Final Recommendation of the Liberal Learning Task Force
May 12, 2020

Background and Charge:

Over the past two years, the Liberal Learning Task Force has solicited and reviewed significant testimony from the campus community about a future program of general education at TCNJ. A faculty survey was developed and distributed in Fall 2018; in Spring 2019, the Task Force used the feedback received to draft four potential models for Liberal Learning. These models were then shared with the campus community, and the Task Force heard testimony in Fall 2019.

Not surprisingly, this testimony was diverse. The campus community neither embraced a new proposal for general education at TCNJ nor expressed a ringing endorsement of our current system. We heard, in equal measure, calls for retaining a simplified version of the current system and calls for developing something new—but not calls for the models that had been developed by the Task Force. One point of consensus is that the current system is too complex; some argue that it is also too bloated, leading students to select Liberal Learning courses that satisfy requirements efficiently, instead of exploring courses and subject matter that they might find engaging. We heard consistent concerns about discrepant expectations across FSP sections, about the need for enhanced student writing instruction, about mid-level writing courses, about the quality of CEL experiences, and about the varying requirements for language acquisition across schools and departments. In light of these points of consensus and concern, the Task Force discussed the recommendations in the 2015 Liberal Learning self-study and the 2016 external review and Chair Cynthia Curtis requested additional direction from Steering.

On February 20, 2020, Steering issued a new charge, directing the Task Force to recommend short-term improvements to the current Liberal Learning model and to share thoughts about how the campus might change its curriculum in the future in light of its emerging strategic priorities. Accordingly, and in keeping with our latest charge from Steering, we recommend several changes to Liberal Learning, in order to strengthen and simplify the Program and its requirements in the short term. Our discussions have been framed around an assumption, based on professional and nonprofessional programs around the country, that general education requirements should comprise approximately 1/3rd of the undergraduate coursework for students not pursuing professional certifications, and that for students pursuing professional certification, general education requirements should comprise approximately 1/4th of their undergraduate coursework.

In April, campus testimony on the preliminary report issued by the Task Force indicated that the recommendations listed below offer a reasonable interim step to address some of the current concerns with the program in the short term. Significant concerns were also raised, however, about the details of recommendations 5-7, and so we have adapted these to address those concerns. We suggest that they be finalized by CAP in the fall, as we do not believe that a decision on these points by the Task Force is sufficient for the campus community.

Specifically, we have left open a final decision on which programs would be considered "professional" in the interim system. Our current system differentiates programs on the basis of accreditation, but this distinction has led to widespread difference in expectations for Liberal Learning for students across campus. To remedy this issue, we proposed using professional certification as a new standard, however, this raised concerns (from the Department of Health and Exercise Science and others) about both the clarity and the appropriateness of this distinction. We also considered a differentiation by school, but the Task Force felt this did a disservice to students in programs in professional schools who could meet the full set of Liberal Learning requirements within their program. That said, this distinction might be more palatable to the campus community. We believe that CAP should make this final decision promptly in Fall, 2020, based on the testimony already gathered by the Task Force.

We also leave open the question of how much double counting should be allowed between interdisciplinary and self-designed majors and Liberal Learning. We did not believe that we had sufficient information to address this question appropriately before issuing our report; additional testimony from affected programs will be needed.

Finally, we acknowledge two additional areas of significant concern: the role of STEM disciplines within the Liberal Learning system and the importance and nature of language acquisition. We recognize that the role of science and quantitative reasoning within Liberal Learning has been diminished in recent years; the proposed interim system cements these changes, but continues to require a lab science. We have attempted to ameliorate some of the concerns raised regarding the Liberal Learning burden for STEM students, in addition to addressing the concern that professional students could avoid STEM education entirely. We recommend that the role of STEM within Liberal Learning be part of future discussions when we return our attention to Liberal Learning following the development of a strategic plan. Similarly, the current system of widely divergent expectations for students regarding language study is a significant point of concern; our recommendation to require all nonprofessional students to return to the standard of proficiency at the 103/152 course-level is obviously controversial. We therefore recommend that the role of language study be a focus of discussion for any future Task Force charged with the role of Liberal Learning at TCNJ.

As the campus engages in discussion about potentially larger changes to Liberal Learning at TCNJ, the modifications identified below can have an immediate impact. If these recommended changes are retained for the future, they will provide better integration between Liberal Learning and the majors and offer a framework for revising student learning outcomes, developing assessment plans, and simplifying student advisement. Ultimately, these suggested changes also begin to address the five recommendations set forth in the self-study and external review. In Appendices to this Report, the Task Force has also included a set of broad learning goals for a TCNJ education and a summary of ideas and issues for future consideration.

Recommendations of the Liberal Learning Task Force:

1) Students should take WRI 102 before they enroll in an FSP.

