

What's Your Big Idea?

December 09, 2008 11:45 AM Fran Simon

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As Tulane administrators, faculty, staff and students drink mulled cider and enjoy other pleasures of the winter break, university officials are encouraging them to mull over big ideas during the pause in the academic calendar. The university's Quality Enhancement Plan team is looking for new and bold thoughts for improving student learning at Tulane.



Ana Lopez, left, associate provost for faculty affairs, and Brian Mitchell, associate provost for graduate studies and research, are spearheading an effort to prepare the university for its 2011 reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (Photo by George Long)

The ["big idea"](#) search is part of the 2011 reaffirmation of the university's accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, spearheaded by Ana Lopez, associate provost for faculty affairs, and Brian Mitchell, associate provost for graduate studies and research.

The Quality Enhancement Plan Topic Selection Task Force is seeking new ideas and approaches to enhance student learning at the undergraduate and graduate level.

The task force, which includes students, faculty and staff and is chaired by Dennis Kehoe, professor of classical studies, will review all ideas that are submitted and then put together one or more topics for the university's senior leadership to develop into a plan.

"Ideas should be as original and as bold as Tulane itself and should be universitywide in scope," said Tulane President Scott Cowen. "Our [TIDES classes](#) and our [public-service requirement](#) are examples of the type of innovative suggestions we seek. But, remember, we need *new* ideas and not simply a rehash of what we already do."

Kehoe said, "We've already received about 80 responses, some quite lengthy and well thought-out." In addition to faculty and staff members and students, parents of current students and university alumni have submitted ideas.

"We'd like to see more ideas, particularly more submitted by faculty members and students," he added. "The task force will sift through the ideas for the best ones, looking for a broad theme or themes that will build upon what Tulane has been doing in the recent past, to continue improving student education."

In February, the university will hold a community forum to examine and discuss the pros and cons of the selected ideas. Various events will be held at the university to encourage as much participation as possible. By the end of the spring 2009 semester, one or more ideas will be selected for implementation.

The Quality Enhancement Plan must be a focused strategic plan that engages the entire university community ? faculty, students, staff, administrators, alumni and trustees ? to develop a project contributing to the university's institutional strength by enhancing student learning. The five-year plan is required to be based on scholarship and research of the best educational practices. Clear outcomes for student learning and a well-developed assessment plan and research design are essential to the plan, which also must include resources for implementation. The accreditation process occurs every 10 years.

To submit an idea, go to the Quality Enhancement Plan website, <http://bigidea.tulane.edu>.