To think strategically about the future of the School of Arts and Sciences represents a significant challenge and a heavy responsibility. As the country and the world are involved in discussions about the nature, value, and prospects of higher education, and as Tufts University is considering its identity, structure, and the relationship of its constituent schools, that challenge is even greater. We, therefore, begin our report with a statement of the principles underlying the vision for the School of Arts and Sciences – principles that serve as the bedrock on which our strategic planning rests.

The most basic is also the simplest: Arts and Sciences consists of faculty, students, and staff who collectively work to preserve, develop, and refine our ways of thinking, knowing, and doing. The school exists to support those endeavors through practices that respect the educational enterprise and the legitimate stake in it variously held by faculty, students, and staff. Tufts is rightly proud of its long history of shared governance rooted in an awareness that decisions affecting such wide-ranging issues as admissions, student life, and co-curricular activities neither can nor should be separated from the academic mission of the school. Insofar as they affect Arts and Sciences, we believe that these areas should come under its purview.

In planning for the future we maintain our belief that the school must preserve what is most valuable from the past. The core value we affirm is a respect for community and for treating all members of the Arts and Sciences community—faculty, students, and staff alike—as persons who must have a genuine voice in the decisions that affect them. This report follows months of conversations with representatives from across the school, and we firmly believe that in this it reflects how the school—and the university—must continue to operate: with transparency, open and efficacious conversation, and a recognition that decision-making processes that fail to respect our tradition of shared governance not only do a disservice to the institution but also threaten its future. We look upon this report as an opportunity to reaffirm that tradition and thereby strengthen the foundation of this essential part of Tufts.

Introduction

The School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University is a community of teachers, students, researchers, artists, scholars, practitioners, and staff members devoted to excellence in the discovery, preservation, dissemination, creation, and application of knowledge, ideas, and works of art. It is pleased to be supported in its mission by approximately sixty thousand alumni.

Fundamental to the identity of Arts and Sciences is its ability to pursue, in ways both dynamic and complementary, a two-fold commitment: to the education of undergraduate students in the liberal arts and to an intensive research environment that includes graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in professional and academic programs. This combination of education and research allows both undergraduate and graduate students to extend the frontiers of intellectual discovery and to enlarge their capacity for artistic creation. The school itself rests on the fundamental belief that undergraduate education and the training of graduate and professional students work in concert to produce graduates at all levels whose commitment to and participation in the creation of knowledge and art fosters the
qualities and characteristics necessary for professional and personal success. Among those qualities and characteristics are: creative and critical thinking; resilience, persistence, and adaptability; independence and the ability to work with others; effective communication skills; insight into the diversity of human experience and the various perspectives from which problems can be approached; a passionate investment in a particular field; and a driving intellectual curiosity.

The School of Arts and Sciences is justifiably proud of its members who embody Tufts’ signature commitment to engaged citizenship by undertaking to have a positive impact on their communities, however understood, and who endeavor to solve the most pressing societal problems through collective or individual action, whether that action be political, scientific, organizational, pedagogical, humanitarian, or artistic.

The School of Arts and Sciences takes equal pride, with equal justification, in its members pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself. Discoveries or intellectual advances may bear fruit in unexpected ways and both the pursuit and transmission of knowledge and artistic creation encapsulate something important about the university as simultaneously the archive and incubator of human resourcefulness.

The School of Arts and Sciences, therefore, embraces these various roles in society as both its responsibility and its privilege. This document is intended to review the state of the school and to lay out its animating vision.

The authors are intensely aware of the many challenges that face higher education and intend to make the case for enhancing our already vibrant intellectual community, both in Medford and beyond, at a moment when brick and mortar institutions are widely said to be under threat on a variety of fronts: from distance learning, changing economic models, shifting demographics among college-age students, and an increasing focus on vocational preparation in place of education in the liberal arts.

This document makes the case for a liberal arts education in which the arts and humanities figure as prominently as the sciences and social sciences. It articulates the continuing importance for our students of the broadest cultural formation at a moment when commentators on higher education say that the humanities are in crisis and when many see education as a way to a job instead of as a preparation for life. It insists that the goal of the academy is to shape future citizens of the world, not merely future employees. It is this approach to education that makes Arts and Sciences graduates so successful in their professions and so much in demand by employers.¹ They have learned how to think, to innovate, to imagine, to evaluate, and to produce.

