

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Steering Committee**

**FROM: Teaching and Learning Council (TLC)**

**RE: Preliminary recommendation on approval process for blended and online courses**

**DATE: February 8, 2018**

### **Charge:**

In the spring 2017, the Teaching and Learning Council (TLC) was charged with reviewing the current steps to offering blended and online courses at TCNJ. Specifically, we were asked to:

- 1) Gather feedback and testimony from relevant TCNJ community members on the current blended/online course approval process; and
- 2) Prepare a new preliminary recommendation or resubmit last year's recommendation for consideration by Steering and CAP.

Testimony was sought through survey feedback from deans, from department chairs, and from faculty who have been trained through the Office of Instructional Design prior to teaching blended and online courses. Additionally, a focus group of faculty members was conducted in mid-May, with invitations sent to all full-time faculty. The following report describes our testimony-collection efforts and specifies our recommendations.

TLC also reviewed and considered relevant reports by the Faculty Senate and the Task Force on Instructional Technology convened by Steering. All of the recommendations from those reports were reviewed and updated (See Appendix A).

### **Preliminary Recommendation:**

TLC resubmits the 2016 recommendation for the course approval process for blended and online courses (see Appendix B) and confirms, based on the testimony we reviewed, that this course approval process is meeting the needs of our institution.

This course approval process provides for planning and preparation on the part of the faculty member as well as the institution. It opens communication channels between deans, their departments, and the faculty developing the courses. It provides for faculty training and professional development when needed, and operates on a timeline that allows Records and Registration time for proper course identification in PAWS in order to provide accurate course information to the students prior to registration. It affords the Office of Instructional Design time to ensure the courses meet federal and state guidelines for distance learning. In completing our due diligence for this charge, we found that the majority of stakeholders are satisfied with the current process.

**Background:**

In the fall of 2014, the Task Force on Instructional Technology was given the charge of outlining a vision and direction for TCNJ's use of technology in teaching and learning. The task force was asked to explore the role of instructional technology in face-to-face classes as a tool for enhancing teaching and learning. It was also asked to evaluate the potential for the success of expanding blended and online courses at TCNJ to include fall and spring terms.

The task force met throughout the fall 2014 and spring 2015 terms, producing a final report that was submitted to Provost Taylor and the Steering Committee in February of 2015. A Faculty Senate committee reviewed this report and endorsed its main recommendations concerning blended/online courses. The report was revised and published on TCNJ's web site in June of 2015, and recommendations from the report formed the foundation for the current process of developing and offering a blended or online course through the Office of Instructional Design. The steps for blended/online course approval were reviewed by the TLC and published to TCNJ's website (See [Steps to Offering a Blended or Online Course](#)).

In the last three years, The Office of Instructional Design has worked with approximately 75 full-time faculty members to redesign courses for blended and online learning. During that time, the number of students enrolled in blended and online courses has grown. In summer sessions for 2016, 259 students enrolled in blended courses. In 2017, 425 students enrolled. Enrollment in fully online courses was roughly the same and holding steady (223 students in 2016; 277 in 2017). Only a handful of blended and online courses have been offered in the fall and spring terms.

**Summary of Testimony:**

***Survey Responses from the Deans.*** Overall, the respondent deans are reasonably satisfied with the current course approval process. When asked if the current process is appropriate and effective for online/blended courses, only 4 out of 7 responded, but all 4 responses were "Yes." The biggest areas of concern (combining multiple-choice and open-ended responses) were a perceived lack of information regarding online courses and how to implement them, as well as the timeliness of the approval process.

***Survey Responses from Department Chairs.*** All respondents (n=16) said that their departments are currently offering blended or online courses. When asked if the steps for offering a blended and online course are "appropriate and effective for those course structures," a majority responded (11, or 73.33%) "Yes," while 4 (or 26.67%) responded "No."

***Survey Responses from Trained Faculty.*** Faculty who participated in the Blended and Online Learning Course Development Training Program were surveyed to provide their thoughts on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the program. Of the 25 faculty who participated in the survey, 19 (76%) developed a blended course, while 6 (24%) developed an online course. A strong majority of respondents (96%; N=24) indicated that they think the current steps for offering a blended or online course are appropriate.

***Focus Group Responses from Faculty Members.*** Focus group participants were recruited via an email message to all TCNJ faculty. The focus group session was held May 17, 2017 and was reasonably diverse in terms of the departments represented there (World Languages & Cultures, Graduate Education, Communication Studies, Political Science, Computer Science, English, Music). Two groups were formed for the focus group discussions.

