat reluctantly are quickly won over and become our strongest boosters. These numbers are relatively high, but they nonetheless indicate a significant number of dissatisfied students. Information on efforts to transfer out of the institution is consistent with this

level of dissatisfaction. The College reports that approximately 10% of students withdraw by the end of the first year, and the Taub survey indicates that 35% of our current undergraduates report that they have taken some step to leave at some time during their College careers.

Many students who described themselves in interviews as being satisfied with their academic performance and as being well matched to the College nonetheless indicated disappointment with other aspects of their collegiate experience. Suggestions for improving the quality of experience thus should not be dismissed as originating in a small core of malcontents: this hard core may present these views most strongly, but they are shared to some degree by many other students [also see COFHE]. It is not unreasonable to presume that students' ambivalent feelings regarding their experience here will continue after they become alumni and will also be expressed to prospective students.

Despite the many strengths of the College, the internal consistency of the quantitative data and the qualitative substance of the interviews indicate non-trivial shortcomings in the undergraduate experience. We believe the University can and should improve the level of student satisfaction.

B. Issues raised most often by current students

1. Caliber of academic program. Not surprisingly, the Taub Survey found that undergraduates overwhelmingly identify academic pursuits as their primary reason for attending this University. Students find their academic experience the most enjoyable aspect of their experience (50%) and are highly motivated to excel academically. In ranking their goals for college, 90% cited a well-rounded education, 80% cited preparation for a career, and 75% cited good grades.

It is not possible to overemphasize the pride that students take in the academic caliber of the College program and their protectiveness of it. They express concern that improvements to non-academic aspects of their experience might compromise or come at the expense of academic quality. This concern also extends to such issues as an increase in the size of the College: students worry that standards for admission will be lowered or that programs will be watered down to attract and retain a larger number of students.

Pride in the College also appears to be one of the factors in student frustration with the public's apparent lack of awareness of the University. In these students' experience, although people who are familiar with the University hold it in high regard, too many neighbors, extended family members, prospective employers, and others are unfamiliar with this institution or fail to recognize us as at least equal to our peer institutions. Disappointment with the University's lack of success in making itself and its accomplishments known among the general public arises consistently in interviews.

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2. Academic pressure. Although College students take immense pride in the excellence of the academic program here, many feel that this comes at a high price, citing excessive academic pressure, lack of time, and competitiveness, including student self-competitiveness, as the biggest difficulties they encounter at the University [Taub: 40% combined]. Time and pressure were also a subtext in many Task Force interviews with students. Resident Masters and College Advisers, who share both personal and professional relationships with a large number of students, especially in their first and second years, also see academic pressure as a major problem, causing students to be too busy and anxious to participate in non-curricular activities, even those purposely organized to alleviate their stress. This academic pressure has been explained in many ways and in fact almost certainly does have multiple sources. Below are listed some of the most important.

2a. Serious mind-set. Many residence staff and College Advisers see students here as axiomatically serious, and in Task Force interviews the students themselves suggest that much of the pressure is self-generated. Many of these students conclude that the College is meant to be an unforgiving challenge, requiring much sacrifice. Moreover, they believe and that many outside the institution and some inside do not appreciate the magnitude of the challenge. They also perceive few rewards along the way or at the end. Not all students are able to adjust to the rigor of the academic program (compared to their high school experience) and to the lack of grade inflation (relative to what their friends experience at other universities). Seriousness of purpose is underscored by anecdotes of students who arrive at Student Counseling before orientation to seek tutors for placement exams. Some graduate students state their belief that this is the only campus in the US where undergraduates are more stressed than graduate students.

Students remark on the sense of inadequacy that they and many of their peers experience for significant periods during their careers here. Such feelings are especially disturbing because they often are expressed by students who seem well-adjusted and outgoing, but who cite the way "something here breeds a sense of inadequacy." Some describe their belief that the first two years here are designed to break them down to where they feel they know nothing about anything, so they can be built back up in the last two years. Unfortunately, they add, despite the boot-camp-like experience of those first two years, they do not leave with the positive camaraderie of a "platoon" because the work is excessively individual and too often competitive, rather than collaborative. Many students tell us that early on, they must decide to become "a grind," foresaking much of life outside the classroom in order to do well academically, or to compromise and live with a disappointing academic record, anxiety about career opportunities, and issues of low self-esteem and parental disapproval.

2b. Academic workload. Students clearly appreciate challenging courses when the educational benefit is high, as demonstrated by most course evaluations. In interviews students report the workload as very heavy (see 2a above). They voice resignation about this, attributing it

to the price of a challenging education; but they also indicate considerable frustration that no one in authority seems to respond to negative course evaluations identifying the most egregious cases of unrealistic workloads or class schedules. Students complain that in subsequent years the same faculty members teach courses with equally unrealistic assignments. Other specific issues include enormously long reading lists, term papers due on exam dates for the same course, and class meetings on the Friday after Thanksgiving or during reading periods.

Residence staff, College Advisers, and student counselors are particularly aware of the weight of class assignments: unlike faculty, these staff know the *total* list of books and term papers that individual students are expected to complete each quarter, and they witness on either a regular or crisis basis how students handle it. Many staff members we interviewed (some of whom have taught in the College) feel very strongly that overall workloads are simply too high, placing frustrating restrictions on time available for other activities that normally are (and should be) part of a young adult's life. In their perception, the College asks too much of even our most talented students, and student complaints about unrealistic faculty demands are often warranted.

These staff members suggest that faculty should to be sensitized to the cumulative demands of student workloads. However difficult it may be to design a system that maintains a realistic balance, efforts should be made to do so. Students have asked that more summer courses be offered, that transferring credit for some introductory courses be made easier, and that there be options to start Core sequences in quarters other than the fall. They believe this will allow them to reduce course loads during the normal academic year. Although no students suggested a pass-fail system for first-year students, when asked some thought such a system might reduce stress the first quarter. The reaction to first-year pass-fail grading was guarded by both students and staff because of fears of diluting the quality of the education. Students definitely do not see any advantage to be gained from reducing the number of credits for the degree; they believe that professors would simply increase the workload per class in response.

To deal with academic pressure, staff of the Student Counseling and Resource Service cite the need for greater resources devoted to tutoring and to study and life skills seminars. Adjustments that many have to make to University life, such as managing a heavy workload and moving to a new city, can be overwhelming for some. Staff note that foreign students (4% of College; 13% in University overall), first-generation students, and students who are the first in their family to attend college understandably may require disproportionate assistance, including academic and personal counseling and in some instances ESL (English as a Second Language). It is not clear to College Advisers and counseling staff that the University provides sufficient support in these areas for the numbers of students currently enrolled, much less for growing undergraduate and international student populations.

Advisers and other staff also cite employment (as part of a financial aid package) as an important factor in academic stress and the overall quality of students' experience. Surprisingly, this issue was not raised by students in interviews, nor was it singled out as a significant factor in the Taub survey.

2c. Calendar. When the question was put directly to students, most, not surprisingly, responded that the present quarter system increases academic stress. A few students remarked on compensating advantages (including greater number of subjects that can be explored; psychological advantages of a sprint versus a marathon; scheduling of final exams before quarter breaks), and some expressed concern that faculty would compensate with comparably enlarged workloads if the University adopted a semester system. All interviewed students, however, felt that the specifics of the academic calendar (and in particular the shortness of quarter breaks and reading periods) unduly aggravate academic stress. These same issues were also raised by College Advisers and faculty at the College Curricular Retreat in December, 1995, and are currently under discussion for possible change.

Advisers also observe students having difficulties in completing concentrations or in selecting from an adequate choice of Core and elective courses because of course scheduling conflicts. Courses tend to be scheduled into a few time slots most favored by faculty, they are occasionally taught at non-traditional hours, and many classes require extra meeting hours that are not listed in published time schedules. More reasonable scheduling of classes is necessary.

2d. Competition. The Taub Survey suggests that perception of peer competitiveness is an additional ingredient of student-generated pressure (2a): 90% of students polled viewed both themselves and the "typical" University of Chicago undergraduate as intellectual; but whereas they consider themselves "well-rounded," they overwhelmingly described the other students as competitive and nerdy. Interestingly, in open-ended interviews, students did not raise competitiveness among students as a problem. Indeed, when asked, students generally rejected this, stating that self-generated pressure to excel is the primary source of stress rather than a lack of cooperation or competitiveness among students. Students noted that excelling is less difficult if others do not have the same high standards for themselves, but also that the expectation of excellence is a hallmark of a great university.

