

Draft Preliminary Recommendations from LLC

March 2021 Steering Charge

In March 2021, Steering issued the following charge to the Liberal Learning Council (LLC):

Steering charges the Liberal Learning Council to review, evaluate, and decide whether to adopt the following short-term changes recommended by the Liberal Learning Task Force (Recommendation number from the Liberal Learning Task Force's final report in parentheses):

1. expand both the number of courses meeting the mid-level writing requirement and student access to them (Recommendation 2);
2. consider expanding the definition of "communication" to include visual and multimedia communication (Recommendation 2);
3. consider renaming the liberal learning program (Recommendation 3);
4. rename the domains (Recommendation 3; see also Recommendation 7);
and
5. consider whether additional aspects of liberal learning should be renamed and retained (i.e., Civic responsibilities, Intellectual and scholarly growth, and Broad areas of human inquiry; Recommendation 3).

In keeping with the timeline below, Steering requests that LLC consult with the Committee on Academic Programs, the Council of Deans, Academic Leaders, and Records and Registration. Once the LLC has completed this work, it should prepare a preliminary recommendation and seek broad testimony from across the campus community, including, but not limited to: Student Government, Faculty Senate, and Staff Senate.

Timeline

LLC should begin work on the charge immediately. LLC should prepare a preliminary recommendation by September 30th, 2021. LLC should solicit campus testimony soon after with the goal of making a final recommendation to Steering no later than November 10th, 2021.

The LLC is now consulting with the various constituents indicated by Steering, and we would like your feedback on Items 2-5 above. Below, we present our draft ideas and rationale for each item, based on the 2020 Report from the Liberal Learning Task Force. We have also provided additional rationale for the specific draft preliminary recommendations.

Item 1. Expand both the number of courses meeting the mid-level writing requirement and student access to them.

From the 2020 Liberal Learning Task Force Report: “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.”

LLC Specific Recommendation: The LLC recommends that the Writing Program and the LLC work with departments to review and approve the courses currently offered by departments as writing-intensive courses but not designated as such in PAWS. Because there are a healthy number of these courses, this process will ensure that enough mid-level writing courses are offered.

The LLC recommends that the mid-level writing requirement be added to the Academic Requirements Report in PAWS as part of a re-alignment of the AR with the requirements of the Liberal Learning Program (see below).

Rationale: The survey of department chairs conducted in June 2021 revealed that departments offer a substantial number of mid-level writing courses that have not undergone formal approval by the LLC and are hence not in the Writing Program’s list of approved courses.

Writing will reach out to each department that, on the survey, lists a writing-intensive course not already listed on the Approved Courses in Writing list. Each department will need to fill out the cover sheet and submit a syllabus for approval by the Liberal Learning Council. Once that is completed, we will be able to add that course to the Approved Courses in Writing list. Because there are a healthy number of mid-level courses not on the list, completing the approval of these courses as writing-intensive will make clear we offer a sufficient number of courses.

Of the 33 departments responding to the survey on mid-level writing courses, 23 (70%) indicated that their mid-level writing courses are open to students from outside their majors.

The LLC will communicate to departments and academic advisors that mid-level courses in writing will be listed in PAWS as of Fall 2023 (see implementation timeline below). Before then, advisors should be aware of the mid-level writing requirement in order to make sure their students understand mid-level writing as a requirement.

Item 2. Consider expanding the definition of “communication” to include visual and multimedia communication.

From the 2020 Liberal Learning Task Force Report: “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.”

LLC Specific Recommendation: Currently, the Liberal Learning requirement in oral communication is met as part of major programs. The LLC recommends that the major programs be allowed, as a component of this requirement, to include visual and/or multimedia communication as important, essential, or even primary modalities of communication, with the weighting of the importance of these modalities left to the program’s discretion. Furthermore, we recommend that, as part of future discussion about the goals of TCNJ’s general education program, the College adopt a definition of “communication” that recognizes the central role of visual literacy in our society.

Rationale: In many disciplines, what have previously been termed “oral presentations” depend critically on visual communication (e.g., data visualization), and in some disciplines (e.g., art), the visual modality is of primary importance for communication. Every year, visual and multimedia communications are seen as increasingly important modalities, as evidenced by their use on social media. Therefore, the ability to communicate ideas through, and to interpret meaning from, visual and multimedia modalities is becoming of greater and greater importance, suggesting that these modalities be added to the two already in place (i.e. written and oral). The LLC is not recommending the inclusion in all programs of a visual and multimedia requirement because of the difficulty involved in adding a new requirement to the current program. Specifically, it would disadvantage students in some programs, and there is a need to define and vet the learning outcomes for the requirement in order to allow the LLC to designate courses as meeting the requirement. Instead, we are recommending the inclusion of visual and/or multimedia communication at the discretion of programs who feel their students would benefit from this change.

Item 3. Consider renaming the Liberal Learning program

From the 2020 Liberal Learning Task Force Report: “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.”

LLC Specific Recommendation: The LLC recommends changing the name of the Liberal Learning Program to “The Core.”

Rationale: This name connects well to the central role of the program in TCNJ’s undergraduate education and to the name of our institution - the “C” in TCNJ. This “C” also lends itself to descriptors that succinctly convey important features of the program (Creative, Critical, and Connected), and engage graphical representations of the program. Preliminary examples of graphical representations of the Core Program and the 3 C’s are presented on the following page (should this name change be accepted through governance, the LLC will engage with Communications, Marketing, and Branding to develop effective graphical representations that conform to the TCNJ Graphic Identity Standards). The LLC feels that changing the name of the program will enhance communication with students about the centrality and importance of the Liberal Learning Program to a TCNJ undergraduate education.

