Goal 2: The University of New Hampshire will provide undergraduate students an innovative, high quality, coherent, integrated education experience

The measures proposed here focus on the key aspects of our students’ first year experience: 1. the academic culture, 2. interfaces between the in and out of classroom culture, and 3. the larger campus social culture. Their implementation will aid new students’ transition to university life and come to benefit the larger University community.

1. We recognize that the fundamental responsibility for the academic culture begins and ends with our faculty. Making the first semester of the first year demanding enough to stretch our students’ intellectual abilities without causing them to fail presents a significant pedagogical challenge. The first measure is designed to support faculty in their efforts to raise the level of academic discourse, challenge our students, and foster an environment of respect and dignity.

2. The second measure is intended to strengthen ties between what happens in and outside the classroom through expanded and coordinated campus co-curricular programming. Co-curricular activities that build on students’ academic experiences while providing a venue for social events allows students to forge links. The academic and the social come to overlap. This type of programming done well with sufficient time to incorporate into curricula also creates opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to join together.

3. The third measure focuses on the campus social environment for new students.* While new students may choose from a variety of University-sponsored social events, many their first weeks at the University are drawn to activities off campus. The challenge for all of us in the University is to build an evening and weekend social scene that complements our second measure and is attractive to students. Both of these measures should work to open experiences and opportunities for new students rather than restricting their options. A key element of this measure is to postpone fraternity and sorority pledging to students’ second year. To do this, though, we must find other social outlets for our students.

There are other several actions that we mention here and list below but do not develop. All fall within the purview of the Faculty Senate. They are 1. Review of the policy concerning four credit hours for three contact hours; 2. Oversee a longitudinal study grade inflation; 3. Revisit methods for evaluating teaching; and 4. Assess the role that teaching performance plays in post-tenure review.
* This measure focuses on residential students who constitute the overwhelming majority of our new students. Each of the measures suggested though would benefit all undergraduates whether living on or off campus.

**Strategy 2A: Foster high expectations for academic excellence in all students.**

**Measure:**
Support/enhance the classroom experience of first year students, by developing the following:
- A summer teaching institute for faculty teaching lecture classes with 60 or more students
- A summer teaching institute for graduate students who serve as teaching assistants, and
- A program on teaching and working with peers available to all campus units where undergraduates serve in an instructional or related capacity (teaching assistants, peer mentors, graders, etc.),

**Rationale:**
Students, new to college, commonly struggle their first semester as they try to balance their in and out of class lives. The relatively structured high school environment, where classes meet for most of each day of the week and teachers and parents monitor their actions, ill prepares students for college. Many first year students at the University of New Hampshire spend only 12 hours a week in class. They face many social diversions, which easily capture much of their remaining time.

The first semester should ignite students’ interests and stretch their abilities. It does for a small number. But many under perform, and some founder. The first semester then sets habits that yield passable grades with minimal effort and mediocre performance.

Aggravating this poor performance is the perception among many faculty that students lack the intellectual abilities of past generations. Some also argue that as our culture has changed so has the way students learn. Still others believe that campus social life overwhelms any demands placed in the classroom. Objective measures of student ability (standardized tests, level of high preparation and high school class rank) seem not to support the first view. Cultural shifts may affect how students approach mastering an area of inquiry; however, some courses that use traditional methods still elicit high quality work. Campus social life has always competed with academics for student attention. Challenging and intriguing classes for first year students remain the most effective way to build interest around the learning environment while also reaching some balance with campus social life. Such classes give students the skills to take full advantage of their university experience the following semesters.
Creating that sort of environment in a small classroom places many demands on a teacher. Each new student should have the opportunity to have that kind of engagement with a faculty member. Through class discussion, writing, reflection, students be exposed to how one accomplished in a field engages in problem solving. Proposed changes to the general education curriculum in tandem with ENGL 401 will assure that all new students have that opportunity their first semester.

Focusing resources to allow small class sizes in one part of the curriculum though will inevitably result in more large classes in other areas. It is in these large classes that many of our new students now stumble. Yet, we have campus models of how a large class may become dynamic learning environments and where students may become intellectually engaged. The approaches and strategies of these successful large classes should be available to all who teach classes high enrollment classes.

Another critical area involves those who provide support to the large class teaching effort: graduate teaching assistants and undergraduates who may serve in various roles from teaching assistant to peer mentor to examination grader. Providing instructional support for large classes, which often have multiple laboratory or recitations associated with them, presents daunting pedagogical and management challenges, particularly for faculty new to teaching or new to teaching first year students. Similarly, those who aid instructional efforts whether they be graduate teaching assistants, peer teaching assistants, or even graders, need programs to develop their teaching skills and raise their awareness of professional conduct.

Graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants and others in related roles carry an important part of the instructional burden in large courses. Yet little attention is paid to providing these students with the skills they need in their roles. Upper-class students who serve in teaching or other mentor functions deserve special attention. Because they are so close in age and experience to our first year students, they need clear boundaries drawn for their mentorship roles. A University-wide effort should address best practice in this area.

**Action Plan:**
- Develop a voluntary summer teaching institute for faculty teaching large lecture classes
  - Encourage the following faculty to participate:
    - New faculty within their first three years at the University
    - Faculty teaching a course with 60 or more students for the first time
    - Faculty teaching high enrollment (60 or more) courses with predominantly first year students
  - Institute content, including but not limited to
    - Course structure
    - Early and repeated evaluation of student performance
    - Evaluation of performance during drop period
Undergraduate Experience: Supplemental Document

Accountability
Course development
Syllabus development
- Evaluation of student performance, including portfolios
- Course expectations
- University policy on academic honesty
Effective use of graduate assistants and other teaching support staff
Use of teaching technology
Grading practice
Effective use of graduate and other teaching support staff
Building academic support, e.g. study skills and learning skills, into course
- Use of upper-class peers
- Building study groups into curriculum
- Use of academic skill professionals in the curriculum
- Making referrals to academic skill professionals
Accommodating students with disabilities
Developing a mentor relationship with a master teacher, especially for new faculty and preferably in faculty members home department
Evaluation of teaching
- Class visits by master teachers
- Mid-semester evaluation
Forming bonds with students without violating boundaries
Provide a stipend for participants

- Develop a week long mandatory teaching institute for all graduate teaching assistants
  Hold just prior to the fall semester
Institute content, including but not limited to
  Best practice:
  - Coordination of laboratory/recitation/seminar with lecture course content
  - Evaluation of student performance and grading practice
  - Use of teaching technology
  - University policy on academic honesty
  - Setting boundaries and rules of good conduct
  - Working with students with disabilities
  - Dealing with difference
  - Assuring English language competence for non-English speakers
Course content
  Conducted by graduate students’ respective colleges/schools

- Develop a mandatory program for all undergraduates who wish to serve as peer instructors or in other mentorship roles
  Content, including but not limited to
  - Overview of models of learning
  - Facilitation/presentation skills
  - University policy on academic honesty
Current and Future Status:
Faculty
The University of New Hampshire expects that its faculty excel in their scholarship and teaching. New faculty must juggle competing demands as they try to establish their research programs while also fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. Many come with experience in the small class setting. Teaching methods effective with a small group do not easily transfer to a large one. They must also coordinate teaching assistants in recitation sections and laboratories.

Many seasoned UNH faculty also face challenges in large classes. The number of students limits the names and faces one remembers. Students rarely seek contact out of class. Many are often unresponsive in class, and class attendance deceeds toward weekends and sometimes as the semester progresses. As interest and attendance dwindle, so too do expectations.

Large classes are also challenging for new students. Coming from high school with small classes and familiar teachers, students often may feel intimidated by their professors and come to feel anonymous. Faced with what students view as a great deal of free time and without the structure of high school, their preparation time and class attendance tend to slip.

In classes where testing and evaluation are limited or come after the first weeks of school, students sometimes feel bewildered and lost.

While faculty are expected to complete mid-semester progress reports for first year students, these reports are often incomplete, indicating that there is no testing yet on which to base progress. Further, students do not receive them until after mid-semester – for most too late to change their course trajectory. The first semester is a rude awakening. For some, it is an experience in barely surviving that is reinforced by diminished expectations in the classroom.

Lowered faculty expectations and student interest result in both “getting by”. Student grades fall in the low B and C range. Teaching and learning at that level fails to stretch students’ ability. In some instances, it aggravates grade inflation, which masks the effort and preparation of students in some classes.

Yet, the University of New Hampshire also offers some outstanding classes with high enrollments where students’ final grades reflect their performance and effort. These classes are taught by faculty who receive outstanding teaching evaluations. Characteristics of these classes include interesting and challenging content. They include clear statements of expectations for: student performance, class attendance, preparation for class, and completion of course assignments. Students receive early and repeated evaluation of student performance. Instructional technology is incorporated into the class. Finally, laboratory or recitation sessions, if part of the course, are congruent with the lecture class content. The skills
and experiences of these master teachers should be used in a formal way – in a teaching
institute – and a more informal way, through mentoring new faculty through regular and
repeated evaluation of teaching through classroom visits. The University, through its
Teaching Excellence Program, also offers extensive support for those interested in improving
their teaching or wishing to embrace new approaches and that program is a ideal vehicle with
adequate resources to conduct such a program.

