**TO:** Steering Committee

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

**RE:** Final Recommendations on Academic Load

**DATE:** May 25, 2011

**Background:**

Currently, the college has a policy on academic load saying:

Students taking a minimum of three full course units per semester are considered to be full-time students for financial aid and billing purposes. This definition of full-time study applies to the fall and spring semesters and to the regular summer sessions. The normal aca­demic load is four course units. The maximum load for any student is five course units. Normally, a student must receive permission of his or her dean’s office to carry five course units.  Permission to carry beyond four course units may be requested by sophomores, juniors, and seniors with at least a 3.3 GPA.  However, programs that require five course units in a given semester or under certain conditions may arrange for blanket approval through the Office of Records and Registration.

Students may take 4.5 course units (=18 credits) without permission. Ther[nayak@tcnj.edu](mailto:nayak@tcnj.edu)

e is, however, no indication in college policy of whether or not there is a restriction on the number of semesters in which a student may be allowed to take five course units. Currently, engineering, a specialized program, requires five course units on a regular basis in order to allow students to complete their degree within four years. On the other hand, the School of Culture and Society (in its printed materials) and the other schools (on a more informal basis) generally limit students to only one semester in which they may take five course units. They do so in the belief that frequent exceeding of the four-course-unit limit is inconsistent with the values that underpinned Academic Transformation.

Additionally, there is currently no policy concerning the ability of students to transfer credit for courses taken at another institution while they are taking a full load at TCNJ.

**Charge:**

At the request of the School of Culture and Society, the Steering Committee asks the Committee on Academic Policy to clarify principles supporting the college’s policy on academic load. As part of its discussion, CAP should consider: whether there should be any limitation on the number of semesters in which a student may take five course units; and if so, whether the limits should be set college-wide or by the individual school.

Additionally, CAP should determine:

1. Whether a student may receive credit for work done at another institution for work done while simultaneously taking a full load at TCNJ.
2. If the answer above is affirmative, should there be a limit to the number of semesters or courses? If it is negative, by whose authority should exceptions be allowed and what should the principles describing exceptional cases be?

**Background to the Recommendation**

In Spring of 2009, CAP met with Deans and/or Assistant Deans from each school to hear the needs, concerns and/or issues relevant to majors and schools. After meeting with the Deans, CAP requested data from Institutional Research. Specifically, CAP asked:

1. How many students in a given semester are taking 5 units (we understand that this is the norm for engineering)
2. How many students are finishing the undergraduate degree in fewer than 8 semesters? Is this because they go to summer school or because they are taking 5 units/semester?
3. The college policy is that a student must have a GPA of 3.3 or higher to take 5 units. Is taking 5 units adversely affecting GPA?

In Spring of 2010, CAP received the requested data and carefully studied it. More data was requested to further clarify these questions. The data showed in general that while many students take more than 4 units in a semester, a very small percentage of students are graduating in less than 4 years and taking 5 units is not adversely affecting their GPA.

In Fall of 2010, CAP requested data on the number of students receiving credit for work done at another institution while taking a full load at TCNJ and found that only 16 students did so in a given semester. CAP also looked at comparable institutions for policies on this issue and found very little information.

In March 2011, a Preliminary Recommendation was approved by CAP. In April 2011, CAP held two open fora on the Preliminary Recommendation in addition to collecting testimony via email. The testimony was mixed. Much of the testimony was with regard to the programmatic exceptions to the standard academic load. Therefore, we attempted to make the language clearer. There was also a concern that the criteria given in the recommendation was too prescriptive so we changed the language there as well. The overarching concern from the testimony was to preserve rigor in the coursework and the “significant amount of out-of-class work” that was a result of transformation. However, CAP believes that there are some exceptional students who can do all of the work required outside of class while taking extra courses. Therefore, we decided to not limit overload to one semester.

**Recommendation**

CAP recommends the following revised policy on Academic Load:

Students taking a minimum of three full course units per semester are considered to be full-time students for financial aid and billing purposes. This definition of full-time study applies to the fall and spring semesters and to the regular summer sessions. The standard academic load is four course units per semester; however, programmatic exceptions do exist and students should check with their major department. A student in a degree program with a standard academic load who wishes to take more than 4.5 course units must receive permission from the dean’s office to do so. This includes additional credits taken simultaneously at another institution. In order to be eligible to request permission to take more than 4.5 course units, a student must have completed 8 course units at TCNJ (4 course units for transfer students) and have at least a 3.3 GPA. Some of the criteria that may be considered when making decisions to grant permission for more than 4.5 course units are: 1) evidence of the student’s ability to continue to maintain at least a 3.3 GPA; 2) whether the additional course or credit is a prerequisite for a subsequent required course; 3) whether there are extenuating curricular circumstances, such as completing a double major.