

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 4th 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 4th 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.