February 19, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

The spring semester brings with it the advent of several new academic initiatives. I write to inform you of these initiatives and to invite your comments and suggestions.

The first initiative concerns the creation of a statement that articulates a vision for undergraduate learning and formation at Notre Dame. The University of Notre Dame is deeply committed to providing an exceptional undergraduate educational experience that is enriched by Catholic intellectual, religious, and cultural traditions. Notwithstanding, the University has not articulated in any comprehensive or distinctive way what it seeks to instill in its undergraduates. In an effort to address this matter, I have asked a group of faculty, administrators, and students to generate—in consultation with the University community—a statement of Notre Dame’s core vision for undergraduate learning and formation. The aim is for the statement they generate to encapsulate the breadth of ways in which the University seeks to cultivate undergraduate students as whole persons with attention to their intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development. Ultimately, the statement will be presented to Academic Council for approval and adoption.

The potential benefits of this initiative are numerous. Students at Notre Dame and prospective students inquiring about Notre Dame will better understand the design and intent of Notre Dame’s curricular and co-curricular offerings. Faculty and staff will gain perspective on how their personal efforts in fostering undergraduate learning and formation contribute to Notre Dame’s broader vision. Finally, the statement will provide a framework for assessing how well Notre Dame is succeeding in its educational goals.

Agustin Fuentes, Associate Professor of Anthropology, is leading this initiative. I invite you to contact him, or any initiative participant, with questions or comments about the project. For a list of those faculty, administrators, and students who are directly involved, please visit the following link: http://provost.nd.edu/academic-resources-and-information/academic_initiatives.shtml.

Second, I am pleased to inform you of the establishment of an academic Task Force on Africa. Two factors prompted the creation of the Task Force. First, Africa is increasingly the locus of phenomena that are both of critical importance globally and the specific focus of several projects being
undertaken by Notre Dame faculty and students, including on disease and health, the environment, and the emergence of Christianity across the continent and the implications of this development for religion worldwide. Additionally, Notre Dame recently has established numerous substantial relationships with people and organizations in Africa through separate and independent programs and initiatives. These programs and initiatives include the Millennium Villages Project, College of Engineering’s collaboration with an African university on issues of water quality, and Mendoza College of Business’s program in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Task Force’s charge is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how Notre Dame currently engages with Africa, through scholarship and research here on campus and through initiatives undertaken within its borders, and then to recommend whether, and if so how, the University should promote greater engagement with Africa moving forward.

The Task Force is led by Larry Sullivan, Professor of Theology, whom you may contact with questions or suggestions regarding the group’s efforts. For a list of the Task Force’s membership, please visit the following link: 
http://provost.nd.edu/academic-resources-and-information/academic_initiatives.shtml.

Finally, when I shared with you the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Recruiting Outstanding Catholic Faculty, I also shared with you a white paper written by Rev. Robert Sullivan titled “The University of Notre Dame’s catholic and Catholic future: professors, teaching, and scholarship,” and noted that an abridged version would be forthcoming. I am pleased to report that the abridged version is finished and now available at the following link: http://provost.nd.edu/academic-resources-and-information/documents/SullivanWhitePaper_Abridged.pdf.

Please join me in thanking Fr. Sullivan for his work on this paper, which is characteristically erudite, nuanced, and engaging. I believe it is an important contribution to our continuing dialogue about Notre Dame’s future as a catholic and Catholic university committed to fostering the highest levels of academic achievement amongst both faculty and students.

I am grateful to all who are participating in these endeavors, and am confident that each will prove of great benefit to the University.

Best wishes for a productive and rewarding semester.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas G. Burish

cc: Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., President