MEMORANDUM

TO: Steering Committee
FROM: Committee on Academic Programs (CAP)
RE: Final Recommendation on Learning Assistant Policy
DATE: May 14, 2018

Background and Charge:
In February 2017, CAP received a charge from the Steering Committee to consider the need for a new policy on the use of learning assistants.   Learning Assistants are undergraduate students enrolled in a credit-bearing course who receive pedagogical instruction in college-level teaching and contribute to the execution of TCNJ undergraduate courses.

Method:
CAP consulted with Jeanine Vivona, chair of the Psychology Department, and AJ Richards, learning assistant coordinator in the Physics department, to gather input on existing learning assistant courses in these departments. After discussion, CAP determined that a new policy on Learning Assistants was warranted and developed a Preliminary Recommendation. In the Fall of 2017, campus-wide testimony was solicited on the recommendation, leading to substantial changes and additions to the policy. In the Spring of 2018, CAP solicited a second round of campus-wide testimony on the revised policy recommendation. The final recommendation was unanimously approved by CAP.

Final Recommendation:
The new policy includes the following points:

1) Definition of learning assistant, sponsoring faculty member, and instructor.
2) Description of the course-related activities that learning assistants may engage in.
3) Description of activities that learning assistants must NOT engage in (e.g., assigning grades, teaching new material without the instructor present, accessing student grades on Canvas).
4) Description of the responsibility of the sponsoring faculty member and instructor in training the learning assistant in how to maintain confidentiality.
5) Responsibilities of the department in creating a learning assistant course syllabus, establishing eligibility/selection criteria for learning assistants, informing students in a course with a learning assistant of their rights, and determining limits around use of learning assistants.

This policy can be implemented as soon as Fall 2018. The few departments on campus (e.g., Psychology, Physics, Biology) who already use Learning Assistants should be alerted of this new policy, so that they can make any necessary changes to bring their current practice into alignment with the policy.

Note: ITS has agreed to create a new role in Canvas called "Learning Assistant," which will allow a Learning Assistant to provide feedback on submitted assignments but NOT view grades or have access to the gradebook. After final approval, Steering should share this policy with Ryan Gladysiewicz, so that a Learning Assistant role in Canvas is created over the summer of 2018.

Section:	
Title:	Learning Assistants Policy
Effective Date:	
Approved By:	
Responsible Unit:	Academic Affairs (academic@tcnj.edu, 609-771-3080)
Related Documents:	Student Complaints Policy
History:	

Version	Date	Notes
1.0		New policy; initial release

I. INTRODUCTION

This policy defines and outlines the parameters for undergraduate Learning Assistants.

II. DEFINITIONS

"Learning Assistants" are undergraduate students enrolled in a credit-bearing course who receive pedagogical instruction in college-level teaching and contribute to the execution of TCNJ undergraduate courses.

"Sponsoring faculty member" is the individual responsible for monitoring the training, learning outcomes, learning activities, and supervision of the Learning Assistant, and who also assigns a grade to the Learning Assistant. The sponsoring faculty member is compensated at the practicum rate for each Learning Assistant.

"Instructor" is the individual teaching the course that has a Learning Assistant. Departments decide (with approval from the dean) whether the instructor and sponsoring faculty member are the same person, or whether it is more favorable to student learning to separate these two roles. If the roles are separated, the sponsoring faculty member and instructor must work together to provide supervision and assessment of the Learning Assistant.

III. POLICY

Statement of Purpose: Because a hallmark of instruction at TCNJ is small class size that enables students to directly interact with faculty in meaningful ways, there are no traditional Teaching Assistants. However, some undergraduate students may benefit from developing their abilities as a teacher by observing instructors as they design courses and by contributing to the planning and execution of learning experiences at the undergraduate level. Thus, undergraduate students may serve as Learning Assistants, for which they receive course units/credits based on

their achievement of pre-determined learning outcomes. Learning Assistants receive pedagogical instruction and mentoring from the instructor and sponsoring faculty member and also enrich the learning outcomes of other students by providing support and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning in formal learning contexts (classrooms, labs, studios, etc.), in tandem with the professor. Learning Assistants do not assign grades, teach independently, or receive pay.

