

September 21, 2015

To: Duke Board of Trustees

From: Stephen Nowicki, Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education 

Subject: Enhancing Duke's Undergraduate Experience: A Four-Year Update

But how can we bring a larger proportion of our undergraduates beyond the surface of things and into touch with the great essential realities, and so make education more creative—creative in scholarship, in literature and the other arts, in culture, in character and in service to the country, to causes and to humanity?

President William Preston Few, 1933<sup>1</sup>

Eighty years ago, the visionary president who a decade earlier had masterminded the transformation of Trinity College into Duke University questioned whether Duke and institutions like it were indeed providing a truly liberal education, one that transcended mere academic training. Duke's destined rise to distinction was already apparent in the promising students it attracted at the time. But President Few worried that those promising students, while excelling in the classroom, might be failing to engage more deeply with the ideas, issues, and breadth of world perspectives that befit a liberally educated person. Eighty years on, Duke's leadership continues to ask how well we are doing in ensuring that "we bring a larger proportion of our undergraduates beyond the surface of things." This concern does not stem from any particular failing but rather—as I suspect was also the case for President Few—from an unwillingness to be complacent with the status quo, and from an urgency to excel that has propelled Duke to the prominence it enjoys today.

In a 2011 memo to the Board of Trustees, I summarized a series of efforts that Duke had made over the previous several years to enhance undergraduate engagement in and out of the classroom<sup>2</sup>. That memo served in part as a progress report on recommendations that had emerged from earlier strategic planning efforts, beginning with the 2006 report of the Strategic Planning Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, which was a foundational document for Duke's last strategic plan, *Making a Difference*<sup>3</sup>. Another motivation for that memo, truth be told, was the occurrence of some campus incidents that seemed to reflect poorly on Duke student "culture" as a whole. As Duke embarks on a new strategic planning process, and as occasional incidents continue to challenge the campus community to reflect on its deeper values, it's appropriate and useful to provide another update. Even more than four years ago, the large majority of our students engage deeply with the many academic, cultural, service-oriented, and entrepreneurial opportunities available to them to enrich their Duke education. More can be done, however. Our efforts to enhance student engagement will always be a work in progress as our students change, and as the world in which they will find their success outside of Duke changes as well.

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<sup>1</sup> From "Making Education More Creative," a speech to the Phi Kappa Phi honor society in Atlanta, Georgia, December, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> Found at [http://undergraduatedean.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/enhancing-dukes-undergraduate-experience-nowicki-bot-may-2011.original.pdf](http://undergraduatedean.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/enhancing-dukes-undergraduate-experience-nowicki-bot-may-2011.original.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Found at: <http://provost.duke.edu/strategic-plan-2006-making-a-difference/>

Two central points made in my 2011 memo remain pertinent. The first is that we should focus our thinking on enabling the best in our best students and not be unduly distracted by occasional incidents that reveal the worst in our worst students. This doesn't mean that we should ignore disengaged, insensitive, or loutish behavior when we encounter it; indeed we work with the community when unfortunate events take place, to do what can be done to learn from them, and to take steps to minimize the likelihood of such things happening in the future. By keeping a positive focus on student engagement, however, we not only enhance the depth of the undergraduate experience, but in so doing we diminish less desirable facets of student culture that follow from disengagement.

A second key point is that the administration can't simply mandate increased engagement in a top-down fashion. Fundamental change needs to be embraced by, and driven by, the students themselves. The administration should clearly articulate its aspirations for Duke as an engaged learning community, of course, and support programs that embody that vision. But our most effective means of instilling change is through actions that align with and support efforts on the part of the students themselves. This role of the administration, then, is to empower students to move their experiences in desired directions. Three ways we can support students' efforts were identified in my previous memo:

- Targeted investment in student groups and initiatives that contribute positively to a pluralistic campus society, including support for living groups, cultural, religious and arts groups, recreation programs, student media, and student entrepreneurship.
- Improvements to physical infrastructure and how it is used, in a way that is designed to promote positive social interactions.
- Creation of curricular and co-curricular programs, and programs that blur the line between the two, designed to multiply the ways in which students can find mentors, find their passions, and connect their learning to the real world in which they will live and work.