¹ A report released in January 2014 from the American Association of Colleges and Universities found that students who had received a liberal arts education ultimately had more professional success and higher earnings than those who received professional degrees as undergraduates. See [http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2014/liberalartsreport.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2014/liberalartsreport.cfm). For a trenchant response to this report that welcomes its findings but also argues that the value of such an education cannot be adequately measured merely in economic terms, see Scott Samuelson, “Would You Hire Socrates?,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 March 2014, A11.
Our fundamental enterprise is to create a diverse, stimulating, and inclusive intellectual community that not only furnishes its graduates with the knowledge and skills required to become leaders in their fields but also equips them to pursue a lifetime of learning and creativity.

Prior Strategic Planning Exercises

This strategic planning exercise should be understood as building upon previous planning efforts. These earlier endeavors have made a difference. The Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience articulated a vision of the ideal Tufts education, one that was important to our accreditors as they sought evidence of purposeful academic planning and assessment. The task force also led to many improvements on campus, including a new system for advising that enhanced “continuity of care,” a new library café, the summer scholars program, a fund for unpaid internships in public service and government, a major lecture series of intellectual figures, and a much improved commencement, among other things (see Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience 2003; final report on implementation, 2009).

Similarly, the last strategic planning exercise of Arts and Sciences in 2005 laid out a vision for significant growth. Major accomplishments of the last strategic plan include: the humanities center, a vibrant mentoring program for junior faculty, regular external reviews across all departments in the school, a thorough review of interdisciplinary programs, health insurance for graduate students, and a publication fund for faculty. The plan’s ambitious goal of the expansion of full-time faculty by sixty additional lines, as a way to support our aspirations to offer a fine liberal education embedded in a larger research institution, has been met. Not everything envisioned by that committee has come to be, but there have been a striking number of successes.

Accordingly, we hope that this strategic plan, developed under the aegis of the University’s T10 Strategic Plan, will guide the school as effectively as these two prior exercises.

Themes and Proposals

We intend this strategic plan to serve as a blueprint for the future of Arts and Sciences. The planning process was conducted by faculty and student representatives together with representatives of the school’s administration. It has been informed by a wide-ranging gathering of information, the sharing of nascent ideas with the community, and feedback on those ideas from the community. Implementation of the plan does not just belong to the administration, but to the entire community of Arts and Sciences. While there are many modest and tangible recommendations in these pages, there are some grander ideas and themes that follow in our discussion of three themes: community and climate; academics, curriculum, and pedagogy; and research and scholarship. We summarize them here so that they will inform a reading of this document.

First, it is clear to us that the thrust of new resource allocations in upcoming years should be toward the improvement of facilities. During President Bacow’s administration the major investments of the university were in students, staff, and faculty. Tufts has greatly benefited from the approach that was taken at that time. Notably, in Arts and Sciences, we added sixty full-time lines to our faculty. We would not want to see retrenchment from these gains in faculty, but we recognize that we cannot do
everything all at once. The next major gains should be in infrastructure—the building of new spaces to accommodate our ambitions as well as repurposing and renovating older structures to meet the demands of a contemporary university.

Second, it is essential that we continue to invest in our students. As the cost of a college education climbs, our values demand that we continually strive to serve a broader swath of society. The key to meeting this goal is providing financial support to undergraduates and graduate students. Many universities have abandoned the idea of “full need” undergraduate financial aid policies. We have not, and should not, do the same even though our approach is costly to maintain. Fortunately, financial aid resonates with many of our alumni. We not only wish to articulate its importance to maintaining our identity as a school but also to partner with the university in its advancement effort on behalf of building additional resources.

Third, improving graduate programs should be among the highest priorities of the school. To this point, the undergraduate program has been the centerpiece of the academic reputation of Arts and Sciences. Our undergraduate student body is filled with enormous talent and our faculty members clearly appreciate the challenge and excitement of teaching very strong undergraduates. Our graduate programs are less selective and of uneven quality. Arts and Sciences needs to focus more resources on graduate student aid and programming so that Tufts can compete with other major research institutions for the best talent. It is clear that improving the graduate programs is central to the research mission of the school, but we also encourage the community to ensure that graduate education continues to complement the commitment of Arts and Sciences to outstanding undergraduate education.

