**TO:** Steering Committee

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

**RE:** Final Recommendations on Mid-semester Evaluations/Grades

**DATE:** October 26, 2010

**Background:**

The Steering Committee received an email from Dean Benjamin Rifkin raising concerns about the mid-semester evaluations for EOF students. He points out that these forms may contribute to EOF students experiencing a sense of discrimination. On the other hand, he notes that use of mid-semester evaluations may serve all students. He offers three possible ways in which mid-semester evaluations might be used:

* All instructors provide mid-semester grades through PAWS grading module for all students in all courses:  either all grades (A-F) or merely grades of satisfactory (perhaps grades A-C) and unsatisfactory (grades below that range).
* All instructors provide grades through PAWS grading module for all students only in those courses numbered at or below 199 (freshmen level).
* All instructors provide grades through PAWS grading module for all students in their first two semesters at TCNJ (freshmen and transfers) in all courses.

Currently, TCNJ does not have a policy about mid semester evaluations or grades. The mid-semester evaluation of EOF students has been a college practice of long standing, but it does not grow out of any formal college policy.

**Charge:**

The Steering Committee charges the Committee on Academic Programs to review the request from Dean Benjamin Rifkin and consider:

* If there should be any college-wide policy concerning mid-semester grades or evaluation?
* If there is to be a policy should it follow one of the options identified by Dean Rifkin?

**Background to the Recommendations**

During the 2009-10 academic year, CAP formed a sub-committee to address this charge. The sub-committee was chaired by Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle. Members were drawn from CAP and Marcia O’Connell was invited to join as the representative from the Advising and Student Support Planning Council (APC). Sub-committee members were:

 Carlos Alves, CAP

Bob Anderson, CAP and LLPC

James Boatwright, CAP

Brenda Leake, CAP

Marcia O’Connell, APC

Lisa Ortiz-Vitarelle, CAP

Brian Skwarek, CAP

The sub-committee collected information relevant to the charge in four ways:

* A sub-committee moderated focus group of upper-class EOF students
* Data on the use of undergraduate mid-semester grades at aspirant peer institutions
* An SGA moderated poll of current students
* A Qualtrics survey of faculty and advisors

The sub-committee then carefully considered this information and discussed the goals, benefits and feasibility of making mid-semester grading part of a college-wide policy.

The sub-committee found that EOF focus group participants who are accustomed to receiving mid-semester evaluations found them useful for gauging their progress and effective in motivating their success. Their suggestions for an ideal mid-semester grading policy were insightful, as they validated the need for more timely and more substantive feedback and underscored that not all professors are expected to provide feedback in the same way.

Data collected from our aspirant peers indicates successful use of mid-semester grades among a majority of the schools studied but not all of them do so as a matter of policy. Many schools provide a supportive infrastructure of advisement targeted at mid-term reports of poor performance and a few publish statements of student accountability to encourage students to assume responsibility for managing their own academic programs.

While most of the current students polled supported having mid-semester feedback, a large percentage of faculty surveyed were reluctant to endorse a college-wide policy that might be broadly conceived and, perhaps, implemented in ways that restricted their professional freedom.

By the end of 2009-10, a Preliminary Recommendation was approved by CAP. At the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year, CAP held two open fora on the Preliminary Recommendation in addition to collecting testimony via email. Although the email testimony was mixed, the majority of the faculty attending the open fora disagreed with our preliminary recommendation to not have a college-wide policy on mid-semester grades and showed strong support for having a policy to at least give students evaluations of satisfactory/unsatisfactory at mid-semester. CAP also invited Don Lovett, director of the PERSIST Scholars program, to its meeting on October 13 to provide testimony on the effectiveness of giving at-risk students early feedback. After thoughtfully considering all of the testimony, CAP decided to substantially revise its Preliminary Recommendation.

**Recommendations**

1. CAP recommends that there be a college-wide policy requiring mid-semester progress reports for all students in all courses. At a minimum, the reports will indicate whether a student’s progress is satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or on the border. The reports may provide optional qualitative feedback. A mechanism must be provided to deliver the progress reports.

2. CAP recommends the adoption of the following as a TCNJ statement of student academic accountability:

In support of TCNJ’s mission to prepare students to “excel in their chosen fields,” faculty provide periodic assessments of student performance in each course. However, it is the student’s responsibility to be aware of their standing in their respective courses. As advocates for their own academic success, students are expected to initiate and maintain open communication with faculty and advisors in an effort to continuously monitor their progress. Students experiencing academic difficulties must assume responsibility to seek appropriate resources and adjust their academic habits and disposition accordingly to ensure meaningful progress toward a degree.