2e. Academic advising. College Advisers handle the mechanics of registration, insure that Core and graduation requirements are met, and attempt to establish supportive relationships with students. As the registration process moves increasingly on-line, more time should be available for them to devote to general life advising for students. There is a need, however, to standardize a high level of concentration-specific advising and mentoring that deals with the intellectual components of students' progress in their concentration. College Advisers are not geared to providing this mentoring because most are non-specialists, have 250 advisees, and undergo high

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turnover. This crucial aspect of advising is, in our view, most logically provided by faculty members. Some students do develop relationships in their concentration with individual faculty who provide advice on scholarly issues, and they rank the College very high for faculty accessibility [COFHE Report 1994], but the level of faculty mentoring of students is highly variable among concentrations and among individuals. This mentoring and oversight role of faculty is important not only in terms of students' course selection and course work, but also to insure that students can get detailed faculty letters of recommendation for employment and graduate and fellowship applications.

2f. Value of liberal arts education. A further source of anxiety for students (and, based on interviews with administrators, probably for some parents) is uncertainty about the value of a liberal arts education in the 1990s. This issue was not addressed explicitly in the Taub Survey, but many faculty and staff point to this concern and it also arose in open-ended interviews with students. As an indirect measure, the Taub Survey indicates 80% of our students regard preparation for a career as "important to get from college." However, 90% of students cite a well-rounded education as important. Our impression from interviews is that students value both a well-rounded education and career preparation, but they need assurances that there are satisfying career paths available to students with a Chicago liberal arts education.

Not long ago, students in the past have asserted that Career and Placement Services (CAPS) has not met their needs. Recent attention and activity in this area, however, (including increased outreach to all students, the bringing of more and different kinds of companies to campus to recruit; improved library of videos and tapes about jobs; increased use of Internet web pages; improved credentials file system) is receiving high praise from students; further improvements are being developed. CAPS and the alumni office have renewed efforts to involve alumni in a meaningful way in this process. Alumni are a vital resource. Not only can they provide professional contacts to employers, but equally or more importantly, they are valuable role models for the wide array of professions in which former College students have been successful. In addition, they can serve as the University's emissaries in the larger professional world, advertising the talents and strengths of the current generation of students.

2g. Signals sent...signals received. Students report that institutional culture and rhetoric contribute to academic pressure in several ways. One factor is the attitude expressed in published articles and addresses in which we have a tendency to extol the quality of our faculty to the exclusion of our alumni and current students. Moreover, we focus on Nobelists and academic success as if success at any lesser level and in any other profession were a disappointment. In fact, although 95% of alumni continue their education within five years of graduation [30% immediately; Spring 1995 Senior Survey], the vast majority of alumni eventually pursue non-

academic professions. The appearance of a single-minded focus on academic success sends a message that the institution values only a subset of students' talents and interests.

Another factor raised by staff as well as by students is the heavy focus on placement exams and other academic administrative issues during orientation, leaving little time for students to meet other students, explore the neighborhood, and otherwise adjust to a new phase in their lives. In response, orientation for Autumn 1995 was expanded from eight to twelve days on a trial basis to accommodate more social and community events, more unscheduled time, and a less intense schedule of course registration. Initial reactions have been very positive [Orientation surveys], and the expanded orientation will be continued and further developed next year.

There is also a sense among students that insufficient time and effort are devoted to listening to students' concerns and soliciting their suggestions. Students desire a more consistent and meaningful voice in deliberations and decisions that affect them. More formal arrangements for vetting proposals with students and getting their feedback would enable students to respond to proposed changes and to learn why the Administration is considering certain tradeoffs (for example, reallocation of space, changes in housing rates and bus services, etc.). Students are angry about what they see as a lack of responsiveness to course evaluations because they believe their comments are constructive and reasonable. They interpret that the lack of response to mean that student opinions do not matter to the University. Student comments include complaints about such matters as a lack of office hours or failure to show up for office hours, unreasonable reading loads, late return of graded material, inconvenient timing of exams and due-dates, etc. Students care deeply about their education, and they believe their complaints and recommendations should be taken seriously.

The quality of administrative services speaks clearly about how an administration values its students. In the last 18 months, there has been considerable progress in this regard. The University has extended the hours of the Bursar's office, relaxed restrictions on the assignment of dining halls, and increased use of web sites for course schedule and research-opportunity (CROP) information. It has also introduced the ChicagoCard, which in coming years will be expanded to simplify many campus and personal financial transactions. University Health Service (UHS, now the Primary Care Group), which was sharply criticized in the Council on Teaching (CoT) graduate surveys as well as by undergraduates we interviewed, has established an Acute Appointment Service, instituted a system of primary care physicians to reduce waiting time, and established a Student Advisory Committee. Efforts have been made to address the slowness of financial aid processing and the problem of erroneous and high late charges on bills. Telecommunications, on the other hand, continues to be a sore spot: students do not feel that they are receiving equivalent or superior service to what they would receive on the private market, despite seemingly higher charges. Moreover, they cannot charge long-distance calls to their own credit cards, and some

residence halls are nearing capacity for Internet access. More generally, students report that all too often they encounter a lack of service mentality in the University's administrative bureaucracy.

3. Social life and sense of community. The perceived poor quality of student social life at the University has been the subject of many *Maroon* articles and is a durable part of campus folklore. Ever since our ranking at the very bottom of a list of 300 institutions by a tongue-in-cheek article in *Inside Edge Magazine* in 1994, our un-fun-ness has been the subject of both mirth and pride (for example, lampooning Admissions materials and commemorative "300" T-shirts). The Taub Survey included many questions designed to determine the importance current students place on social life and their judgment of its quality here, and the Task Force was, of course, eager to hear what students would volunteer in open-ended interviews. Campus folklore, for example, appears to be contradicted by the extremely high participation rates by students in intramural sports on campus and the long-running success of organized groups such as University Theater, various club sports, Model United Nations of the University of Chicago, DOC films, the *Chicago Maroon*, and the many other student organizations on campus [Table 2].

The Taub Survey found that few students (10%) describe "social life" as a problem (compared to insufficient time and academic pressure at 40%), and 50% cite their social life as a positive factor in making College life enjoyable (equal to the 50% who cite their academic experience as such a positive factor). "Social life" was nonetheless the most frequently cited item (25%) in Taub's open-ended question about how the College had not met students' *expectations*, and it was by far the most common complaint among respondents in the 1995 Senior Survey (30%; versus 15% size of Core and 15% housing and food plan). A "sense of isolation" was one of the first things students mentioned as a source of dissatisfaction in our interviews. It thus appears that about 50% of students are satisfied with social aspects, about 25% are not, and the rest are neutral or have mixed feelings. The apparent contradiction between campus folklore and, for example, intramural participation rates may be explained if most participants in organized events are among the half reporting social satisfaction.

Based on our interviews, we believe that disparate definitions of "social life" also contribute to divergent opinions. In interviews, faculty and staff tended to consider "social life" as code for parties and romantic attachments and "lack of social life" as code for too many term papers. Students, however, were quite clear in open-ended interviews that "social life" is much broader than numbers of parties attended or romantic fortune. Their definition stresses time simply to be sociable or "non-academic", and a general ease of informal interactions: Do people on campus seem friendly, open, and supportive? Do instructors assist students in getting acquainted within classrooms, for example through assigning small-group projects, encouraging study groups, and using name cards? Is it relatively easy to meet people outside the classroom or

residence hall? Do they have time to be or do things that are not identified as student or academic? For faculty and administrators to define "social life" more narrowly (and often dismissively) is to miss the students' point entirely. Not only students but also alumni reflecting on their experience in the College often recall this as an important and missed opportunity of their time here.

3a. The House System. Most undergraduates we interviewed currently live in residence halls or recently left (approximately two-thirds of current undergraduates live in residence halls). These students view the house system (residence halls are subdivided into units called "houses," which are known collectively as the house system) as the primary focus of social life in the College. This focusing of social life in residence halls is not an accident. Since the 1970s the University has invested heavily in staff and organized social events within residence halls as a means of compensating for the geographic dispersion of students away from the central campus. This placement of residence halls throughout Hyde Park was undertaken in the 1960s to help stabilize parts of the neighborhood.

