

TO: Steering Committee

FROM: The Liberal Learning Council

DATE: November 17, 2021

SUBJECT: Final Recommendation on the Short-Term Changes to the Liberal Learning Program Recommended by the Liberal Learning Task Force

### **Summary of the Charge**

On March 17, 2021, Steering charged the Liberal Learning Council (LLC) to review, evaluate, and decide whether to adopt the following short-term changes recommended by the Liberal Learning Task Force:

- expand both the number of courses meeting the mid-level writing requirement and student access to them;
- consider expanding the definition of “communication” to include visual and multimedia communication;
- consider renaming the liberal learning program;
- rename the domains; and
- 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).

The LLC submitted its preliminary recommendation to Steering on October 15, 2021.

Testimony was gathered on this preliminary recommendation through a Qualtrics survey and oral testimony at the Faculty Senate and Student Government. Originally, oral testimony was scheduled to be collected from the Staff Senate, but testimony collection was bumped from the agenda by other items and no other Staff Senate meetings occurred before the deadline for submission of the final recommendation to Steering. The LLC Vice-Chair, a Staff Senator, emailed the Staff Senate to solicit testimony directly. The LLC received a memo from the Humanities and Social Sciences Anti-Black Racism Committee and Antiracism Advocates expressing concern about the preliminary recommendation to rename the Civic Responsibilities to Global Responsibilities, rather than Social Justice, as was recommended by the Liberal Learning Task Force.

The survey was sent to all students, faculty, and Academic Affairs staff, and to selected staff in other divisions who have regular interactions with students or connections to the Liberal Learning Program. The survey asked, for each recommendation, whether or not the participant supported the recommendation, and if so, whether the participant had any

suggestions. An open-ended response for each recommendation allowed respondents to explain the reasons for their level, or lack, of support of that recommendation. A total of 117 faculty, 44 staff, and 85 students answered at least one question about the recommendations.

Testimony was critical in supporting some of the preliminary recommendations and modifying others. There was strong support from survey respondents (> 70% supported or supported with minor changes) for all of the recommendations except for renaming the structural elements, which was supported by only 56% of faculty and 65% of students.

Specific comments from both the survey and oral testimony led to in-depth discussion by the LLC about, and changes to, some of the preliminary recommendations. Below we summarize the main issues for each item and how the LLC addressed these issues.

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

No substantive issues were raised.

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

Students expressed strong support for this expansion, and most issues raised concerned the consequences of adding to the Liberal Learning Program a new requirement for visual and multimedia communication. The preliminary recommendation explicitly stated that such a requirement would not be added, but the LLC has added additional emphasis on this point in the final recommendation.

**Item 3. Consider renaming the Liberal Learning program**

There were two main concerns about renaming Liberal Learning to The Core. The first had to do with the use of “core” in major programs to mean a defined set of courses that all students take, which is not the case with Liberal Learning beyond the first-year. The second concern was whether the three C’s represent, or must map onto, requirements. The LLC felt that both concerns could be adequately addressed through clear communication with constituents. Language about what the core represents was already in the preliminary recommendation, the LLC has added language to the final recommendation to clarify that the three C’s do not represent requirements, and this communication will be replicated on the Liberal Learning

website as part of implementation. Given the support for The Core indicated by students in their comments, the LLC felt that the change will be beneficial.

#### **Item 4. Rename the domains**

A consistent comment, mentioned at Faculty Senate and Student Government, as well as through the survey, was that a critical perspective was omitted when “Cultural” was removed from the domain name “Behavioral, Cultural, or Social Perspectives” to produce the name “Social & Behavioral Sciences.” The LLC agrees with this argument and is now recommending the retention of the original domain name.

Several concerns were expressed about the LLC’s recommended replacement for Worldviews and Ways of Knowing: “Philosophy and Belief Systems”. “Belief systems” is too general and can encompass almost anything; Philosophy is the only discipline named; and the label does not encompass all courses currently meeting WVWK (e.g., HGS - Holocaust and Genocide Studies). The LLC agrees that Philosophy should not be singled out as a discipline, and now recommends “Belief Systems” because the definition of this term (“a set of principles or tenets which together form the basis of a religion, philosophy, or moral code” *New Oxford American Dictionary*) seems to encompass the types of courses that currently meet WVWK and does so more completely than any alternatives that have been proposed.

In response to feedback from stakeholders, the LLC recommends that the preliminary recommendation “Natural Science” be changed to “Natural Sciences.”

#### **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).**

The recommendations for this item had the lowest level of support in the survey and produced the greatest amount of critical feedback. “Catalysts for Learning” was generally considered confusing and unclear, so the LLC is recommending retention of “Intellectually and Scholarly Growth.”

Overall, there was support to change “Broad Areas of Human Inquiry” to “Multidisciplinary Perspectives,” but it was pointed out that not all courses within a domain are multidisciplinary. The LLC recognizes this issue but feels that the goal of this structural element is to provide students with multiple disciplinary perspectives that they can apply to complex problems and societal issues and that this goal is captured in the term “Multidisciplinary Perspectives.”

