**TO:** **President R. Barbara Gitenstein**

**Provost Carol Bresnahan**

**Committee on Planning and Priorities**

**FROM: The Faculty Senate**

**DATE: 18 February 2010**

**TOPIC: The Big Issues Confronting TCNJ, 2010**

In November, 1998, the Faculty Senate unanimously approved a document entitled, “The Ten Big Issues Confronting TCNJ,” for the President-designate. In May, 2004, the Senate reviewed this document and wrote a follow-up document for the President and the Provost. The Faculty Senate has once again turned its attention to the state of The College. At its meeting yesterday, February 17, 2010, the Senate unanimously approved the following document.

The Faculty Senate has identified nine issues in particular need of College attention in the coming years. Under the heading of ACADEMICS, we address the issues of curriculum assessment and planning, the student learning environment, and support for faculty; under the heading of PROCESS we address the issues of governance, strategic planning, and decision-making outside the governance system; under the heading of DEVELOPMENT, OUR INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY, AND AFFORDABILITY we address these issues.

1. **ACADEMICS**

We believe we must focus our attention on the academic enterprise as the central mission of the College. It would be easy in times of ongoing financial crisis to lose our mission in the midst of the search for funding. Campus strategic planning in recent years has focused on non-academic issues; however this has led to a dichotomy in the College’s sense of self, with administrators focused on academic support issues and faculty focused on departmental academic issues, leaving little sense of shared goals. The administration has laudably encouraged the campus to find ways to integrate student learning experiences in- and out-of-the-classroom; however at times this has been interpreted to mean that all academic goal-setting must incorporate non-academic learning. We feel that it is time for the faculty and the institution as a whole to once again look at our shared academic goals and aspirations.

**Assessment of the Transformation**

The first step towards a revitalization of campus-wide academic planning should be a thorough review of our current curriculum. TCNJ engaged in a major academic transformation in the past decade. The transformation process included a reduction in the teaching load for faculty to enable an increased engagement in scholarship along with a corresponding reduction in the course load for students to enable an increase in the intensity of learning and expectations for work outside the classroom. As discussions leading to the transformation progressed, many came to understand that transformation would fundamentally change the faculty’s role in students’ education and the way that students learn. Clearly there have been many changes in the number of courses students take and the number of courses faculty teach; however, it is unclear whether the broader original goals of transformation have been universally met. Moreover, it is not clear that there was (or is) faculty consensus with respect to the goals of transformation beyond a reduction in course load for faculty and students.

It is time for us to assess the transformation as a whole. Departments and programs are now undergoing regularly-scheduled assessments on a rotating, five-year basis; however this process does not examine issues which extend beyond departmental or programmatic boundaries. The assessment should address the extent to which the cultural understanding of the College regarding the purpose and nature of a college education has changed. We should also explore the extent to which the overall student learning experience has been deepened, evaluate students’ flexibility to explore a range of interests, and examine the effect of transformation on faculty scholarly engagement.

We designed our current liberal learning system as part of transformation; this should be a key piece of our assessment. All aspects of the liberal learning system should be examined including the first year seminar program, community engaged learning, and liberal learning requirements and expectations beyond these early experiences. We note that our understanding of liberal learning seems to differ across campus and schools. Further, many students view their courses as a list of requirements to be checked off as completed (becoming “credentialed”), whereas many faculty members would prefer that students consider their education as a total and meaningful experience. A symptom of this seems to be our lack of success in promoting interdisciplinary concentrations, which organize liberal learning requirements in connected, thematic blocks. Too few students have opted to pursue these concentrations. We should examine student interest in or understanding of these options and how students are advised about them.

The faculty must take responsibility for the assessment through the process of governance; however, the work of the assessment process should be supported by appropriate administrative offices where possible. As with all assessment, there needs to be clear communication regarding the goals of the process and the roles that people in different positions play in assessment. In the past, the roles and goals of assessment on campus have not been articulated well. Faculty members are often unclear about their role in the process and what the process of assessment is designed to achieve. It often appears overly bureaucratic and burdensome for faculty members and department chairs.

