

May 4, 2011

To: Duke Board of Trustees

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

Subject: Enhancing Duke's Undergraduate Experience: Where We Stand Now

At colleges and universities across the nation, attention is often drawn to the issue of “campus culture” by unfortunate, stupid, and sometimes terribly egregious actions on the part of students, actions that can draw out underlying issues of serious concern in our society, such as gender violence, racial tension, or socioeconomic inequity. Duke – like all of its peer institutions – has had its share of such incidents, large and small, and Duke students – like students at all of Duke’s peers – are not immune to the underlying tensions that these incidents bring to light. The university should and does work with individuals, groups, and the community at large when such unfortunate occurrences take place, to do what can be done to learn and teach, and to take steps forward that reduce the likelihood of such things happening in the future.

Although particular events draw our attention to issues of campus climate, it is important that we keep in mind the broader context of student engagement and cast our thinking in those terms. The university is a place where students should come not just to hone their intellectual skills and acquire academic credentials, but also where they come to encounter people unlike themselves and ideas unlike what they’ve known before, and in so doing prepare themselves to be members of the fast-changing, pluralistic, and global society they will enter upon graduation. To the extent we are successful in creating an educational environment that produces this outcome, many of the issues underlying concern about “campus culture” begin to find resolution. This doesn’t mean we can guarantee bad things will never happen – that’s simply not possible – but by focusing on the big picture of student experience and engagement, we can proactively (even if less obviously) address the issue of campus climate in a way that is more systematic and more effective than if we focus our thinking solely through the lens of bad student behavior.

It is also important to bear in mind that, however it focuses its efforts, a university cannot hope to change the culture of its student experience solely by administrative fiat. If change is to happen, students themselves must play a central role, generating change from within. We are fortunate at Duke to have students willing and able to work for change at the grassroots level. The successful student movement last fall, spearheaded by the Pan-Hellenic leadership, to cancel a kind of social event that was particularly demeaning to women is just the most recent example of effective grassroots efforts to promote change. This year’s DSG-sponsored gender summit and creation of the “Intellectual Climate Committee” are two other recent examples; many other examples could be cited. Far from being recalcitrant or loutish, the majority of our students do their share to foster the kind of educational environment we all seek.

One role the administration must play, of course, is to articulate our aspirations for Duke as a learning community and our high expectations of those who join that community as its youngest scholars.

Equally important, the administration also needs to stay closely attuned to the currents of student thinking and action, working to support the most positive and productive of student efforts while minimizing, as best we can, negative trends. One way to conceptualize this latter role is as a series of levers the administration has the ability to push one way or the other, providing resources and infrastructure that enable student culture to move in desired directions. At Duke, a concerted emphasis on this approach can be traced back across the last half-decade. Beginning with the 2006 report of the Strategic Planning Committee on the Undergraduate Experience (the “Ruderman Report”) written in support of Duke’s current strategic plan *Making a Difference*, continuing with the work of the Campus Culture Initiative Task Force (the 2007 CCI report), and culminating with the Provost’s 2008 follow-on report to the President on campus climate, we have identified three main levers that can be particularly effective in enhancing undergraduate engagement and community in the Duke context, and in so doing can help diminish negative behaviors and undesirable aspects of student culture. These three levers are:

- 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; notably, these improvements include changes in our residential model intended to enhance community building, and additions to social and recreational spaces intended to promote mixing across student interests and identity groups in a casual and non-programmed fashion.
- 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.

Duke has worked steadily over the last several years on all three of these fronts. None of these levers can be expected to change the undergraduate experience quickly, but with concerted effort, all represent factors that will change that experience dramatically over time. We are now beginning to see some of these initiatives have a profound effect on Duke student engagement and student culture; DukeEngage is a notable example in this regard. And we are on the verge of having other efforts reach fruition, notably the launch of the new “Duke House” residential model in the fall of 2012, which will transform the Duke undergraduate experience even more profoundly. While admitting we still have much work to do, and in spite of cases of bad student behavior that will always grab our attention and that can never be completely eliminated, the Duke undergraduate experience is substantially different – and better – than it was five years ago as a result of these efforts, and it is evolving at a good pace in the right direction.

