

MEMORANDUM

To: Ad Hoc Task Force on Online and Blended Learning
Cc: Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Government
From: Steering Committee
Re: Initial Charge
Date: April 21, 2021

Background

In 2014, the Task Force on Instructional Technology was charged to “outline a vision and direction for TCNJ’s use of technology in teaching and learning.” The guidance provided in the Task Force’s 2015 report served TCNJ well in its initial development and expansion of online and blended courses. Following the sudden shift to remote instruction in 2020, faculty interest in blended and online learning increased substantially. TCNJ now needs updated guidance to manage this expansion and to ensure that its continued growth remains informed by best practices, meets the interests and needs of its students, and is consistent with the mission and vision of the college.

Charge

The Steering Committee convenes an ad hoc task force to develop and present to the campus community updated guidance for academic departments/schools regarding blended and online learning and the strategic use of these modalities now and into the future. The task force should consider the impact of online and blended courses and programs on student experiences at the undergraduate and graduate levels, faculty workload, support systems, technology needs, and campus culture.

Questions the task force may consider:

- How many online/blended classes can an undergraduate student take in a typical undergraduate program of study? Should there be separate guidelines depending on the program, department, school, accreditor, etc.?
- What considerations need to be in place for graduate courses and programs?
- How often should a course be re-evaluated for best practices in online/blended pedagogy?
- How will an increase in synchronous online courses affect our students’ experiences?
- What spaces on campus could accommodate a student who needs a quiet place to attend a Zoom class?
- Do we have the necessary tools to meet the pedagogical needs of different courses (e.g., secure testing?)
- Do we have the support systems in place? Will required courses need an in-person alternative?
- How do the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement and accreditation needs factor in?
- How are we making our courses accessible for all learners?
- How many online/blended courses should a faculty member be able to teach in a semester? Should this guidance vary for undergraduate and graduate courses/programs? Should there be separate guidelines depending on the department/school and/or classification of the faculty member? What about new hires?
- How might online/blended courses attract new student populations (e.g., working students)?

The task force will be composed of:

- The Director of the Office of Instructional Design, serving as co-chair;
- 4 faculty members (one to serve as co-chair), 3 appointed by the Faculty Senate (including a minimum of one Department Chair) and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning;

- 2 deans;
- 2 staff members, appointed by Staff Senate; and
- 2 undergraduate students, appointed by Student Government.

In completing its charge, the task force should consult widely across campus. At a minimum, the task force should consult with the Council of Deans, Academic Leaders, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Accessibility Resource Center, the Office of Instructional Design, and the Office of Media and Technology Support Services.

At the end of its work, the task force should submit a formal report to Steering as well as prepare a formal presentation to the campus community. The group should elect a co-chair from among the faculty members. Minutes of meetings should be submitted to Steering.

Timeline

The task force will present a draft report to the Steering Committee for comment by mid-November 2021. It will present its final report to the campus community by February 2022.

Testimony Tier

Tier II – Faculty, Staff, and Students

The issue requires moderate testimony from the campus community. The assigned council or committee should consult with relevant individuals and groups in developing a preliminary recommendation. The completed preliminary recommendation should then be made available to the relevant stakeholder groups, and testimony should be solicited in the form of written feedback (through a survey and or e-mail).

The Governance Process

Step 1 – Steering issues a charge

If Steering considers the issue appropriate for Governance, it will generate a charge and assign it to the appropriate committee or council. The charge will include:

- A clearly defined statement of the issue;
- A specific action that the committee or council should undertake;
- A list of individuals or groups with which the committee should consult in the development of a preliminary recommendation;
- The testimony tier (see page 24) that the committee or council should use in presenting the preliminary recommendation to the campus community;
- A suggested timeline for completing the charge.

Copies of all charges will be cc'd to the presidents of the three representative bodies. This will notify them that Governance is undertaking a new charge. It will also give them the opportunity to request that the testimony tier (see page 24) of the charge be changed. If such a request is made, it must be made within one week of receiving the 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

Once Steering receives a final recommendation from a committee or council, it should consider whether or not the proper process has been followed. If it determines that the full process has been followed and that the recommendation is sound, it should approve the final recommendation and forward it to the provost.

If Steering decides that the process has not been followed, or that the recommendation is not sound, it should return the final recommendation to the appropriate committee or council and the charge should move back to Step 4.

Step 6 – The Provost and/or President and Board consider the Final Recommendation

The provost will consider the final recommendation and then accept it, accept it with minor revisions, accept it with major revisions, or reject it. In the case of acceptance, the final recommendation will either be sent to the next relevant individual for approval or will become policy, and will proceed to step 7.

If a final recommendation is rejected, or if changes are suggested, the provost will relay concerns and suggestions to Steering and the relevant committee or council chair. The steps listed under section X of this document – Governance Resolution – will then take place.

Step 7 – Steering notifies the Campus Community

Once an issue has been formally approved and has become policy, the provost will notify the faculty co-chair of the Steering Committee, who will in turn notify the campus community through the appropriate means. This may include email, a notification on the Governance website, and/or email to the presidents of the stakeholder representative bodies.