Among faculty members who participated in the session, the general consensus was that TCNJ faculty are aware of the Blended/Online course options. Focus group participants said they knew about the training requirement that is part of the blended/online course approval process, but few had completed the training. Most focus group participants said they were open to learning more about the ways that Canvas and other technologies can be used to enhance the learning environment. One of the groups specifically addressed the issue of whether the process was “appropriate and effective.” That question yielded only one response: “Yes, with caveats [like] trying to find a way to get adjuncts to be able to attend the training.”

## Appendix A

<b>PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION FROM INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN TASK FORCE</b>	<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>
<p>1. Initiate steps to provide for a more robust technology infrastructure on campus. This includes faster and more reliable Internet connections; expanded Wi-Fi service; the establishment of a digital video service on campus for recording, editing and storing video; Google tools for faculty, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>TCNJ's internet bandwidth has increased, providing faster speeds and more reliable experiences.</i></li> <li>● <i>IT has continued expansion of WiFi coverage to 100% of instructional and residential spaces and 90% of administrative spaces. Outdoor spaces are planned to receive coverage within the next semester.</i></li> <li>● <i>Faculty and staff joined students on Google Apps in May 2016, providing access to Team Drives, Groups and Hangouts, among other tools.</i></li> <li>● <i>Spring 2018 pilot to explore Kaltura, a media streaming platform that includes integrated recording and editing capabilities.</i></li> </ul>
<p>2. Provide for increased opportunities on campus where faculty, students and staff can see instructional technology in action through guest speakers, educational workshops, and other campus events. We believe our campus would benefit from seeing specific examples of ways in which digital tools can be put to work to further our Signature Experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>3-4 lunch 'n' learn events throughout the year through OID</i></li> <li>● <i>Annual Instructional Technology Workshop Day approaching year 20</i></li> <li>● <i>Virtual Tour of TCNJ-built blended and online courses available</i></li> <li>● <i>Virtual Access to OLC Conference provided 2016</i></li> <li>● <i>CanvasCon event hosted at TCNJ 2016</i></li> </ul>
<p>3. Continue to support faculty pioneers for their leadership with release time, stipends, equipment, or other incentives for integrating innovative approaches to teaching and learning with technology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>TCNJ signed MOA #104, guaranteeing full time faculty a stipend or a course release the first time they train and offer a blended or online course.</i></li> <li>● <i>Developed Faculty Fellows Program for AY2017-2018.</i></li> </ul>

<p>4. Review our faculty support in the use of our Canvas Learning Management System. If we are going to increase faculty use of Canvas, we need to be sure we have the support in place to handle the expansion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Faculty satisfaction is assessed at the end of each academic year.</i></li> </ul>
<p>5. Review our student support to ensure that TCNJ students are prepared for whatever digital tools they may encounter in the classroom. For students enrolled in blended or online courses, develop visible support channels to ensure success with instructional technology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>OID Student pages on Canvas use have been expanded and continue to be improved.</i></li> </ul>
<p>6. Continue the strategic offering of blended and online courses in the summer, winter and minimester semesters, when existing TCNJ students and other student populations will appreciate the flexibility of these alternate modes of instructional delivery. Before a blended or online course is offered in a fall or spring term, the justification for offering the specific course in an alternate format must be presented by the host department, the school dean, and the Office of Instructional Design. If it is determined that the course is both suitable for this format and that the alternate delivery mode enhances at least one of TCNJ's Signature Experiences, the faculty member who has proposed the course may apply to work with the Office of Instructional Design to build the course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>The training application process requires faculty to provide a rationale on the need for their blended or online course. Department chairs and deans sign letters of support.</i></li> <li>● <i>While we are slowly introducing blended and online courses in the fall and spring terms, the numbers are in the single digits.</i></li> </ul>
<p>7. Require faculty teaching blended and online courses to participate in formal training on best practices through the Office of Instructional Design during the semester prior to the course offering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>This has been made possible by the "Steps to Offering a Blended/Online Course."</i></li> <li>● <i>Training is offered multiple times a year, serving over 70 full time faculty.</i></li> </ul>

