

Report of the Trent Colleges Review Committee, May 25, 2018.

Mandate and Work of Committee

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The 2017-18 committee was tasked with the following mandate:

- i) to review the administrative changes to the colleges implemented in 2014 to see if they achieved their intended goals, which were to: 1) strengthen the role and focus of the colleges; 2) enhance the overall student experience; 3) reaffirm the importance of the college system; 4) provide greater capacity for the colleges to provide student support and community development; 5) grow the role that the colleges play in student retention; and
- ii) to make recommendations on how further progress toward these goals might be achieved.

The committee met with key stakeholder groups including: students, staff, student services staff, alumni, faculty, student presidents/prime minister, Provost Planning Group, Director of Colleges, Academic Advisors, Academic Skills Instructors, Principal of Trill College, the President, and the Founding President of Trent University. In addition to these in-person meetings the committee solicited feedback through email and through a survey that was distributed to students, staff, faculty, alumni and retirees. The survey received close to 700 responses.

The committee relied on mainly anecdotal information as statistical information pre 2014 or post 2014 was not readily available. The feedback the committee received on the changes that took place in 2014 was, overall, positive. Key areas of particular mention were the move to full-time college heads and the trend to improve student support. The general theme of the comments was that the 2014 changes enhanced the colleges but that improvements could be made to further strengthen the colleges and enhance the student experience.

Overview of Findings

The committee found that the 2014 changes were an effective way to strengthen student support, a critical area for students. The feedback received was consistently positive on that issue, subject only to the need for more resources to be made available to the extent possible.

The areas where the colleges were found wanting were more amorphous in nature, and related to the colleges' struggle for relevance to both students and faculty in an era when a university education is for most students primarily an opportunity to gain the qualifications for a career. Today, colleges are strongly associated with the student residence experience, and are important to that constituency, but the reality is that most Trent students do not live in residence, and those that do often move to other accommodations for their upper years. College programs and activities are consistently supported by a small minority of student and faculty enthusiasts: "you see the same group of students and professors

at every event.” The challenge is to reach the group of students and faculty outside of that core minority.

Students at Trent, as at any university, are here for an education, and college affiliation may seem only marginally relevant to an off-campus student whose attention is naturally focused on course work; if any element of the university’s structure is important at all, it is the university department of his or her area of specialization.

The situation for faculty is comparable. Faculty’s responsibility is to teach Trent students and engage in research and other projects relevant to their expertise and career track. Many no longer live near campus and must commute to and from work. All faculty belong to a department, but are not required to be members of a college; for many faculty, it is unlikely that involvement in college activities will be a priority unless such involvement relates to their responsibilities and success as a professor at Trent.

Nevertheless, Trent was structured as a collegiate university for a reason, and it is helpful to consider some of the merits of the college system integral to Trent’s culture:

- students benefit from being part of a smaller community within the larger university;
- similarly, the individual character of each college community helps students identify with – and benefit from – their college affiliation;
- colleges have a tradition of interdisciplinary membership;
- colleges create opportunities for students to interact with academic faculty outside the classroom setting; and
- colleges create an appropriate venue to provide student support services.

Overall, the committee has concluded that for the college system to remain strong and relevant within Trent, it must contribute meaningfully to students’ academic experience. The comments received from many participants echoed this theme:

- i) How can a college be important to a student or faculty member whose main affiliation is to a department?
- ii) Students want better relationships and more visibility with faculty than is achievable in class, and how can colleges provide that when many faculty members are reluctant to get involved in college activities?
- iii) Students come to Trent because they are attracted by the university’s reputation, campus and curriculum; many are not even aware of Trent’s colleges until after they arrive as students.
- iv) Colleges are really just places for residence students to live; apart from that, many students have no basis to prefer one college over another, and the university’s increasingly centralized administration fosters college homogeneity rather than distinctiveness.
- v) Full-time college heads are committed to developing relevant programs and a unique personality for their colleges, but much of their time is taken up with administrative tasks, and high-level programming of interest to students requires more faculty support that is (in the present situation) inconsistently available.

