

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steering Committee

FROM: Committee on Academic Programs (CAP)

RE: Academic Structural Changes to Support Institutional Financial Sustainability

DATE: March 30, 2024

Background

In December 2023, President Bernstein presented the LIONS plan, outlining initiatives to address the budget shortfall faced by the college. In response to this plan, the Faculty Senate identified three academic structural changes that had potential to support financial sustainability. On February 9, 2024, Steering received a request from the Faculty Senate Executive Board (FSEB) to issue a charge to CAP to look deeper into the three structural changes and make the suggested recommendations to support financial sustainability.

1. Adjusting the number of units for a typical baccalaureate degree at TCNJ from 128 credits (32 units) to 120 credits (30 units).
 - FSEB Request: CAP should provide a yes/no recommendation on the idea upon collection of campus testimony and exploration.
2. Adjustments to the first-year writing curriculum and more holistically look at the writing program at TCNJ keeping in mind the writing proficiency of our students across the curriculum.
 - FSEB Request: To move forward and make a recommendation, CAP should use the faculty expertise in HSS (English faculty) to identify best practices, propose a plan for implementing the delivery of writing across majors along with the Core courses and FYS. We are recommending that CAP should consider the reduction of the pair of courses (FYW and FYS) to a single course for writing and that CAP then request broader campus testimony.
3. Reevaluate the language requirement in light of the fact that more than half of TCNJ students are exempt from the requirement.
 - FSEB Request: CAP should consult with the working group that is working on this charge, consisting of Admissions, World Languages and ASL faculty, faculty representatives across schools, Honors program, Phi Beta Kappa and the Associate Provost, and create a plan that involves departments evaluating their need for a language requirement. The plan should address removing a College Core language requirement and evaluate the possibility of having these courses count for correlate requirements in certain majors. This would encourage students to still continue to take language courses, but provide flexibility and along with alignment with other peer colleges in NJ. CAP should oversee this work and collect campus testimony regarding the plan.

Process

On February 21, 2024, Steering issued the charge to CAP mandating Tier III testimony. Steering was aware that CAP had already begun review of a proposal from the College Core Council related to the writing curriculum, and Steering asked CAP to continue this work, keeping in mind the suggestions in the FSEB memo. Steering also asked CAP to review the other two items outlined above and in the FSEB summary, and to proceed as suggested in the FSEB summary.

To understand the level of support for, and the potential benefits and disadvantages of each of the suggested structural changes, CAP gathered Tier III testimony from the campus community in the following ways:

- Oral, in-person feedback, during an Open Forum on Wednesday, March 6. This forum was held in conjunction with the faculty senate meeting, and open to all members of the TCNJ community.
- Oral, in-person feedback, during the staff senate meeting, on Wednesday, March 6.
- Oral, in-person feedback, during the student government meeting, on Wednesday, March 6.
- Written feedback through a Qualtrics survey, open to all members of the TCNJ community.

At the open forums, TCNJ community members were asked to provide their views on the first two charges:

1. Adjust the number of units for a typical baccalaureate degree at TCNJ from 128 credits (32 units) to 120 credits (30 units). CAP was asked to provide a yes/no recommendation for this suggestion.
2. Remove the FYW 102 course requirement and enhance FYS courses to improve students' writing skills more effectively. CAP was asked to provide a yes/no recommendation for this suggestion.

Note: After further discussions within CAP, with the faculty senate president, and with the co-chair of Steering, it was concluded that there wasn't yet sufficient evidence that changing the language requirement (as per Charge 3) would contribute significantly to cost savings and financial sustainability. Additionally, more time is needed to determine the broader consequences of the proposed changes on different majors and programs, including those with accreditation requirements. As a result, CAP did not request testimony on the third charge. A working group with representation from a variety of areas was formed to gather and analyze data to create a plan that can be presented to the campus community for testimony.

The feedback received through the open forums and survey, as well as through conversations with different groups and individuals across the campus, was analyzed and discussed at the CAP meeting on March 29th. The details of the analysis are in Appendix A.

Final Recommendation

Back on the feedback and analysis, CAP makes the following recommendations for the first two charges.

1. Adjusting the number of units for a typical baccalaureate degree at TCNJ from 128 credits (32 units) to 120 credits (30 units).
 - CAP recommends that the number of units for a typical baccalaureate degree at TCNJ should be adjusted from 128 credits (32 units) to 120 credits (30 units) if the change will result in significant cost savings and support financial sustainability.
2. Adjustments to the first-year writing curriculum and more holistically look at the writing program at TCNJ keeping in mind the writing proficiency of our students across the curriculum.
 - CAP recommends that the first-year writing requirement should be reduced to one course, i.e., FYS, and that this course should include more writing instruction. The writing program should consult with programs across the campus to develop a plan to better meet the writing needs for different majors. This plan should then be reviewed through TCNJ's governance process.