

## Liberal Learning Council (LLC) Summary AY 2017-18

1. Fall 2017, the LLC started to use the Interim Liberal Learning Council approval process to review courses requesting liberal learning designations. The process is described at: <https://liberallearning.tcnj.edu/approval/>. The interim process required the LLC to make changes to the approval process, as well as edits to the course proposal documents. The process also required consulting with various advisory groups about the interim process, as the process involved new tasks for all groups involved. Appendix A includes a summary the LLC submitted to CAP (May 9, 2018) regarding the interim process, including the number of proposals reviewed, how the interim policy impacted the work of the LLC, issues/challenges with proposal reviews, and general recommendations about the interim policy.
2. In addition, the LLC continued to consider revisions to the liberal learning program based on recommendations from the self-study and external review conducted 2014-2015. We engaged in discussions with various stakeholders on campus (e.g., Academic Leaders, Faculty Senate, Student Government), which resulted in a proposal to CAP for Steering to create a Task Force to determine whether TCNJ should develop a set of baccalaureate learning goals that would specify what skills and knowledge all TCNJ undergraduates would gain by the time they graduate; these goals would encompass Liberal Learning and the learning outcomes common to all major programs, as well as co-curricular activities. April 2018, CAP forwarded this recommendation to Steering. May 2018, Steering authorized a Liberal Learning Task Force for the 2018-2019 academic year. (See Appendix B: Memo for Ad Hoc Liberal Learning Task Force.)
3. Finally, the LLC reviewed and discussed course approval processes for specific academic units or programs on campus, including Honors courses with the Global Designation and a group of Public Health courses requesting Liberal Learning designations.

## APPENDIX A

LLC feedback about the interim course approval process  
May 9, 2018

1. How many (if any) proposals have you reviewed since the interim policy took effect last fall?

The LLC reviewed 12 courses (see Table below) using the interim procedures described at: <https://liberallearning.tcnj.edu/approval/>. The column on the far right indicates how long it took for the LLC to make a decision after the course was submitted.

<b>Course</b>	<b>LL designation(s) requested</b>	<b>Advisory group identified to review the request(s)</b>	<b>Decision time (weeks)</b>
SLP 410	Writing	Writing Program	6
HIS 375	Gender	HSS Curriculum Committee	10
SLP 320	Writing	Writing Program	10
PHL210/REL210	Global	Global Engagement Council	8
CMP/WGS 321	Global	Global Engagement Council	8
EFN 398	SCHP	HSS Curriculum Committee	12
ECE/ELE 113	LVPA-Visual & Performing Arts	A&C Curriculum Committee	25
INT/POL 361	LVPA-Literary	HSS Curriculum Committee	1
HIS 367	Race-Ethnicity	HSS Curriculum Committee	12
SPE 340	VLPA- Visual & Performing Arts, Gender, Race-Ethnicity	HSS Curriculum Committee/ A&C Curriculum Committee	22
CRI 340	Global	Global Engagement Council	5
BUS 380	Global, SCHP	Global Engagement Council, HSS Curriculum Committee	In process

2. How has this interim policy impacted the work of the LLC?

There were many moving parts to the interim policy, especially when the faculty member requested more than one LL designation that required review by different advisory groups (see SPE 340, BUS 380). At the beginning of the year, it took time to draft the interim policy (and related course proposal documents), as well as to discuss the role of the advisory groups (and how to review proposals) with the chairs/directors of the groups/programs. This is still a work in progress because some advisory groups didn't have to reviewed proposals this past year (Science Curriculum Committee, CELC).

With respect to the actual work of reviewing course proposals, the interim process has streamlined some of the work for the LLC. Most of the time, having feedback from advisory

groups expedited the review of courses during LLC meetings. In some cases, however, the LLC didn't agree with the recommendation of the advisory group, which required follow-up with the chair/director of the advisor group/program.

The interim process also prompted the LLC to develop a rubric to evaluate proposals (to help standardize the process with multiple advisory groups involved). This work is not complete and will require additional effort next year in collaboration with the advisory groups.