These avenues for supporting engagement remain equally relevant today, and we have pushed even farther on all of them in the last four years. Some of the initiatives called out in 2011 have now become a part of the fabric of Duke and others that were just being conceived or launched at that time are now coming to fruition. Some things we've tried did not work as we anticipated and have been sunsetted, and new initiatives have arisen in their wake. The good news is that the Duke undergraduate experience continues to evolve for the better as the students we admit increasingly seek a greater level of engagement with the university and with each other, and as we increasingly improve our ability to encourage and support that engagement.

Two signature initiatives are worth highlighting at the outset. **DukeEngage** ran its first pilot programs in 2007 and in only eight years has become one of the most distinctive and well-recognized features of a Duke education, with over 3,000 students having participated to date. DukeEngage is now the most commonly cited reason applicants give for their interest in attending Duke, and peer institutions are just beginning to emulate the program. More importantly, assessment shows that DukeEngage has a meaningful impact on the overall educational experience of students who participate, and even those students who don't participate in DukeEngage benefit indirectly from the change in interests and attitudes that DukeEngage has brought to the campus. Those who originally conceived of the DukeEngage program hoped that it would have a substantial positive effect on Duke student culture and most would now agree that this hope has been realized.

The recently created **Bass Connections** program is likely to have as profound an impact on the Duke student experience as DukeEngage. Whereas DukeEngage focuses on civic engagement, Bass Connections enables students to connect their classroom learning with complex societal challenges through problem-focused educational pathways and project teams comprised of undergraduates, graduate and professional students, and faculty. In its third year, Bass Connections already has engaged more than 600 students and 300 faculty members, from all of Duke's schools, in the most visible component of the program, the project teams. More than 130 project teams have formed so far, including nearly 50 running this current academic year. Opportunities associated with the Bass Connections program intentionally interweave with other curricular and co-curricular programs, including a student's academic major through Bass Connections academic tracks, as well as global opportunities such as Study Abroad and civic engagement opportunities including DukeEngage, allowing students to focus the arc of their four-year Duke experience around one of the five Bass Connection themes: (1) Brain & Society; (2) Information, Society & Culture; (3) Global Health; (4) Education & Human Development; and (5) Energy. Evaluation of the program so far tells us that what students gain through their Bass Connections experience goes far beyond learning about a particular topic or question. Students report gaining skills that both are relevant immediately to their Duke experience and that will also make them better prepared to enter professional lives after their time on campus. Notably, Bass Connections teams provide an environment for building close relationships among students having disparate interests as well as with faculty, both of which serve as foundations for an engaged scholarly community.

The following is an updated summary of other key initiatives and projects we have undertaken with the goal of enhancing student engagement. Some of what is described below are well-established efforts, others are more recent and experimental ideas. As in my 2011 memo, this list is not intended to be exhaustive or detailed, but rather a synopsis illustrating the nature and extent of administrative efforts to "bring a larger proportion of our undergraduates beyond the surface of things" as they engage with the Duke learning community.

### **The "Duke House" System**

The new Duke House residential system was launched in 2012 after four years of planning, including extensive discussions with students, alums, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders. The need to fundamentally rethink how housing is assigned at Duke came from the realization that the older system gave special privileges in terms of access and control of living and social space to a limited number of highly-affiliated groups, including Greek organizations and non-Greek "selective living groups," while leaving the majority of our students without a framework for developing a residentially-based sense of home and community. This inequity had a pervasive negative effect on Duke's campus climate overall. By emphasizing three-class housing (sophomore through senior years) and continuity of living communities for all students, not just those who are members of selective living groups, the new house-based residential system was designed to promote campus inclusivity, to enable pluralism across campus groups through their shared living experiences, to enliven and diversify the social scene, and to enhance cross-generational community both among undergraduates and between students and faculty.

From the outset, we knew that a fair evaluation of the Duke House system would not be possible until at least four years after its implementation, after students familiar with the old system had graduated and a sense of community in newly-established independent houses had been given time to evolve organically<sup>4</sup>. Thus, it is too soon to know the extent to which the goals of the new residential model will be realized. Early indications are encouraging, however. The “right of return” – the right to stay in one’s Duke House instead of transferring to another space on campus – has risen steadily across the three years when students could exercise this right, from 57% in 2013 to 82% in 2015. That is, students are choosing to stay in their houses, which is one measure of how much they value the community their house represents. Another encouraging trend is that students report their Duke House experience increases their opportunities to interact with students unlike themselves; this result stands in parallel with the fact that the composition of individual independent Duke Houses generally matches the demography of the Duke undergraduate population as a whole in terms of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. The extent to which independent Duke Houses (i.e., houses not associated with a “club-like” social selective group) have developed a strong community identity remains mixed, but there is clear progress towards the goal of having a more inclusive and positive residential experience on campus.