Graduate Teaching Assistants
Some programs in the University, including the College of Life Science and Agriculture, the
College of Engineering and Physical Science, and the Psychology Department, provide
instruction for their graduate teaching assistants. The level of that effort often reflects the
number of students involved and the resources available. Absent best practice standards,
these units develop training that meets their needs. In some case, the expertise reflected in
these efforts could profitably be transferred to other departments. Similarly, with more
resources and some standardization all these efforts would be improved.

Undergraduate teaching assistants, peer mentors, student graders
On the undergraduate level, programs like Center for Academic Resources, the Connors
Writing Center, and the Whittemore School prepare their students to work effectively with
peers. The University, however, does not have “best practice” standards to guide student
training in these programs. Further, the expertise developed in these programs if shared
could benefit other programs in campus that use students in this role.

A special case involves undergraduates used as course graders. These students relieve faculty
of a significant burden, but in interpreting student answers they may not identify correct
answers when those answers are expressed outside of the specified bounds. This group needs
help in setting the range of appropriate and/or acceptable answers.

Assessment over a Five Year Period:
• Measure change first to second semester retention and ultimately, retention and time to
  graduation
• Measure change student satisfaction
• Measure change in grade distributions
• Measure change in number of faculty interested in teaching large classes/large classes with
  significant first year enrollments
• Measure change student participation in study groups, etc.
• Measure change in number of faculty using of the Teaching Excellence Center services

Responsibility:
Teaching Excellence; Academic Affairs; Colleges/Schools; Graduate School; Academic
Achievement and Support; Connors Writing Center; Center for Academic Resources, Health
Education

Timetable:
Strategy 2F: Integrate academic and non-academic aspects of student life into a cohesive experience.

Measure:
Set theme(s) for large-scale campus activities; develop and implement a university-wide conversation on the topics in classrooms, the residence halls, and other campus venues; and establish a clearinghouse for these co-curricular activities.

Rationale:
What goes on in the classroom is central to student learning. Students reflect, digest, experience and integrate that learning outside of the classroom. Bridges between these domains heighten the academic experience. Building course content around themes that are echoed in university-wide lectures, performances, volunteer activities and other events provides integrative and experiential learning for students. Shared events also create commonalities that allow students to join together and students, faculty and staff to mix. In sum, they provide springboards for learning and build community.

Developing these activities requires coordination and communication. Coordination of event scheduling allows longer range planning for major events, better incorporation of those events in the curriculum, where appropriate, and eases the pressure of finding funds. Central planning adds coherence to planning large-scale events and provides the necessary promotion to assure success of the activity.

Action Plan:
• Establish a University dialog that begins with new students first days at the University

• Plan events around themes that may be incorporated into the curriculum
  Identify at least one year in advance
  Make the centerpiece for campus activities.
• Schedule sufficiently in advance to allow their incorporation in to syllabi and assure strong attendance

• Development a mechanism for event coordination and communication
  Use the electronic University calendar to list events
Create a University board for serve as clearinghouse for programs and support

**Current and Future Status:**
Other than hockey, there are few campus-wide events that capture campus attention and bring people together. Yet, the University offers far more events than any one person may attend. The online University calendar skims the surface of those events. Events often coincide. Funds are often scarce for worthy events. Events are sometimes scheduled with insufficient lead-time to promote and incorporate into curricula. The opportunity to use them as part of the classroom experience is thus lost. Better coordination and broader use of the University calendar would reduce scheduling conflicts and allow their integration into the classroom experience.

**Assessment:**
- Campus events built into syllabi over a five-year period
- Better attendance at University events over a five-year period
- Savings by sharing costs of prominent speakers, etc., over a five year period

**Responsibility:** Faculty Senate, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, University Relations, President’s Commissions, Faculty Senate, First Year Programs, MUB, OMSA

**Measure:**
Build a student life culture -- academic, social, recreational – attractive to first year and upper class students with emphasis on the first six weeks of the fall semester.

**Rationale:** Creating a social life that expands the horizons of new students results in students taking full advantage of academic and social activities. When new students’ primary social experiences occur off campus late night scene, they quickly come to see that as the center of campus social life. They fail to take full advantage of the University’s offerings. Others, who opt not to participate, are often so few in number that they feel out of place here. Those feelings limit their participation.

Bringing the social life of new students in line with academic expectations and making it attractive to students means that the University must build social programming that has a greater interest than what is offered off campus. Most of this activity, which begins as new students arrive on campus, revolves around pledging in fraternities and sororities. The University will have only limited success with its social programming as long as it must compete with the activities. For the students who opt to join a greek organization, the decisions they make their very first weeks on campus limit their exposure to college life and in some case have a disastrous affect on their
academic performance. For other students caught on the swirl of parties, these events also mar their academic performance and social adjustment to college life.