3. Have any issues or challenges come about as you've reviewed proposals and feedback from various committees?

Yes. The biggest challenge and concern is similar to the concern that perhaps prompted the use of advisory groups in the first place – that there might not be adequate expertise in the group to provide input about the LL designation requested. Although the HSS Curriculum Committee might, on paper, seem to be the appropriate advisory group to review Gender LL designation requests, it may be that a faculty member with this expertise isn't serving on the committee at the time the proposal is reviewed (or is absent during the committee meeting that the proposal is discussed).

Some of the Advisory groups don't normally review course proposals as part of their normal charge (e.g., Global Engagement Council, CELR), so the learning curve was steep (not surprisingly).

The meeting times (1/month, 2/month) of advisory groups were different, and it was a challenge to keep track of these different timelines and communicate efficiently with advisory group chairs/directors and the faculty member requesting the LL designations. This type of coordination seems unavoidable for any course review process, but having committees/councils with different scheduled meetings seemed to slow down the process (especially if committees met only 1/month). See the final column in the summary table above.

Sometimes, the LLC would disagree with the recommendation of the advisory group. We resolved the issue by having a follow-up discussion with the chair/director of the advisory group/program, but these disagreements may be related to differing levels of expertise in the LLC and advisory group.

4. As CAP considers next steps for this interim policy, what would be helpful for CAP to know about the way the interim policy works?

In general, the LLC supports the use of advisory feedback, as we lack expertise in certain content areas (especially because of our reduced size) and have valued the feedback from individuals/groups who have more knowledge in these areas. In addition, involving more faculty in the evaluation process has resulted in valuable input about the LL outcomes/learning goals themselves and how we want to achieve them in our courses.

The challenges in the current interim policy seem to center on:

- Expertise in groups (having relevant expertise in the advisory group depends on the composition of the group in a given semester, as well as who attends meetings to provide input).
- Efficiency (review process takes a long time because committee/council meetings may meet only 1/month, and other priorities might take precedence during a given month).
- Transparency (would help to provide some training about the review process up front and develop some type of rubric that all advisory groups can use to evaluate proposals and provide relevant feedback).

One recommendation is to maintain an advisory system, but instead of using the current advisory groups, the LLC can identify certain individuals (with relevant expertise) who can provide input about proposals on an ad-hoc basis. Feedback can be provided to the LLC via email (within a certain timeframe), so the LLC doesn't have to wait to receive feedback after an advisory group's committee/council meeting takes place. This type of process can help to address the expertise and efficiency issues above. In addition, we can increase transparency by inviting advisory individuals to LLC meetings during the time a course proposal is scheduled to be reviewed. This way, the advisory individuals and LLC members can review potential disagreements as they arise during the discussion; attending the LLC meeting will also provide an opportunity for advisory individuals to give input about recommendations (if the course is not approved).

## APPENDIX B

**TO:** Jacqueline Taylor, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs  
William Keep, incoming Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Amanda Norvell, Faculty Senate President  
Christopher Blakeley, Student Government President

**FROM:** Steering

**RE:** Ad Hoc Liberal Learning Task Force

**DATE:** May 16, 2018

### **Background**

TCNJ's Liberal Learning Program was established in 2004, as a part of the reformulation of the entire undergraduate curriculum that was completed in 2004. In 2015, the Liberal Learning Program Council (LLPC) issued a report on its extensive self-study, conducted from September, 2014 – October, 2015. In December, 2015, two external reviewers conducted a site visit, and they submitted their review in January, 2016. LLPC identified from the self-study and the external review the following five major recommendations regarding Liberal Learning:

1. Revise the Liberal Learning student outcomes. Currently, there are too many outcomes, many need rephrasing, and some important outcomes from national conversations are not included.
2. Pursue true integration between Liberal Learning, the majors, and co-curriculum. The self-study highlighted the need to address student perceptions that Liberal Learning (LL) and major programs are separate and/or conflicting. The external reviewers encouraged the College to engage departments, majors, and co-curricular staff in conversations to identify how their learning outcomes align with Liberal Learning outcomes.
3. Revise the curricular structure of Liberal Learning. Revision of the current LL curriculum will be needed to implement changes to the outcomes, increase connections between LL courses and major programs, and make apparent that TCNJ provides a liberal arts education as a whole.
4. Improve Liberal Learning advising. The external reviewers identified as an area of concern the high rate of self-advising by students with respect to the Liberal Learning, and they recommended that substantial attention be devoted to advising following the revision of the outcomes and curricular of the Liberal Learning Program.
5. Implement a robust direct assessment of Liberal Learning. Currently, there is little direct assessment of student mastery of Liberal Learning outcomes; most is indirect (i.e., measures student/faculty perceptions).