Disparity in infrastructure remains one of the major reasons students cite for leaving their current Duke House. Previously, both Central Campus and Edens Quad were seen as the least desirable places to live, but investments in both areas of campus have had a remarkable effect on how students perceive the quality of these living spaces. The renovation of Central Campus apartments five years ago as they were reconceived as Duke House clusters, along with the addition of a large number of affiliated houses (all of Duke’s Panhellenic sororities as well as several fraternities and non-Greek social selective groups) and the addition of good dining, recreation and social spaces, transformed Central Campus almost overnight into one of the most desired student housing locations on campus. The renovation of Edens Quad this past summer has had an equally significant effect on student opinion, with Edens now emerging as the “hot” place to live on campus. These reductions in perceived inequities in the quality of different residential spaces across campus will no doubt help accelerate the development of a robust set of residential communities in the Duke House system<sup>5</sup>.

Although the sense of community in independent Duke Houses ultimately must emerge from the bottom up, the administration is working carefully with student leaders to encourage and nurture the development of nascent residential identities. One example is the **FINvite** program (short for “Faculty Invitation”), a student-initiated idea that provides funding for student-proposed activities intended to

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<sup>4</sup> It’s worth noting that President Keohane’s reconfiguration of East Campus into an all first-year campus in the earlier 1990s was widely vilified by students when first implemented and remained so until the last students who knew any other system had graduated. Now, some 20+ years later, this move is considered by students, parents, faculty and staff to be one of the most positive aspects of Duke’s first-year experience, and a great success of the Keohane presidency.

<sup>5</sup> Two cautionary notes concerning residential space require mention: First, given the very limited swing space available for student housing on campus, the impending renovation of both Crowell and Craven Quads may lead to disruption of Duke House communities as they are displaced, and so careful thought must be given to how to maintain communities in the face of this disturbance. Second, and more critically, the renovation of Central Campus done in 2010 was seen as a short-term fix for housing stock that has long outlasted its intended lifespan. We now face an impending problem with deterioration of Central Campus facilities similar to that which we faced five years ago, requiring further serious thinking about a long-term solution to this aging housing stock.

encourage house-based community building through connection with faculty. In its first year, over 100 faculty signed up to participate in the program, in which faculty are invited by Duke Houses to engage in community-building activities as wide-ranging as pumpkin carving and go-cart racing, to attending a performance at the Durham Performing Arts Center followed by a conversation about that performance. A total of 105 FINvite events occurred in the 2014-2015 academic year, with the large majority of these (73) being sponsored by independent houses. Students report that FINvite events are proving to be a good catalyst for community building in their Duke Houses, and faculty report great satisfaction with their participation in these events.

Staff from the Residential Life office in Student Affairs and staff from the Office of Undergraduate Education continue to work closely together and with the leaders of independent Duke Houses to identify mechanisms for supporting unique opportunities for community building across the variety of Duke Houses.

### **Social and Arts Spaces**

In my 2011 memo, I cited the impending renovation of the **West Union Building** as a critical new addition of flexible space for community dining and social interaction. As we near completion of this project, it is becoming increasingly clear that the re-opening of this central gathering space, scheduled for 2016, will be truly transformative for campus culture. Furthermore, the reconfiguration of the new **Penn Pavilion** as a space for large community gatherings across the board once its temporary use as a dining facility has ended, and the thorough **renovation of the Bryan Center** as a home for student group space, completes the vision of an integrated set of student community facilities on West Campus that will provide a setting for community interaction not known on the Duke campus for many decades.

As is true for colleges and universities across the country, the performing and creative arts have long played a central role in student engagement at Duke. The arts have exploded at Duke, however, making this opportunity for student engagement an even more powerful force than we might have hoped for four years ago. New spaces have helped fuel this explosion. Certainly, the top-to-bottom renovation of **Baldwin Auditorium** has been transformative, with the more recent improvements to **Page Auditorium** adding to the list of quality spaces that support our students' creative work. Less formal, but at least as impactful on the student experience, was the recent creation of the **Arts Warehouse** in an unused building located between East and West Campus. In its first year of operation (academic year 2012-13), over 1,000 separate reservations were made for the Arts Warehouse dance and studio arts spaces; two years later that number had grown to over 1,500, and the 2015-16 academic year is on track for another record-setting number. This steep increase in use of arts spaces is not surprising given the equally steep increase in number of arts-related student organizations. For example, the number of dance organizations has grown from 8 in 2011 to 18 in 2015.