The name “The Core” may suggest to some a core curriculum in which all students take the same courses (e.g., Columbia College, Champlain College, College of Arts & Sciences of Boston University). However, we are using the word “core” in the sense of “a central and often foundational part” (Merriam-Webster), and in this sense, “The Core” communicates clearly to students its central and essential role in their education. Indeed, other institutions refer to their general education programs as the “College Core” (Bucknell), “The Core Curriculum” (Notre Dame), or “University Core” (Loyola University-Chicago) in which the requirements or components represent the core, and students take different courses to meet those requirements. Clear communication about the meaning of “The Core” should dispel any potential confusion with a core curriculum.



The Core is a shared undergraduate academic experience designed to ensure that all TCNJ graduates have the essential skills, knowledge, and values needed to be successful and fulfilled in their personal, professional, intellectual, and civic lives.

Creative

The Core engages students with new knowledge, differing viewpoints, and new ways of thinking. Students are challenged to innovate, create, and inspire as agents of change in a rapidly evolving world.

Critical

The Core gives students the skills required to carefully examine arguments, ideas, evidence, events, and issues before forming their own opinions or conclusions -- or accepting those of another.

Connected

The Core links students to each other and their instructors as scholars and collaborators working across majors and disciplines, to their community as contributors, and to the world as global citizens.

Item 4. Rename the domains (Recommendation 3; see also Recommendation 7)

From the 2020 Liberal Learning Task Force Report: “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...” The Task Force identified the following changes:

World Views and Ways of Knowing → Philosophy and Religion
Behavioral, Social, or Cultural Perspectives → Social & Behavioral Sciences
Social Change in Historical Perspectives → Historical Perspectives

LLC Specific Recommendation: The LLC recommends implementing the name changes identified by the Liberal Learning Task Force:

World Views and Ways of Knowing → Philosophy and Belief Systems
Behavioral, Social, or Cultural Perspectives → Social & Behavioral Sciences
Social Change in Historical Perspectives → Historical Perspectives

The other three domains should retain their current names:

Literary, Visual and Performing Arts
Natural Science
Quantitative Reasoning

Rationale: These changes simplify the terminology used and more clearly identify to students the types of courses that satisfy the requirements.

Item 5. Consider whether additional aspects of liberal learning should be renamed and retained (i.e., Civic responsibilities, Intellectual and scholarly growth, and Broad areas of human inquiry).

From the 2020 Liberal Learning Task Force Report:

The Task Force recommended the following:

Civic Responsibilities → Social Justice
Domains → Multidisciplinary Perspectives

LLC Specific Recommendation and Rationale:

Intellectual and Scholarly Growth → Catalysts for Learning

The new term emphasizes these requirements as the beginning of life-long learning and conveys more of a sense of excitement than does the current term.

Civic Responsibilities → Global Responsibilities

The new term more directly connects the requirements to the important current conversations and issues in society.

Broad Areas of Human Inquiry → Multidisciplinary Perspectives

The new term emphasizes the connection among the requirements (domains) and better reflects the nature of the societal issues to which students will apply the disciplines embodied by the requirements.

Additional Recommendation

This recommendation is an outgrowth of the other recommendations above.

2. Re-align the Academic Requirements Report in PAWS to reflect the three structural elements and the four writing requirements of the Liberal Learning Program.

Currently, Liberal Learning requirements are represented in the Academic Requirements Report in PAWS in three boxes. The first, entitled “Civic Responsibilities and Proficiencies,” contains the requirements for two of the structural elements of the Liberal Learning Program: Intellectual and Scholarly Growth and the Civic Responsibilities. The second box in the AR, entitled “Breadth Distribution,” contains the requirements for the third structural element, Broad Areas of Human Inquiry. The third box, entitled “Second Language Proficiency” is another component of Intellectual and Scholarly Growth. Additionally, only one of the four Liberal Learning writing requirements, FYW 102, is made explicit.

We recommend that the Academic Requirements Report be modified to place the Liberal Learning requirements into four boxes and that all four of the Liberal Learning writing requirements be made explicit, as follows:

Liberal Learning: Intellectual and Scholarly Growth (dark blue bar)

>Information Literacy Proficiency - IDS 102 (online tutorial)

>First-Year Seminar (FYS)

Writing Proficiency (light blue bar)

>First-Year Writing (FYW 102)

>First-Year Seminar (FYS)

>Mid-level Writing-Intensive Course

>Senior Capstone

Liberal Learning: Global Responsibilities (dark blue bar)

Internal components remain the same as now

Liberal Learning: Multidisciplinary Perspectives (dark blue bar)

Internal components remain the same as now

Liberal Learning: Second Language Proficiency

Internal components remain the same as now

This is represented graphically in the image below (except that the current nomenclature is used, rather than the proposed nomenclature)



Implementation Timeline and Processes

Based on consultation with Records and Registration, all recommendations that require changes in the Academic Requirements Report in PAWS will be implemented with the incoming cohort of Fall 2023. Making changes in PAWS for all current cohorts is prohibitively laborious, and the earliest date of final approval by Steering and the Provost for these recommendations will be

too late for Records and Registration to implement the changes for Fall 2022, given all they must do during Spring 2022 to prepare for that incoming cohort.

Previous cohorts will use the current nomenclature, and any student from one of these cohorts who switches majors will switch to the new nomenclature.

These complexities require the development of a communication strategy for the name changes, and during AY 2022-23, the LLC will develop:

- an explanatory communication contextualizing different Liberal Learning designations and other name changes for students from prior cohorts who switch into new programs of study.
- a conversion table outlining updated language.

The Associate Provost will work with Records and Registration on the implementation of the changes in PAWS.

Implementation of the recommendations concerning the mid-level writing-intensive courses that do not involve changes in the Academic Requirements Report will begin upon approval of the final recommendation by Steering and the Provost.