In the self-study (p. 7), LLPC notes that it stopped short of proposing a revised program, recognizing that this would require engagement of the entire campus and was therefore beyond the scope of the self-study.

Following this, LLPC agreed to attempt to address the first two recommendations by developing baccalaureate level learning goals for the Liberal Learning Program. Over the past three

academic years, LLPC has worked on drafts of these goals and has attempted to engage the faculty in a conversation regarding both the wisdom of this approach and the details of the suggested goals. However, these conversations have not led to consensus on a path forward.

In addition, in Summer, 2017, faculty members Andrew Bechtel, He Len Chung, and Piper Kendrix Williams as well as Associate Provosts Kit Murphy and Mosen Auryan attended the AAC&U Summer Institute on General Education and Assessment. These individuals are now a resource for the campus regarding national trends and best practices in general education goals and curricular structures.

Finally, during the 2017-2018 academic year, the Faculty Senate has held extensive discussions concerning the direction of the College. In its memo to incoming President Kathryn Foster entitled “The Current State of The College of New Jersey,” the Senate expresses a desire to “chart new directions in course and curriculum design” and describes the Liberal Learning program as an area “ripe for innovation.” The Senate goes on to request consideration of how Liberal Learning and coursework in the major are integrated to “provide a seamless and relevant learning experience” for students.

### **Charge**

Accordingly Steering charges the Liberal Learning Task Force to discern faculty opinion regarding the scope and nature of the revision of the Liberal Learning Program and to define parameters for this revision, to engage the faculty in conversation regarding the role of Liberal Learning vis-à-vis the major, and to lead the faculty at large in defining the goals and composition of a revitalized Liberal Learning Program.

The task force should rely heavily upon the good work and important recommendations developed by the 2014-2016 Liberal Learning Program Councils in conducting the self-study and external review and should also introduce to the faculty information learned by the AAC&U attendees on national trends and best practices. The task force should gather additional faculty input regarding our current program to identify which aspects of the program are perceived as essential and to identify the extent to which the faculty wishes to restructure the program. Questions for consideration by the task force and by the faculty at large should include but not be limited to the following:

1. What goals do we view as essential to a future liberal learning program, regardless of its structure?
2. What goals do we view as essential for our students’ education? Are these the same as those identified in item 1?
3. The current program evolved to meet numerous goals with maximal flexibility for students. This has led to a rather complex program. To what extent is this complexity valuable? What aspects of the program, if any, might we sacrifice to simplify the program?
4. Do we remain wed to a system which requires a distribution of courses across disciplines of all students?
5. Do we remain committed to a system which incorporates civic responsibilities? Are the current civic responsibilities still the right ones? What are we missing? For example, should class considerations or sustainability be added to this mix? How can our

expectations for civic responsibility be better married to our goals for breadth of knowledge?

6. Do faculty perceive general education as secondary to the major? How can we better integrate all aspects of a TCNJ education?

7. What benefits do we see for our students for the various paths we offer through the liberal learning program?

8. The Faculty Senate asserts the following: “While we should not ignore national trends and best practices, we want to develop our academic programs to reflect our own expertise as a faculty and our own unique position as a public institution with many of the characteristics and advantages of a private liberal arts college.” With this in mind, how do we wish to be innovative?