The student-led organization **duARTS** (<http://www.duarts.org/>) was formed in 2012. It has now grown to a size requiring an executive board of 17 members in 2015 and has become one of the most influential student organizations on campus. duARTS took over ownership of the Duke Arts Festival in 2014, increasing student engagement in this weeklong event. In February 2015, approximately 200 students attended the first annual **ArtCon**, a two-day, student led, arts and creativity summit intended to move Duke forward in the arts, and in August 2015, 31 students participated in the inaugural Project

Arts; a new art focused pre-orientation program. Yet another addition has been the emergence of the “**Artstigators**” on campus (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5xZa1jtzOk>). This grassroots group of students, faculty, staff and alumni are the “Crazies for the Arts” at Duke, creating fun pop-up events such as the Poetry Fox at Nasher parties, sharing photos of campus art on social media, and generally encouraging spontaneous acts of creativity and art on campus. The arts are now clearly a visible and affirming dimension of student engagement at Duke.

### **Curricular and Co-curricular Programs That Enhance Engagement**

A fundamental way to foster greater engagement by our students is to deepen the connection between classroom learning and real-world application of ideas. Many institutions “talk the talk” of putting knowledge in service to society, but Duke “walks the walk” better than most, especially through the willingness of its faculty to innovate in and around the classroom experience. DukeEngage and Bass Connections already have been mentioned as signature programs designed to connect student knowledge and interests to critical societal issues. Another signature example is the **Grand Challenge Scholars** program (<http://pratt.duke.edu/undergrad/students/grand-challenge-scholars-program>), which invites our engineering students to focus their studies around one of the "Grand Challenges for Engineering in the 21st Century," challenges that the National Academy of Engineering has identified as critical for ensuring a sustainable, economically robust, and politically stable world future.

Four other programs deserve particular mention for the way in which they expand the classroom experience and blur the lines between the classroom and the world at large.

- The long-standing **Focus Program** (<http://focus.duke.edu>) remains one of Duke’s best resources for meaningfully engaging first-year students with faculty and classmates. The small-group learning experience of Focus clusters, combined with the residential component of the program, provides an excellent opportunity for faculty to experiment with different models of teaching and learning, as well a venue in which students build lasting social bonds with each other and faculty around an area of shared intellectual interest.
- The Franklin Humanities Center’s **Humanities Labs** program (<http://www.fhi.duke.edu/labs>) brings together groups of faculty and students to engage in research that’s rooted in the humanities but connected widely to disciplines outside the humanities. Supported by the “Humanities Writ Large” grant from the Mellon Foundation, each Lab explores a central theme (e.g., Haiti, borders, games) through a constellation of interconnected classroom activities and research projects. Labs may run for one or several years, with participants joining as new ideas emerge and new expertise is sought. Humanities Labs also emphasize the creation of new ways to engage public audiences with academic inquiry, both at Duke and beyond.
- The **Winter Forum** (<http://undergraduatedean.duke.edu/programs/winter-forum>), first launched in 2010, has now become established as one of Duke’s more visible and engaging co-curricular programs. Each January, approximately 100 students return to campus two and a half days before the spring semester begins and are immersed in an intense, hands-on, retreat-like setting in which they explore a major global issue from interdisciplinary, global, and real-world perspectives. A different theme is chosen each year, with the “curriculum” of the forum

planned by the Duke Institute, Initiative, or school that proposed the chosen theme, supported logistically by the Office of Undergraduate Education. The seventh Winter Forum, to be held January 2016, is titled “Madagascar 2030: Sustainable Development Innovation Challenge” and is sponsored by the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative in collaboration with the Duke Lemur Center. Another distinctive feature of the Winter Forum is that faculty from all of Duke’s schools contribute, including faculty from the professional schools who otherwise have few opportunities to interact with Duke undergraduates, as well as leaders from government, industry, finance, the media, and other realms outside the academy who add their practical and political experience to the mix.