This arrangement has many advantages. Student housing varies tremendously in style, availability of food service, size of hall, degree of privacy, and location within the neighborhood, among other factors, and students seem to appreciate this choice. Some clearly prefer housing somewhat removed from campus because of the psychological separation it provides between "home" and school and because if enables them to feel a part of the larger Hyde Park community. Housing facilities are further supported by an extensive shuttle bus system, 24-hour front desk service for security, and a staff of undergraduate and graduate student Resident Assistants, Resident Heads (mostly married couples, at least one of whom is a graduate student or staff member at the University), and, in the large residence halls, a faculty Resident Master. This support system, which also offers residents a large number of in-house and off-campus activities, is a significant reason why housing receives such high evaluations as having a positive impact on students' College experience [40%; compare with 40% citing faculty as positive impact, and 60% citing their concentration; Taub Survey]. In addition, each house is governed by a House council, providing students with opportunities to participate, voice concerns, act constructively on them, and acquire leadership skills. Admissions Office and administrators in the Dean of Students Office also cite the housing arrangement as an important selling point for prospective students and their parents: students are guaranteed positions in residence halls during their College years, and the level of staffing and involvement in residence life is much higher than at most other universities. Residence staff also cite the importance of house-dedicated tables in dining halls as an important means of socializing and bonding students.

Despite its many advantages, the current housing arrangement is also described as having several significant drawbacks. One is that, because of the travel time to their residence halls (even Blackstone, Breckinridge, and Burton-Judson are considered as "outlying"), virtually all of our

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students describe themselves as commuters: students ride the bus or walk into campus in the morning, spend the entire day there, return to residence halls only for dinner or after dinner, and tend to stay in their own residence hall until morning. Many students living in apartments throughout the neighborhood have similar routines. Some students clearly like the sense of getting away from school, but the commuter lifestyle creates feelings of isolation for many others as well as a certain inefficiency (transit time, bus-stop waiting time, etc.).

A second drawback is that, in developing house programs to compensate for the geographic isolation of residence halls, the residence halls have become the primary focus for social activities: students report a social vacuum between the house and the classroom, tend not to associate positive experiences in the House with the College, and feel isolated from students outside their House because they have few ways to meet them. The Housing Office offers associate house memberships so that students who have left the residence hall system can retain a connection and participate in house intramural teams, but this has had limited success, apparently because of the special effort it takes to get to the residence halls and the dispersal of the original house cohort.

Efforts to increase faculty involvement in residential hall life (and thus directly associate the residence hall experience with the College) have focused primarily on one-time dinner and lecture visits. This format succeeds in exposing students to faculty but fails to provide a venue for comfortable informal social interaction and rarely leads to development of meaningful mentoring relationships. Repeat opportunities for contact with individual faculty are more likely to accomplish these aims: for example, weekly lunch-time groups organized around topics of interest to groups of students with regular attendance by particular faculty members who share those interests might be much more effective in bringing faculty and students together. Students outside the House System, too, should be encouraged to participate in such groups; a ChicagoCard that permits students to eat at any number of campus dining facilities and coffee shops would facilitate this.

Based on our interviews, students and residence staff overwhelmingly approve of having a mix of year-classes in houses, which is seen as speeding the integration of first-year students into college life and bringing new faces and energy to the life of the house. Others, primarily administrators, have recommended concentrating first-year students within the House System to foster a greater sense of class cohesion. They point out that concentration allows for more effective administration of various programs, resources, and events of particular interest to first-year students; permits all must-board students to be located close to dining facilities; and gives the University the option of reserving buildings with kitchens for upperclassmen. They also note that "freshman dorms" and houses are common at other universities, including those of our competitors who have extraordinary class and school spirit. On the other hand, arguments in favor of a full

mix of year classes include quicker integration of first-year students into the College, opportunities for mentoring by upperclassmen, and concern that freshmen halls would encourage a less mature atmosphere. Moreover, although the current system certainly does not advance class-cohesion, it is not clear that this cannot be built effectively through other means, nor is it clear that the high spirits at other schools arise from their freshman housing policies alone.

3b. Student Center. Because of the commuter lifestyle discussed above, and the fact that approximately one-third of College students live outside the house system, the students we interviewed overwhelmingly recommend establishing a student center on campus. They see this as providing the necessary structure for informal socializing on campus when they are away from the residence halls, for example between classes and during library study breaks, without the structured time commitment required by organized groups. They are specific that this is not a request for more Registered Student Organizations, but for a place to hang out — TV rooms, lounges with comfortable furniture, lockers, late-night food availability, and centralized bulletin-board type information — and that these services be centrally located outside Regenstein Library. The center should be open past midnight to provide a welcoming and secure space for students, who work long hours. In interviews, students placed higher priority on a student center than on additional common space in residence halls and academic departments, and the students we interviewed even prefer a student center to improved athletic facilities. Students believe that the administration will have to assist in making the center work, at least initially, for example by sponsoring or encouraging food vendors to hold inexpensive and informal events such as the popular milk-shake night of Morry's. However, they believe that the existence of an off-hours student center will not only serve as an informal gathering space, but also will increase the likelihood that students will take advantage of organized groups (because they will be easier to find) and already existing campus events such as DOC films. Such a center would also increase potential interactions between undergraduates and the many graduate students who have no central place to meet or socialize on campus.

In response, the University began a major renovation of the Reynolds Club during the summer and early fall of 1995 to make it more amenable to informal student use. By relocating Career and Placement Services from the second floor of the Reynolds Club to newly renovated offices in Ida Noyes Hall, and relocating many of the student group offices to the Reynolds Club, this renovation restored the Reynolds Club to its original purpose. After its first two quarters of operation, the renovated Reynolds Club with its three lounges, pool tables, televisions, and student-run coffee shop that is open until 2:00 a.m., has received very positive reviews by students [various *Maroon* articles and informal comments made to staff]. There is an overall sense that more is happening on campus because much of the activity is centered in the Reynolds Club. It is a rare Saturday night when there are not multiple events in the building, including a music concert

in Mandel Hall, a University Theater production, a student band performance in the coffee shop, and student group-sponsored dance or dinner in Hutchinson Commons.

There is still a need in the Reynolds Club, however, for additional informal lounge space. In a recent conversation with the Student Government committee that advises the Office of the Reynolds Club, students strongly suggested that they want even more recreational lounge space (including more pool tables, a TV room to watch news events, etc.). Additionally, the metamorphosis of the McCormick Tribune Lounge (formally the first floor North Lounge) into a silent study area from its intended purpose as an informal meeting lounge for conversation indicates that there is a need for additional study space on campus, particularly space that is convenient, inviting, and allows food and drink. The ongoing review to reconfigure campus libraries provides another opportunity to develop more space of this sort (including, upgrading canteen areas in Regenstein and Crerar and recouping informal study space lost in the renovation of the Harper Romper Room).

The newly renovated Reynolds Club and the concurrent increased energy level on campus provide an opportunity to encourage a wide range of formal and informal social activities on and off campus. As mentioned above [Table 2], organized athletics, governing boards, and clubs already are extremely popular among students, and student participation should further increase with Reynolds Club being a central clearing area for information. This energy might also invent new events and help transform existing annual events into full-fledged College traditions (such as Summer Breeze, Spring Formal, Kuviasungnerk, Scavenger Hunt). Such traditions are important highlights to look forward to in the school year and can become part of the collective institutional memory. Equally important are low-key but regularly scheduled events such as weekly shake day and concerts at the music department that students can easily participate in and enjoy, either individually or in small groups of their choosing. Students stress the importance of regular scheduling of events because this gives them something to anticipate and enables them to plan their schedules.

These structures — a student center for "creative procrastination" and finding each other, a series of large traditional events (whether social parties, community voluntarism efforts, year-class centered events, or "sanctioned fun" in the sense of Sleep-Out), and a variety of small frequent events (food nights, lunch groups with a faculty member) — were all mentioned repeatedly by students as essential supplements to organized student groups. They are extremely important motivators for socializing and are also important in giving students a means of directly associating with the College the fun they have in their undergraduate years. The University has made considerable progress in the last few years in these directions and should continue to evaluate the way it spends its budget for student activities with the diverse needs of students in mind. It also needs to do a much better job of communicating to students the wide variety of opportunities that

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do exist and, equally importantly, the high levels of participation that exist, so that student perception more accurately reflects the reality of campus life.