What follows is a summary of key initiatives we are using to move these three levers. This is not an exhaustive list nor is it intended to provide detailed rationale and expected outcomes in each case. Rather this listing provides an overview of the kinds of actions that can and are being taken on the administrative side of the equation to enhance student community and student engagement.

## Investment in student groups and student-led initiatives

A central and long-recognized challenge we face at Duke is that some social groups, notably (but not exclusively) fraternities, have disproportionate control over social capital. To overcome this challenge, Duke has worked proactively to create and support a broader array of social groups, some of which interface with our residence system (see below on the new Duke House residential model) and others of which create strong alternatives for social bonding and positive social activity in a non-residential context. Notable examples include:

- The **Baldwin Scholars**, a residential women's leadership program, established in 2004 on the recommendation of the Women's Leadership Initiative.
- **Ubuntu**, a selective living group based on the theme of civic engagement, originally proposed by a group of first-year students in 2007 and then established with administrative support as a prototype Duke House (see below) in fall 2008; note that the success of the Ubuntu experience has led to a flurry of similar student-led efforts to create alternative theme-based living groups, including for example "**Jam!**," a living group based on outdoor recreation and sports, and "**InCube**," a living group based on entrepreneurship, both of which will be launched as "proto-Duke Houses" in fall 2011.
- **WHO House** (for "Women's Housing Option"), a living group associated administratively with the Duke Women's Center, which emerged as a proposal from a Public Policy course on women's leadership taught by Rachel Seidman in the Fall 2009 semester and was launched as a living option in the fall of 2010; similar to WHO House are the previously established **Wellness and Substance-Free living groups**.

Other non-residential, student-initiated efforts identified as contributing to positive social climate and student engagement have received strong administrative support, both logistic and financial. The **Center for Race Relations** and their highly-successful "**Common Ground**" program is a long-standing example of a student-led contribution to broad community building. A more recent example is the **Duke Partnership for Service**. Established only in the 2009-2010 academic year, this group already has emerged as a highly visible and highly effective umbrella student organization promoting civic engagement and supporting both emerging and established student social entrepreneurship efforts. The DPS also quickly became an effective conduit for connecting the activities of the newly-reconfigured **Duke Center for Civic Engagement** to student interests and activities in the sphere of social activism in general.

The DSG **Intellectual Climate Committee** created this year already has begun to establish connections that funnel student ideas for enhancing campus climate to appropriate administrative units. For example, inspired by the "flash lecture" concept (<http://www2.dailyprogress.com/news/2010/oct/23/uva-flash-mobs-learn-sake-learning-ar-582849/>), the ICC is working with Prof. Tom Ferraro (English) and the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education to launch a uniquely Duke version of spontaneous faculty-student engagement venues.

**Performance** and **art groups** are proliferating rapidly; here, too, Duke has been working steadily to provide administrative and financial support to ensure new groups thrive. Similarly, **entrepreneurship** and the **environment** represent growth areas for student-initiated groups and activities, and have been targeted for support as well.

While not student-led efforts, it is important to mention here the work of the **Gender Initiative Task Force** led by Ada Gregory, Director of the Women's Center, and the **Socioeconomic Diversity Initiative**, co-led by Donna Lisker, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and Alison Rabil, Assistant Vice Provost and Director of the Office of Financial Aid. Both efforts are yielding data on central metrics affecting campus climate and student engagement, data that continue to help Duke identify where best to invest its administrative and financial support of student-led efforts, as well as where to weigh in with administrative action when needed. Updates from both efforts are being reported to the Board's Undergraduate Education Committee at their May 2011 meeting.

### **Investment and innovation in residential and social spaces**

Space – both its physical design and the conventions involving its use – can have a profound influence on the culture of the people who occupy it. At Duke, the differential privileges given to members of social selective groups as compared to “independent” students is a major reason for disparities in social capital that are disruptive to our culture, a point clearly identified in the Provost's 2008 report on campus climate. The most substantial change in physical infrastructure to be undertaken since the inception of the all-first-year East Campus will be the launch of the new **Duke House residential model** in the fall 2012 semester, motivated specifically by the need to create a more equitable residential experience for all our students. By emphasizing three-class housing (sophomore through senior years) and continuity of living communities for all students, not just those who are members of social selective living groups, this house-based residential system will have a pervasive, positive effect on many aspects of Duke student culture, promoting campus inclusivity, enlivening and diversifying the social scene, and enhancing cross-generational connections not only among undergraduates but also among all members of the broader Duke community.