- The **DukeImmerse** program (<http://sites.duke.edu/dukeimmerse/description>) was conceived by a faculty committee charged with developing ideas for engaging students in a curricular-based program as deeply as DukeEngage clearly does as a co-curricular program. The idea emerging from this committee’s work was an interdisciplinary program that would allow students and faculty to spend an entire semester exploring a single issue through the different disciplinary lenses of four fully integrated seminars. Instead of enrolling in four independent courses, as in a typical semester, students would instead enroll as a cohort in a DukeImmerse program, which would then be delivered as one cohesive whole occupying the entirety of the students’ academic work for a given semester. Narrowly scheduled class times and the traditional classroom would be substituted with a dedicated work space where students and faculty interact on a daily basis, sometimes for scheduled activities such as lectures but more often in the context of ongoing work on collaborative projects. DukeImmerse is intended to shift the discourse of education from knowledge acquisition to knowledge construction and to raise the level of intellectual engagement of undergraduates with faculty. Two pilot programs launched in the spring of 2012; as of fall 2015, 13 DukeImmerse semesters have run, involving a total 131 students in six different programs. Four programs will run in the spring 2015 semester. Examples of DukeImmerse programs include: “Freedom Struggles in the 20th Century: A Comparison of the Civil Rights Movement in the American South and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggles;” “Uprooted/Rerouted: The Ethical Challenges of Displacement;” and “The Role of Intercultural Competency and Community-Based Learning in Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers for a Globalized World.”

### **Administrative Supports for Student Engagement**

In concert with the creation of curricular and co-curricular programs designed to enhance student engagement, Duke also is innovating and expanding support in several key domains that can influence the extent to which students take advantage of the opportunities for engagement that Duke provides. While seemingly disparate, these three domains in fact intersect in important ways in the lives of our students.

- **Academic Advising Center.** As a leader in innovation in liberal education, a next critical step for Duke is to address the challenge of how to help students move with greater intentionality through the rich curricular and co-curricular terrain it has created. The gist of the issue is that even the most informed faculty find it hard to know enough about all that Duke has to offer to be able to serve as the sole source of advice to students, but at the same time faculty must play

a central role as advisors and mentors. What is needed is a complementary and collaborative network of advisors, including but not limited to faculty, to help students understand both themselves and how the many opportunities available to them can be selected and integrated to best support their desired educational outcomes. To this end, Duke has begun to implement a new approach to advising, one that maintains the essential mentorship that faculty must provide at an academic institution, while at the same time supporting that mentorship and better connecting it with an advising network through the creation of a cadre of full-time advisors – Directors of Academic Engagement (DAEs) <https://advising.duke.edu/dae>). DAEs play a central role in helping students define their academic ambitions and make deeper and more intentional connections across the many curricular, global, and co-curricular opportunities they have available to them. Assessment of the DAE program has shown its worth and we are now working to increase the number of DAEs so as to expand that program’s reach to more students.

- **Office of Access and Outreach.** Following the launch of the Financial Aid Initiative at Duke, the number of Pell-eligible students enrolled at the University increased from 9% in 2007-2008 to 14% in 2013-2014. This change resulted in an additional 325 low-income students on campus, many of whom were first-generation college students. These students formed a group they called the “1-G Network”. Their challenges included a sense of isolation, feelings of not belonging, and continued financial and emotional responsibilities to their families. The stressors created by these challenges had a profound effect on these students’ engagement at Duke as they experienced additional challenges in the classroom and in attending to the often silent tasks of college life, such as how to network and how to seek help from their professors. To better serve these students, the Office of Access and Outreach was created in 2014 and a director was hired. For the past three summers, we have offered a two-day pre-orientation program that introduces students to critical elements of campus life, including campus resources and conversations about how to negotiate life at Duke. The Director now provides other programming and support throughout the year. In the coming year, we will propose to expand our programming and resources for these students and others who have challenges in accessing a campus like Duke’s through a special fellowship program. Our proposed fellowship program will be designed to offer these students the support they need by providing an increased level of social, emotional, and intellectual support as they transition into and through their college experience.
- **Office of Undergraduate Scholars and Fellows.** Beginning this academic year, we have reconceived and reconfigured the existing Office of Undergraduate Scholars and Fellows (OUSF), expanding its role beyond simply providing administrative support for Duke’s merit scholarship programs (e.g., the A.B Duke Scholars, B.N. Duke Scholars, Reginaldo Howard Scholars, etc.) with the goal of transforming this unit into a center of scholarly engagement for all students. With new faculty leadership and the creation of a new executive director position, we anticipate that OUSF will become a beacon of intellectual engagement for our students, a home that brings together many of the programs intended to foster greater engagement, and an incubator for ideas that will continue to expand the reach of programs large and small that encourage Duke students to approach their Duke education as a truly intellectual endeavor.

