In response to our specific charge, How excellent are we and how do we improve academics? The Academic Excellence Committee of the Faculty Senate, after examining several sources that compare our academic reputation with those of similar and benchmarking universities, submits the following recommendations for improving the academic excellence at TCU.

The focus of these recommendations lies in four key areas: faculty issues, student issues, program issues and administration issues. Committee deliberations were guided with the absolute conviction that academic excellence is achieved within the dynamic bond between faculty and student in a learning environment thoroughly supported by the administration.

**Recommendations**

“Excellent schools have excellent faculty.”

We believe that faculty invested in the discovery and dissemination of new thought are the core of the academic experience. The Academic Excellence Committee therefore submits the following recommendations concerning Faculty issues.

- We recommend an increase in the number of faculty lines for the University to lessen the reliance on occasional faculty and improve TCU’s student/faculty ratio by aligning the University competitively with tier one institutions.

- We concur with the Senate Budget and Finance Committee and recommend that compensation levels for current faculty and staff be set at competitive levels to ensure that we retain and attract good people to work at TCU and ensure gender equity.

- We further recommend that the merit increase system serve as an incentive program that truly rewards individuals for exceptional merit and dedication to the University independent of an annual cost-of-living increase.

- We concur with the Chancellor that reasonable and thoughtful risk taking is essential to growth. Reasonable and thoughtful risk taking in regards to research and creative activity is imperative if we are to heighten TCU’s academic reputation on a national and international level. We highly recommend the allocation of stronger financial and staff resources to promote and support research and creative activity across the campus. Furthermore, if TCU is to compete in an international marketplace, greater resources must be allocated for travel to allow faculty to present their findings and heighten their involvement nationally and internationally, thereby increasing TCU’s national and international profile.

- We recommend instituting a comprehensive and continuous faculty development program to ensure that the faculty is offered the opportunity to develop their skills and talents to the fullest measure possible. The program should offer professional development opportunities including, but are not limited to:

  - Sabbaticals
  - Funding to attend professional meetings to explore new research opportunities
  - Funding to attend teaching effectiveness workshops and conferences
  - On-site workshops to assist faculty in writing grant proposals
  - On-site workshops to provide training for faculty to use technology
  - On-site workshops to enhance teaching effectiveness
  - Start-up funds for labs to support the teaching and research programs of new faculty
  - Teaching release time to develop new courses, new research avenues, new teaching technologies or new approaches to teaching, particularly of an interdisciplinary nature.
To achieve that end, we further recommend that the Center for Teaching Excellence be provided with the necessary funding, personnel and resources to assist the faculty in the improvement of teaching effectiveness and facilitate programs aimed at heightening the academic excellence of the University.

Finally, as no University or its faculty can be an island isolated from the world of new ideas and innovative thought, we recommend an increase in the number and caliber of visiting professorships, honor chairs and endowed chairs across the University. We believe that bringing individuals of national and international reputation to join with existing Faculty can enhance TCU’s academic reputation. The resulting exchange of ideas and collaboration on research and creative activities will heighten the students’ academic experience.

“Excellent schools attract and keep excellent students.”

We believe that students who are academically curious, enthusiastic of learning and active in their academic life are an asset to the University and enhance the academic experience for both fellow students and faculty alike. The Academic Excellence Committee therefore submits the following recommendations concerning student issues.

- We strongly recommend developing an active recruitment process aimed at attracting “quality” students whose SAT/ACT scores rise towards the upper percentile of our current SAT/ACT entrance standards and whose High School class ranking falls in the Top 10% of their graduating class. By attracting a greater number of students with higher SAT’s, the lower level of our SAT percentile range would be raised, heightening the quality of our students and raising our selectivity classification. Furthermore, by attracting a greater number of students whose High School class ranking falls in the top 10% of their graduating class we would further heighten the quality of our students and raise our selectivity classification.

- We strongly recommend greater support and resources (budgets, personnel, travel, “signing bonuses” etc.) to implement the recruitment process mentioned above.

- We strongly recommend the funding of more competitive financial aid packages to attract and retain quality students including those in under-represented populations.

- We strongly recommend redefining our advertising to attract quality students and promote academics as the centerpiece of the student experience (i.e.: It’s about You AND your Education; We’re here so you can explore your world; TCU - A place to open your mind and discover a brave new world! etc.)

“Excellent Schools have and continue to develop excellent programs of study that will challenge and educate excellent students.”

We believe that a student’s academic experience and the quality of the academic programs available directly effect student retention and the academic reputation of the University. The Academic Excellence Committee therefore submits the following recommendations concerning program issues.

- We strongly recommend revising the University undergraduate core to develop a more cohesive program of study that offers all the students a stronger Liberal Arts foundation through a series of common broad based interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary courses. For example, developing a common interdisciplinary natural science course that all students would take, rather than a series of natural science courses in specific disciplines taken randomly by students. (If this is to be the students’ only exploration in the sciences, histories, arts, languages, etc., what do we want them to walk away with from that exploration?)
· We recognize the significance of the Honors Program in nurturing and challenging our finest students. We strongly recommend greater funding and support for the Honors Program to allow for growth in the number of students and in the quality of their scholarship.

· We recommend the creation of a "Scholars Program" to nurture and challenge students who are motivated and of above-average ability but who are not quite qualified or who are not interested in participating in the Honors Program.

