MEMORANDUM

TO: Steering Committee

FROM: Advising and Student Support Program Council

RE: Assessment plan for advising

DATE: May 17, 2017

Background:

In November 2016, Steering charged the ASSPC with developing college-wide assessment plan for advising, as is called for in the Undergraduate Advising Policies and Practices (attachment). As the ASSPC will not exist in next year's governance structure, this report represents the ASSPC's final report on our progress on this charge, including our current recommendation and the remaining steps to be accomplished by another group in the future.

Summary of Progress:

As part of the process to develop an assessment of advising, Steering suggested that we consider several questions, discussed below, and solicit input from Associate Provost Mosen Auryan, from Academic Leaders, from the Council of Deans, and from the Faculty Senate and Student Government Executive Boards on these questions. To facilitate efficient discussions, and because the ASSPC has been discussing potential assessments of advising for several years, the ASSPC drafted our thoughts on those questions as well as a draft of a potential assessment tool. We distributed those documents to the above individuals/groups and solicited their feedback. Unfortunately, this took the remainder of the spring semester as we just received our final pieces of feedback in the first week of May.

Below, we provide our responses to the questions posed by Steering, as well as some of the relevant feedback we received. We also include some additional issues or concerns raised in our discussions and/or from our feedback that should be addressed by any assessment plan and/or implementation efforts.

We have attached our current recommendation regarding assessment of advising as well as our draft of a core assessment of advising to be used campus-wide. These documents are meant to be used as a starting point when a group designated by Steering is ready to solicit testimony from the campus regarding this assessment in the future. Below, we also outline our suggestions regarding the next steps in this process.

ASSPC responses to Steering questions:

1) *What is the purpose of the assessment? Is the goal to assess the advising offered by individual faculty members, to assess the effectiveness of departments in advising their students collectively, or to assess the effectiveness of advising at the College as a whole?*

   ASSPC response: We view the purpose of this assessment to be two-fold. First, it should measure the success of the new advising policy in promoting a strong and holistic undergraduate advising practice here at TCNJ: are students meeting with their advisors each semester?, do those advising meetings include discussion of career goals and professional development, rather than solely focusing on registration?, etc. For this goal, we see the assessment as useful for College, School and Department level assessment of the advising policy. Second, the assessment should facilitate the identification of best practices in advising, which could be shared and encouraged campus-wide. To do this, the assessment will first allow the college to identify units that are particularly successful in their advising approaches. Those units can then share their specific advising practices so that the greater campus community can learn what advising best practices they employ.

   The ASSPC consensus is that the goal of this assessment is not to assess advising on an individual level. The ASSPC has heard informally that assessment that is not at the individual level would be less useful for some academic units. For example, without knowing which advisor is being assessed, it may be difficult for the School of Education to tease out assessment of their own advising as opposed to advising by their students' advisors in their dual major. We recognize these challenges and acknowledge that a part of the original impetus to develop an advising assessment was to provide individual faculty with a way of documenting advising in their portfolios. However, we do not think that the value of such an individual-level assessment outweighs the significant challenges of initiating such an assessment. In addition, ASSPC members raised the following concerns about assessing advising at the individual level: 1) We know that the advising loads vary significantly between advisors and departments. Should this unequal distribution of advising load lead to worse outcomes on an advising assessment, that should not reflect on individual advisors. 2) The sample size for each advisor could be low so that individual level assessment may not be accurate.

   Selected relevant feedback:
   - Some individuals felt strongly that assessment of individual advisors is necessary or would be more helpful or effective. We understand that such an approach has recently been undertaken in the School of Business and Bill Keep indicated that there were no written or verbal complains about this approach. An alternate suggestion was to take a more informal approach, dropping the word "assessment" and keep results at the departmental or school level. The ASSPC considered those viewpoints, but still came to the unanimous consensus that assessment of individual advisors was too problematic to be feasible for the reasons described above.
   - The Faculty Senate Executive Board noted that "there were also some concerns raised regarding the anonymity of advisors. In some departments, only a few

faculty members advise particular cohorts of students, so the survey results may be able to be identified with particular individuals."

2) *Should students be given an opportunity to provide feedback on their individual experiences?*

ASSPC response: We suggest that asking student to complete a short survey on their advising experiences is an effective way to gather information about advising. Such a process has been used successfully by the TCNJ School of Engineering for a number of years. However, we suggest that student names and advisor names should not be collected as part of this process as we do not intend to assess advising at the individual advisor level.

