A HISTORY OF THE STUDENT COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

The Student Committee on Undergraduate Education (SCUE) is a group of self-appointed students which represents the College for Women, the College, and Wharton. No particular class or major is more heavily represented. The Committee is organized to improve the quality of the academic environment at Penn. SCUE has consistently advocated student self-determination: the freedom and concomitant responsibility of every student to plan and develop his education, guided by his goals and sound faculty/student advice, and not bound by coercive requirements.

SCUE has acted as a student lobby in order to achieve these goals. The Committee was formed in 1965 by a group of eleven students who were funded by the Men's Student Government in order to conduct research on educational reform. SCUE surveyed undergraduate student attitudes towards the Penn educational experience in Spring, 1965. One year later, SCUE published an analysis of the survey results along with numerous proposals for comprehensive reforms in the first SCUE report. The report's stated goals were to stimulate change and to promote faculty-student-administration communication. It achieved both.

Not only have many of these recommended changes been effected, but also SCUE has become a starting point for students interested
in academic reform to become involved in other planning committees throughout the University. SCUE members have represented students on committees such as academic planning, educational policy, admissions, and financial aid. They have also served on search committees for vital administrative positions as well as on the Development Commission and at meetings of the trustees.

SCUE's operating methods have not changed greatly over the years. More proposals have been written and are now being formulated which reassert and clarify earlier recommendations as well as suggesting more innovations. The first SCUE report resembled greatly a student development commission report pointing out necessary improvements in University facilities, resources, and structures. Later reports pinpointed specific issues in an attempt to allow the student more variety in his undergraduate years at Penn. SCUE issued a report in 1967 which suggested improvements in the ROTC curriculum, one in 1968 on the language requirement, and a 1971 report which recommended models for a thematic learning program, a program of fieldwork for credit, and a tutorial semester, besides proposing changes in admission and tenure policy. This report was followed by one on grading and by the most recent one in 1973 on the pre-med program at Penn.

SCUE does not argue that its suggestions should be adopted because its members are "representative" of all student opinion, but rather because the proposals themselves make educational sense.
Evidently, the faculty and administration have agreed, for many SCUE reports have been adopted in various forms (for example, pass/fail, relaxed distributionals, increased student input in tenure decisions, no academic credit for ROTC in the College, abolition of admissions requirements for entrance into the major, CTS programs, the tutorial semester, more individualized majors).

As SCUE commitment to advising faculty and administrators has increased, so has its commitment to advising fellow students. With more flexible requirements and more varied options, the Pennsylvania undergraduate needs a better advising system, and student advising helps meet that need.

The SCUE office, located in the basement of College Hall, is open almost full-time during pre-registration and registration periods to assist students in making course selections. In 1974, SCUE added more advisors to this office in order to offer long-range academic advising and to help students with procedural, bureaucratic problems.

One of SCUE's more recent and most valuable functions is the publishing of the Course Guide, a student evaluation of courses and instructors at Penn. SCUE assumed control of the Course Guide in 1971 when it instituted a program to computerize the course evaluation forms and computer analyze the results. Information generated is used to advise students on course selection, to provide faculty with feedback on their teaching, and to provide
a more reliable mechanism for student input into the evaluation of teaching ability required in all individual tenure decisions. Since its inception in 1965, in fact, SCUE has been stressing the importance of student evaluation of teaching as an important factor in tenure decisions. In 1974 SCUE began a personnel center, a file of upcoming tenure cases from cooperative departments. This service is intended to conveniently provide departments and personnel committees with the relevant material SCUE has gathered from the course evaluation forms. The SCUE office has also become an organizing center for those students who wish to lend their support to faculty members up for tenure who have received high teaching evaluations from students.

No school has a monopoly on good educational ideas; SCUE has found that an interchange of ideas on the inter-university level has been highly beneficial. It has sponsored two intercollegiate conferences, one a national symposium in 1965 on "The Role of the Student in Policy-making," and one in 1973 to compare and exchange views with students from other colleges in the Northeast.

SCUE presently has approximately 30 members, and is still financially dependent on the student government. Many major battles of the late 1960's have been settled, and many of SCUE's recommendations have been adopted. SCUE's primary concerns are now advising students through personal help and the Course
Guide, and communication to the faculty and the administration information about innovative educational opportunities. In this year of transition at the University, SCUE sees itself as participating in University decisions, especially those concerning teaching, tenure, and the new structure to be set up. In short, SCUE's goal is the continuing improvement of undergraduate education.

Heidi Solomon, Chairman
The Student Committee on Undergraduate Education
October, 1974