    <u>3c. Voluntarism and community involvement.</u> A variety of factors motivate students to volunteer their time, including the desire to return something to the community, to explore future career options, to diversify résumés, and to engage in activities with friends. The College and the various Divisions and Professional schools each coordinates its own volunteer programs. It is thus difficult to assess the full extent to which students are involved in volunteer efforts. Campus-wide, however, voluntarism falls into four categories: (1) student-sponsored; (2) religious-affiliated ; (3) agency-sponsored, and; (4) administration and faculty-sponsored. [This section reflects work by a subcommittee of this Task Force and by the Richman Task Force.]

    Recent efforts to centralize student-sponsored volunteer efforts have helped extend more opportunities to more students than in the past. At the undergraduate level, the University Community Service Center (UCSC) is particularly active in coordinating and supporting the efforts of recognized student organizations whose primary mission is community service. A newsletter detailing on- and off-campus volunteer opportunities is published periodically and circulated to all community service organization members and other interested volunteers. In addition, a database has been established to collect and organize service opportunities both in and around the University as well as throughout the metropolitan Chicago area. Word of mouth among networks of friends remains the primary medium through which undergraduates learn of and become involved in community service. These undergraduate volunteer programs welcome graduate students, but are typically geared to the undergraduates' needs and schedules.

    The professional school volunteer programs tend to draw participants exclusively from their own students. The Law School and the Graduate School of Business, for example, have both established successful multi-project programs. These programs have given students valuable entrepreneurial and management experience. The duplication of effort has created unnecessary competition for shared resources and consequently lost opportunities to improve the options available to all students.

    Religious institutions also play an important role in encouraging voluntarism. The Dean and Associate Dean of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel serve as advisors to UCSC as well as to many student-run volunteer groups. Campus ministries maintain an active role in various decentralized volunteer efforts. Calvert House and Hillel, just to name a few, have both expanded volunteer activities in recent years, for example, continuing to enhance the relationship between the University and the surrounding community.

    Many volunteer efforts are student-run although others are agency-sponsored. The Blue Gargoyle, for example, plays a central role in the efforts of those interested in adult literacy and

tutoring and the University of Chicago Hospitals offers opportunities to those interested in pursuing a career in the health professions.

Administration- and faculty-sponsored volunteer activities also have increased in the recent past. From the newly introduced community-service component of undergraduate freshman orientation to the yearly Celebration of Community Night, the administration has heightened its role in voluntarism, including the recent use of University of Chicago police vans during the day to help students get to volunteer activities. Despite this, students still complain of a shortage of administrative support for volunteer efforts, especially in the areas of establishing new groups, maintaining consistent relationships with the community, and day-to-day administrative tasks.

Student volunteer efforts are distributed by area of study, dorm or living arrangements, religious affiliation, and choice of social activities. This diversity and decentralization is beneficial in many ways, but it also presents structural and administrative concerns. For example, students in one group often know little about other groups that may be highly related but in a different part of the University. As a consequence, duplication of volunteer efforts results in multiple targeting of the same population and competition for transportation or administrative support. In addition, students continue to experience a shortage of office space, centrally located resources, and guidance to negotiate through administrative channels.

C. Programs to enhance the experience of first-year and returning students

In the course of our information gathering and discussions, the Task Force has come to realize that the initiation or expansion of a relatively few but well-executed programs might help alleviate a broad array of concerns on the quality of undergraduate student experience. These programs are, namely, (1) enhanced orientation programs for first-year students, (2) other programs (retreats, seminars, purely social events) later in the first year designed to reinforce and build upon orientation, and (3) orientation-type programs for returning students, perhaps culminating in a capstone senior program. In this section, we offer justification for such programs and describe a range of specific structures used elsewhere that might be adaptable to the University.

1. Orientation programs for first-year students. We have been struck by the immense value of investing time and resources in running an effective, positive orientation programs for new students. Such programs are important in familiarizing students with University academic facilities such as the library and computing centers and student support services, as well as with the diverse array of academic and non-academic resources in the surrounding neighborhood. They also permit students to establish an initial set of social connections among classmates, facilitating and increasing class identity and the bond with their residential houses. More broadly, orientation should foster a sense of connectedness and belonging both to the University and to the larger

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community, provide opportunities to meet with University faculty and staff in non-traditional venues, and in general help reduce initial anxieties about living in a new setting and embarking on a new phase of life. In addition to helping students get their college careers off on the right foot, orientation programs provide an important opportunity for the University as well to get off on the right foot with the students. Through public presentations and student activities, the University can clarify the goals, missions, and ideals of the educational experience, demonstrate its pride in the accomplishments of its students and indicate its commitment to support students in their aspirations.

The Task Force applauds the efforts already underway to expand the College's Orientation Program; as discussed above (2g), the initial experiment in 1995 was a success. Continuation and further refinements of the program deserve the full support of the administration.

2. Follow-up programs for the first-year. No matter how well-organized and effective an orientation program may be, students will be overwhelmed with information. Hence, it is essential that orientation be followed by other programs or retreats during the rest of the first year to reinforce and build upon the initial efforts. Whereas other institutions offer special programs during the first year to help students build the skills needed for academic and social adjustment, the University of Chicago does not. Students we have interviewed have expressed the desirability of such programs. Although some administrators and faculty believe that Core courses accomplish the same goals as freshmen seminars at other institutions, many students indicate that the majority of Core courses are entirely academic and do not focus on skills building and student interaction outside the classroom, particularly when a class is large.

Other post-orientation efforts should focus on developing resources and skills of particular importance in the transition from high school, such as programs that target the development and maintenance of good study skills, note-taking, time management, and priority setting, as well as resolution of interpersonal conflict, healthy lifestyles, and stress management. Advice and counseling on these topics are available on a limited basis from SCRS and PCG, but the University needs to do more both to increase the offerings and to encourage students to take advantage of them. In addition, the continuation of orientation-type programs throughout the first year provides an excellent opportunity for students to build an even larger social network, especially within their year-cohort, benefiting them both individually and as a group in solidifying groups that will work effectively in organizing class-events in their future student and alumni lives.

3. Orientation-type programs for returning students. There is a great deal to be gained from orientation programs for returning students, culminating in some form of senior week shortly before graduation. Students currently return to residence halls only one or two days before classes begin in the fall quarter, giving them little time to renew friendships, make new friends, organize their living quarters, learn about new University resources and policies, or investigate new

activities or groups before the onslaught of a new, academically intense quarter. This time (or other time set aside during the school year, perhaps coinciding with first-year retreats) also would be useful for introducing students to the next level of programming and advising, and would further bolster growing social networks.

Programs for returning students would be designed to meet student needs at different times in their careers. For example, for 2nd year students, the choice of programs might include social events, full or half-day community voluntarism projects, seminars in time-management and study skill brush-ups. For returning 3rd year students, the choices might focus more on leadership skills, oral presentations, career planning, information about study abroad programs or special scholarships (such as Rhodes), as well as social events and community voluntarism projects. Well thought through capstone courses and senior week are other ideas that institutions use to help students bring their undergraduate experience to a positive, memorable close.

Returning students should have a graduated orientation program, each year of which focuses on community-building and acquisition of new skills and exposure to additional opportunities appropriate to the different stages of their College career. To assure continuity, some institutions appoint for each undergraduate class an Assistant Dean of Students who develops an ongoing relationship with that class from its first day of orientation until the time it graduates.

III. The Graduate Student Experience

A. Sources of Information

As noted earlier, the Task Force focused predominantly on undergraduate students. Our brief comments here on the quality of graduate student experience are based mostly on standing reports, such as the Council on Teaching/Graduate Affairs Office surveys of current students and recent alumni of the Graduate Divisions and Divinity School (hereafter referred to as CoT survey), a survey of current students in the Biological Sciences Division conducted by the BSD Dean's Council, and the report of the Task Force on Graduate Education (March 1996). We also interviewed departmental administrators from selected departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences Divisions, and we have drawn on our own experience. While we had neither time nor resources to conduct a complete, original survey of graduate students and alumni, this struck us as duplicating the effort of the very recent (November 1994) CoT report. Moreover, given the Council on Teaching's conclusion that the quality of graduate student experience is overwhelmingly determined by the culture and conditions in individual programs or departments, it seemed unlikely that anything short of a massive department-by-department survey would move us significantly ahead in our understanding.