The report’s recommendations are set out below. Many of the recommendations are designed to address issues that did not arise from the changes made in 2014, but from trends within the university

and academia that predated them by several years, including the growth of university departments and the centralization of services and procurement for budget and efficiency purposes. The recommendations are suggested as a way to make further progress toward the goals of the 2014 revisions, by way of the following: i) Trent's commitment to the college system should be reflected in its communications strategy; ii) enhancing the unique identity of each of the colleges; iii) achieving increased faculty engagement in the colleges; and iv) some suggested changes to more logically coordinate the administration of the colleges, housing and programming, and to improve the colleges' community visibility.

Commitment to the Colleges – Communications Strategy

If Trent wants to be a truly collegiate model, it has to truly commit to this model by starting with its communication strategy, in particular where newcomers are concerned. Suggested methods of enhancing this commitment include:

- bringing Trent's collegiate system to the forefront of our recruitment process, and highlighting it as an element that sets Trent apart (such as by putting colleges at the front of the view book and online marketing, and including the college experience in open house tours and recruiter presentations);
- effective briefing of faculty and staff on the history and value of college affiliation, so that they know what it means and how it is of benefit to them; to that end, not only students, but all faculty and staff should be required to be members of a college, and the role of the colleges should be incorporated into staff and faculty – as well as student – orientation;
- review how students select and learn about the colleges: Trent should make it mandatory for all non-residence students to select a college of their choice, develop a welcome package for each college, and help students become excited about their college before they arrive for orientation;
- in a similar vein, introduction of a Colleges fair – where colleges each set up an area advertising the benefits of their college.

Unique Identity of the Colleges

For students' relationship with a college to be meaningful, each college must have a unique identity with its own traditions and culture. We suggest that each college specialize in something of academic interest to a broad group within the student body, preferably multi-disciplinary in nature, so as to attract students while maintaining a diversity of academic specialties within the college community. For example, Traill College is initiating (and has already had marked success with) affiliation with Trent's prelaw program, a program of interest to students in many different fields. A similar approach could possibly be taken with other multi-disciplinary program areas, such as education. An affiliation with specific departments would also enhance college distinctiveness, but it is best if colleges do not overspecialize to the detriment of a multi-disciplinary culture.

In addition, we suggest:

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In addition, we suggest:

- the college heads need to be given a greater level of autonomy to direct programming and activities; the approvals process for programming initiatives at the college level should reflect

the university's commitment to this principle; controls to standardize the quality of college amenities is what is appropriate, not uniformity of college activities and culture;

- more effort in making spaces for students to socialize/study between classes - improve junior and senior common rooms and clearly define their purposes;
- continue events/services that encourage student engagement with their college, such as intercollegiate friendly competition (strut your swag, fundraising challenges, sports, and east vs west bank); provide targeted programming to students who are under-engaged with colleges, including through partnership with academic departments (this is discussed further in our next section).

Faculty Engagement

To make Trent's collegiate culture more meaningful, we have already suggested that mandatory affiliation with a college should be brought back for all faculty including with sessional as well as tenure track appointments. We suggest that the academic importance of colleges to both students and faculty be further strengthened at the college leadership level by creating the position of faculty fellow at each college. The position would be both a teaching and administrative role, and the faculty member would be required to teach at least one course physically located at the college. The position would be for a limited term (2-4 years) with a possible renewal (one renewal only). In addition to teaching one course, the role would include working with the college head to develop academic programming for the college, increasing other faculty members' involvement in college activities, and providing student mentorship. The person in this position should receive one course release/service credit.

As one stakeholder commented: "Colleges should be academic and social hubs, focused on intellectual engagement and empowerment of students. Facilitating integration of faculty into student life and activity would be well-suited to the Colleges to help students build relationships and seek mentorship and meaningful connections with their instructors." Feedback from students consistently emphasized the importance the colleges as a venue for mentorship and a vehicle for establishing relationships with faculty outside the lecture hall or laboratory.

