Dean Paul Woodruff convened the meeting at 2:35pm.

The meeting began with a report from the dean on the state of the school. Dean Woodruff reviewed information that was contained on a handout (see below) distributed to the audience of approximately 50 faculty members and about 15 administrative staff and other visitors. This report provided basic information about the structure and operation of the school and brief descriptions of its various programs.

Dean Woodruff then asked for questions from the floor.

Janet Staiger (RTF) asked two questions: Are there plans to modify the core curriculum? and How are the efforts to implement the flag requirements into the curriculum proceeding?

In answer to the first question, Dean Woodruff responded that there is a regular process in place for updating the list of core courses in each category of the state-mandated common core curriculum. The Undergraduate Studies Advisory Committee oversees this process in an effort to have a dynamic and relevant list of course options for all undergraduate students. He also noted that the Higher Education Coordinating Board, which establishes the rules governing the state common core curriculum is currently reviewing the requirements and may well revise the standards in the next year or two, at which time UT Austin will have to make adjustments as appropriate.

In answer to the second question, Dean Woodruff noted that substantial progress is being made in adding flag requirements to the many undergraduate degree programs across campus. He said that discussions underway with all undergraduate schools and colleges suggest that only two are likely to require fewer than 4 of the 8 flags in the 2012-14 catalog, and several will require 6 or more flags. The implementation process has been more difficult in the largest colleges, and in several cases it has been slowed by limited and shrinking resources. He mentioned three flags in particular - the third writing flag, the ethics and leadership flag, and the independent inquiry flag – as being the most challenging to implement campus-wide. Dean Woodruff also acknowledged that there have been several instances of faculty resistance to meeting specific requirements of certain flags, and that these are being dealt with through continuing deliberation and education and, in a few cases, of modifications to the interpretations of the flag requirements by the faculty committees approving flag course proposals.

Molly Cummings (Integrative Biology) asked the dean about the role of the school being to provide an academic home for undeclared students for up to 4 semesters. Specifically, she indicated a concern that this may prolong students’ time to graduation and asked whether this rule might be changed to a shorter time, such as 2 or 3 semesters. She also asked
whether the school has data on student progress toward the degree to address this question.

Dean Woodruff responded that since the school is only in its second year of having students enrolled it is too early to know about how starting in the school will affect time to graduation. The school is tracking the academic progress of all of the students who have been enrolled and will know after two years how they compare to students entering in previous years as undeclared majors. Dean Woodruff agreed with the concern underlying the question and said that the school would continue to keep the faculty informed about this matter.

Martha Hilley (Music) asked whether the School of Undergraduate Studies has any plans to develop a $10,000 undergraduate degree plan as called for by Governor Perry.

Provost Steve Leslie rose to address this question. He said that the university is working closely with the UT System to respond to the governor’s recommendation for a $10,000 undergraduate degree program. It this time this goal, does not appear to be achievable while maintaining the current quality of UT degree programs. He further noted that the university is working on ways to hold costs to a minimum by developing more efficient ways to deliver a high-quality undergraduate education.

Dean Woodruff added that one example of how the school is attempting to improve efficiency is exploring the feasibility of being able to have large courses carry the writing flag, which will mean developing different and more efficient ways to teach students to write effectively.

Provost Leslie added that the efforts underway in the Center for Teaching and Learning to support improved instruction in large courses (the Course Transformation Initiative) are another example that may lead to more efficient use of instructional resources in undergraduate education.

Hearing no additional questions, Dean Woodruff adjourned the meeting at 2:55pm.