B. Factors in student satisfaction

Faculty reputation in research, the perceived caliber of the academic program as measured by alumni success, and financial considerations are probably the paramount issues in recruiting excellent graduate students. Once here, academic and financial issues remain important, followed in importance by concerns with the quality of various administrative services, social opportunities and living conditions in the neighborhood.

1. Faculty access. The most fundamental issue for graduate students, both doctoral and masters, is access to faculty. The most important factor determining faculty access seems to be competing demands for faculty time, including the number of graduate student advisees per faculty member and the size and relative instructional importance of an undergraduate program or second graduate track. This applies to all graduate divisions, whether laboratory sciences or humanities, because of student expectations of genuine mentorship and technical apprenticeship. From the Ph.D. student's perspective, access to faculty seems to be most difficult in departments with large masters programs in which entering students compete for a limited number of doctoral slots. Chicago has a proportionately large graduate student population and some departments are under financial and academic pressure to have high number of graduate student admissions [see Task Force on Graduate Education report]. Because of the issue of faculty access, decisions on program size can have significant consequences on graduate student success and satisfaction. According to departmental administrators, Ph.D. students already perceive difficulties arising from reconfigured masters programs: some departments decreased their Ph.D. programs in order to have smaller seminars, only to see seminar sizes increase back to former levels because of masters students from other programs.

2. Funding and placement. Some students are concerned about both lack of financial support during their initial years and with funding levels in the dissertation writing phase. As suggested in the CoT report, many students expressed dissatisfaction with the present system of tuition remission and differential stipends. Some masters and Ph.D. level students pay full tuition while others receive fellowships from the University. While the decision to award fellowships is based on merit, the unfunded students report considerable morale problems. Because of the competitive and still shrinking academic job market, graduate students in the 1990s have a high level of concern about teaching opportunities while in school, preparation for teaching in institutions with larger class sizes and different missions than Chicago, and, for those not planning on academic careers, being prepared for alternative career tracks. Although CAPS is now being redesigned, in the past it has been perceived as mainly serving undergraduates. These concerns deserve to be taken very seriously by faculty and administration.

3. Academic atmosphere and culture. Other important factors in graduate student experience include (a) policies of student admission and the degree to which students compete with each other to be a particular faculty member's advisee, (b) cooperative versus competitive

atmosphere among faculty (this collegiality, or lack thereof, also influences faculty access), (c) the degree of social integration among students and between students and faculty, (d) willingness of faculty to provide effective leadership of departmental and center programs (so that highly effective programs do not risk collapse if a key faculty member leaves), (e) faculty respect for students, as signaled through access, mentorship, and general opportunities for feedback and communication to faculty, (f) quality and on-site presence of departmental administrators, (g) general sense of a welcoming atmosphere, (h) general opportunities for feedback and communication with faculty, and (i) the extent to which students must rely on word of mouth to get information on policies and resources. For minority graduate students, the presence of a sympathetic faculty member in a program can make a huge difference in the perceived atmosphere. Programs that are judged to provide high quality experiences are those that integrate students into research or faculty-moderated study groups at the earliest opportunity, monitor student progress regularly, and pay special attention to the quality of instruction in the first-year sequence.

These goals and qualities are manifested in the notable success of graduate student workshops in the Humanities and Social Sciences and terminal master's programs like MAPSS. Many Ph.D. students cite the graduate student workshops as among the best aspects of their educational experience because they provide much needed opportunities for open and mutually beneficial student-faculty exchanges. The most successful masters' programs also have a clear and well-articulated structure, clear lines of responsibility among faculty, and ample opportunities for faculty-student interaction. Ph.D. programs in the physical and biological sciences tend to receive especially high evaluations: because of the scientific culture, students have virtually continuous contact with faculty advisors, high levels of cooperative interaction with fellow students, counseling and first-hand experiences in professional skills (publication, grantsmanship, oral presentation, lab management, undergraduate teaching), and consistent levels of financial support that continue through the dissertation-writing phase.

4. Support of students' academic effort. Quality of experience is also influenced by the academic support structure. One particular concern is the already high need for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs; if total student numbers were increased, or if foreign students were targeted more intensively for recruitment, the situation would become even more severe. Foreign students need to take ESL courses in the summer before matriculating, but, according to departmental administrators, courses offered in the Chicago area that fit our quarter schedule are of inadequate quality. They suggest that the University consider running an ESL summer program itself, as this would not only satisfy the needs of our own students, but would also attract tuition-paying students from elsewhere. Such a course could be taught by outside contractors, rather than increasing demands on existing faculty.

Other academic support issues cited by respondents to the CoT Study concerned the library and, for students outside the natural sciences, computational support. Library comments focused on the limited hours (Regenstein), level of staffing (staff members themselves were highly praised), and general atmosphere (non-academic staff attitude, noise levels, shortage of copy machines, fine policies).

The departmental administrators we interviewed felt very strongly that programs to develop professional skills, such as seminars on teaching, are of low priority to doctoral students in the Humanities and Social Sciences divisions. They believe that graduate students would much prefer that such funds were used to enable students to attend (or at least subsidize attendance at) professional meetings, to develop more office space, or to support dissertation writing (including small research grants, better computers and printers for general student use, and especially fellowships to support students during the dissertation-writing phase). In some programs the lack of office space for students prompts students to work in the library or at home rather than within the department, which should be the hub of the intellectual and social community. The success of lounge areas devoted to graduate students or shared with faculty for lunches and seminars suggest one means of compensating for this. Students in the natural sciences also can suffer from isolation from other graduate students in their department if their work is highly lab intensive, but the close association of graduate students, faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and technicians within each lab produces its own social group and commonly leads to long-lasting personal bonds.

Departmental administrators are themselves valuable assets to programs. They commonly are the most reliable source of information within a department for students to learn about policies and support services. Because of their personal contact with graduate students from the entire department or program, they are also important sources of information to faculty on the effects of policies and structures on student morale, and on the adequacy of student support services. For these reasons, it is important that these staff members retain offices physically within departments, and that they, as well as divisional Deans of Students, are effective in conveying a sense that the success of its students is University priority.

5. Social life and the neighborhood. In the CoT surveys, the inadequacy of athletic/recreational facilities was cited most frequently following library conditions and computational resources. Many students consider facilities to be undersized and not well maintained, and comment that they are typically closed when graduate students are most likely to have time to use them (for example, in the late evening and during quarter breaks). The quality and expense of University health services and of housing handled by the Neighborhood Student Apartments Office were also particular concerns.

Like undergraduates, graduate students see a strong need for more space dedicated to student-union type activities and for longer hours of food service on campus. Renovations and

new services in the Reynolds Club directly address these concerns, and efforts are underway to renegotiate food services across the campus. Concerns about personal security also ranked high in the CoT surveys, particularly since graduate students tend to keep long and late hours. The shortage of social opportunities and amenities in Hyde Park (music, bars, pool tables, gyms, stores for jeans & inexpensive children's clothes) were more frequently cited by graduate students than by undergraduates. Consequently, like undergraduate students, they suggest improvements in public transportation to downtown and the North Side (late-night hours).

In general, graduate students seem to have higher expectations for social opportunities in the surrounding community and larger metropolitan Chicago area. Some look outward because of disappointment with social opportunities directly on campus (including perceived poor quality and inconvenient hours of athletic facilities). However, many arrive believing that the University is located in a more urban, downtown part of Chicago, or that Hyde Park is a social and commercial facsimile of the North Side. This dissonance between expectation and reality of the University's surroundings is an important cause of dissatisfaction for some graduate students; the sense of having been misled during recruitment seems to frustrate them as much or more than the actual living conditions in Hyde Park.

IV. The Professional School Experience

A. Sources of information

Members of the Task Force met with administrators and students from the Graduate School of Business, the Law School, and the Medical School. Owing to time limitations, we were not able to pursue such conversations with those at the Schools of Social Administration, Public Policy, or Divinity School (the Divinity School is included in the CoT report).