The need to deeply rethink Duke's residential system was identified as a priority by the Board of Trustees at their September 2007 meeting (shortly after the position of Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education was created). The outline of a new residential system was described to the full Board of Trustees at its February 2010 meeting and, as work on the Duke House model has progressed steadily, its details have been discussed by the Undergraduate Education Committee of the Board at its February 2008, May 2009, December 2009, May 2010, October 2010, and February 2011 meetings. A vote by the Undergraduate Education Committee at their May 2010 meeting formally endorsed the guiding principles of the emerging Duke House residential model.

It is also worth noting that, although the process has been administratively-driven, student leaders have played a central role in formulating this new residential model, beginning with Molly Bierman (P '09), who as president of Campus Council in the 2008/2009 academic year created a student survey and organized “town hall” discussions that got the ball rolling, and continuing with the leadership of Stephen Temple (T '11) as her successor for two years on Campus Council and Mike LeFevre (T '11) as DSG president, both organizing student input, selecting student representatives to committees charged with working on various details, and themselves participating deeply in the process of refining the nature of the new Duke House model. Leaders of other student groups, such as the Black Student Alliance, the Inter-Fraternity Council, and the Pan-Hellenic Council, have also been brought into the process.

As planning for the Duke House model progressed, other initiatives and projects necessary for its successful launch have begun to be put into place. Mentioned above, the student-led creation of new kinds of residentially-based groups, such as **Ubuntu** and **WHO House**, have provided us with “proto-Duke Houses” that allow us to experiment with how best to support the organic emergence of positive communities in our residences. Also critical has been the construction of a new residence hall – “**K4**” – that will not only provide needed bed space when it opens in 2012, but that also is designed explicitly as a pair of two “Duke Houses” and thus provides a model from which to learn as we move towards future residential construction on New Campus. Finally, investment in the residential experience of **Central Campus** has transformed that part of campus in a way that incorporates it better into the overall Duke undergraduate experience and – remarkably – that has made it a desirable place to live for many Duke students<sup>1</sup>. This investment includes not just physical improvements such as the addition of the “**Devil’s Bistro**” eatery and the creation of social spaces in the **Mill Village**, but also incentivizing social selective living groups to locate on this part of campus (e.g., Ubuntu, Pi Kappa Phi, Jam!, and others) and thus enlivening the social scene there.

Reconfiguring residence spaces and how they are used is only one mechanism for ensuring that students interact across the full array of different segments of the Duke community. Also important are the meaningful interactions students have through activities unrelated to their living space or their academic experiences, in places where they come to meet, to dine, to recreate, or simply to “hang out.” Because the groupings that form in casual social and dining spaces are by their nature fluid and dynamic, more so than residentially-based communities could ever be, one cannot overstate their importance for developing an inclusive environment where students can cross boundaries of race, gender, socioeconomic class, or other dimensions of difference among our students.

The planned renovation of the **West Union Building** is now the focus of much discussion as to how best to use this opportunity to create these much-needed social spaces and improved dining spaces. Nearer on the horizon is the reconfiguration of social and dining spaces in **McClendon Tower** being done in tandem with the completion of the **K4** residence hall, which will include an outdoor plaza and indoor “von der Heyden-like” space that augments the effective footprint of space available in McClendon. **Recreational sports** space improvements being undertaken by Athletics and the impending renovation of **Baldwin and Page Auditoriums** also will contribute greatly to the infrastructure we have available to support our students’ interests in healthy, expressive, and generally engaging forms of activity.