We suggest including a general comment box in an advising survey to allow students to share feedback on any aspect of their advising experience, even if not specifically addressed in a survey question. We recognize that some students may discuss their specific advisor by name. Any college-wide assessment plan would need to address the collection of this information and provide a mechanism to prevent the distribution of information about any individuals. We suggest that this could be done by redacting this information prior to dissemination.

Selected relevant feedback:
Most feedback seemed to indicate that our approach of using a student survey was appropriate. A few individuals noted that there was no mechanism for assessing the student side of the advising relationship. One suggestion to address this that was presented was an SGA administered survey to ask students about whether they attended meetings with their advisors, their level of preparation for advising meetings, etc. Another suggested surveying faculty members about these items.

3) *Should information gathered be shared with individual advisors, departments, and deans with information identifying the advisor in question, or should data be kept only in the aggregate?*

ASSPC response: We suggest that data should only be kept in the aggregate (with the department as the smallest aggregation unit). As indicated in our response to #2 above, any information inadvertently collected about individual advisors should be redacted and not distributed.

Selected relevant feedback:
As described above, some respondents felt that assessment of individual advisors would be most appropriate. Most, however, seemed to agree with the ASSPC that analyzing at the college, school and departmental level would be helpful.

4) *Should a single assessment tool be developed for use by the entire campus, or should sample tools (perhaps with common elements) be developed from which individual schools might choose?*

ASSPC response: To allow us to accomplish the two goals outlined in our response to question #1: 1) assessment of the effectiveness of the advising policy, and 2) identification of best advising practices by identifying particularly successful nodes of advising on campus, we believe that it is important that a common tool be used throughout the campus. However, we recognize that some units of the college may have specific advising challenges or questions that could be better addressed in a more "personalized" assessment tool. For this reason, we suggest a core advising survey be used campus-wide to which departments or schools would be able to add a small number of questions specific to that academic unit.

In order to facilitate assessment of advising at TCNJ relative to our comparator and aspirant institutions, we strongly suggest use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) advising module each time that NSSE is administered.

Selected relevant feedback:
- We received comments both in support of using the NSSE instrument and in agreement with the concept of a core set of questions to be adopted campus-wide with the ability to "personalize" with additional questions for each school.
- We received a number of helpful comments regarding the exact questions included in the core survey, their phrasing, etc. We incorporated many of these comments and suggestions, as well as some aspects of the Business School advising survey which we received as part of this process, as we revised the core advising survey. For example, several comments raised the point that students often make use of mentors beyond their formal academic advisor. To capture these informal advising relationships, we've added a question asking students to assess the effectiveness of their overall academic advising, including additional mentors and resources.

Additional Questions/Concerns Raised during this Process:

- A number of concerns were raised both by the ASSPC and by those providing initial feedback regarding logistics of implementation. This included the following questions and concerns:
  - Who will administer the survey?
  - When and how often will this be administered?
  - Who will analyze the results and how will they be disseminated?
  - How will students who have multiple advisors (either within the same school/unit or in two different schools/units) be able to submit the survey for each advisor?

The ASSPC considered these questions beyond the scope of this charge, but offered some thoughts on implementation in our final recommendation document (attached).

- A major concern raised both by the ASSPC and by those providing initial feedback was completion rates and survey exhaustion. <u>This is a critical concern that needs to be carefully addressed in order for this assessment to be effective.</u> Again, while addressing this concern is outside the scope of this charge, we wanted to emphatically second these concerns and share the following suggestions from our initial feedback:
  - o The Business school appeared to enter students into a raffle for a gift card upon completion of this survey.
  - o Another suggestion was to set up a table (perhaps in Eickhoff) encouraging students to complete the survey with prizes, candy or some kind of incentive.

- An additional logistical concern is assessment of advising by staff members who do not fall under an academic school (e.g. EOF and CSS advising). In this case, who would be responsible for "personalizing" the core survey for this class of advisers? In addition, it would be nearly impossible for data about these advisors to be anonymous as one person is often responsible for advising a particular groups of students. These logistical challenges may represent an unsolvable problem, but we hope that those implementing this assessment would attempt to do so in a way that allows assessment of these critically important advising relationships.