The task force should begin by carefully reviewing the 2015 self-study and the report from the external reviewers hearing from the AAC&U team. It should proceed to develop ways to effectively share the results of the self-study together with information regarding national trends with the faculty and to simultaneously gather preliminary testimony from the faculty regarding all of the questions raised above. Additionally the task force should review all data gathered by LLPC in the process of the self-study, and should gather additional testimony from students and from staff currently involved with academic advising regarding the current program. Following this the task force should prepare a preliminary recommendation for Steering, to include a recommendation concerning the scope of the overhaul to be undertaken, parameters for this overhaul, and a suggested process forward appropriate to the recommended scope. It is expected that the task force will continue to lead this process, but the preliminary recommendation should first be shared with Steering and with the faculty.

The Liberal Learning task force shall consist of all members of the Liberal Learning Council together with up to four additional faculty members appointed by the Faculty Senate. The task force will meet monthly on the first Wednesday of the month from 1:30-2:50pm, utilizing the LLC time slot. LLC will conduct its normal business on third Wednesdays. If the task force requires additional meeting time it will meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday from 1:30-2:50pm.

The first meeting will be convened by the Associate Provost for Liberal Learning. In keeping with the standard practice for Councils, the group should elect a chair and vice chair for the task force from among its members. To ensure that both the work of the task force and the regular work of LLC move forward effectively, the chair and vice chair of the task force should be different individuals from the chair and the vice chair of LLC, although both may be elected at this first meeting. Minutes of meetings should be submitted to Steering. The task force should see fit to draw on expertise from across campus or outside to assist it with particular issues.

### **Testimony Tier: 3**

The issue requires a high degree of testimony from the campus community. The assigned council or committee should consult with relevant individuals and groups in developing a preliminary recommendation.

**Meeting times:** The Task Force will meet on the 1st and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays as needed from 1:30 to 2:50pm.

**Timeline:**

The Ad Hoc Task Force should prepare a preliminary recommendation for Steering by December, 2018.

**TCNJ Governance Processes**

**Step 1 – Steering issues a charge**

**Step 2 - Governance prepares a Preliminary Recommendation**

Once the appropriate standing committee or council has received the charge, it should start by collecting data needed to make a preliminary recommendation. It should receive input from affected individuals and all relevant stakeholder groups prior to making a preliminary recommendation. For issues that have broad implications or that affect a large number of individuals, initial testimony should be solicited from the campus community at large. For some issues, sufficient initial testimony may come from input through committee membership or solicitation from targeted constituent groups.

When, in the best judgment of the committee, adequate clarity of the principles contributing to the problem are known, a preliminary recommendation should be drafted and disseminated to the campus community.

**Step 3 – The Relevant Stakeholders provide Testimony**

Once a preliminary recommendation has been completed, the standing committee or council should seek testimony from the campus community. The testimony should be gathered in accordance with the Testimony Tier (see page 24) assigned to the issue by Steering.

For issues that require public testimony from the campus community, the chair of the standing committee or council should approach the president of the appropriate representative bodies to schedule the next available time slot at a meeting of that body.

Testimony should be gathered in a way that allows stakeholders to weigh in fully on the issue. Members of the standing committee or council that wrote the preliminary recommendation should be present to hear and record the testimony.

**Step 4 – Governance prepares a Final Recommendation**

Once the standing committee or council has received appropriate testimony, it should revise the preliminary recommendation into a final recommendation. Once the final recommendation is complete, the standing committee or council should use sound judgment to determine whether or not more public testimony is required. If, in its feedback to the original preliminary recommendation, a stakeholder representative body requests to review an issue again, the committee or council is bound to bring it back to that body. If a full calendar year has passed since the formal announcement of the preliminary recommendation, the committee must resubmit a preliminary recommendation to the campus community.

When the committee or council has completed the final recommendation, it should forward it to the Steering Committee. The final recommendation should be accompanied by a cover memo that summarizes the initial charge, how testimony was gathered and the nature of that testimony, and how the committee responded to that testimony, including a description of how the preliminary recommendation evolved as a result of testimony.

**Step 5 – Steering considers the Final Recommendation**

**Step 6 – The Provost and/or President and Board consider the Final Recommendation**



**Step 7 – Steering notifies the Campus Community**

**For a complete description of all steps and of the other testimony tiers, see Governance Structures and Processes, 2017 Revision, pages 21 – 24.**