Student Relations Committee
Academic Year 2003-2004 Report

Committee Members: David Bedford, Andy Fort, Sally Fortenberry, Nadia Lahutsky (Exec. Committee Liaison), Steve Levering, Suzy Lockwood, Mike Sacken, Melissa Young (Chair)

Standing Charges

1. Represent the Faculty Senate on matters involving student concerns.

2. Meet with the officers of the Student House of Representatives at least once a semester in order to monitor issues of concern to the student community of the University.

Specific Charges

1. Continue, in coordination with the Academic Excellence Committee, the conversation on the development of a culture of academic integrity at TCU.

2. Arrange for a House, Staff and Senate meeting on a mutually agreed upon topic.

3. Collaborate with Student House of Representatives Academic Excellence Committee to consider whether there is student interest in assessing the SPOT forms initiated a few years ago.
In keeping with our charges this year, our committee has met regularly with students representing various constituencies of the undergraduate population. We invited student leaders to our monthly committee meetings, attended the weekly meetings of the House of Reps, and worked with the Integrity Council. This regular contact with students has improved our understanding of the issues that concern them and allowed us the opportunity to represent the Faculty Senate on these issues. From these conversations, it was clear to us that the Faculty Senate and students have several areas of overlapping interest. The three issues that received the most attention in our meetings were: 1) continuing to develop a culture of **integrity**, 2) strengthening the **advising** process, and 3) increasing **communication** and collaboration with faculty and students on issues of joint interest.

The following details our activities in regard to these three areas and provides suggestions for next year’s SRC for continuing this work.

**Developing a Culture of Integrity**
At the beginning of the semester we met with SGA president Brad Thompson and Katie Gordon, chair of the Integrity Council. Both Brad and Katie communicated their deep desire to continue the work of other groups (faculty, staff and student) in developing a stronger culture of integrity at TCU. For example, both Thompson and Gordon had been involved in working on an Honor Pledge that was signed by the incoming class at their Freshman Assembly as part of the development of an Academic Honor Concept.

In order to support their efforts and to increase exposure for this important issue, we decided (along with the Staff Assembly) to make Integrity the topic of the Fall Joint Assembly. On Tuesday, November 18th over 100 representatives of the Faculty Senate, Staff Assembly and the Student House of Reps met in the Student Center Ballroom to discuss how we develop and support a culture of integrity. There, the Integrity Council reviewed their work, previewed the Honor Pledge, and solicited feedback from the campus community on ways to increase the overall integrity at TCU (a summary of the Academic Honor Concept as it was presented at that meeting is provided in Appendix A). At the end of the meeting all were invited to sign the Honor Pledge as a demonstration of their individual commitment to integrity at TCU.

The Integrity Council is now working on the suggested revisions for language and conceptualization, and we look forward to their feedback. This will be an important transition for the group as Katie Gordon, the founder and lead advocate, graduated in December 2003. All the students we met with this year agreed that our mission statement and their best interests are rooted in creating an environment that supports and expects all members of the TCU community to act with integrity. We hope that next year’s SRC will work closely with the Integrity Council to follow up on the Joint Assembly meeting and support their work.

**Improving Advising**
This spring we met with Anthony Oppermann and other members of the SGA Academic Affairs Committee. One of their main areas of concentration for the next year will be strengthening the advising process. Attention to this issue has grown over the last two years, with at least two other student groups making presentations to the Senate indicating the need to improve advising. Oppermann and his committee (made
up of mostly freshmen) explained that their interest in this issue is due to our increasing enrollments as well as the development of the new undergraduate core curriculum. This semester, they developed an advising survey that has been administered to both faculty and students. While the results have not yet been tabulated, the committee believes that several steps could be taken to improve the quality of advising. One suggestion is to create departmental advising guides that would be available on the web to help students track their progress in the major as well as the UCR. Another suggestion is to explore the possibility of hiring staff taking on advising roles, especially for pre-majors.

We agree that advising is an important concern for and would like to suggest that next year’s SRC be charged with follow-up on the survey and working with the SGA Academic Affairs Committee to identify specific concerns and develop solutions to best meet the needs of students, faculty and staff with regard to advising. This will be especially important in light of the curriculum changes made to the core.

**Stronger Communication**

Finally, the students we interacted with indicated a desire for stronger communication between faculty and students. All of the students we spoke with expressed a desire to have faculty more involved with their concerns, and similarly to be more involved with issues that concern faculty. One way our committee tried to increase our familiarity with student concerns was to attend the weekly meetings of the Student House of Reps. While we did not make every meeting, each of us committed to attending at least one meeting over the course of the Spring semester. All of us agreed that attending these meetings was important for building stronger communication with students. Each of us that attended also agreed that we were impressed with the professionalism, sincerity, and efficiency of these meetings. We believe it would be to next year’s SRC’s benefit to continue attending these meetings. Our credibility was greatly enhanced when students saw tangible evidence of our concern for their issues and it gave us greater insight into the workings of the Student Government Association.

**Not even on the Radar…**

Somewhat surprising to the members of this committee, none of the students we spoke with were interested in assessing the revised SPOT forms initiated a few years ago. Because this was one of our charges, we brought it up often as an issue for discussion with student representatives. Few of them realized that the forms were ever different, but all agreed that they were satisfactory and meeting their needs to provide feedback to instructors about their experience in class. Based on this feedback, we believe this issue could be removed from next year’s charge, perhaps to be revisited in later years if it becomes an issue for the students or if another committee feels it meets their mission.
Appendix A

Texas Christian University
Academic Honor Concept -- Summary

Honor Pledge
I pledge myself, as a member of the TCU community, to the continuous pursuit of personal and academic integrity, through individual accountability.

Spirit of the Honor Concept
The Academic Honor Concept is one application of the ideals of the Honor Pledge. Because attaining knowledge and learning to think critically are defining components of a college education – components that are threatened by academic dishonesty – the Honor Concept seeks to address this aspect of integrity in a very specific way.

The primary goals of the Honor Concept are to define and promote the highest standard of academic integrity and to instill the responsibility for that standard with the student body. This is sought for the purpose of empowering an increasingly proactive mindset, in which students are made responsible for the integrity of TCU and furthermore the value of their education.

A student-led honor system not only raises the expectations for the student body, but it teaches ethical leadership to students through real experience. Although it differs from a system enforced solely by administration/faculty, it is not a system in which faculty are rendered powerless. However, it entrusts the process of enforcing academic honesty to the student body, allowing students the opportunity to internalize their ethical decisions. The Honor Concept impresses upon students the immense responsibility they personally have to uphold the quality of education at TCU.

Cornerstones of the Honor Concept
• Active student participation in preventing, reporting, and speaking out against academic dishonesty
• Founded upon “doing what is right” not just “following the rules” - taking positive action in upholding integrity, not simply establishing rules in order to root out violators
• Protection of an environment of grace, in which students may be given the chance to develop ethically, learning ethical values through real experience
• Protection of the student/faculty mentor relationship, while establishing student responsibility of academic standards.
• Fair, impartial, and consistent treatment of all students
• Uniform procedure that exposes repeat offenders