## Student-initiated Programs

Most if not all of the programs and policies described above were developed with significant input from students, to ensure that our administrative efforts do align with student interests and needs, in keeping with the principle that fundamental changes in student engagement cannot be imposed from the top down, but must be embraced by the students themselves. In that light, we also keep constant watch for efforts that are student-driven, so as to provide support for entirely student-initiated efforts that may have a significant and lasting effect on the climate of engagement on campus. In my 2011 memo, I pointed to several examples of how student activism was contributing to changing the campus scene, such as a campaign by Pan-Hellenic leadership to rein in sexist Greek traditions and the establishment of Duke Student Government's "Intellectual Climate Committee." Three more recent efforts are worth highlighting here, chosen because each is on track to become as deeply ingrained in the Duke experience as many of the programs already mentioned.

- **Flunch.** Short for "faculty lunch," the Flunch program is now seen as a distinctive and desirable feature of the Duke scene, often cited by student tour guides as a prime example of how easy it is to connect with professors here and even occasionally mentioned in student's application essays for why they wish to attend Duke. The concept behind Flunch is simple: Instead of providing funds to faculty if they choose to take their students out for a meal, provide funds to students instead, giving students the agency in the interaction and generally allowing for a more one-on-one experience. Students sign up to Flunch a professor on the web (the word now has both noun and verb status at Duke) and when they swipe their Duke card, the meal is charged to the Office of Undergraduate Education. What is less well-known now, and almost entirely forgotten by students, is that Flunch was the brain-child of a former Duke Student Government president and not an idea stemming from the administration. Flunch has indeed become ubiquitous – in each of the last three academic years, approximately one-third of all undergraduates participated in at least one Flunch. This is a prime example of a student idea that has transformed how students and faculty engage with each other at Duke.
- **Duke Partnership for Service.** Another student initiative that has transformed student engagement in the space of social entrepreneurship on campus was the creation of the Duke Partnership for Service (dPS) in 2009 (<http://dps.dukegroups.duke.edu>). More than 80 clubs and other student organizations now coordinate their activities and funding through this student-led umbrella organization. More importantly, dPS provides advice and support for new student initiatives and helps connect those initiatives with existing programs and resources. Given its diffuse and broad influence, it's impossible to measure the impact of dPS in simple terms, but this organization – the product of student imagination and inspiration – now serves as a primary connector new Duke students encounter when they ask how they can gain greater meaning from their Duke educational experience.
- **Duke Conversations.** Piloted only last spring, this last example is a student-initiated program that already appears to be on a trajectory to become a deeply embedded Duke tradition fostering engagement beyond the classroom. As with Flunch, the concept is simple: Create a program through which small groups of students (20 or so) have dinner at a faculty member's

house, and have a conversation over dinner on some topic of broad significance and relevance. There are institutions where this practice is commonplace, but these are generally small colleges and they invariably are institutions where faculty predominantly live on or immediately adjacent to campus. Such is not the case at Duke, which is surrounded on three sides by Duke Forest and on the fourth side by the Duke Medical Center. The fact is that, at Duke, it typically takes some effort for a faculty member to bring students to her house for dinner. Two enterprising Duke students, however, one a member of the Class of 2015, the other a member of the Class of 2016, realized that a simple solution would be to devise a system that provided car-pool transportation and inexpensive catering, making participation by both faculty and students easy. Three pilot dinners were held in the spring 2015 semester, all smashing successes. When the student leaders scheduling Duke Conversations dinners for the fall 2015 semester put a notice out to the Class of 2019 Facebook page, more than 500 students signed up within days. A subsequent notice to upper-class students yielded another 400 interested individuals. Whereas the initial plan for the fall 2015 semester was to hold nine total Duke Conversations dinners, this extraordinary student interest led the student organizers to engage more faculty members to hold dinners this fall. As of this writing, 30 Duke Conversation dinners will take place by the end of the fall semester – that’s approximately three dinners a week – and a similar number of Duke Conversations are being planned for the spring. The Duke Conversations program does more than illustrate another outstanding example of student-led efforts to support greater intellectual engagement, it illustrates that both our students and our faculty are hungry for increased engagement; all the administration needs do is to lower barriers to this kind of interaction.