**Community and Climate**

“Education is all a matter of Building Bridges.” Ralph Ellison

**An Intellectual Community**

First and foremost, Arts and Sciences is an intellectual community in which all of its members—faculty, staff, and students alike—pursue the life of the mind. The intellectual community we strive to embody both produces and is supported by a campus climate that is inclusive and endeavors to support all of its members in exploring new undertakings, assuming new responsibilities and challenges, and expanding the range of their competencies. Enhancements of the intellectual community on campus should, whenever possible, take advantage of Tufts’ identity both as an elite institution for undergraduate students pursuing a liberal arts education and as a rigorous graduate school that houses both academic and professional programs.

The health and success of our intellectual community are built upon the dedication and tireless efforts of the school’s outstanding staff. That support depends on close knowledge of the specific needs, practices, and priorities of the people and units being served. Even as we seek greater efficiency, it is essential that staff be treated as valued and respected colleagues and that we not lose the benefits of close and long-term professional relationships between staff members and the faculty, students, and administrators who rely on them.
Composition of the Community and Climate

The intellectual community of Arts and Sciences must be as diverse as possible in order to maximize the experience that Tufts can offer its members. The President’s Council on Diversity has recently completed a large-scale, in-depth study of the many dimensions of diversity at Tufts. We support the council’s various findings and recommendations as they relate to faculty, staff, and students. As a general principle, we believe that diversity should characterize all parts of the student body and not be confined to discrete pockets (e.g., undergraduate rather than graduate programs, social sciences or humanities rather than science departments).

Because more than two-thirds of each undergraduate applicant pool applies for need-based aid, continued excellence in undergraduate quality demands expanded endowment resources for need-based financial aid. We are proud to highlight Tufts’ status as one of a diminishing number of institutions that meets the full, demonstrated need of each student we accept and enroll—a resource-intensive commitment we honor for four years—and we call for a reconfirmation of that commitment to access for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and the dedication of additional resources to sustain our policy on need-blind aid. We support an expansion of the percentage of need-based grant recipients to at least 40 percent of each first-year class. To accomplish this, a concurrent commitment to maintain at least 10 percent of each class from first-generation college-bound backgrounds will require at least $400 million in additional endowment resources.

A healthy campus climate requires that we be ever mindful of who we are and who we wish to be. Given projected changes in the demographics of the northeastern United States, we recommend the creation of a task force in which faculty and administrators in Arts and Sciences work in concert with central administration to examine the size and composition of the undergraduate and graduate student bodies, to assess the global and socioeconomic diversity of the campus, and to forge a plan for the future demographic make-up of our student body. In short, the task force should ask “Where do we want to recruit, whom do we want to teach, and whom do we want to enroll?” There is a clear opportunity for Arts and Sciences to enhance its visibility in the fast-growing markets of the West Coast, Southwest, Asia and Latin America. In attracting these prospective students to our undergraduate and graduate programs, Tufts has an opportunity to develop ties to new populations of students who will expand and enhance the intellectual and social atmosphere on campus. In so doing, there is an opportunity both to enhance campus climate by showcasing perspectives drawn from around the globe and to continue to reinforce our international signature. (See Academics, Curriculum, and Pedagogy.) The creation of a discrete endowment to support need-based aid for foreign citizens—undergraduates as well as graduate students—will support this objective.

Bringing students from diverse backgrounds to campus is not enough; we must also help to ensure that all students thrive as participants in the intellectual life of the community once they arrive. To that end, we regard the creation of the Bridge to Liberal Arts Success at Tufts (BLAST) as an important and positive initiative. We call for it to be sustained through continued funding so it can provide support to incoming undergraduates who are the first in their families to attend college or who attended under-resourced high schools. In addition, we propose that a multi-year assessment of the program
be implemented to gauge its efficacy in helping these students achieve academic success and to provide data for a subsequent review of the program that would consider ways of enhancing it. (See Academics, Curriculum, and Pedagogy for additional proposals in this area.)

Our graduate student population is less diverse than our undergraduate population. The expanded outreach and recruitment efforts for graduate students, including the development of an enhanced web presence for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the creation of an Office of Graduate Admissions, will no doubt help to address this challenge. In addition to the general increase in graduate student support recommended elsewhere in this document, we call for increased financial resources necessary to increase merit and need-based grant aid to recruit a diverse graduate student population. (For additional discussion and proposals, see Scholarship and Research below.)