Currently, students who place into WRI 102 take the course in the Spring, *after* completing a writing-intensive FSP. We recommend instead that, beginning in Fall 2021:

a) students who place into WRI 102 take it in the Fall, and take FSP in the Spring
b) students who place into WRI 101 take WRI 101 & 102 in the Fall, FSP in the Spring.
c) students who place out of WRI 102 take FSP in the Fall
d) All students continue to take IDS102 in the Fall

Following current practice, students exempt from WRI102 do not need to replace the course with an additional Liberal Learning requirement.

We recommend that assessments be implemented to measure the improvement in students' writing skills along each of the three pathways listed above. We also suggest monitoring to ensure that placement in WRI101 & WRI102 is not regarded as an academic stigma by the larger campus community.

2) Revise FSP and writing requirements.

a) Carefully articulate expectations for FSP courses, and ensure that all FSPs meet them.

b) Consider granting Social Justice and/or Multidisciplinary Perspective Designations (indicated in #6) to FSP courses.

c) Expand course offerings that meet the mid-level writing requirement; when a sufficient number of such courses become available, fulfillment of this requirement should be verified in PAWS. When possible, courses meeting the mid-level writing requirement should be open to students from all majors.

Current expectations for oral communication and capstone writing requirements within the major remain unchanged; however programs may also expand the notion of oral communication to include visual and multimedia communication.

3) Rename aspects of the current Liberal Learning Program.

Rename the Program: Because the current name—"Liberal Learning"—does not make the Program's connection to a liberal arts education apparent, it is sometimes misinterpreted as advancing a liberal political agenda; it also fails to clearly articulate the importance of the skills and knowledge that students gain. We recommend that, in Fall 2020, the Liberal Learning Council (LLC) develop a list of possible names for the Program, solicit testimony about these possibilities, and make a recommendation to CAP in Spring 2021.

Rename the domain names: Because the current names are not easily remembered, and because students (and faculty) sometimes interpret the "World Views" of "World Views and Ways of Knowing" to be the equivalent to a "Global" designation, we recommend the domains be renamed as indicated in Recommendation 7 below.

Determine whether additional aspects of Liberal Learning should be renamed. LLC should consider whether the groupings "Intellectual and Scholarly Growth," "Broad Areas of Human Inquiry," and "Civic Responsibilities" should be retained, and if so whether changes to names are needed. Should LLC determine that changes to groupings and/or names are appropriate, the council should follow the procedure and timeline listed above for renaming the Liberal Learning Program.

4) Adopt a short set of clearly articulated, broad learning goals for a TCNJ education.

While we heard diverse testimony about many aspects of the system, we did not hear significant differences of opinion regarding the purpose of general education at TCNJ. We therefore recommend the adoption of the learning goals found in Appendix I. These goals should be shared with current and potential students, faculty, and staff as holistic expectations for a TCNJ education. To ensure that both major and general education requirements are discussed as meeting aspects of these broad goals—and to avoid talking about TCNJ degrees largely in terms of major requirements, with general education requirements expressed as additional annoyances—they should be made available on the TCNJ website under "Academics." Ultimately, these broad learning goals should form the basis for the development of more specific learning goals for Liberal Learning by the Liberal Learning Council, beginning in 2020-2021, thereby addressing the recommendation from the self-study and program review to revise the Liberal Learning outcomes.

5) Require all TCNJ students to meet the goals of Liberal Learning to at least a minimum standard, and expect students not pursuing professional certification to delve more deeply

An outline of specific requirements appears in Recommendation #7. Department and school exceptions to requirements should not be made, although a department or school may choose to add to the expectations established by these requirements by adding broad correlate requirements to majors.

6) Require all TCNJ students to complete two courses that integrate ideas from multiple disciplines or social justice perspectives.

These courses should help students make connections across various fields of study, providing them with practice synthesizing knowledge, solving problems, and/or thinking critically about how different disciplines approach "wicked problems."
As this is a new requirement for students, LLC should assess this two years after implementation.

7) Rename and simplify Liberal Learning requirements.

Simplifying requirements and removing the option to apply individual courses to fulfill multiple Liberal Learning requirements will enable students and advisors to move away from a "box-checking" approach to Liberal Learning and shift the focus to selecting an array of courses that the student finds compelling.

Courses should continue to carry multiple Liberal Learning designations, and indeed the new Interdisciplinary Requirement will require students to take two such courses. However students will use these courses to meet only one Liberal Learning designation, of the student's choosing, with the following two exceptions:

1) A student may use the FSP to satisfy one Social Justice designation or one Multidisplinary Perspective designation (but not both)
2) One course used to fulfill the Interdisciplinary Requirement (identified below) may be used to satisfy two designations in the categories of Social Justice & Multidisciplinary Perspectives (identified below) provided that the designations are from two different broad categories: SJ, A, B, C, or D.