Additional suggestions to improve faculty engagement include:

- increasing outreach to faculty by college management, including invitations to faculty for events;
- faculty involvement in college activities should be relevant to performance reviews and promotion and be considered part of the faculty service obligations; generally it should be understood that university management values faculty involvement in college activities; one commenter recounted that organizers of a college conference were having little luck with their invitations to faculty speakers, until it became known that university senior management would be involved, at which point a number of professors volunteered their services;
- review timing of events and investigate having more events during the day to increase faculty participation;
- investigate opportunities to provide more casual social interaction in the colleges with faculty (i.e. regular lunch/coffee area for faculty, encourage faculty to hold some of their office hours in a public setting such as the cafeterias in the colleges);
- advancement office should investigate establishing endowments or raising funds to increase endowments in order for colleges to host events with high profile writers, scientists, journalist etc. to attract faculty to events;

- encouraging events that would be engaging to faculty to improve participation; the faculty fellow role should be helpful here.

Coordination: Colleges and Housing

Organizational Structure. A much stronger collaboration appears to be needed between the housing department and the colleges, and the services delivered by both. Broadly, there is a need to review the relationship between housing and the colleges and consider how they can better complement one another to meet the needs of a collegiate university and avoid duplication. Clearly, residence life is a key aspect of the collegiate experience at Trent, but the current organizational structure excludes college leadership from many areas logically important to college culture, including programming aimed at students in residence (which currently is primarily developed through housing).

The job description of a college don (now called a residence life don) is illustrative:

“the Residence Life Don (RLD) is a live-in student employee... who fosters a sense of community within the residence community that is conducive to learning, engagement, academic success, and personal growth and development. The RLD acts as a mentor and peer educator, offering support to students that live in residence, and implementing the Residence Learning Model. Responsible for community management community building, and facilitating learning experiences for their assigned community, RLDs provide students with opportunities to build connections to their College.”

The Residence Life Don position reports to a college residence life coordinator in the department of housing. Dons are not necessarily placed in the college with which they are personally affiliated.

On a longer-term basis, more fundamental changes to the allocation of responsibility between the colleges and housing, based on the in-depth organizational review that we have recommended should be considered. In the interim, we recommend the following:

- the university should prioritize placing residence life dons in the college with which they are affiliated; the role of the dons should include promoting and participating in college events as part of a team that fosters a connection to the college;
- we suggest that colleges and housing explore establishing a “dotted-line” reporting relationship of residence life education staff to college leadership with respect to residence life programming, in order to ensure that colleges are involved in its planning and delivery, with the eventual goal that colleges will have more responsibility for college residences;
- college residence life co-ordinators should meet regularly with the college head in their assigned college(s), in order to ensure that colleges are connected to residence activities, and that college heads have the opportunity to promote the colleges to residence students;
- Living Learning Communities¹ (LLCs) should be interdisciplinary in nature and involve off-campus first year and upper year students as well as residence students; if academic in nature, they should be assigned a faculty member to champion the LLC;
- encourage college branding to be embedded in the residence areas;

¹ There are currently ten different LLCs including: Active Living Community, Trent Global Living Community, Environmental Sustainability, Business Administration Community, Endahying Community, Creative Expressions, Leadership and Civic Engagement, Nursing, Forensics and Trent-Swansea Law.

- college and housing services should continue their efforts to work together more effectively, with the goal of achieving greater parity between programming support for residence and off campus students.

New Residence Builds. It is critical that Trent's commitment to the college system be reflected in its longer-term housing growth strategy. All new residences should have a college affiliation, and be located in areas where students want to live, including in the City of Peterborough (through an expansion of Traill College or elsewhere in central Peterborough) and at or near the Durham campus. To the extent possible, new residences should be able to accommodate some upper year students. If we can resolve physical space constraints, it would be ideal to reintroduce guest suites into residences so that the colleges can have Scholars in Residence and/or Alumni in Residence programming to strengthen the living-learning component of college life.

College Leadership and Staffing

College Assistant Position

Overwhelmingly we heard that the change to full-time college heads in 2014 was positive. The committee also heard that this new group of college heads had also taken on many of the administrative tasks that were once the responsibility of the college assistant in each college. The daily administrative tasks often interfere with the college head's ability to manage college staff and develop programming. The committee feels that having a college assistant role in each college needs to be revisited; we recognize that this reexamination must be sensitive to the positive impact of the increased role of student staff since 2014 and the budgetary impact of any change.

Different models that could be explored:

- 2 years – 8 month recurring contract for a recent graduate from the college – a “college ambassador;”
- 4-8-month internship/co-op opportunity;
- one full-time college assistant for West Bank and East Bank that would divide their time equally between the two colleges; or,
- one full-time college assistant for each college.