Tufts must maintain and improve its web-based infrastructure for recruitment as well as for student services at the undergraduate and the graduate levels. We need to continue to develop the digital presence of Arts and Sciences in various on-line and social media channels. An ability to convey to an international audience the achievements of our students and faculty and the myriad opportunities that this institution provides is now an essential element in recruiting students and faculty alike. Those same outlets can serve to keep the community informed about and engaged in the institution. Thus, attention to and investment in our digital footprint can enhance the campus climate by opening channels of communication among faculty, students, alumni, parents, and prospective students.

A Residential Community

For its undergraduate students in their first and second years in particular, the Medford campus is also a residential community, where they sleep, dine, receive medical attention and counseling, socialize, and participate in over 200 student organizations. When students from different backgrounds live together in a residence hall, they have numerous opportunities to interact as thinkers, whether that interaction occurs as a result of a sponsored talk, a social event, or a chance conversation. The distinctions between the social and the academic dissolve in ways that promote a sense of a community. The co-curricular activities and organizations teach students important life skills as they not only participate, but also found, organize, promote, and lead them. We should embrace the learning that goes on in these activities and redouble our efforts to bring the learning that goes on in the classrooms, laboratories, and practice spaces into the broader campus community (an express objective of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience). Finding ways to integrate curricular and co-curricular activities at Tufts more successfully should be a priority over the next decade. We strongly believe that matters related to admissions, residential experience, co-curricular engagement, and student life are intimately bound up with the academic development of students in Arts and Sciences.

The development of a strong undergraduate community at Tufts is hampered by the fact that approximately 48 percent of juniors study off campus for one or both semesters, and that, when they return as seniors, fewer than 20 percent live in campus housing. For many undergraduates, their involvement in campus life ends with their sophomore year. In addition, there are significant challenges
in drawing the graduate students, who are housed off-campus and who currently find their intellectual life largely in their distinct departments and programs, into the life of the campus.

**We propose a new residence hall that will be designed for both advanced undergraduate and graduate students.** Such a residence hall would address the needs facing both populations, but its most compelling case, we believe, rests on the type of intellectual community it could help the school to build.

International graduate students in particular would benefit from a residence in which they could live for one academic year before they navigate the rental market in a new country. Moreover, the difficulties of navigating the private rental market in the area surrounding the campus for all students will become more acute when the new MBTA stop becomes a reality. We anticipate that the area around this new commuter hub will become more attractive, increasing the value of the property and driving up rent.

This new residence hall will bring a larger percentage of the senior class back to campus, incorporate some graduate students into the residential population, and allow both groups to benefit from the presence of the other. In this way, Arts and Sciences would be making a powerful statement that graduate students are an essential part of campus life.

**Additional Spaces on Campus**

Individuals with disabilities are valued members of our community and we wish to make the campus environment as accessible as possible to all. We support the employment of Universal Design concepts throughout the campus as the university continues to improve accessibility for all.

There is a dearth of appealing spaces on campus in which students, faculty, and staff can congregate for conversation. Moreover, since the closure of the faculty dining hall in the Chase Center, the faculty has had fewer opportunities to interact outside individual departments and programs. This seriously impedes the establishment of a vibrant intellectual community. **We propose that all new buildings and major renovations offer gathering spaces and lounges as well as options for food and drink.**

Undergraduate and graduate leaders have been pursuing the possibility of a pub on campus, which would serve undergraduate and graduate students who are 21 and older, as well as staff and faculty. Students who support its construction note that a pub would address the lack of a campus community for seniors who live off campus. They also note that it would attract graduate students onto campus in the evenings and provide a place for students, faculty, and staff from all three schools—Engineering, Fletcher, and Arts and Sciences—on the Medford campus to interact. This approach is fully compatible with our intention to promote a more vital campus community.

**We recommend that Arts and Sciences work with operations and campus planning to initiate a phased refurbishing of the current spaces on campus with a view toward creating more attractive and welcoming spaces in academic, residential, and athletic buildings.** As the central administration renovates and remodels, the administration of Arts and Sciences as well as appropriate faculty
committees should be consulted to ensure that the new spaces are appropriate for their occupants and as user friendly as possible.

The Community beyond the Campus

We understand that one aspect of Tufts’ appeal is its location near Boston. We support efforts to make the cultural life of Boston available to all students. (See the Boston drop-down menu on TuftsLife.com for Cultural Ticket to Boston). We also support the student government’s effort to discount MBTA transportation to all undergraduate and graduate students.

We recognize that faculty, students, and staff have active commitments to other communities outside of Tufts. Helping employees and students navigate challenges related to work-life balance is an important piece of recruiting and retaining top faculty, staff, and graduate students. We applaud the progress that has been made on these issues and support the continuing work of the AS&E Committee on Faculty Work/Life.