The professional schools represent very different aspects of the university, with each providing a determinate two to four-year program in largely its own academic and social environment (these schools have small numbers of Ph.D. students). In the GSB, Law School, and Medical School, reputation of the academic program and faculty are considered the paramount issues in recruiting excellent students because high external rankings are seen by students as indicators of the likely attention that recruiters will focus on the school. Once here, academic stress and individual debt burden are the most important concerns. These professional schools are particularly aware of competition for top-quality students therefore tend to be responsive to student concerns.

B. Factors in student satisfaction

1. Academic program administration and atmosphere. Course evaluation data and interviews indicate that students seem to be pleased with the quality of the teaching and academic programs. However, professional school students, like those elsewhere on campus, have mixed views about the quarter system and academic schedule. A perceived advantage of the quarter system is the diverse range of courses that can be offered. Some believe that the greater number of courses available outweighs the disadvantages of three sets of examinations per year and the stress of 12-week quarters. The scheduling of quarters presents practical problems for law students since many summer employment opportunities as well as all bar review courses begin in May, before the school year is finished.

All three schools have a system of course evaluations to provide students with information about the quality of each course; these evaluations are taken seriously by the administrations (faculty curriculum committees and appointment committees). Law School students believe that they feel much more academic pressure and competition with classmates than do students in other law schools. At both the law and business schools, the out-of-the-norm grading (meaning that both schools regularly assign C and lower grades to students) is a concern for students. Students worry that recruiters will not recognize that the schools assign grades differently than peer institutions, and that they will therefore be hurt in the job market. This pressure and competition are increased by the quarter system and grade quotas (such as caps on percentages of As, etc.). In the medical school, students report being challenged but not excessively competitive with each other. The Pass/Fail grading system encourages group learning, and the school provides funds for special tutoring if necessary.

Although faculty access and interaction are not as crucial they are a source of academic success in the professional schools as in Ph.D. programs, it is a source of continuing student concern. There is also a perception among the students in some of the schools that faculty primarily value teaching as a career choice. Law students, for example, cite a desire an atmosphere that values legal practice careers as well as teaching and for more interaction with practicing alumni.

2. Finances and post-graduation career. Students at all three schools typically face at graduation a heavy debt load that increases the pressure to secure high-paying jobs. Even though graduates of the Law School typically have numerous job opportunities with high starting salaries, many feel they cannot pursue lower paying public interest positions because of the debt they have incurred. Financial counseling and career advice are also becoming increasingly important to Medical students. In general, concerns about jobs raise general stress levels, place more pressure to obtain good grades, and drive higher expectations for assistance in career placement.

The issues of school pride and the status of the institution present the same concerns for the professional school students as for undergraduate and graduate students. Students believe that

they receive a superior education, but students at both the law and business schools are frustrated by the University of Chicago's lack of name recognition. Those familiar with the legal profession understand the stature of the Law School, but the students often find themselves defensively explaining to family and friends that the University of Chicago Law School is one of the top-ranked national law schools. Students at the business school are concerned about their perceptions that the school is mentioned less prominently than its peer institutions in business publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*. Students would like the University to do more to publicize the activities of faculty and alumni, both to enhance the broader name recognition of the University and to increase pride in the institution among students while they are here.

3. Support of student community. The professional schools are particularly aware of competition for top-quality students. Most schools dedicate considerable funds and staff to provide efficient student services and support their student organizations, which are an essential component of the school's academic programs. These programs and administrative staff enhance communication among faculty, administration, and students, and confirm to students that the school is responsive to their needs.

Co-curricular non-credit activities at the professional schools are also very successful. An innovative and successful example is the GSB Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Program. The school instituted the Lead Program in 1989 to develop the leadership and team skills of its MBA students and to build a stronger sense of community at the GSB. The program has worked very effectively to counter feelings of isolation and alienation, which were common among the students before the program, by helping them get to know one another and to interact with a sizable but not overwhelming group of other MBA students (approximately 55-60 per group or "cohort" as they are called). The business school also has about 35 student special interest groups, focused on occupation (such as management or consulting), geography (for example, Asian business students), demography, and other bases; a full-time staff member works with these groups. The Law School supports students in similarly diverse ways. In the first year legal research and writing program, 30 students are assigned to each Bigelow Fellow for small-group instruction. The School also supports three student-edited law journals, the legal aid clinic, Moot Court, 32 student organizations, and a variety of public service programs within the Hyde Park community; it also schedules regular town meetings and dean's breakfasts to encourage student input. The Medical School provides an orientation program, career day programs on medical specialties, computerized lists of alumni, about 20 student groups of social or professional nature, and retreats for first-year students, faculty, and their families.

These varied activities support an active extracurricular life for professional students, many of whom live outside Hyde Park. One of the few social needs expressed by professional students was for improved and expanded athletic and recreational facilities so that there is sufficient space

for recreational users and varsity athletes during the day when they are on campus. They see recreational athletics as an important means of socializing and relaxing.

V. Minority Students and Gender Issues

A. The Experience of Underrepresented Minority Students

After talking with a variety of students and staff members it appears that there are a number of student experience issues that primarily and disproportionately impact underrepresented minority students. The term "underrepresented minority students" refers to students from racial and ethnic groups whose enrollment at the University of Chicago is generally much smaller than that group's representation in the general population. African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans currently fit this definition. These issues did not surface in the Task Force's listening conversations, possibly because many have difficulty discussing this concern frankly in public. A series of meetings held with members of culturally specific student organizations by Student Government and some one-on-one conversations have revealed a number of concerns specific to minority students.

Many of these issues can broadly be classified as issues of overall "climate." Many minority students see the University's climate as insensitive or even hostile to their racial or ethnic identity, and much of this alleged insensitivity comes from other students. Upon encountering a racially or culturally insensitive remark or action, many minority students feel limited to one of two responses. Some choose to ignore it, or not discuss it with anyone other than close friends. While this may sometimes be an appropriate strategy, it is not advisable in cases of more egregious behavior. It also fails to alert and educate the other party about what remarks are appropriate. Students who choose to confront others often find such a strategy to be emotionally exhausting and socially off-putting, particularly when the incident resulted from another's ignorance rather than malice. Some minority students feel that they are called on more often than is appropriate or comfortable for them to educate other students about aspects of their culture and history.

There is also a perception that current methods of dealing with and discussing campus security sometimes place minority students in awkward situations. Incidents at building access points have given rise to complaints that minority students' University status is challenged more often or more aggressively than that of other individuals, with no apparent justification. Additionally, some students have reported offhand remarks and statements made during orientation security presentations that they found to be stereotypical and demeaning. This problem has tended to surface in professional schools where there is not a standardized security presentation made by a representative of the University Police.

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Finally, underrepresentation itself can add to a feeling of isolation among minority students. The lack of fellow minority students, staff, and faculty at the University often creates a sense of being in the "out" group. The recent increase in activity of groups such as Organization of Black Students, HACER (Hispanic Association for Cultural Expression and Recognition), South Asian Students Association, Sistafriends, and Minority Graduate Students Association suggests that these students are looking to create support networks that will help them better cope with feelings of isolation.

It should be noted that issues of "climate," while of special concern to minority students, contain elements that are common to many students of different backgrounds. Emphasizing civil discourse, evenhanded treatment inside and outside the classroom, and sensitivity to differences in background and culture will benefit the entire campus and broaden every student's horizons. Because of the complexity of the above issues and their prevalence as well as their persistence, the Task Force strongly encourages the University to take a closer look at the overall experience of its underrepresented minority students.

B. Gender issues

As was true with minority concerns, students themselves did not raise gender issues in our listening conversations with them. A number of our Task Force members, however, related concerns that students have expressed to them. We realize that these issues are not unique to the University community but they do bear on some students' experience. Since data is limited, we do not know whether these issues are more pronounced at the University than elsewhere [CoT report on graduate satisfaction; while the Taub report explores these questions with undergraduates, data has not yet been processed]. Existing reports of dissatisfaction sort into three broad categories:

• Classroom culture — In so far as some students perceive biases in the classroom, we encourage faculty to discuss the relationship between issues of gender and pedagogical practice.

• Academic culture — Some graduate students perceive a relationship between gender and success in an academic discipline. Issues raised include progress toward degree, problems with collegiality within an insufficiently diverse faculty, and in some instances of difficulties finding mentors. The University's recent establishment of the Gender Studies Center and program should help remedy this situation for those students studying gender issues. We suggest that members of the Center be consulted in future studies of gender issues involving the University community.