To ensure that students achieve the educational breadth we intend for them, we propose that at most two courses from the student's major be used to satisfy the Social Justice and Multidisciplinary Perspectives designations. Students pursuing dual, double, or triple majors may use a maximum of three courses from all majors and a maximum of two courses from a single major in fulfillment of these designations.

We recognize the need for a course counting rule for Interdisciplinary Majors (see TCNJ policy, "Types of Majors and Minors Defined.") CAP should solicit testimony on this point in Fall, 2020.

We recommend that all students complete Liberal Learning requirements in the following areas:

a) FSP (with additional Liberal Learning designation), Writing, and Oral Communication (2 first year courses plus upper level writing and communication, as outlined in recommendations 1 and 2 above)
   1) Social Justice (3 courses/experiences, one from each of the subcategories listed below)
      SJ 1: Community Engaged Learning (CEL): 2-week course followed by approximately 4 hours of community engagement
      SJ 2: Race and Ethnicity
      SJ 3: Gender

      Note: This category includes all current race and gender courses and CEL experiences. Future Liberal Learning course approvals should consider social

justice more broadly to allow for issues of class, intersectionality, and sustainability, perhaps creating an additional subcategory.

Following the current plan being developed by the CEL Council, students will take a 2-week course and 4 hours of community engagement. This plan should be brought to the community for feedback in 2020-2021, then assessed, and further reviewed.

b) Multidisciplinary Perspectives (8 courses for students in programs not leading to professional certification; 4 courses for students in programs leading to professional certification. See below for specific requirements)

A) Humanities (consists of currently approved courses in the categories listed below)

A1: Literary, Visual, and Performing Arts
A2: Philosophy and Religion (formerly World Views and Ways of Knowing)
A3: Historical Perspectives

B) Quantitative Reasoning (consists of currently approved courses in QR)
B1: Quantitative Reasoning

C) The Sciences (consists of currently approved courses in the categories below, with the requirement that a Natural Science course include a lab)

C1: Natural Sciences
C2: Social & Behavioral Sciences (formerly Behavioral, Social, or Cultural Perspectives)

D) Global Engagement (consists of currently approved courses in the categories listed below)

D1: Languages (includes a 103- or 152- level language course or demonstrated proficiency)
D2: Global

c) Interdisciplinary Requirement (no additional units)
All students will take at least two courses that have multiple designations. As noted above, if one course carries both a Social Justice and a Multidisciplinary Perspective designation or designations from two different Multidisiplinary Perspectives, the course may be used to satisfy requirements in both categories. The second interdisciplinary course will count toward only <u>one</u> Liberal Learning designation, of the student's choosing.

Students in programs not culminating in professional certification will take one course in each of the <u>subcategories</u> of the Multidisciplinary Perspectives (Categories A1 through D2), <u>including a 103- or 152- level language course or demonstrated proficiency</u>.

Students in programs that culminate in professional certification will take one course in each of the Multidisciplinary Perspectives (Categories A-D).

A table that compares the proposed Liberal Learning requirements identified here with existing Liberal Learning program requirements has been included in an Appendix.

8) To assist in advising and student course selection, the creation of a keyword-searchable database of Liberal Learning courses should be developed.

9) Faculty should review all major programs, considering any questions that arise as part of TCNJ's upcoming strategic review.

Steering should refine the following questions and determine the best timing for curricular review vis-à-vis the development of TCNJ's forthcoming strategic plan.

What restructuring is needed to accommodate both the increasing numbers of first-year students entering TCNJ without a declared major and the increasing numbers of transfer students?

What factors are currently influencing program requirements? Are increasing program requirements a result of administrative concerns or other circumstances that need to be addressed holistically?

Can we foster students' desire for broader intellectual exploration—whether within the major, through Liberal Learning, or through electives—by granting greater curricular freedom?

Appendix I: Learning Goals for a TCNJ Education

1) Students will communicate effectively.
Express ideas clearly and persuasively orally and in writing; work, communicate, and engage effectively with others using media as appropriate; be able to use these skills to support consensus-building, collaboration, teamwork, and facilitating outcomes.

2) Students will acquire and evaluate knowledge independently.
Students will locate and apply reliable information ethically and legally to complex questions, problems, or issues.

3) Students will demonstrate a scholarly approach to knowledge
Students will demonstrate intellectual curiosity, critical analysis of arguments, and the ability to solve problems creatively.

4) Students will integrate knowledge from the arts, humanities, social sciences, history, natural sciences, and quantitative reasoning
Students will learn to solve difficult problems, explore complex issues, or understand contemporary or enduring questions across disciplinary boundaries.

5) Students will explore diverse perspectives on global citizenship
Students will study international cultures, histories, political systems, and languages

6) Students will engage collaboratively in the community
Students will demonstrate the ability and commitment to work collaboratively across and within community contexts and structures to achieve public action in local communities.