As one of the goals of Tufts is to create life-long learners, we recommend that the school redouble its efforts to keep track of alumni and to keep them engaged in and informed about the intellectual life of Tufts. Alumni, both from the undergraduate and graduate programs in Arts and Sciences, should be inspired, based on their shared educational experiences, to serve, to donate, and to mentor. This sense of appreciation and commitment to the long-term excellence of this institution should be cultivated in our current students—that is, in our future alumni.

Postscript

As our discussion and our recommendations in this section illustrate, we regard admissions, financial aid, student life, and student affairs to be of collective concern to the school—to its faculty and its administrators alike. Throughout this project, the strategic planning group has taken on questions of who our students are, where they come from, how they can best contribute to the community, and how their experience in the classroom dovetails with their experience outside the classroom. These are all questions that must be answered within the school. There are benefits to be gained from a university-wide perspective and officials from the various schools should have opportunities to share best practices. Arts and Sciences, however, is the only school delivering a residential liberal arts undergraduate education, and we have distinct answers to our distinct questions. We hope that the provost’s recent initiative to reorganize Arts, Sciences, and Engineering will take our strong collective opinion into consideration.

Research and Scholarship

“The challenge for Tufts over the next decades will be to balance the values of outstanding teaching, the values that got us part of the way to where we are, with those of significant research, which got us the rest of the way.” – Sol Gittleman
The School of Arts and Sciences regards research and scholarship carried out by faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and visiting scholars, artists, and experts in their fields, as central to its multiple missions of transformative education, the pursuit of knowledge, and engaged citizenship. Over the past ten years Tufts has substantially enhanced its research profile through the addition of outstanding faculty members and increased resources, including the establishment of individual faculty research accounts, improved administrative support for sponsored research, and the Summer Scholars program. During the next decade we need to consolidate these gains; this will mean, among other things, securing reliable funding for existing programs, increasing the number of endowed chairs across departments, and enhancing the school’s infrastructure to support a world-renowned research environment. In addition to these efforts at consolidation, we also must make strategic investments and decisions to reinforce areas in need of support and respond wisely to an evolving intellectual environment.

Enriching the Research Environment

In many fields excellence in research and in graduate education are inextricably linked. Graduate education is an area in which relatively modest resources can leverage much larger improvements in scholarship and, in some fields, competitiveness for external funding, both by attracting a stronger pool of students and by providing them with the support they need to be successful and productive researchers. Areas of priority include: fellowships for summer support of graduate students; one year of guaranteed research support for all doctoral students; named fellowships for a range of purposes, including masters as well as doctoral students; and improved career development and placement services for graduate students and postdocs, for both academic and nonacademic careers.

Strengthening the graduate programs in Arts and Sciences also contributes to a stronger and richer undergraduate research experience. In many disciplines research programs are built on a three-legged stool with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates each serving to support and reinforce one another. Undergraduates work as lab assistants or as research assistants to graduate students on their doctoral dissertations; graduate students serve as teaching assistants in undergraduate classes; and both groups of students interact at lectures and departmental events that enrich the intellectual community on campus. Done well, graduate and undergraduate education complement rather than compete with each other. Tufts should take the opportunity to invest in graduate education in a way that enhances the education of all students in Arts and Sciences. Arts and Sciences and Engineering should expand the Summer Scholars program to include teams comprising both graduate and undergraduate researchers, and provision should be made to allow the participation of graduate students on senior honors thesis committees for departments where this is appropriate.

Researchers engaged in externally sponsored projects need to be supported by an effective infrastructure of pre- and post-award administration with a mission of facilitating the research enterprise at Tufts while ensuring compliance with the growing body of complex rules and regulations. In recent years that support structure has lagged behind the evolving needs of researchers in Arts and Sciences, leading to inefficiency, missed opportunities, frustration, and risk of penalties. We welcome recent steps to improve research administration in Arts and Sciences, but continued effort and
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investment are needed to ensure that all faculty members who have or seek external funding are fully supported throughout the process.

The science facilities on the Medford campus have been outdated for quite some time. The new building at 574 Boston Avenue and the new Science and Engineering Center are exciting projects that we hope will address our needs for modern, highly functioning, environmentally sound research and teaching space for decades to come. Of course, the planning of these buildings should balance the needs of the faculty who will populate these buildings with the desire for efficient, flexible space.