• Social environment — Some students, particularly undergraduates, report difficulties establishing and maintaining appropriate social relationships and boundaries with their peers. We encourage the University to make better known its resources for advising and assisting students with questions and concerns in this area. These resources include residence staff, College Advisers, and Deans of Students.

The University has in place a complement of resources and procedures for addressing the related but distinct issue of sexual harassment. These mechanisms, which include the Sexual Harassment Complaint Advisors, have been designed to address hostile environment and *quid pro quo* sexual harassment as well as to help with related issues. While there is a sense among administrators and many students that these mechanisms work well, other students are skeptical. Their skepticism ranges from a belief that these mechanisms are not communicated well to a conviction that sexual harassment and sexual assault should be addressed by a single policy and procedure.

These concerns merit further discussion and examination, perhaps by a smaller working group formed specifically to explore gender issues and perceptions of gender bias in the University community. The University has both a tradition and a responsibility to be a leader in studying these complex and deeply contextual issues and it is in this spirit that we suggest further study.

VI. Strategic Goals and Recommendations

The Task Force takes as a given that, above all, the University must maintain its high academic standards: enhancing the University as an institutional leader in scholarship and teaching should remain our paramount priority. All segments of the University community with whom we spoke, including students, agreed on this priority. Students very much wish to feel a part of the larger institutional community and its mission. They also, however, expect their years in college and post-baccalaureate programs to be a multidimensional experience, encompassing much more than the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. They expect opportunities to develop new friends and establish lifelong personal and professional relationships, to have access to mentors, to find their vocation and avocation, and to mature as individuals in myriad ways.

Following 18 months of consultation with students, staff, and faculty, we recommend the following five strategic goals with respect to improving the quality of the student experience: **(1)** reduce factors that unnecessarily aggravate academic stress; **(2)** increase students' sense of social community; **(3)** foster an institutional philosophy that clearly values students; **(4)** increase assistance to students in developing plans and skills for life after graduation; and **(5)** broaden awareness of the institution outside the University and of the talents of its students both inside and outside the University. Our specific recommendations for accomplishing these goals include some changes that are already in the process of being effected and others that can be implemented immediately. Recommendations also include topics for further investigation and development, either by *ad hoc* committees or by standing groups such as the Council on Teaching, the College Council, and the University Senate. We have written these recommendations based upon current

student body size and composition. If increases occur in either undergraduate or graduate programs, these suggestions will take on an added urgency.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: <u>**Reduce factors that unnecessarily aggravate academic stress**</u>

This is the most fundamental issue for improving the quality of undergraduate, graduate, and professional student life. Undergraduates report that the greatest impediment to their having a well-rounded experience is a lack of time due to heavy workloads. While a number of approaches might be taken to improve this situation, we only recommend changes that insure that academic rigor is not diluted.

Recommendations:

- lengthen breaks between academic terms
- insure that undergraduate reading periods and holidays are respected
- consider increasing summer course offerings for time-intensive courses such as languages and science labs
- review University course scheduling policies and practices to assure that courses are distributed throughout the day and year to help students complete requirements
- insure reliable course evaluation system for student feedback on the quality of teaching and on workloads; insure timely communication of evaluations to faculty and department chairs; improve responsiveness of the system to criticism
- reconsider structure of undergraduate academic advising, particularly with respect to the concentrations
- establish a joint faculty-student group to examine the issue of pass/fail options for the first year
- insure availability of resources that students need, including computer access and, for graduate students, office space and small research grants
- improve ESL support to foreign students, perhaps through summer courses
- increase number of relaxed study areas for students, including comfortable areas in the libraries that allow food and drink
- re-evaluate the size and structure of graduate programs with large numbers of masters students who are funneled into small Ph.D. programs
- insure that Core courses introduce undergraduates to a similar array of skills and provide a comparable level of interaction with instructors as do freshman seminars elsewhere
- make every effort to insure that the faculty's accessibility to undergraduates is preserved

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: <u>**Increase students' sense of social community.**</u>

Many students feel socially isolated. The perception of inadequate social opportunities appears to be driven more by academic pressure and geography than by the availability of planned social events. There is much room for improvement, particularly in compensating for the commuter lifestyle that many students have, even when living in residence halls, and in broadening the sense of community within year-class cohorts, with the campus at large, and with Hyde Park and the city of Chicago.

Recommendations:
• proceed with Phase II of the Reynolds Club as well as with long-range planning to establish an effective, adequately-sized Student Center for unscheduled and planned activities
• support the growth of "traditions" that foster a sense of institutional pride and community; "sanctioned fun" ameliorates the perceived tension between academic rigor and an improved social atmosphere
• promote regularly scheduled events in which students may participate singly or in small groups
• expand "late night" food options on campus and continue evaluation of campus food services using the ChicagoCard to link Hutchinson Commons and residential dining halls
• consider extending ChicagoCard use to charge rides on campus buses
• encourage faculty and others to assist in the creation of small informal breakfast, lunch, or dinner groups with common interests that meet weekly in dining halls, Reynolds Club, local restaurants, or private homes
• continue expanded first-year orientation program that introduces students to each other as well as to resources on campus, in Hyde Park, and in Chicago
• create additional opportunities in first and subsequent years to encourage year-class cohesion by initiating freshmen seminars; experimenting with some first-year residence halls or houses within halls; offering orientation-type experiences for returning students that provide renewed opportunities for socializing, community voluntarism efforts, advanced skills training, and career development before classes begin; and strengthening senior week
• improve ease and regularity of inexpensive access to downtown and the north side
• consider appointing for each new class an Assistant Dean of Students who will maintain relations with that class over the full four years
• for graduate programs with scarce student office space, or with many commuter students, consider establishing lounge areas and regular social hours or tea-times to facilitate informal interactions and a sense of community; increase efforts to incorporate students into faculty-led research groups as early as possible
• build new athletic center including a swimming pool, with improved and expanded facilities for both recreational use, intramural teams, and varsity athletics.

• work in whatever ways possible to increase the concentration of undergraduates on and close to campus in selection of site for any new residence halls

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: Foster an institutional philosophy that clearly values students

Valuation of students can be demonstrated in three main ways: (a) by the attitude we convey in speeches — we tend to focus on faculty rather than on student and alumni achievement; (b) by the degree of voice students have in decision-making on campus; and (c) the quality of administrative services rendered to students. The consideration of quality of student life issues should become a continuing priority at all levels of the University, and student participation in the process should be increased. Student satisfaction with their experience is strongly influenced by their sense of being valued by the institution.

Recommendations:

• aggressively communicate to the University's constituents, friends, and other interested parties — ranging from students, alumni, parents, prospective students, prospective employers, and other academic institutions — the achievements of not only our faculty but of our students and alumni as well

• avoid implying to our students that the only measure of academic achievement is a Nobel Prize, or that the only career path to be valued is the academic one

• encourage and support direct, two-way communication between representative student bodies and the University

• establish permanent means by which students can convey their concerns and suggestions (academic and non-academic) directly to the administration — for example, a suggestion box in Regenstein; a standing column in *The Maroon* for timely publication of questions and administrative responses, a description of the changes implemented or planned, or an explanation of the difficulties or trade-offs involved; regularly scheduled quarterly or semi-annual town-hall meetings of area Deans of Students with students, and an annual University-wide meeting with the President and area Deans of Students. In all of the above, be certain that questions, concerns, and suggestions are responded to promptly. Chairs of undergraduate concentrations and graduate programs should consider instituting similar semi-annual town-hall meetings for open discussion of issues with their students.

