

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Committee on Academic Programs

**FROM:** Steering Committee

**RE:** Learning Assistants

**DATE:** February 1, 2017

### **Background:**

The attached memo from Matt Wund, chair of the School of Science curriculum committee, calls attention to the peer-to-peer teaching courses in the departments of Psychology, Physics, and most recently Biology. In reviewing the course proposal for the most recent of these, the School of Science Curriculum committee felt that it could have used guidance from the College regarding such courses.

While the College prides itself in not having teaching assistants, it seems appropriate to consider ways in which undergraduates can assist effectively in the classroom and can learn from this experience. The experience for the undergraduate learning assistant may be considered analogous to that of any other internship. However, the use of learning assistants also impacts the students in the classroom. There would be a benefit to the College in having a college-wide understanding of these impacts. The assessment of the learning goals for the learning assistants by school-based curriculum committees may not be the best way to achieve such an understanding.

### **Charge:**

Steering asks CAP to consider the need for a new policy on the use of Learning Assistants. CAP should consider the extent to which the existing policy on internships applies and whether additional guidelines are needed. If CAP determines that a policy is needed it should proceed to develop such a policy. In considering the need for such a policy and in developing a policy if it is warranted, Steering recommends that CAP review the current Internship Policy, consider the attached memo from Matt Wund, and solicit input from the departments of Psychology and Physics concerning the existing learning assistant courses in these departments. If a policy is to be developed, at Step 1 CAP should also consider current practice at a sampling of PUI's and solicit testimony from Academic Leaders.

If 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 in Spring 2017.

## **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/>

Dear Steering Committee Members,

I am writing this message in my capacity as Chair of the School of Science Curriculum Committee. Over the past two years, our Committee has reviewed and supported three course proposals that involve undergraduates earning course credit as they engage in peer-to-peer teaching (PHY 290, PHY 291, BIO 300). The mechanics of each course differ to some degree, but in each case the students enrolled facilitate learning activities while the course instructor is present in the class or laboratory, and mechanisms are in place for the students to have demonstrable learning outcomes. After thorough review, which included discussion with the proposing departments, the School of Science Curriculum Committee felt that these courses added value to our curricula. We also felt that these courses were not using “teaching assistants” in the sense that research institutions do, and therefore do not conflict with TCNJ’s Mission or Values. Dean Osborn (cc’d) agreed with our assessment, and these courses have all been approved.

However, in discussing the most recent course proposal, our committee also discussed the broader point that this type of course is a departure from a more standard course, internship or independent study. We also recognized that two different models had already emerged in the School of Science, with a third in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (PSY 397). Therefore we felt that the Steering Committee might want to direct the issue to CAP in order to develop guidelines for how these courses should be structured moving forward.

I am happy to provide more information about these courses or our Committee’s discussion. As a courtesy, I have also copied Dean Osborn, and the chairs of the Physics (Dave McGee) and Biology Departments (Keith Pecor).

Sincerely,

Matt Wund