Lastly, we note that modern research takes place within a global community of scholars. Just as Tufts benefits greatly from its reputation as a national and international school at the undergraduate level, the school’s intellectual climate, research enterprise, and reputation are enhanced when established researchers as well as those in training come to Tufts either for short visits or for longer-term study and collaboration. The lack of housing poses a major obstacle to realizing such exchanges, especially for international students and visitors. Within the larger context of expanding and improving housing options on and near campus, we recommend that opportunities be sought to provide suitable space for both short-term (a few days to a few weeks) and longer-term (a semester or more) housing for this important population. A guesthouse on campus, perhaps in a wood-frame building, also might allow us to accommodate job candidates and other campus visitors, saving significant funds that Arts and Sciences as well as the School of Engineering are presently spending on hotels.

Keeping the Universe in University

Both within and outside the walls of Tufts there has been a strong and welcome emphasis on research and education in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and a valuable effort to increase the diversity of the students prepared to explore them. Sometimes, however, this emphasis has been accompanied by a tendency to question the value of the arts and humanities and to discourage students from majoring in these allegedly “impractical” fields.

We strongly reject this way of conceiving the university in the 21st century. A core belief underlying this Strategic Plan is the important role that a liberal arts education plays both at Tufts and in the wider world. To that end we reaffirm the mission of Arts and Sciences to cultivate excellence in education, research, scholarship, and artistic creativity across the fields of human intellectual inquiry, encompassing the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics. In our efforts to enhance research and scholarship in the coming years, we must ensure that all of these areas of inquiry are supported. We call upon our leadership, particularly the president, to advocate forcefully for the value of the liberal arts to our students and to society.

Since the last strategic plan we have seen the development of much-needed facilities for the sciences as well as the renovation of Packard Hall; the institution of semester leaves for longer-term associate professors in the social sciences, humanities and arts; and the creation of the Center for the Humanities at Tufts (CHAT), among other initiatives. Ensuring the continued success of CHAT through

Topic for Discussion:
In planning campus development, is it desirable to try to locate related departments and programs in proximity (e.g., an “arts corridor” along Talbot Ave., an “international cluster” near Packard Ave.)?
a dedicated endowment should be a priority in the coming years. We also need to continue to invest in the human resources of our faculty. Allocating funds to top off prestigious but often underfunded external fellowships is one important way to promote success in the humanities and social sciences. Given our commitment to the teacher-scholar model for tenure-stream faculty, it is also critical to develop flexible mechanisms for balancing the demands of research, teaching, and service. We endorse the study of a workload policy that takes into account important and time-consuming activities such as directing theses and dissertations, serving in leadership roles, and teaching courses with large enrollments.

Facilities improvements for the social sciences, humanities, and arts are long overdue. We look forward to the renovation of Eaton Hall, the repurposing of Barnum Hall, and the development of new studio art space. It is important that planning for them be done well, as these spaces and buildings have the potential to offer office space for our overcrowded departments and interdisciplinary programs, new classrooms, and much needed multi-purpose spaces for conferences, meetings, and admissions programming.

Strategic Planning in an Evolving Intellectual Landscape

Every university must be able to adapt to a changing environment of ideas, student interests, resources, and societal needs and demands, while remaining true to its central values and mission. Over time, fields of inquiry wax and wane in priority and new fields emerge. In many cases new and exciting interdisciplinary intellectual arenas arise at the interfaces between traditional fields, and Arts and Sciences must be nimble enough to nurture scholarship and education in those areas. Interdisciplinarity, however, is one means to the goal of excellence, not an end in itself.

Those developments are most easily managed during periods of growth, and the changes in Tufts’ intellectual profile over the past decade have been facilitated by the addition of some sixty full-time faculty lines, roughly two-thirds of them tenure track. Even as resource constraints dictate that over the next ten years we can anticipate little or no growth in overall faculty numbers, we must not relinquish the hard-won gains of the last decade. With approximately one-third of the tenured and tenure-track faculty over the age of 60, however, anticipated retirements offer the opportunity to evolve in response to changes in intellectual and educational priorities. That evolution should be guided by the regular reviews of departments and programs initiated as a result of the last strategic plan. Future reviews should include an explicit ten-year outlook including both opportunities for and consequences of growth and contraction in particular areas as well as potential synergies with other fields. We also need to continue the ongoing conversation about modes of hiring for faculty who do not fit into traditional academic categories, such as artists and practitioners and those with degrees or scholarship in interdisciplinary fields. This could include expanded use of the title “Professor of the Practice” and other titles and positions that may need to be developed.

