

## MEMORANDM

**TO:** TCNJ Deans, Chairs, Faculty, Staff, and Students

**FROM:** Committee on Academic Programs (CAP)

**RE:** Final Exam and Reading Days Policy **DATE:** October 18, 2020

**Background and Charge:** In Fall 2018, the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) was asked by Steering to revise the policy on final exams and reading days in light of the five-year review for campus policy documents. CAP was to write a college-wide policy comprising sections covering undergraduate, graduate, and simultaneously offered courses regardless of the course format or delivery mode. Consideration should be given to the differences in courses that are offered in Fall and Spring terms relative to those that are offered in Winter or Summer sessions.

**Rationale:** The current final exam policy does not reflect the campus' mission to be an exemplar for inclusive excellence in the classroom. This means that final assessments should be equitable across campus as far as a) when they are administered; b) how they are administered; c) how they contribute towards a student's final grade. Final assessments for students, as the policy states, should allow for a reflective tool to look at a course holistically, rather than as a means to compromise a student's grade for an entire semester of work. Preliminary testimony from students, faculty and other stakeholders shows that final exam week is a stressful time for students. Thus, high stakes exams and an overload of exams on a particular day were issues that the committee saw as highly problematic. The current policy does not adequately address these issues and that is why CAP is recommending a significant change that protects students in the spirit of the purpose of a final assessment. The conflicts for final assessments are not well defined by the current policy. For instance, what is inferred in the policy is a calendar day rather than a 24-hour period. To better elucidate this point, we have provided relevant scenarios and a mechanism for students to deal with exam conflicts. In addition, the current policy does not clearly define the deadline for out of class final assessments, as faculty put a due date on the final assessment that may not coincide with a final exam time. This new policy requires that out of class final assessments be due on the due date assigned by the College for the final assessment. In this light, CAP is recommending several changes to the policy to include inclusive, equitable language for students and faculty.

**Final Recommendation:** We revised the policy to better align with inclusive practices and to incorporate suggestions from key stakeholders and from campus-wide testimony. The current policy was modified to encompass all courses at TCNJ, regardless of delivery mode, and provide separate sections on final assessments for graduate courses and courses offered outside of the regular semester. The CAP Subcommittee received a policy written by GSC on graduate courses and final exams/reading days. Their input was incorporated into the revised policy. The policy also describes policy for simultaneously offered graduate/undergraduate courses at TCNJ. A list herein describes all of the modifications that have been made to the policy during testimony and after.

### **Additional Recommendations:**

- 1) CAP worked with Records and Registration to create a survey that would allow faculty to sign up for a final exam period time for each course offered on campus, regardless of the activity for the final assessment. This provides a mechanism to ensure that each course will be assigned a date for the final assessment, as well a mechanism for faculty to indicate that they have an out of class assessment and therefore do not need a room assignment. This mechanism aligns with the revised policy. Records and Registration piloted the new final assessment survey via Qualtrics in Fall 2019 and has made necessary changes based on the performance in the 2019-2020 academic year.
- 2) In addition, the academic calendar will be updated with a timeline for students to notify faculty of a final assessment conflict. Records and Registration should set up a mechanism to notify the campus community of this timeline as well, similarly to when it notifies the campus when it is time to withdraw from a course.
- 3) We recommend that the Syllabus Policy be modified to include language about exam conflicts. The modifications to this current final assessment policy now impact the syllabus policy. In the exam section of the syllabus faculty should include this statement:

"Final exam conflicts should be brought to the attention of the professor at least two weeks prior to the last day of class and should be dealt with according to the Final Assessment, Reading Day Policy"

### **Modifications to the Policy**

The following modifications have also been made to the policy:

- 1) Structural changes made to the policy to provide rationale before the definition.
- 2) Addition of the definition of "Final Assessment".
- 3) Replaced "exam" with "assessment" throughout the policy as not every department or program gives an exam for a final assignment
- 4) Created a heading for
  - a) COURSES OFFERED OUTSIDE THE REGULAR SEMESTER: provided text to set policy for final assessments for courses taught outside of traditional semesters; added text about the due date for the final assessments which mirrors the graduate school courses.
  - b) POLICY FOR GRADUATE COURSES: added text provided by the graduate school council feedback with minor edits from CAP.

5) In item B: adjusted the statement to make mention that the grade on a final assessment should not compromise a student's performance in a course; to accommodate this statement the maximum percentage for a final assessment was adjusted to 35% of the final grade.

6) In item D: emphasis was placed to ensure that for final assessments that are not in-class exams or activities to be completed by the date of the regularly scheduled exam and not just some time during the final assessment window. This is out of fairness to both students and faculty, as some faculty would have jurisdiction on when to have the finals while those who have an in-class assessment have none.

7) In item F: this item was changed to define exam conflicts. The policy was clarified to provide scenarios for when in-class final assessments would be considered a conflict. We kept the language about which in-class assessment should be moved, but clearly outlined the process for addressing conflicts. In instances of conflicts where three final assessments that are in-class and out of class are due in a day (24-hour period), it is recommended to move the out of class final assessments. This was done to provide a more equitable and inclusive process for students and faculty.

8) Added "online and blended courses" at the beginning of the (IV) POLICY FOR UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

*After receiving testimony from relevant stakeholders several minor changes were made to the policy. The testimony came from 115 participants, and the breakdown was 4 Deans, 43 chairs/faculty, 12 staff, and 55 students.*

1). There were concerns that it was not clear if capstones and similar types of courses would be included in the courses for the final exam policy. A section of text was added to the graduate and undergraduate policy to clarify that if a capstone has a culminating assessment during the final assessment period then a final assessment time slot must be requested. This system for requesting final assessment time slots is being piloted currently by Records and Registration using a new Qualtrics survey.

2). In item B, we put back in the minimum threshold of 15% from the previous version of the policy, as concerns about the integrity of a final assessment were described. This ensures faculty administer final assessment rather than potentially not have them, a proposed issue brought to light from testimony responses.

3). In item D, we defined some examples of out of class final assessments. It was pointed out that a list of examples would be helpful.

4). There was still some confusion about the term "day" or "calendar day". We have defined this as a 24-hour period in item F.

5). In item H1, we modified the text for travel plans during the final exam time.

6). Removed “exam” in title of the policy and replaced it with “assessment” to be consistent in the policy document. Replaced “exam” throughout policy with “assessment” for consistency.