### **Curricular/co-curricular programs that enhance engagement**

Within the complex landscape of the contemporary undergraduate educational experience, the most important opportunity we have for improving the broad suite of issues we lump together as “campus climate” is to capitalize on the interfaces between what we traditionally think of as “classroom learning” and all of the other opportunities for learning that exist outside of the classroom. By pushing this interface to new heights, we not only better achieve our goal of putting “knowledge in service to society,” we also create opportunities to engage our students more deeply with their fellow students,

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<sup>1</sup> In the Duke Chronicle’s summer take-home edition in July 2010, Central Campus was cited as the “hot” place to live on campus and a survey this year sponsored by Campus Council found a very high level of satisfaction among Duke students living on Central Campus.

with the faculty, and with the real world. On this front, Duke already has done much that is noticeably changing the way our students think and act.

**DukeEngage** stands out as a shining example. In only its fourth year of operation, this program already has become one of the most visible signatures of the Duke undergraduate experience, cited more frequently on admissions application essays than any other facet of Duke as to why prospective students want to come here. As the earliest cohorts of DukeEngage participants are now graduating, we already are seeing measurable positive effects of having experienced this program on a broad range of metrics we assess for members of each graduating class. This is a program that works and we now have data to support that claim.

The **Focus Program** is a long-established program that also stands out as a Duke signature and it remains one of our best mechanisms for engaging students with faculty and their fellow students. The intimate learning experience promoted in Focus course clusters, combined with the residential component of the program, provides a particularly rich landscape for faculty to experiment with different models of teaching and learning, moving beyond the walls of a traditional classroom experience, and it creates a venue in which students build lasting social bonds with each other and with faculty around an area of shared intellectual interest.

Other programs launched over the last few years are having similar success, even if the scope of these more targeted programs and their impact is inherently less than that of major signatures such as DukeEngage or Focus. Examples of such programs include:

- The **Chautauqua Lecture Series**<sup>2</sup>, launched in 2008, introduces first-year students to distinguished Duke professors in a casual manner by having the professor give an engaging and entertaining lecture over an elegant catered dinner served in the parlor of an East Campus residence hall. The popularity of this program has grown to the extent that students have recently requested it be expanded to include lectures on West Campus for upperclass students, who are not invited to the East Campus events.
- The **“Flunch”** program, established in response to a suggestion by DSG in 2008, conveniently allows students to ask faculty to lunch, with the payment of such charged to the university automatically through a simple web-based system. Unlike typical programs supporting student-faculty interaction over dining, Flunch reverses the dynamic by giving the student the opportunity to take the initiative. Nearly 500 Flunches occurred this academic year and Flunch is now appearing on admissions applications as a reason prospective students find Duke attractive.
- The **Winter Forum**, launched in January 2010, is a two and a half day experience that brings together students and faculty in an intense, retreat-like setting to explore a major global issue from interdisciplinary, global, and real-world perspectives. A different theme is chosen each year, with planning and execution of the forum falling to the Duke institute or school that proposed the chosen theme. The first Winter Forum, “Making the Green Economy Work,” was sponsored by the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions; the second forum, held this past January, was titled “Pandemic 2011” and sponsored by the Duke Global Health

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<sup>2</sup> This title is based on a popular movement started in the late 1800s in upstate New York that introduced notable writers, artists, philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals of the day to ordinary citizens by sponsoring lectures and demonstrations in town halls and other public venues in small communities throughout the country.

Institute. The Winter Forum provides students with hands-on, team-based learning experiences in close contact with faculty and leaders from outside the academy. Another important feature of the Winter Forum is that faculty from all of Duke's schools contribute, including faculty from professional schools who have scant opportunity otherwise to work with Duke undergraduates.

