September 23, 2011

Task Force on Enhancing Student Learning in Large-Enrollment Courses
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Melissa Bowles, Associate Professor, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, LAS
Walter Hurley, Professor, Animal Sciences, ACES, chair
Tara Earls Larrison, Visiting Assistant Professor, Social Work
Stephen Notaro, Lecturer, Kinesiology and Community Health, AHS
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Jose Vazquez-Cognet, Lecturer, Economics, LAS

Dear Colleagues,

At their annual summer retreat, the academic deans celebrated the fact that excellence in undergraduate instruction abounds on our campus. Yet it was also acknowledged that more can be done to spread the effects of excellent teaching, especially those effects that influence students’ academic achievement in positive ways. Consequently, the deans and I are making it a priority this year to explore enhancements to undergraduate teaching, beginning with instruction in large-enrollment courses for first-year students.

I ask that you work together this semester and early next to identify creative ways to elevate the student experience in our largest enrollment courses. Such courses include ATMS 100, CLCV 115, ECON 102, ECON 103, FSHN 101, GEOG 101, HIST 141, HIST 142, HIST 171, HIST 172, IB 105, IB 150, MCB 150, RLST 110, SHS 120, and SOC 100. Specifically, the deans and I would be most appreciative if you would:

- identify a set of common themes and learning goals for large enrollment courses at Illinois;
- build a repertoire of best instructional practices that foster teaching excellence in such settings;
- recommend ways to fund curricular improvements in these courses;
- establish incentive models to engage our most skilled instructors and faculty in these courses;
- suggest ways to communicate with students, parents, and other stakeholders about the transformations we are making to the first-year experience.
I am grateful that Professor Walter Hurley has agreed to chair the task force. Peter Mortensen from my office will provide the task force with support.

It will be most helpful to have a brief report that presents your findings and recommendations by February 20, 2012. Shortly thereafter, I will share your report with the academic deans, and we will decide on implementation steps to be taken in advance of the 2012-2013 academic year.

Many thanks for your willingness to contribute time, effort, and expertise in service of improving undergraduate education at Illinois.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Richard P. Wheeler
Interim Vice Chancellor
for Academic Affairs and Provost