Policies: The following points clarify the roles and responsibilities for TCNJ Learning Assistants and the instructors/departments who use them.

1. To support students in TCNJ courses, Learning Assistants, with oversight from an instructor and sponsoring faculty member, may engage in a variety of tasks. Learning Assistants may provide assistance in the classroom (e.g., taking attendance, helping students doing independent work, helping instructors with logistics or paperwork), lead recitation sessions/review sessions, assist in laboratory sessions, hold office hours, provide peer mentoring or tutoring, and update course materials. Learning Assistants may not teach new material in the classroom setting without the instructor present, but they may review material previously presented by the instructor and/or offer information that helps a student better understand the materials in review sessions and/or office hours.

2. Only instructors assign student grades. Learning Assistants must not assign grades, evaluate the correctness of answers on tests/quizzes, or have any form of access (including electronic platforms/communication) to student grades. They also may not proctor exams without the instructor present. Learning Assistants must not be aware of exam content before it is given or create test questions.

3. With training and oversight from the instructor, Learning Assistants may provide feedback on student work that has yet to be graded by the instructor (e.g., comments on drafts or final products). Feedback from Learning Assistants should be instructive and not evaluative. Learning Assistants may also indicate whether an assignment is complete or incomplete (e.g., indicate whether all problems on a homework have been answered). However, only feedback from the instructor is used to determine grades on assignments.

4. Sponsoring faculty members and instructors are responsible for training and monitoring Learning Assistants in maintaining confidentiality (pertaining to assignments, academic accommodations, special circumstances, etc.) regarding all students in the class. Learning Assistants, as well as students enrolled in a course with a Learning Assistant, should follow the procedure outlined in the Student Complaints Policy to report complaints about instructors and/or Learning Assistants (e.g., violations of confidentiality).

5. Each department wanting to use Learning Assistants must create a Learning Assistant course that is approved through the governance process (i.e. Department and School Committees). A course syllabus must specify appropriate prerequisite courses (see point 7 below), learning outcomes, required learning activities, criteria for determining course grades, and the number of course units/credits that a Learning Assistant will earn. In addition to course-related learning activities, a written assignment (e.g., reflective paper, proposed enhancement to the class, research-based paper) deemed appropriate by the sponsoring faculty member must be required.

Additional learning activities (e.g., participation in pedagogical workshops, weekly meetings with the instructor) may also be required.

6. Any syllabus for an undergraduate course that uses a Learning Assistant must clearly state: a) the role(s) of the Learning Assistant in the course; b) that the Learning Assistant will not assign or have access to student grades; and c) that any student may request (without penalty) that a Learning Assistant not provide feedback on their particular assignments.

7. Because serving as a Learning Assistant may be competitive, equitable access must be ensured by each department according to their needs. Selection criteria must include a) a minimum GPA, and b) having successfully completed the course (or an appropriate equivalent) for which the student will serve as a Learning Assistant. Departments determine the appropriate minimum GPA and operationalization of "successful completion," as well as other appropriate selection criteria. All selection criteria must be approved through the governance process (i.e. Department and School Committees) and published on the departmental website.

8. Departments determine the maximum number of Learning Assistants that are appropriate for each course, the number of Learning Assistants that a sponsoring faculty member may have in a single semester, whether students may serve as a Learning Assistant more than once, the number of units/credits earned by a Learning Assistant for a particular course, and whether students may serve as a Learning Assistant for Pass-Fail credit. Departments must also establish an appropriate means by which students enrolled in a course with a Learning Assistant may "opt out" (without penalty) of having the Learning Assistant provide feedback on their assignments. These departmental policies must be approved by the dean.