Management Status of College Head

The committee was impressed with the calibre of the college heads with whom we met. While salary cost is always an issue, we consider it appropriate for the full-time college head position to be management-level. If our recommended changes to college administration are adopted over time, including the addition of a faculty fellow at each college, and the expansion of college assistant support, the college head's status as a member of management will better reflect his or her greater autonomy with respect to college programming and leadership generally, and Trent's commitment to the college system.

Programming

During the review the committee heard a great deal about events. While some asked for more events, most reported that there was over-programming for students and event overload. While there is a sense that the coordination between the colleges of the timing and types of events has improved, there is also a sense that the colleges should be focusing on a few higher-quality events each year rather than many small events in addition to the pan-collegiate events. The overlap between college cabinet events and college events was also mentioned.

The committee feels that our recommended changes to enhance faculty involvement in college programming and increase the academic relevance of the colleges should improve the quality of college programming. To address the concern that there remains a need for better coordination between the colleges, departments and student groups on campus, the committee – with some trepidation – suggests that consideration be given to each department becoming affiliated with a college and hosting its events through that college. Our hesitation relates to the value of colleges remaining multidisciplinary institutions and avoiding over-specialization. Nevertheless, better program coordination between departments and colleges should help reduce duplication, and provide more staffing, event expertise and possibly funding to departmental programming. This support could also be extended to departmental student associations. To the extent that student groups become affiliated with a college, this will contribute to college culture and create synergies for event planning of interest to both on- and off-campus students.

Some additional suggestions regarding college programming:

- advance planning, communications and calendaring are crucial; we recommend that colleges, Communications, the TCSA, college cabinets and other stakeholders work to develop userfriendly and effective event calendaring and marketing that provides clear distinctions between types of events and that all the stakeholders also work to provide a balance of events throughout the year, both in frequency and in type;
- more high-profile speaker events and working with the advancement office to grow endowments to fund these events;
- consideration should be given as to whether other student services programs such as Rebound, Biishka, wellness programs, peer support programs, counselling drop-in events, career counselors, physical health and education, sexual health and education, bridge programs, leadership and co-curricular programs should be offered in the colleges;
- generally, we recommend a focus on ways to bring on-campus, off-campus and international students together, as the current system can promote the creation of close-friend groups within each of those circles, rather than across them;
- offer theme-specific events for marginalized or potentially more isolated groups (e.g. transfer students, LGBTQ+ students, first generation students, racialized and Indigenous students and off-campus 1st yr. students);
- enhance programming such as academic services like mentoring and tutoring, life-skills workshops such as budgeting and time-management, and intellectual, academic engagement opportunities, like alumni in residence and guest speakers, as well as research-sharing events;

- consider the creation of college-specific clubs to help get to know people in the colleges, potentially in collaboration with some of the existing clubs on campus; □ enhance mature student-focused programming and orientation.

Community Visibility

Colleges should be a venue for students to become part of the broader community. This will not only contribute to Trent students' education, but will also showcase the colleges as key elements of Trent's strength as a university.

Specific suggestions for increasing the colleges' visibility in the community:

- increase and reinvigorate long-term, active partnerships between the colleges and the downtown and wider Peterborough community (a successful example is Lady Eaton College's relationship with Black Honey);
- community leaders should be given honorary membership in colleges;
- each college should adopt a local community group (charity or non-profit) and students from the college volunteer with that charity throughout the year or during designated volunteer days; □ hold events aimed at off-campus students in the community.

Conclusion

The goal of these recommendations is to strengthen the role, reputation and viability of the colleges at Trent so that they may better contribute to the quality of education that Trent can deliver. The committee notes the recent changes implemented at Traill College, which latest achievement of Trent's collegiate system underlines, in our view, the importance of colleges having – and being perceived to have – academic relevance. Going forward, a hybrid approach that provides academic and social opportunities for students and faculty, together with first-rate student housing and services support may offer the best structural model for the colleges to adopt over time, as budgets, management time and curriculum changes permit.

Rosalind Morrow (former Board Member, Chair of the Review Committee)

Tom Miller (alumnus, former Board Member)

Nona Robinson (Associate Vice-President, Students)