ASSPC Current Recommendations Regarding Assessment:

The ASSPC has outlined its current recommendations in the attachment entitled: "ASSPC recommendation on advising assessment May 2017."

Key points include:

- Assessment data will be aggregated and compared at the departmental, school and college levels, but not at the level of the individual advisor.
- The NSSE Academic Advising Module (attached) will be used.
- A core advising survey (attached) will be used college-wide with the opportunity for schools to add a few questions to address school-specific concerns.

ASSPC Recommendations Regarding the Next Steps in this Process:

As the ASSPC will not exist in the future governance structure, our current recommendations reflect the final recommendations of this Program Council. However, we feel that this assessment is currently at the final stage of step #2 in the process outlined in the original charge from Steering (Preliminary Recommendations) and is ready for testimony from the entire campus community. At that point, the group soliciting that testimony can revise these documents and prepare the final recommendations. Please note that the current and most recent former chairs of the ASSPC (K.T. Elliott and Tracy Kress) would be happy to help with this process in any way that we can.

The strong consensus of the ASSPC, however, is that it would be counter-productive to solicit campus-wide testimony in the current campus climate. Based on the response to the assessment policy roll-out, as well as morale issues surrounding the contract situation, we would suggest waiting to solicit testimony until the campus environment allowed a more productive space for discussions of this issue. Specifically, based on input we've received across the campus community, we feel it would best to table this discussion until after a new contract is in place.

Attachments:

- Advising Assessment – Charge to ASSPC
- ASSPC recommendation on advising assessment May 2017
- ASSPC draft advising survey
- NSSE 2017 Academic Advising Module
- Collated initial feedback from stakeholders
- Undergraduate Advising Policies and Practices

ASSPC Recommendation on Assessment of Academic Advising

Background:

In November 2016, Steering charged the ASSPC with developing a college-wide assessment plan for advising, as is called for in the Undergraduate Advising Policies and Practices (attachment). Previously, in 2010-2011, the ASSPC (then the ASPC) undertook an extensive evaluation of assessment practices and experiences at TCNJ including focus groups with faculty, students and staff. The ASPC recommended in 2011 that advising be reviewed via governance and best practices implemented campus-wide and that "an instrument should be designed to quantitatively measure our success in advising." Since 2011, the ASPC/ASSPC has been discussing and considering what this assessment might look like as part of their work on developing and soliciting testimony on the new Undergraduate Advising Policies and Practices (adopted 2016, attached). The following recommendations are based on these efforts and incorporate initial input from a variety of groups and individuals including Academic Leaders, the Council of Deans, the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, and the Executive Boards of both the Faculty Senate and Student Government. We welcome the input of the entire campus community on these preliminary recommendations so that they can be revised to best reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of everyone involved in academic advising at TCNJ.

Preliminary Recommendations:

Goal of Assessment:

The ASSPC views the goal of assessing academic advising as two-fold. First, the assessment tool(s) should measure the success of the new advising policy in promoting a strong and holistic undergraduate advising practice here at TCNJ: are students meeting with their advisors each semester?, do those advising meetings include discussion of career goals and professional development?, etc. For this goal, we see the assessment as useful for College, School and Department level assessment of the advising policy. Second, the assessment tool(s) should facilitate the identification of best practices in advising, which could be shared and encouraged campus-wide. To do this, the assessment will first allow the college to identify units that are particularly successful in their advising approaches. Those units can then share their specific advising practices so that the greater campus community can learn what advising best practices they employ.

Key Points about the Assessment Plan:

- <u>This plan does not include assessment of advisors at the individual level.</u>
  The ASSPC consensus is that the goal of this assessment is not to assess advising on an individual level. The ASSPC has heard informally that assessment that is not at the individual level would be less useful for some academic units. For example, without knowing which advisor is being assessed, it may be difficult for the School of Education to tease out assessment of their own advising as opposed to advising by their students'

advisors in their dual majors. We recognize these challenges. However, we do not think that the value of such an individual-level assessment outweighs the significant challenges of initiating such an assessment. In addition, ASSPC members raised the following concerns about assessing advising at the individual level: 1) We know that the advising loads vary significantly between advisors and departments. 2) The sample size for each advisor could be low so that individual level assessment may not be accurate.