Action Plan:
• Create a rich assortment of activities in the residence halls and the Memorial Union that substitute for the late night activities that Greek organizations now hold
• Organize life in residence halls with high numbers of first year students around academic issues (see 2 above)
• Provide programming from midnight to 2 PM on Saturday and Sunday mornings in the Memorial Union and outside when the weather is appropriate for such activity
• Expect students to attend classes on Fridays
• Postpone pledging until students are in their sophomore year
  Require that all members and pledges are in good academic standing (2.0 gpa)
  Require that all members participate in workshops on alcohol and other drug use, sexual assault and harassment, and cultural alcohol
• Expand intramural and other recreational opportunities
• Co-schedule students for common courses and place those students in the same residence hall
• Develop new or more theme residence halls (or floors) around academic and other issues
• Develop more pre-orientation programs like Connect that allow students new students to develop social networks
• Encourage faculty to develop links between common first year courses
• Encourage departments to focus energy and attention on their majors during the student’s first year

Current and Future Status:
UNH students often note that there are few things to do weekend evenings on campus or in Durham. Yet, a review of activities in the residence halls and the Memorial Union indicates range of programs. Many of these events are planned by students. UNH students, though, seem to seek their social outlets elsewhere.
Thursday evenings and on weekends, many students may be found at parties in the local fraternities and the private homes in Durham where some students live. These events appear to out compete campus-sponsored activities. The promise of alcohol not doubt plays a role as does the perception that fraternities provide a venue for men to meet women.

Off campus parties draw students and others from surrounding areas. This combination with the addition of alcohol and other drugs creates volatile conditions, sometimes escalating out of control. The resulting problems aggravate University relations with the town of Durham and deflect public attention away from the academic accomplishments of the University.

The University and the town of Durham will never completely control students’ attraction to alcohol. We should though be able to control it. There are two steps the University may take, which would benefit to our first year students: 1. postpone student pledging in fraternities and sororities until students have successfully (gpa of 2.0 or above) completed two semesters at the University and 2. provide expanded social and recreational activities, some which build on students’ academic programs.

1. Postpone Pledging
The abysmal academic performance of many of our male students in fraternities alone is reason for action. Activity around pledging – the rush period – begins as new students are arriving on campus. The late night activities that are part of our fall orientation dim in comparison with the loud music and numbers of students at the late night fraternity activities. These events continue through the first weeks of the semester.

Ultimately, only a small number of students pledge but the activities up to that point extend to many others. The larger effect on students is only hinted at in conversations with professors, advisors and other support staff. The result is dropped classes; missed classes, particularly on Fridays; poor class preparation; reports of being physically or sexually assaulted in or near greek houses; and other behaviors inconsistent with University life.

2. Expand Campus Social Life and Link to Academics
Any recommendation to postpone pledging until the second must recognize though that fraternities and sororities do provide community for some UNH students and at some point provide a social venue for all our students. What then is missing from the lives of new students, particularly those new to the University living in the residence halls.
The first area revolves around late night campus programming. Over the last five years, the Memorial Union has made a major effort to expand its late night and weekend programming. That programming frequently ends at mid-night. To capture student interest, programming needs to extend into the early morning hours.

The next area addresses why students who pledge find the greek system attractive. Consider the positives of the greek system. Young women who join sororities appear to thrive there academically. Each year, small but consistent number of young men are attracted to fraternities their first semester. (Upper-class male students tend to move away from their fraternity houses.) A simplistic conclusion is that for some of our students, a living environment with a small group – 30 to 60 – appears to be attractive. For young women this size appears to have the requisites for a positive social and academic adjustment; for young men it appears to have the requisites of a comfortable social adjustment.

Given the number of students housed in the residence halls, creating these small communities represents a daunting challenge. The new residence hall to be ready in the spring semester of 2003 will provide more suite orientated living. Further, building residence halls around themes both academic and social establishes structures where students may find community. Residential Life, Housing, First Year Programs, and the dean offices in the colleges and schools have worked to develop residential living programs built around academic and other themes. They are steps in the right direction. With limited resources and short planning windows though, these efforts have not reached enough students.

Another critical area deals with the overall social adjustment and academic performance of our male students. While coming to campus with the same level of achievement as our young women, their academic and social performance often falters. Many of the residence hall and campus-wide activities that attract our women students do not draw our male students. One area attractive to male students though is intramural sports and, more generally, fitness activities. The Hamel Center is a magnate for all our students. The staff of Campus Recreation has done an impressive job meeting that demand. The growing interest in physical fitness is an opportunity to reach male students. Their continued interest in intramural teams particularly is an opportunity to shift behavioral norms.

**Assessment:**
Improved academic performance of first year students over a five year period
Improved town and gown relations over a five year period
Responsibility: Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Residential Life, MUB, Campus Recreation