Academics, Curriculum, and Pedagogy

“The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.” Robert Maynard Hutchins
The School of Arts and Sciences is proud of the education it provides to its students. Our national and international reputation, strong and ever-improving applicant pool, high retention and graduation rates, and impressive measures of student satisfaction all support that pride. Rather than a balance between teaching and scholarship, we seek an integration in which faculty scholarship enriches the student experience by offering opportunities for intellectual transformation in the classroom and beyond (for example, by encouraging students to participate in faculty research or engaging in their own). Over the next ten years our academic programs will need to evolve to maintain our tradition of leadership and excellence in the face of several important trends: 1) changes in the composition, preparation, needs, and interests of our student population; 2) the impact of modern technology on citizenship, culture, and scholarship; 3) the rise and influence of cultures outside of western traditions; and 4) the growing body of research on effective pedagogy.

Faculty members own the curriculum both by right and by virtue of faculty composition and interest. We must review and modify our curricular offerings and requirements and invest in the human and physical resources to offer our students the transformative intellectual experiences that make a Tufts education extraordinary. It is critical that we provide a modern interpretation of what it means to have a liberal arts and science education. This requires a continuous evaluation of our curriculum that recognizes and anticipates the challenges presented by the emergence of new academic fields and transformations in the basic nature of society. As just one example, computers and technology have revolutionized and transformed the world and the academic pursuit of knowledge. Technological literacy across all fields of inquiry will be a requirement in the future. One challenge to the faculty is to respond with initiatives that advance our curriculum and our scholarship within this digital context. We need to prepare our students to be sophisticated digital citizens.

It is also important to recognize that curricular changes are driven in part by student demand and interest. Between a constantly evolving faculty and changing student interests, our curriculum will change and we can expect new majors, minors, graduate degrees, and certificates to be offered as new areas of inquiry develop. We also need to recognize that we cannot be everything to everyone. Within the framework of maintaining a world-class program offering a full experience of the liberal arts and sciences, we may need to prioritize certain areas of faculty strength in response to changes in the intellectual landscape. As the world changes, so should our curriculum.

Commitment to Improved Teaching and Learning Infrastructure

A university of Tufts’ caliber requires an absolutely first-class digital infrastructure that flexibly and seamlessly works with the different hardware platforms that faculty, students, and staff commonly use. By infrastructure we mean not only the learning and teaching spaces in the school—the classrooms, teaching laboratories, library spaces, and Academic Resource Center—but also the support systems that allow the faculty to teach and advise students more effectively. While our lecture halls and teaching laboratories have improved since the last strategic plan, classrooms designed to encourage more effective faculty-student and student-student interactions are still not the norm. As old buildings are refurbished and new buildings are planned and constructed, we encourage the continued updating of our teaching spaces with the most advanced technology and with the flexibility to accommodate a
range of approaches to teaching and learning. Our concern with accessibility makes this updating all the more imperative. Classrooms should have sound systems that provide equal distribution and clarity within the classroom space as well as assistive technology (such as SMART boards and similar real-time platforms) that allow students with low-vision access to presentation materials without the need for special arrangements.

Infrastructure also includes software such as our learning management system (TRUNK), student information system (iSIS), and new on-line student evaluation process. The entire community of Arts and Sciences has high expectations in this domain. We encourage continued efforts to improve and update these teaching, learning, administrative, and advising systems so that they are efficient, easy-to-use, interconnected and ADA-compliant.

Finally, Tisch Library is an important intellectual center on the Medford campus. As we move towards a digitized society, a newly envisioned library that reflects both the increasingly collaborative nature of student learning activities as well as the exponential growth of information in digital form will be critical to achieving our scholarly and educational goals. Library staff and administrators in Arts and Sciences are considering how the library space can be revitalized to enhance education and research. To translate an emerging vision of a twenty-first century university library into a reality will require financial resources that should be an important element of the upcoming capital campaign.

Examining Undergraduate Requirements

The foundation and distribution requirements for the undergraduate degrees in Arts and Sciences should reflect the values and priorities of the school and its faculty. Our present requirements require students to master certain skills, such as writing and a foreign language that are critical to any well-educated person. They further require students to encounter an array of disciplines and methodologies, a reflection of our firm commitment to the importance of the liberal arts, and our belief in forming well-rounded individuals equipped to think critically and creatively.

