

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steering Committee

FROM: Committee on Academic Programs (CAP)

RE: Course of Study Charge

DATE: October 28, 2019

Background and Charge

In April 2019, Steering issued CAP a charge to 1) review how Courses of Study designations are being used at TCNJ, and 2) to consider if a Course of Study policy is recommended. The catalyst for this charge was a request from Amanda Norvell, Chair of the Medical Careers Advisory Committee (MCAC). Her memo requested a review of how Courses of Study were designated, prompted by implications for the School of Science (SoS) stemming from the Pre-Medical Course of Study designation.

To address this charge, CAP, in collaboration with Records and Registration, has explored the use of Courses of Study at TCNJ. Our initial conversations suggested to us that since there is no policy on Course of Study, there is limited use of them and those situations do not parallel one another. A common use is to aid in an advising capacity or to organize student coursework beyond their major and minor requirements. In those instances, a Course of Study designation is used because it was the best way for it to be logistically structured to address limitations in PAWs, not because of larger conversations that suggested this was a designation that fit best from a curricular perspective. With the exception of the Pre-Medical Course of Study, we have not determined that other current uses of the Course of Study designation in general are problematic (i.e., Honors Program, Pre-Law).

Relating to the Pre-Medical Course of Study, it is a designation created and being used in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, specifically in the Psychology Department. In that school, it is serving an important advising role for students who are interested in pursuing medical school by facilitating advising and coursework guidance. However, the Pre-Medical Course of Study designation is not being used broadly at TCNJ, and it is creating confusion for students who have goals for medical school but are in departments that are choosing to not use such a designation. Our conversations suggested that those departments, mostly in SoS, are concerned that a designation is misrepresenting what TCNJ is offering in terms of formalized access and trajectories to medical school. Beyond concerns over misrepresentation, the SoS also receives requests for access to courses in their departments from students in the Pre-Medical Course of Study who believe they need those classes to graduate. This problem stems from two issues. The first is that the Pre-Medical Course of Study appears on their academic report as required courses (a limitation of PAWs), and despite being advised that they are guides, not requirements, by their advisors, the ambiguity causes confusion. The second is that by not having a centralized and systematic way to track all the pre-medical students at TCNJ, course needs are difficult to plan and might be beyond the capacity of the resources of the corresponding departments. In addition to these points, there is a more general concern from

CAP that the Pre-Medical Course of Study designation creates confusion for parents and students about whether TCNJ has a formal Pre-Medical School Track.

Final Recommendation

Despite these findings for the complicated nature of the Pre-Medical Course of Study, it is our recommendation that a Course of Study policy is not currently needed. Our rationale is based on a series of findings. First, the general use of Course of Study designations to address limitations in PAWs is serving a useful purpose in general. We are not convinced that situating Course of Study as a curricular issue rather than as a PAWs designation is needed. Complicating the use of this designation might have negative implications for the many instances in which it is helpful to the campus community. Second, if we continue to pursue conversations about the Course of Study at this point in time, testimony and conversations will likely be eclipsed by an existing, specific situation (Pre-Med Course of Study) rather than resulting in us getting feedback about a *general* review of policy and procedure. Finally, we do not think that developing a course of study policy will solve the bigger issue about how to address the diverse, and important, concerns of various departments and schools on campus who are working to serve TCNJ's students with intentions to go to medical school.

Our conversations and assessments resulting from this charge present to us various groups of teacher/scholars and advisors at TCNJ who are deeply committed to best serving their students with ambitions for medical school. It is clear to CAP that this is an important issue for TCNJ and, although beyond the scope of our charge, our conversations yielded some recommendations we believe can begin to mitigate some concerns:

- 1) First, we highly recommend immediately converting the current Pre-medical Course of Study from a "Course of Study" designation to a "what if" report in PAWs. This adjustment would continue to aid the Psychology Department in doing their important work advising psychology majors interested in medical school while alleviating some of the confusion students in general have about what the current designation means. This revision would also take the designation off of their academic report, which might help broader concerns that students misperceive that they are in a pre-medical school track, which TCNJ does not offer. Although this step will not address some of the larger issues, it immediately alleviates some minor ones related to student confusion while preserving the advising role the current designation plays.
- 2) Second, but equally important, we highly recommend that a group of faculty and administrative experts from all affected units (specifically SoS, HSS, Engineering, School of Nursing, and any other units yielding students with medical school goals) meet to clarify TCNJ's formalized and unformalized options for preparing students for medical school. This conversation would allow dialogue about a potentially centralized and systematic approach to aiding these students while managing resources and perceptions. Specifications for the type of group to be formed is beyond the charge and the scope of CAP at this time, but in addressing this charge the importance of this next step was made clear to the committee.