Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee
Report for 2012-2013

At the request of Dean Berger-Sweeney, we took a look at the BLAST program, which was created with our involvement in 2011-2012. We had a number of meetings: As the chair of the committee, Christoph Börgers met with Dean Robert Mack, director of the BLAST program, and then with the students in the BLAST seminar. Then the committee had a meeting with the administrators and faculty involved in the program, and another meeting with some of the students belonging to the first cohort of BLAST students. The program appears to be a real success so far. We did have some suggestions for possible improvements, summarized in a letter to Dean Berger-Sweeney attached to this report.

In consultation with Dean Lee Coffin and Director of Financial Aid Patricia Reilly, we identified several other topics for consideration by the committee. Among these was the question whether, in view of the steadily improving preparation of students admitted to Tufts, we should consider tightening distribution requirements. We decided to defer to the EPC on this issue, and asked the EPC to consider it. Other issues that we identified, but have only just barely begun conversation about, are listed here in hopes that the committee will take up some of these topics in the future:

- Should Tufts offer merit aid?
- Are very high need international students sufficiently supported? How does one balance the desire to admit very high need international applicants, who are often extremely strong academically, with the need to provide financial aid for U.S. applicants?
- On the other hand, many international applicants are able to pay fully on their own. Does admitting them raise any “campus culture” concerns that should be taken into consideration?

We also had a brief conversation about policies regarding admission and tuition remission for children of faculty and staff. It was our impression that not all faculty are fully informed of what the policy is. The administration referred us to information available at [http://hr.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/BEN_TuitionRemissionPlanGuide.pdf](http://hr.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/BEN_TuitionRemissionPlanGuide.pdf) and [http://hr.tufts.edu/benefits/tuition-remission/](http://hr.tufts.edu/benefits/tuition-remission/).

On behalf of the committee,

Christoph Börgers
Professor of Mathematics
Chair of UAFAC

Appended: Letter to Dean Berger-Sweeney concerning BLAST.
May 3, 2013

Dean Joanne Berger-Sweeney
Ballou Hall

Dear Joanne,

I am writing on behalf of the Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee, which I am chairing this year. We spent some time inquiring and thinking about the BLAST program this year, and I would like to report to you what we found.

This report is based on three meetings. The first, on September 17, 2012, was a conversation that I had, at Dean Mack’s invitation, with the BLAST seminar. The second, on November 13, 2012, was a meeting of the committee with faculty and administrators involved in the BLAST program. The third, on February 4, 2013, was a meeting of the committee with several of the BLAST students.

Positive comments from the students:

In general, the students are almost unanimously extremely positive about the program. Here are some specific things they said to us.

- The students had the greatest enthusiasm for David Proctor and Kim Ruane. They had noticed that both are among the very best teachers Tufts has, and they considered that a proof of Tufts commitment to them. They had equally positive things to say about Zach Faubion. Students were eager to make sure that the same people would teach the BLAST courses next summer.
- They were just as enthusiastic about others involved in the program: Deans Mack and Barker (who were “available 24/7”, as a student said, and another student said that Dean Mack is “like a dad” to them), as well as Leah Knobler, Ikenna Acholonu, Kevin Buckles.
- Both courses were extremely well received. Students said that the Mathematics course showed them the subject in a whole new way, and praised the History course equally, emphasizing in particular the value of doing a lot of writing, including a research-style paper.
- They emphasized the team-building value of the lodge trip at the beginning of the program. They appreciated that they were asked to cook together during that trip.
- They noted that having the BEST and BLAST students on campus at the same time, housed together, was valuable. There were also joint events of the two programs, which were perceived as valuable by the students.
- They said that the Monday BLAST seminar and the Wednesday BLAST study group are very helpful to them.
- More important than anything else, the students said, were the connections that being in the BLAST group created for them. In the fall, they felt much more at home on campus because they knew some of the professors and deans well already, and they knew each other. Students also mentioned that they were made aware of the tutoring service on campus during the BLAST program, and felt that that was very valuable.
- Many of the students would be eager to help as peer mentors with future BLAST groups.
• Students feel that the BLAST program can be a recruiting tool for Tufts.

Further positive comments added by the faculty:

• The courses are helpful even to the weakest among the students. Even the one student who did not complete the Mathematics course benefited, and should not have been kept out. He has potential.
• The writing fellows were a huge help in the History course.

Suggestions for potential improvements:

• Several students said that the dorm rooms were so hot at night that they were constantly sleep-deprived. Window air conditioners would sound like a fairly inexpensive but significant improvement.
• Four students have been chosen as peer mentors during summer of 2013. It appears that more would be willing and eager to serve as peer mentors, if there were funding for more. If four peer mentors are sufficient during the summer, perhaps some others could serve as peer mentors for the students in the program during the academic year.
• Even though the students had noticed that they were taught by two of the best teachers Tufts has to offer, it was suggested that this fact could be emphasized in the admission letter.
• There appeared to be consensus, among students but also in the admissions office, that the admission letter needed to be phrased more carefully: It has to be clear that this is a bridge program, not a remedial one. Most importantly, the students said that the letter should make clear why they specifically were selected for this program. The students also mentioned that the admission letter said that their admission was “contingent upon” completion of the BLAST program, and they did not know what exactly that meant.

[The admission letter was in fact re-phrased this year, and now explains why these particular students are being asked to join the program. Much of the last point has therefore become moot. The admission letter does still contain the phrase “contingent upon”, and at least some of the student felt that that ought to be explained in the letter.]

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Christoph Börgers
Professor of Mathematics

cc: Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee, and
Robert Mack, John Barker, David Proctor, Kim Ruane, Zachary Faubion, Leah Knobler, Ikenna Acholonu, Kevin Buckles.