- This plan is a hybrid between college-wide and school-level assessment.
  We propose a core set of questions that form the basis of a college-wide assessment of advising. We also suggest that, in order to address school-specific concerns and challenges, schools could append a reasonable number of questions to that core survey. This would allow simultaneous assessment at the college, school and departmental level with one core tool that could be somewhat "personalized" for each school.

Preliminary Assessment Plan:

Tools:

1. Each time the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered at TCNJ, the NSSE advising module (attached) will be included. This will allow comparison of advising experiences at TCNJ with those nationwide.
2. The core assessment survey (attached) will be administered college-wide regularly (see below), but no more than once a year.
3. As part of the same advising survey, a small number (≤ 4) of school-specific questions can be administered simultaneously. These questions should be drafted with feedback from all stakeholders within a given school.
4. Data from the advising survey will be aggregated and analyzed at the departmental level and, for the core survey questions, data should be analyzed between departments and schools college-wide. Data will not be collected regarding individual advisors and any information regarding individual advisors that is inadvertently collected should be redacted before results are disseminated.
5. Results of these analyses will be disseminated to students via SGA and faculty/staff via Deans, department chairs and unit directors (e.g. Directors of EOF and CSS). Units with particularly strong scores should be solicited to share their approaches to advising with the campus.

Implementation:

The ASSPC suggests that implementation of this assessment be performed by the individual or unit deemed most appropriate by the Provost. The following points represent the ASSPC's current recommendation regarding the logistics of implementation. This is somewhat beyond the scope of the original charge, but, as we have been considering this process carefully for several years, we respectfully make the following suggestions:

- The core advising survey could be administered, analyzed and results distributed to SGA, Deans, Department Chairs and unit directors by the Center for Institutional Effectiveness.

- Analyses should include comparisons between departments and schools in order to facilitate units with exemplary advising practices that can be disseminated and modeled campus-wide.
- We suggest that the core advising survey be administered approximately every 2 years, but certainly not more often than once per year.
- Students will multiple assigned advisors (e.g. double/dual majors, EOF, etc.) should complete the survey once for each advisor.
- Any comments containing names or identifying information regarding individual academic advisors should be redacted by the Center for Institutional Effectiveness before these data are aggregated and disseminated.
- Particular efforts should be made to boost completion rates. These efforts could be informed by examining best practices of units with high completion rates for the Student Feedback on Teaching.

Attachments:

- Advising Assessment – Charge to ASSPC
- ASSPC draft core advising survey
- NSSE 2017 Academic Advising Module
- Undergraduate Advising Policies and Practices

Draft Undergraduate Student Survey on Advising

General information

1. What is your major or specialization?
   Provide pull down menu. Also, provide options to indicate dual/double majors here.
2. Do you have more than one academic advisor?
   This question is needed so that students with only one major, but multiple academic advisors (e.g. EOF students), complete the survey for each advisor.
3. Indicate your class level.
   Provide pull down menu.
4. Are you a transfer student?

Experience with your assigned academic advisor

5. How many times have you met (in person, by phone, or electronically) with your academic advisor (assigned in PAWS) per semester?
   Provide pull down menu.
6. Indicate your level of agreement with the following aspects of your academic advising:
   Provide Likert scale for responses (scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree and including "not applicable").
   a. My advisor and I have meaningful discussions about my career and post-graduation plans.
   b. My advisor provides me with helpful information about how I can graduate on time.
   c. My advisor and I discuss which Liberal Learning courses might be most beneficial to me.
   d. My advisor and I discuss the specific courses I will register for in the next semester including discussion of requirements for my major.
   e. My advisor and I discuss any academic difficulties that I have experienced.
   f. My advisor and I discuss any personal concerns that I have. (Examples might include juggling extracurricular or job commitments with academics, balancing demands of family and academics, dealing with impacts of personal illness and/or family emergencies, referrals to Counseling and Psychological Services, etc.)
   g. My advisor has referred me to resources that could answer questions, solve problems, help to explore on/off campus opportunities, etc. (Examples might include the Center for Global Engagement, Career Center, Tutoring and Writing Center, Center for Student Success, Counseling and Psychological Services, field-specific career websites, etc.).

Overall academic advising experience

7. Please indicate your assessment of the overall effectiveness of the academic advising you have received from your academic advisor and other mentors and resources.
   Provide Likert scale for responses (scale from very effective to not effective)
8. Please provide any additional comments you would like to share about your academic advising experience.