- The Franklin Humanities Center's **Humanities Labs** program brings together groups of faculty and students who share discipline-crossing research and pedagogical agendas rooted in the humanities. Each Humanities Lab is built around a theme that connects the humanities across disciplines and runs for a period of 1 to 3 years. While designed to have a major research emphasis, undergraduates participate by working with faculty and graduate students on shared research projects and by participating in undergraduate courses built around the lab's research project. The first project was the "Haiti Lab," begun in the fall of 2010; two new labs being launched in the fall of 2011 are titled "BorderWork(s)" and "GreaterThanGames."
- The **Global Semester Abroad** offers a novel alternative to traditional study abroad programs, one that provides multiple, on-site global perspectives on a single unifying theme. Instead of the typical approach of basing an abroad experience at a single location where students study a variety of different topics, the Global Semester Abroad takes an integrated approach to studying one major theme, and does so while moving between two areas of the globe. In a pilot run in the Spring 2011 semester, students traveled to India and China to study the relationships between development, environment, and global health in rural and urban settings from the differing perspectives of the world's two largest emerging economies. Working closely with Duke faculty in each country, students combined academic study at the two sites with hands-on, community-based research and service.
- **Duke INTense Global** offers another novel means of fostering deep student connection with faculty in a global context, with the additional goal of better integrating the students' global experience with the entirety of their four-year Duke experience. A pilot led by Prof. Edna Andrews (Slavic Languages) that focuses on Slavic language and linguistics and will begin in the Fall 2011 semester illustrates the program's structure and goals: Students enroll as sophomores in the fall semester in a coordinated set of four courses that includes accelerated Russian study. After the first eight weeks of class in Durham, the participating students and Duke faculty leader travel to St. Petersburg where they continue study in the same courses but now under the additional direction of Russian faculty, returning to Durham to complete the end of the semester. Students remain participants in the program in the spring semester, but with only a single required course, the continuation of accelerated Russian (thus allowing students in the program to fill in general education or other requirements with the remaining three open course slots). The program continues in the summer following the sophomore year with the students and same faculty leader traveling back to St. Petersburg to participate in a 10-week hybrid summer program that combines two summer session courses and a DukeEngage program.
- **Duke Immerse**, proposed by a group of faculty as a means for increasing intellectual engagement between students and faculty, is envisioned as a semester-long, full-immersion academic program. Instead of enrolling in four disconnected courses, as in a typical semester, students participating in a Duke Immerse program will devote a majority of their academic time and effort to an integrated faculty-led research project yielding the equivalent of several course credits on the students' transcripts. Narrowly scheduled class times and the traditional classroom would be substituted with a dedicated work space where students and faculty would interact on a daily basis, sometimes for scheduled activities such as lectures but more often in

the context of ongoing work on a common project. Duke Immerse would thus provide a fundamentally different kind of space promoting intellectual connections between students and faculty – a collaborative, interdisciplinary learning laboratory that would help to move Duke’s educational approach away from a sole focus on knowledge acquisition to an increasing focus on knowledge construction. We are now working on a pilot, led by Prof. Bill Chafe (History) to run in the Spring 2012 semester that will compare the civil rights movements of the U.S. and South Africa, with the full immersion structure of Duke Immerse allowing for an extended field trip to South Africa as part of the program.

### **Final Thoughts**

While there is notable progress on moving all three of the levers we have identified, and while the effects of these sustained efforts are becoming ever more apparent, there is much more that can be done and there remain challenges we must recognize and face squarely:

- Even as we work to support student groups and initiatives that contribute positively to a pluralistic campus society, there remain pockets of concern, including some groups that remain entrenched in antiquated views of the American collegiate experience and some “traditions” that are hard to dislodge. While the vast majority of our students are moving forward, it is unfortunately the case that even a small minority can have a disruptive effect on progress.
- Even as we make ground-breaking progress on our infrastructure and our conception for how it is used to support the residential experience and social activities of our students, we are still faced with the need for major renovations of existing facilities beyond what is now in progress and a need for the addition of new facilities if we are to fully instantiate our aspirations.
- Even as we launch new programs that increase student engagement in and out of the classroom, we have yet to come to grips with the societal pressures our students face that drive them to dwell excessively on professional outcomes as the expense of the kind of intellectual exploration that is the hallmark of a liberal education.

Thus, it is important to realize that our work to enhance the big picture of student experience and engagement at Duke continues to be – and perhaps will always be – a work in progress.

### **Questions for Consideration**

- How can Duke better project the gains it has made around issues of “campus climate” and disseminate information about programs and projects that support these gains?
- How can we avoid having our attention unduly distracted by singular events while at the same time responding appropriately to negative incidents when they do arise?
- Are there other major “levers” that Duke has at its disposal that can further assist us in moving campus climate in positive directions?