7) Students will apply concepts of social justice to understand power and privilege
Students will explain how socially constructed patterns of privilege and oppression affect access to power and resources through exploration of historical and present-day cultural differences with regards to race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

8) Students will develop expertise in a field or discipline.
By completing a major, students will obtain the knowledge and skills required to make substantial contributions to areas of knowledge and practice.

Appendix II: Table of Current and Proposed Requirements

Current LL Program Requirements	Proposed LL Program Requirements	Suggested Change
FSP (without designation)	FSP (*with* designation)	FSPs should have a LL designation
WRI102 (if required)	WRI102 (if required)	WRI102 should be taken Fall semester of freshman year if required
mid-level writing	mid-level writing	Expand course offerings
Capstone	Capstone	None
CEL	CEL	Renamed category (Social Justice)
Gender (double/triple counting)	Gender	Renamed category (Social Justice
Race & Ethnicity (double/triple counting)	Race and Ethnicity	Renamed category (Social Justice)
Global (double/triple counting)	Global	Moved to new category (Global Engagement)
Foreign Language (with variation across campus)	Foreign Language	Moved to new category (Global Engagement)
LVPA	LVPA	Renamed category (Humanities)
WVWK	Philosophy & Religion	Renamed category (Humanities)
SCHP	Historical Perspectives	Moved to renamed category (Humanities)
SCBP	Social Science	Moved to new category (The Sciences)
QR	QR	No change
NS (lab)	NS (lab)	Moved to new category (The Sciences)
2 additional courses (student selected, from two different domains)	Interdisciplinary requirement (met by courses selected from above, one double counted)	

Current System (Typical course load*)	Proposed System (Typical course load*)
Requirements: 17+CEL+upper level writing	Requirements: 17+CEL+upper level writing
Courses outside major (non-accredited): 8 - 10	Courses outside major (non-professional): 8
Possible additional language prereqs	Possible additional language prereqs
Courses outside major (accredited): 2 - 8	Courses outside major (professional): 4
Variations for double majors, interdisciplinary concentrations, etc.	For dual or double majors, course load reduced by 1

*Typical course load assumes
1) 1 - 3 LL courses are met through major requirements (including correlates) for nonprofessional students in both systems and for professional students in the new system.
2) 2-6 LL courses are met through major requirements (including correlates) for professional students in the current system.
3) WRI102 is required.

Appendix III: Future Possibilities

  In the next year, TCNJ will map out a new strategic plan that may significantly impact our curriculum. It is therefore reasonable to wait to ensure that any bold curricular changes align with the direction of the College. We conclude our report by sharing some of the Liberal Learning Task Force's ideas for bolder changes to general education and/or other aspects of the curriculum. We list these ideas in no particular order, in hopes that portions of the campus community may find them worth exploring in the near term and/or that a future task force may consider them worthy of further consideration.

- If we continue to be unable to find faculty willing to teach FSPs that meet our high expectations for this course, what would be a successful alternative that would engage students deeply and help students grow as writers and communicators? Would a pair of half courses fare better, either with diverse faculty-chosen topics (as the current FSP) or focused on "big questions" akin to the "engagements" courses in the UVA model: http://as.virginia.edu/general-education

- Should we have a first- year writing course for all students? What should it look like and how would we staff it?

- How do we better address civil discourse?

- We do seem to be bolder than many campuses in our curricular expectations surrounding social justice. How can we highlight this to gain national attention? Would there be interest in a common junior-level course on social justice for all students? How do we appropriately engage first- year students in discussions of social justice and civil discourse while also engaging more mature students in deeper considerations of these issues? This seems like a good area for our campus to seek to be a national exemplar.

- Should we restrict the courses included in a general education program? Should we require that general education courses be open to all, without prerequisites, to ensure that course enrollments include students with diverse perspectives?

- Where should ethics fit in the curriculum? What about sustainability?

- How can we incorporate truly interdisciplinary team problem solving into the curriculum? This seems to be a broad liberal arts "skill" akin to critical thinking which industry is calling for and which we are not addressing. How do we get four upper-level students from very diverse disciplinary backgrounds into a room to learn how to communicate and collaborate to bring their diverse backgrounds together to tackle a large societal problem?

- How can we use our capstone courses to encourage students to see their entire educational experience coming together? Could we include one or more assignments asking students to think about how their major fits with their broader educational experience?

- Could we introduce a half credit course that explores some real life application of each designation? For example, using history to understand current politics, science to understand climate change, etc. How do we help students connect what they are learning to their lived experience?

- Should we consider a learning goal of helping students understand, articulate, and question their own values? Where does this fit?

- What implications does online learning have for the curriculum?

- At what point(s) in the four-year experience should social justice issues be addressed?