• clarify Deans of Students' role as general problem-solvers for academic and non-academic concerns of all types

• insure student input to reviews of possible change to the calendar, pass-fail options, and other factors related to academic stress

• continue to increase the level of student involvement in designing changes in community resources mentioned in Goal 2 above, and in the administrative maintenance of these programs once established; student involvement should be a continuing, not episodic, feature

• encourage University publications and News Office to increase coverage of students' achievements and alumni successes in non-academic as well as academic areas

• encourage undergraduate concentrations and graduate programs to initiate annual newsletters for their alumni; for many students, this is an appealing means of keeping in touch with former classmates, faculty and staff connected to a specific program; also use newsletters to report initiatives at the departmental and University level in which alumni input would be valuable

• continue work that has already begun to improve the delivery of student services, including the graduate Housing office, the Primary Care Group (formerly the University Health Service), and food and other services associated with the ChicagoCard; improve financial aid processing, telecommunication services, and Internet access capacity; encourage a service mentality, particularly among those who have direct contact with students

• provide easy to use information about which forms and offices are needed to complete common administrative processes; the fragmentation of many processes, especially in financial aid, and lack of instruction result in much irksome trial-and-error by students

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: Increase assistance to students in developing plans and skills for post-graduation life

Students desire practical advice in preparing themselves for professional careers after graduation. This is not a request for a completely different kind of education at the University, but for supplemental training in basic professional skills, contacts and mentoring relationships with alumni, especially those outside academia, and for wider information on pre-graduation internships and other opportunities to explore career choices and build their résumés.

Recommendations:

• capitalize on our alumni as resources; include them in highly visible relationships with students, from orientation through role-modeling and career mentoring; focus on alumni as speakers and as subjects of speeches and feature articles; alumni reassure students of the value of their education by demonstrating their success in diverse careers

• arrange for more internships and other opportunities for students to develop hands-on, practical experience

• provide general, life-skills training (for example, time-management, conflict resolution, stress management) through additional orientation for returning undergraduates and other programs described above

- encourage and support programs that offer students leadership opportunities
- expand CAPS' responsibilities to include aiding masters and Ph.D. students seeking non-academic careers

STRATEGIC GOAL 5: Broaden awareness of the institution and the talents of its students both inside and outside the University

To support the process of student recruitment and further the success of alumni, we must be more aggressive in raising nationally the name-recognition of the University, and in communicating to the public the high standards and remarkable accomplishments of its students and faculty. It is not sufficient to rely on the strength of our reputation among the cognoscenti, particularly as other institutions become more aggressive in recruiting and as more students look to careers outside academia. Additionally we need to work within the institution to acquaint current students with the successes of fellow students and recent alumni. To list specific recommendations for achieving wider recognition is outside the expertise of this Task Force. However, we do stress our strong belief that public recognition is fundamental to the morale of current students, the satisfaction of alumni, and the successful recruitment of outstanding students. Wider recognition of the University and the standards of academic achievement for which it stands will not only assist our students in their lives after graduation and further our efforts to continue attracting the best students in the country, but will also bolster students' sense of pride in their association with the University and in their accomplishments while here as students. McKinsey and Company has been retained to make recommendations, which should be helpful in this regard. We look forward to the insights of that study and hope that this work will open the way for other marketing and public relations studies. We urge the University to make broader awareness of the institution a high priority over the coming years.

Membership of Task Force

Susan Kidwell, Geophysical Sciences, Chair (1994-96)
Brad Barbeau, Graduate School of Business (1995-96)
Alison Boden, Rockefeller Chapel (1995-96)
Sondra Cohen, Resident Master (1994-96)
James Crown, Trustee (1994-95)
Ingrid Gould, Provost Office (1994-96)
Janice Knight, English (1994-96)
John MacAloon, Social Sciences (1994-96)
John McCarter, Trustee (1994-96)
Michael Mendoza, Student in the College (1994-96)
William Michel, Reynolds Club (1994-96)
William Novak, History (1995-96)
Harvey Plotnick, Trustee (1994-96)
Thomas Rosenbaum, Physics (1994-96)
Steven Shevell, Ophthamology & Visual Sciences (1994-95)
Morton Silverman, Psychiatry (1994-96)
William Simms, Physical Education (1994-96)
Abbie Smith, Graduate School of Business (1994)
Jonathan Z. Smith, Humanities (1994-95)
Geoffrey Stone, Provost (1994-96)
Arthur Sussman, Vice President (1994-96)
Henry Webber, Associate Vice President (1994-96)
Karen Wilson, Graduate Student (1994-95)
Judith Wright, Law School (1994-96)

Additional Student Members of Task Force 1994-1995 Subcommittees:
Chris Albanis, Student in the College and SG representative
Sara Bruce, Student in the College and Food Committee representative
June Chung, Student in the College and Council representative
Andy Curtis, Student in the College and HARC representative
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Appendix on first-year orientation programs

Students need support in making a successful transition from: (a) high school to college; (b) each academic year to the next; (c) undergraduate life to graduate school; and (d) the completion of their studies or training to entering the "real world." Each transitional step requires the acquisition of new skills, perspectives, and tools for success.

Issues identified by staff (counselors, advisers, etc.) and general manuals as specific needs during the freshman year of college include:

(1) dealing with new-found freedoms, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations;
(2) adjusting to new environments and independent-living conditions;
(3) developing "survival techniques" such as being responsible for daily routine, conflict resolution, learning from experience, developing tolerance and civility toward others;
(4) developing and/or enhancing study skills — time management, reading proficiency and comprehension, note-taking, memorization techniques;
(5) refining mechanical skills, such as writing skills, critical thinking skills, computer skills, problem solving skills, test-taking skills;
(6) building healthy self-esteem;
(7) managing money;
(8) managing stress;
(9) making and retaining friends;
(10) making connections to campus and community activities;
(11) making a lifelong commitment to wellness;
(12) assessing realistically one's strengths and weaknesses, expectations and limitations.

The following common developmental themes exist for all students:
(1) Students need to hear that they are wanted and appreciated by virute of their background, skills, talents, and potential contributions.
(2) Students need to be instructed about their duties and responsibilities by virtue of their student status. Expectations must be clarified and reinforced.
(3) Students need to be reminded of the University's limits, values, expectations, priorities, and ethos. Students need to know what is their relative role in an institution of higher education which is, first and foremost, committeed to the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge.
(4) Students need to know that the institution fosters exploring and experimenting with new roles and responsibilities in a safe and secure environment. They need role models to emulate, react to, or even reject.
(5) Students need to be regularly reassured that they made the correct choices (and sacrifices) to engage in a University of Chicago education. This should occur both inside and outside the classroom, and all University faculty, staff, and administrators should be involved.

Table 1. Summary of available quantitative data

Date	Name of Survey	response level	number of respondents	Methods, Focus of Questions
COLLEGE				
in preparation	Taub Survey of Current Students	63%	718	face-to-face interview in 1995 using form, random selection; academic experience & general quality of life; commissioned by College Dean
1993	Admitted Student Questionnaires	54%	1583	return by mail when accept or decline admittance; rank importance of issues in decision & rate Chicago & other schools applied to; conducted annually by College Admissions Office
1994	COFHE Class of 1982 Survey	17%	105	volunteer return of form; overall satisfaction and loyalty (willingness to recommend), plus particular satisfaction with academic life, student life, facilities, faculty/admin; conducted by Consortium on Financing Higher Education
June 1995	Senior Survey	24%	164	distributed to all graduating seniors; poll of participation in campus activities, housing, post-graduation plans, open section for comments; conducted annually by College Dean
1994-95	Housing Survey	51%	1143	standard form distributed to all residents; rating of housing facilities, staffing, activities, and food services; conducted annually by Housing Office
Oct 1995	Response to Orientation Week	46% students; 28% O-Aides	473 students; 68 O-Aides	rating by 1st-year students & by Orientation Aides, return by mail with lottery prize offered; College Dean's Office;;
GRADUATE DIVISIONS				
Jan 1995	Council of Teaching survey of recent alumni (CoT)	~30%	833	mailed to recipients of master's and doctor's degrees from 4 divisions 1988 through 1993; academic program, campus life, services, overall experience
Jan 1995	Graduate Affairs Office survey of current students	~30%	1133	mailed to current students in the 4 divisions and Divinity School in May 1994; same topics, similar form as survey of recent alumni; combined in single report with CoT results
Jan 1995	BSD Dean's Council Survey of current students	41%	128	sent to all BSD graduate students, return by mail; recruitment & admissions procedures, course work, research/thesis advising, teaching requirement, quality of life, post-degree advising

Table 2. Student Participation Levels in Organized Social Activity (1995-1996)

Activity Category	Number of Organizations	Number of Participants
Athletics		
Club Sports	34	1000
Intramural Teams	715	7700
Varsity Athletic Teams	20	400
Governing Bodies		
Student Government		
House Councils	38	252
Divisional Advisory Councils		
Social & Other Interest Groups		
Student Organizations	160	8000
Prof School Student Orgs.		
Greek Organizations	11	388