MEMORANDUM

TO: Committee on Academic Programs

FROM: Steering Committee

RE: Student Academic Complaint Policies

DATE: September 21, 2016

Background:
On August 30, 2016, Steering received the attached memo from Jennifer Palmgren, Assistant Provost, requesting a review of the College's undergraduate and graduate student complaint policies. These policies articulate the procedure by which students may pursue academic complaints other than grade complaints, complaints of discrimination, and academic integrity appeals. Examples of complaints in recent years which have fallen under these policies include concerns about advising, discrepancies in the academic requirements report, and course scheduling. A more extensive list of examples is attached.

Charge:
The Steering committee charges CAP to review the existing student complaint policies to develop a single revised policy for graduate and undergraduate academic complaints. Steering suggests that at step 1, testimony could be limited to Academic Leaders as well as any other stakeholders deemed appropriate by CAP. Once a preliminary recommendation is prepared, testimony should be sought from faculty, students, and staff via Faculty and Staff Senates and Student Government, along with open forums and any other means deemed necessary by CAP.

Timeline:
CAP should complete its work on this charge by the end of Fall 2016.

TCNJ Governance Processes

Step #1 -- Identifying and reporting the problem: When a Standing Committee receives a charge from the Steering Committee, the first responsibility is to clearly articulate and report the problem to the campus community. The problem may have been set out clearly in the charge received from the Steering Committee, or it may be necessary for the Standing Committee to frame a problem statement. The problem statement should indicate the difficulties or uncertainties that need to be addressed through new or revised policy, procedure, or program. The problem statement should be broadly stated and should include a context such as existing policy or practice. Problem statements may include solution parameters but should not suggest any specific solutions. Clearly stated problems will lead to better recommendations.

Step #2 -- Preparing a preliminary recommendation: Once the campus community has received the problem statement, committees can begin to collect data needed to make a preliminary recommendation. Committees should receive input from affected individuals and all relevant stakeholder groups prior to making a preliminary recommendation. For issues that have

broad implications or that affect a large number of individuals, initial testimony should be solicited from the campus community at large. For some issues, sufficient initial testimony may come from input through committee membership or solicitation from targeted constituent groups. When, in the best judgment of the committee, adequate clarity of the principles contributing to the problem are known, a preliminary recommendation should be drafted and disseminated to the campus community through regular updates and the Governance website. At this point, committees typically receive input or testimony through committee membership, formal testimony, and open comment from affected individuals and all stakeholder groups. Committees must be proactive in inviting stakeholder groups (including Student Government, Staff Senate and Faculty Senate) to provide formal testimony. In cases where testimony results in significant and substantive changes to the preliminary recommendation, the new recommendation will be considered to be in step #2.

Step #3 -- Making a final recommendation: Committees must use sound judgment to give the campus adequate time to review the preliminary recommendation before making their final recommendation. Again, committees are expected to be proactive in receiving feedback on the preliminary recommendation. If a full calendar year has passed since the formal announcement of the preliminary recommendation, the committee must resubmit a preliminary recommendation to the campus community. When, in the best judgment of the committee, the campus community has responded to the proposed resolution of the issue, the committee shall send its final recommendation (with documentation) to the Steering Committee. That final recommendation should include a suggested implementation date. Accompanying the final recommendation shall be a report of how testimony was gathered, the nature of that testimony, and how the Committee responded to that testimony, including a description of how the preliminary recommendation evolved as a result of testimony.

Testimony

The presenting of testimony, prior to both the preliminary and final recommendations, is central to the concept of shared governance. All stakeholder groups will have an opportunity to provide input into governance issues through direct membership as well as invited testimony. Individuals appointed or elected to the governance system are expected to take a broad institutional perspective relative to issues being considered. In contrast, invited testimony will reflect the stakeholder perspective on the issue being considered. Committees are expected to be proactive in inviting stakeholder groups to provide testimony at both steps # 2 and #3 of the process. Committees need to identify stakeholder groups that are interested in each particular issue and invite their testimony at scheduled Committee meetings or hearings. Committees should report in their transmittal memos which groups were targeted as stakeholders, how testimony was invited, the form of the testimony (written, oral, etc.), and the substantive content of the testimony.

To see the Steering Committee's guidelines for gathering testimony and making a final recommendation, see the "Governance Toolbox" at http://academicaffairs.pages.tcnj.edu/college-governance/a-governance-toolbox/

Background
TCNJ has separate undergraduate and graduate student complaint
policies, developed through governance in 1999 and last updated in 2009
and 2007, respectively:

http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8642
http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8682.

These policies are used for academic complaints and appeals not
covered by other policies, and they were also used for grade appeals
until the approval of a separate grade appeals policy in 2015:

http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9302.

Because grade appeals are one of the most common types of appeal,
when Steering charged CAP with creating a grade appeals policy in
2012, it asked CFA to consider whether a separate "student complaint
appeal" policy was still needed. CFA argued that it was not, and that the
process for handling student complaints not related to grades could be
covered by other policies, such as the Professional Behavior policy it
was developing. The Steering Committee rescinded the "student
complaint appeal" charge to CFA, and it was felt that the two student
complaint policies could eventually be removed from the policy manual
as other policies took their place. However, there remain student
complaints and appeals not covered by other policies for which the
student complaint policies continue to be used. In addition, MSCHE's
*Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal
Regulations* has expanded to include confirmation that "institutions have
effective policies and procedures for tracking and resolving student
complaints."

Request for Charge
As the College's undergraduate and graduate student complaint policies
are due for review, and as they will likely continue to be needed even as
other, related policies are developed, the Provost's Office asks that they
be reviewed at this time, and that the development of a single student
complaint policy be considered for complaints and appeals not covered

by other policies.

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