<p>8. Require all blended and online courses to go through a rigorous peer review process prior to being offered as part of the curriculum. This would include a department-level review, school-level review, and a College-level review through the Office of Instructional Design.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In our current environment, we only allow existing TCNJ courses to be re-designed for blended and online learning. The course content is vetted through the curriculum committees, are delivery mode agnostic.</i></li> <li>• <i>Delivery method (blended or online) is assessed through self-review via the Quality Matters rubric. This has provided a practical method for determining if our blended and online courses are meeting TCNJ's expectations in terms of delivery mode.</i></li> </ul>
<p>9. For any required undergraduate courses, students seeking face-to-face courses must always have that option. The election to take a blended or online course should be a student's choice, not a requirement or an only option.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>TCNJ should consider speaking to students directly to see if this is still a concern. It was something brought up by one of the task force members in 2014, before the majority of blended and online courses were developed.</i></li> </ul>
<p>10. Academic schools should set their own enrollment caps for blended and online courses, but those caps should reflect the best practices supported in the literature. We recognize the need for a lower course cap for blended learning than traditional classes. As course size goes up, quality of course and student satisfaction goes down. Online and blended courses should not exceed caps that would prevent us from offering students the personalized, collaborative experience they seek at TCNJ.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Deans and chairs have been setting caps and have been mindful of the benefit of smaller class sizes.</i></li> </ul>
<p>11. Work with TCNJ's Office of Records and Registration to establish guidelines for communicating the details of blended and online courses to students. This process will allow students to make informed decisions about their course selections.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In 2015, Records and Registration established new codes for PAWS to designate blended (BL) and online (OL). They also created explanatory "notes" to be added to the course description.</i></li> </ul>
<p>12. Review our current course evaluation instruments and develop an equitable instrument for alternate methods of course delivery that addresses features unique to the digital environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>TCNJ is currently reviewing its student feedback in general with the Task Force on Student Feedback on Teaching (<a href="https://governance.tcnj.edu/committees-councils/student-feedback-on-teaching-task-force/">https://governance.tcnj.edu/committees-councils/student-feedback-on-teaching-task-force/</a>). The OID has been in contact with the task force chair.</i></li> </ul>

<p>13. Continue to build the resources available through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Office of Instructional Design in order to keep faculty current on best practices in the use of digital tools for teaching and learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ongoing.</i></li> </ul>
<p>14. Request that the Committee on Faculty Affairs add the use of contemporary/innovative pedagogical tools by faculty as a "plus factor" in the tenure and promotion process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pedagogical innovation is included in the most recent Reappointment for Promotion document (2017). We should make sure departments deans and the Provost are recognizing faculty's work in online and blended learning as meeting that expectation.</i></li> </ul>
<p>15. Chart our progress by regularly assessing blended and online courses to ensure they are rigorous, effective and true to our Signature Experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Faculty employ the Quality Matters tools for self review. Blended and online courses are evaluated by students using the same feedback instrument applied in traditional classes. A number of faculty conduct customized assessments as well. For summer and winter courses, end of term surveys provide additional data on our blended and online offerings.</i></li> </ul>

## Appendix B

### **Proposal for Steps to Offering a Blended/Online Course**

#### **Step 1: Plan for the Course**

- The course must be an **existing TCNJ course** that has already been vetted for learning outcomes and content. The instructor should review the course's learning outcomes to ensure that these can be achieved via a blended or online format.
- The instructor must consult with his/her host department prior to submitting this proposal.
- The instructor must participate in training through the Office of Instructional Design before developing the course. Training can be expedited for faculty with previous experience.

#### **Step 2: Complete the Course Request Form**

- Submit the course request form online. The form requires three signatures: instructor, department chair, and dean.
- You will be contacted within 48 hours (M-F) by the Office of Instructional Design to confirm your request.

#### **Step 3: Meet with the Office of Instructional Design**

- All instructors will meet with a representative from the Office of Instructional Design at the start of the development process to map out a plan and timeline for course development.
- After the initial meeting and when a timeline is agreed upon, the course will be “open” in PAWS at the request of the Office of Instructional Design.

#### **Step 4: Develop the Course**

- All blended and online courses should be developed to meet the standards outlined in the Quality Matters Rubric 5th edition. [Click Here](#) for details on how to access the QM website for self-review.
- The Office of Instructional Design and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning are available to assist you with the creation of course content. For assistance, contact the Office of Instructional Design.

#### **Step 5: Submit the Course for Review**

- All instructors will complete a self-review using the Quality Matters rubric that will be sent to the Office of Instructional Design to initiate the final review stage. This Quality Matters video explains how to conduct a self review.
- Final review will include a meeting with a representative from the Office of Instructional Design.

#### **Deadlines for Course Review Submission**

Online courses must be submitted for review (Step 5) 3 months prior to the start of the course.  
Blended courses must be submitted for review (Step 5) 1 month prior to the start of the course.



Appendix B

**Blended/Online Course Request Form**

**To be completed by the faculty member:**

Faculty Name:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Department:

School:

Course Name and Number:  
(If Special Topics, please add course description)

Semester you plan to teach the course:

Mode:

Blended

Online

Have you participated in the Blended/Online Course Development Training Program through the Office of Instructional Design?

Yes

No

Have you offered this course as blended or online before?

Yes, blended

Yes, online

No

**To be completed by the department chair:**

Department Chair's Name:

This proposed blended or online course aligns with our department's curriculum and course planning goals, and it has been discussed and is supported by the department's faculty.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**To be completed by the school dean:**

Dean's Name:

This proposed blended or online course aligns with our school's curriculum and course planning goals.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_