Standing Charges:

1. Maintain interest in and awareness of all policies, procedures, programs, and goals that affect the academic life of the University.

2. Study and advise the Faculty Senate on any request concerning academic matters forwarded by the Student House of Representatives.

3. In conjunction with the University Library Committee, monitor the status of library resources.

4. Meet with the Student House of representatives’ Academic Excellence Committee at least annually in order to monitor issues of concern for University students.

5. In conjunction with the Office of Admissions, monitor how the University promotes its academic mission.

Specific Charges:

1. [In conjunction with the Undergraduate Admissions and Retention Committee] Continue to study perceptions of TCU’s academic program among prospective and incoming students, and how these perceptions may be affecting

   • the size and composition of TCU’s undergraduate applicant pool
   • the academic expectations of incoming students
   • the academic culture among TCU students in general

2. In conjunction with the Student House of Representatives (including the Integrity Council), encourage serious discussion of student-led initiatives to promote academic integrity at TCU.

3. In conjunction with the TCU Intercollegiate Athletics Committee, explore how TCU might better promote academic excellence among its student athletes.
Most of the efforts of the Academic Excellence Committee this year have focused on the academic life at TCU. With the hiring of a new Chancellor this year and new Provost next year and with the “town hall” meetings going on this year, the time seems ideal to examine the academic atmosphere at TCU. Before presenting our suggestions, we begin with a quick summary of work on the Committee’s other charges.

1. We met with Katie Gordon, Chair of the Integrity Council, who presented her committee’s draft of an Honor Code. Members of the Academic Excellence Committee made some comments and await further progress by the Integrity Council.

2. We have received this year’s recruitment materials from the Office of Admissions. We view them as better representing the academic side of the university. We plan a more in depth review for our April meeting, unless it is supplanted by more pressing items. We have suggested to the Undergraduate Admissions and Retention Committee that they take an active role in reviewing these materials.

3. We monitored meetings of the Intercollegiate Athletics Committee. It appears that some of the problems with advising of athletes have been resolved. We also supported the representation of TCU in Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), although this was not an AEC initiative.
The Academic Excellence Committee of the Faculty Senate investigated ways to promote more of an academic atmosphere at TCU. We met with William Koehler, Provost; Bob Lusch, Dean of the Neeley School of Business; Katie Gordon, Chair of the Integrity Council; Barbara Herman, Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of Student Development; and the Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association. We collect our recommendations within two main themes: enhancing the atmosphere of academic achievement within our student body and increasing the overall level of scholarship across the faculty.

**Academics and the Student Body**

Most of our student-oriented suggestions center on freshmen, whose first experiences set the stage for their entire undergraduate experience. We want students to view themselves as a part of a vibrant academic community.

- Admissions materials and presentations should *always* highlight academics. Preliminary drafts of Admissions materials should be reviewed by the Undergraduate Admissions and Retention Committee and the Academic Excellence Committee. More generally, academics should be part of the message whenever TCU communicates with its students and with those outside of the TCU community.

- Continue current efforts that have succeeded in increasing the diversity of the student body.

- Compete financially for truly outstanding students.

- Increase efforts at Orientation to include an academic experience. The common book reading and discussion is a good idea. It needs more faculty support and, perhaps, more administrative support for faculty participation. (This has been suggested in a meeting of AddRan College faculty as well.)

- Promote freshman enrollment in small classes, including freshman seminars. Administrators should not focus rigidly on credit hour production at the level of the individual instructor. Staff introductory courses with enthusiastic and effective full-time faculty.
• Defer Rush for fraternities and sororities to the spring semester. This would allow students to focus on academics at the start of their time at TCU and allow them to gain a greater perspective on all that TCU offers. Early Rush is one of several factors that contribute to isolating students from one another. Part of the reason for TCU’s lower retention rate, when compared to peer schools, may well be due to our early Rush.

• Begin a discussion on making Honors more accessible to the entire university. Much of its current focus is within the AddRan College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

• Adjunct faculty should be hired primarily for pedagogical rather than financial reasons.

• Encourage undergraduate participation in research, seminars, field experiences, service-based learning, and special lectures. Many of the most influential academic experiences take place outside of formal classes.

Scholarship and the Faculty

Our general conclusion is that the teacher-scholar model, if apt at all, has tilted toward the teaching side (with a numbing dose of service thrown in). Thus our suggestions below concern scholarship among the faculty.

• Provide greater support for research and creative activity. Additional money for travel and visiting speakers would have relatively minor impact on TCU’s budget. Though more expensive, internal grants for research should be increased; outside funding is nearly impossible to obtain in many fields. This includes support for publication costs in fields where these costs are typically subsidized by the author. Do what can be done to reduce teaching and service loads. The number of committees and faculty responsibilities in areas that have little to do with teaching or scholarship seem always on the rise. Try to abolish some of these committees and paperwork that is not truly necessary.

• Allow individual faculty more flexibility in course scheduling as long as departmental needs are met. For instance, an unbalanced load where the
faculty member teaches one more course than usual in the fall semester and one less in the spring should cause no inconvenience to a large department or, perhaps, to one with adjunct faculty. One could possibly even extend this to instead teaching a summer school course (without additional salary) as part one one’s regular duties. However, care would need to be taken here to ensure that TCU does not become a year round program for its students.

• Each department should work to establish its own areas of excellence. Our size precludes excellence in all areas.

• Make more of an effort to hire rising stars, whose best work is yet to come, for endowed chairs. A bit more risky than what seems to be our current strategy, but on average, the rewards will be far greater.

• Consider awarding immediate tenure when hiring faculty at a senior level. Once again, with greater risks, come potentially greater rewards.

• Compete, within reason, for our outstanding faculty members who receive offers from other institutions.

• Should an improved financial situation ever allow it, increase the frequency of sabbaticals.

For Further Study

• Do we as faculty demand enough of our students? We refer to both the amount of work expected in a class and the meaning of grades assigned to students. From conversations with Barbara Herman and from anecdotal sources, some of our best students don’t feel intellectually challenged in their first-year courses. The analysis of results from currently ongoing NSSE and FSSE surveys provides a natural start to a possible campus-wide dialogue.

• Explore decreasing the total number of hours required to graduate to 120. As is now the case, certain plans of study require more than the minimum number of hours. A fifteen-hour semester is considered a typical load at many universities. With increased, though perhaps misguided, emphasis on increasing the four-year graduation rates, this
could help a few more students graduate within four years. It could also marginally decrease class sizes or teaching loads. There was not sufficient committee discussion to establish whether there was any group consensus here. At the same time, it might be worthwhile to consider more drastic actions of typical student loads of four courses per semester and four-day class schedules. Our committee had differing opinions on this one, although discussion was again minimal.

**Dissemination**
Entire Document: Provost, Chancellor, SGA President, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Sections on admission to Admissions
Letter to entire faculty on common book
Peggy Watson on Honors
Leo Munson and Nowell Donovan, Vision in Action Committee