The recommendation to change “Civic Responsibilities” to “Global Responsibilities” garnered a number of comments, in addition to the memo mentioned above. “Global Responsibilities” was considered confusing in different ways by different groups, and did not appear to have any support. For these reasons, the LLC discarded “Global Responsibilities” and instead discussed whether to name this structural element “Social Justice” or to retain the current “Civic Responsibilities.”

Faculty comments with regard to “Social Justice” as a name for this structural element represented two main viewpoints. Some thought that “Social Justice” would carry the same political connotation that has been expressed about “Liberal Learning” (advancing a liberal political agenda), whereas others supported “Social Justice” because it communicates TCNJ’s commitment to this concept. In their memo to the LLC, the members of the HSS Anti-Black Racism Committee and the Antiracism Advocates faculty group argued that “Social Justice” is consistent with the learning outcomes of the current requirements of this structural element and is the foundation of the TCNJ’s current efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism. The LLC found the arguments in favor of “Social Justice” compelling and recommends its adoption.

**Item 6. Re-align the Academic Requirements Report in PAWS to reflect the three structural elements and the four writing requirements of the Liberal Learning Program.**

There was very strong support for this recommendation. One survey respondent noted that not all programs have a capstone course and suggested that “Capstone” be replaced with “Third-Level Writing.” In response, the LLC changed “Senior Capstone” to “Senior Capstone or Third-Level.”

There was a strong plea by one respondent to place all of the Liberal Learning requirements in a single box in PAWS. Although this would indeed be the ideal format, discussions with Records and Registration make it clear that this option is not feasible.

## **Final Recommendations from the LLC for Changes to the Liberal Learning Program**

Items 1-5 below represent recommendations made by the Liberal Learning Task Force in its final report that Steering subsequently tasked the LLC to evaluate. Item 6 is an additional recommendation that arose from consideration of the other five items.

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

LLC Recommendation: The Writing Program and the LLC work should work with departments to review and approve the courses currently offered by departments as writing-intensive courses but not designated as such in PAWS (see implementation timeline below). 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 (AR) Report in PAWS as part of a re-alignment of the AR with the requirements of the Liberal Learning Program (see Item 6 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.

The Writing Program 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, so there should be no problem for students to complete a mid-level writing course if their major does not offer such a course.

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.**

LLC 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.

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. However, we do recommend that, as part of future discussion about the goals of TCNJ’s general education program, the College explore adoption of a definition of “communication” that recognizes the central role of visual literacy in our society.

**Item 3. Consider renaming the Liberal Learning program**

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

Rationale: The Liberal Learning Task Force indicated that the current program 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.”

The recommended name “The Core” 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 three 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 three Cs are not meant to be tied to specific requirements, structural elements, domains, or disciplines. Instead, “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. Coursework fulfilling “Core” requirements facilitate opportunities for students to be “Creative, Critical, and Connected”. These three Cs represent the strengths of “The Core” and permeate the coursework therein, spanning across all disciplines included within “The Core,” but they are not requirements.



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**

LLC Specific Recommendation: The LLC recommends changing the following domain names the name changes identified by the Liberal Learning Task Force:

World Views and Ways of Knowing → Belief Systems  
Social Change in Historical Perspectives → Historical Perspectives  
Natural Science → Natural Sciences

The other three domains should retain their current names:

Literary, Visual and Performing Arts  
Behavioral, Social, or Cultural Perspectives  
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).**

LLC Specific Recommendation and Rationale:

Retain Intellectual and Scholarly Growth

Civic Responsibilities → Social Justice

The term directly connects the requirements to the important current conversations and issues in society, is consistent with the learning outcomes for the requirements in this structural element, and TCNJ's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism.

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.

### **Item 6. 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 shown below. Discussions with Records and Registration made it clear that it would not be possible to place all of Liberal Learning into a single box because of the way in which Liberal Learning requirements can be major-specific.

Discussions at the meeting in which this final recommendation was finalized led to changes to the recommended representation of writing requirements, which were divided into first-year and advanced writing, and a Writing-Enhanced Curriculum option was added. A Writing-Enhanced Curriculum has mid- and upper level courses that provide a variety of writing assignments that in combination fulfill TCNJ’s mid-level and capstone/third-level writing requirements. WEC programs are approved by the Director of Writing and the LLC, and one such program has been approved for Chemistry.

The Core: Intellectual and Scholarly Growth (dark blue bar)

>Information Literacy Proficiency (IDS 102)

>First-Year Seminar (FYS)

Writing Proficiency (light blue bar)

First-Year Writing

>First-Year Writing (FYW 102)

- >First-Year Seminar (FYS)
- Advanced Writing
  - Writing-Intensive Course Option
    - >Mid-level
    - >Senior Capstone or Third-Level
  - Writing-Enhanced Curriculum Option
    - >(completion of major with WEC writing program)

The Core: Social Justice (dark blue bar)

- >First-Year Community Engaged Learning (new course number when approved)
- >Gender
- >Global Perspectives
- >Race & Ethnicity

The Core: Multidisciplinary Perspectives (dark blue bar)

Internal components remain the same as now, with the exception of the changes of the names of the domains recommended in Item 4.

Liberal Learning: Second Language Proficiency

Internal components remain the same as now

## **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 after Fall 2023 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.