· We applaud TCU’s investment into international study programs and recommend continued support to allow more of our students to participate in this exceptional learning experience.

· We strongly recommend the continued development and investment into teaching technologies and distance education including the creation of a Center for Instructional Technology to assist faculty in developing the use of technology to enhance current courses and to develop distance learning courses.

· We support the Chancellor’s initiative to strengthen the Graduate and Doctorate programs and recommend greater support in both financial aid, stipends and support for research and creative activity.

Furthermore, we believe that an excellent school should have a well thought out first year experience. This time should encourage students to begin their university with a focus on academics and lifelong learning while being supplemented with various support activities to aid in the transition to the university environment. The Academic Excellence Committee therefore submits the following recommendations concerning the Undergraduate first year experience.

· We recommend the creation of a First Year College where all incoming non-transfer students would invest themselves into a common core of courses and designed experiences that would offer a uniform academic experience and aid the student in the transition to the university environment.

· We highly recommend developing a new advising/mentoring process that begins in the students’ first year and continues through their academic experience, possibly with students grouped in "circles of colleagues" with a junior or senior student or alumni as a mentoring leader and a faculty member as an advisor.

· We recommend expanding the students’ academic experiences into informal social settings by offering informal academic presentations similar to those in the Honors retreat. These presentations should be designed to simulate thought and discussion, or expand the student’s horizons through non-traditional events like plays, concerts, art exhibits and be made available throughout the students’ academic experience.

Finally, we believe that the faculty is responsible for the creation, maintenance, modification and elimination of academic courses and academic programs. This responsibility includes continuous quality assessments and improvements to ensure that excellence is attained in the academic programs offered by the University. We therefore highly recommend that all programs and courses are reviewed by the faculty to ensure that they are a modern, relevant, and cohesive to the student’s educational experience and that each and every faculty member strives to develop and deliver each course as an academically stimulating and challenging experience worthy of good students.

“Excellent schools have an administration that supports faculty, students and the academic mission”

As stated above, we believe that the faculty is responsible for the creation, maintenance, modification and elimination of academic courses and academic programs. This responsibility includes continuous quality assessments and improvements to ensure that excellence is attained in the academic programs offered by the University.
Furthermore, we believe that the administration should support the faculty in this endeavor by providing leadership, advice, and resources for the improvement of the academic programs. It is the responsibility of the administration to support an academic environment in which an intellectual community of learners thrives and flourishes. This includes, but is not limited to, insuring that faculty compensation levels are appropriate for retaining and recruiting outstanding faculty members, providing ample resource support for faculty research/creative activity and development, providing ample resource support for teaching excellence among the faculty, attracting and supporting outstanding students, and promoting academic excellence at every opportunity. The Academic Excellence Committee therefore submits the following recommendations concerning administrative issues.

- We highly recommend that the TCU Board of Trustees mandate that the responsibility for academic programs rests with the faculty.
- We highly recommend that members of the faculty should chair Academic Curriculum Committees.

In regards to the Faculty’s role in University governance, we recommend the following:

- We applaud the current opportunities for interaction between the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate and the Provost and recommend continued meetings on a monthly basis to discuss academic matters of mutual interest.
- We concur with the Faculty Governance Committee and recommend a new Senate committee be formed for interaction with vice-chancellors in non-academic areas (i.e., Administrative Services, Advancement, and Campus Life.)
- Finally, we applaud the current opportunities for interaction between members of the Faculty Senate and members of the Board of Trustees and highly recommend continuing and advancing this relationship, to the point where eventually the Chair of the Faculty Senate is asked to join the Board of Trustees with full voting rights.

In regards to the Training and Compensation of Department Chair, we recommend the following:

- We concur with the Faculty Tenure, Promotion and Grievance Committee and recommend that greater resources and training be provided for department chairs (i.e.: issues and procedures concerning legal matters; financial planning and budget responsibilities; faculty and staff job performance assessment; faculty development; and grievance problems) to ensure that they are successful in executing their tasks.
- Furthermore, we concur and recommend that compensation for department chair should be raised and increased annually in alignment with merit increases.

In regards to facilities and equipment to support academic programs we recommend the following:

- We highly recommend that a program be instituted to upgrade classrooms on the campus over a three to five year period, equipping more classrooms with computer/graphics capabilities, updating furniture, equipment and blackboards as needed, and to maintain older, but useful technology.
Finally, in regards to University visibility, we recommend the following:

- We highly recommend that the University should develop plans for an increased web presence.
  Regarding academic programs, this implies funding/training to help faculty members develop web
  pages for themselves and web course pages for their courses.

SUMMATION:

Academic excellence is achieved within the dynamic bond between faculty and student in a learning
environment thoroughly supported by the administration. Academic excellence is based on an intricate
balance of support and collaboration between faculty, administration and students. Any weakness in any of
the four areas: faculty, students, administration and programs; will undermine the effectiveness of the
institution to pursue excellence. These recommends are presented with the understanding that we are
actively pursuing one outcome -- an effective and significant educational experience for our students.
Excellence must be pursued with thoughtful and reasonable risk-taking, expenditures of energies and
monies, and progressive thinking for the benefit of the future.

Academic Excellence Committee 1999 - 2000:

George H. Brown - Chair
Art Busby, Nancy Meadows, Don Nichols, Carol Stephenson, Peggy Watson
Ron Watson, Roger Pfaffenger, Liaison to the Executive Committee and Chair of the Faculty
Senate