It has been decades since the faculty has undertaken a comprehensive review of our undergraduate requirements. Our recent accreditation review and the increasingly stronger skills and abilities of our incoming students each present challenges to our current requirement structure. Together with the Educational Policy Committee, we endorse a faculty-led comprehensive examination of the foundation and distribution requirements.

Building on our International Signature

Tufts is synonymous, throughout the United States and around the world, with international education. Arts and Sciences contributes to this profile with an international student body and faculty; a curriculum that emphasizes the importance of the languages, arts, literature, history, and religions of other cultures; international research collaborations; and nationally-recognized study abroad programs. More
than 20 percent of the Arts and Sciences graduating class in a given year majors in International Relations. For decades, Tufts undergraduate students have had the opportunity to study at the Tufts European Center in Talloires, France; in ten Tufts programs of study abroad; and in over forty-five countries around the world through hundreds of approved non-Tufts programs. It makes strategic sense to build upon this strength. As Arts and Sciences plans for the coming decade and beyond, it will be important to supplement the on-going review of existing programs—on academic and extra-curricular matters—with an assessment of the criteria for Tufts curricular programming around the world.

Our Tufts study abroad programs are extraordinary educational immersion programs rivaled by few programs in the United States. It is worth asking whether there is an opportunity here to build upon their stellar reputation. Marketing our programs and opening places for students from other universities could be a valuable new source of revenue for Arts and Sciences.

Finally, our study abroad programs (whether Tufts owned or Tufts approved) are based almost entirely on linguistic and cultural immersion. While there are great benefits to such immersion, we see opportunities in global educational programming built around thematic rather than language foundations. One could imagine, for example, intellectually challenging and rigorous programs centered on the study of global health, climate change, or art and architecture that places students in different parts of the world—perhaps several places over the course of a semester or year—to study important global issues. We encourage the Committee on Foreign Programs to examine this issue to see if this alternative way of thinking about non-Tufts study abroad should be pursued as well.

Financial aid considerations are significant factors as students consider study abroad. Although Tufts fares much better than most universities in providing opportunities for low-income and underrepresented students to study abroad, any plans to enhance opportunities for foreign study will need to ensure that these opportunities continue to be available to all Tufts students, regardless of family income and resources.

Supporting Pedagogy and Career Development

Improving the quality of teaching in the school should continue to be a priority. We support the goal of the T10 Strategic Plan to add resources to teacher training via Teaching and Learning Engagements (TALEs). This program will enable our faculty to share best practices, to teach more effectively with technology, and to keep their pedagogy fresh.

The starting date for new faculty contracts in Arts and Sciences has long been September 1. We recommend that the starting date for contracts for all new full-time faculty members be July 1. This change would allow Arts and Sciences to provide orientation and pedagogical training to our new colleagues during the summer when they are planning their first courses.

We further recommend that the Campus Planning and Development Committee include teaching and learning specialists from Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) or elsewhere as...
ex-officio members. This sends the important signal that campus space planning decisions should be informed not only by faculty and staff who are intimately involved in day-to-day teaching but also by scholars who can contribute to a better understanding of new directions in pedagogy.

In providing teaching training for advanced graduate students pursuing academic careers, the Graduate Institute for Teaching (GIFT) has been such an extraordinary success that it has generated much more demand than we can meet. An increased focus and attention on professional and career development for our graduate programs and students is critical for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. We encourage greater investment in GIFT, thereby creating more available slots for graduate students. We further encourage comparable programs focused on the professional development of graduate student research skills and scholarship.

Concluding Remarks

Much of what we have called for requires significant resources. But for resources to be spent, they also must be raised. We could increase revenue via a larger undergraduate student body, improved grant infrastructure, better support for technology transfer, and new master’s degree and certificate programs. We must engage in creative thinking about how to bring other new revenue streams into the school in order to meet our myriad objectives. How do we take full advantage of our intellectual resources and our physical plant to raise funds for the university? This will continue to be a challenge for the school—an exciting challenge that we hope will be welcomed.

We also call attention to the implementation of this plan. The key to the success of this document rests in how it informs the future. We encourage the administration to report back regularly on progress made in implementation. The experience of drafting this plan has been time-consuming, demanding, and sometimes contentious, but has also been very satisfying. We all care deeply about this institution and we look forward to what is in store for Tufts University and the School of Arts and Sciences.