**Student learning**

The student experience at TCNJ was good five years ago and is much improved since. The campus has committed itself to emphasizing intensive learning experiences as a primary focus of our curriculum. Small classes are available for focused study in all areas. Undergraduate research activities and other forms of faculty-student collaboration, both through the summer MUSE program and in academic-year experiences, have grown tremendously over the past few years to include participation from all seven schools. Community engaged learning is required for all students and is supported by related learning activities and structured time for reflection regarding the experience. Participation in study abroad and in interdisciplinary activities has increased. Students are now allowed to design their own majors, and several students have taken advantage of this opportunity. The College has continued in its efforts to diversify the student body. Nonetheless there is room for improvement in the student experience at The College.

The participation by all schools in summer research should be expanded to encompass year-round activities, while recognizing that not all research from all disciplines represented in the College may lend itself to student involvement. There is little consensus among faculty in some disciplines about what it means to “involve students in research.” Faculty must have ownership of whether undergraduate research is done in specific disciplines, and if so, what the nature of these experiences should be. There should be an informational source and/or forum for the sharing of best practices and models for the implementation of undergraduate research where departments can share what they have done and how it is working for them. There should also be forums of discussion and sharing of student research work during the academic year. These could be modeled after the research presentations that take place during the summer as part of the MUSE program.

While interdisciplinary scholarship is encouraged more across the College, and events such as the Faculty Senate “Colloquium for the Recognition of Faculty Research and Creative Activity” help disseminate faculty work across campus, there remain impediments to interdisciplinary teaching, particularly the way in which team-taught courses are counted in teaching load. It is recommended that a set of guidelines for how to count a team-taught course in the standard teaching load be developed, as well as a structured information process to communicate best practices of interdisciplinary scholarship. Interdisciplinary work should be explicitly supported via articulation in disciplinary standards.

The College’s commitment to providing intensive learning experiences should be reflected in Library collections and services. Faculty and library staff must continue to cooperate to build deep, high quality collections and to promote information literacy skills which will enable students to pursue intellectual inquiry and to develop as critical thinkers and lifelong learners. Two initiatives for academic libraries are gaining ground on many academic campuses and should be investigated : open access mandates and digital holdings.

The faculty support the exploration of new academic programs and modes of teaching; we should explore new ways for communicating ideas to our students. However we feel it important that these keep in mind the identity of the institution. In particular, the faculty are concerned that the expansion of accelerated programs (a stated priority of the administration) could have negative implications for liberal arts, four-year experience extolled by the College. Such programs therefore need to be considered more carefully, and with full input from the faculty.

The College has made good efforts to continue to diversify the student body through active recruitment. Having a racially and economically diverse student body is a valued goal and should be actively sought. We recognize that a diverse student body depends on the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty and staff. We should monitor the academic and social success of all subgroups of students on campus to ensure that all are receiving the support they need. We should also assess the degree to which various groups integrate on campus. The College has made good progress in promoting our Study Abroad programs. To more fully internationalize the campus, it is equally important that visitors (both students and faculty) from other institutions come to TCNJ. Residential Life, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs should coordinate support systems carefully to ensure that our visitors have good experiences on our campus.

Finally, as we explore these and other ways of improving the student experience at TCNJ, we should watch several items carefully: first, we should continue to monitor the usage and support for adjunct faculty. Reliance on adjunct faculty remains high, although it is uneven across campus. We should continue efforts to reduce adjunct usage to the degree that we are able in the current budget climate, and we should make every effort to support adjunct faculty and integrate them into the campus community. Second, while important progress has been made in recent years, we should continue to work to improve our advising and mentoring systems for our students, particularly those most at risk including various specially admitted students. Third, we should monitor the success of the new influx of transfer students including those entering through the STARS II program. We need to provide the support these and other transfer students need to fully integrate into the campus and to succeed academically. Finally, we should be mindful of the needs of our small body of graduate students. In particular we note that many resources and support services are unavailable in the evenings, when most graduate students are on campus.

**Support for faculty**

Students will never be more engaged than the faculty teaching them; thus it is essential for student learning as well as for the health and reputation of the institution that we maintain a highly engaged faculty. We have hired outstanding faculty members in recent years. To preserve and strengthen this asset we must provide sufficient support for faculty in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service.

For the past several years the primary support requested from faculty for their teaching was for the establishment of a teaching center; we are delighted that the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been established. An advisory committee is in place for the center, and discussions of programming for the center are underway. We recommend that the center take an active role in assisting with the assessment and possible improvement of advising on campus. An effort should be made for articulating the timeline for having a director in place and a dedicated space for the center. Once the center is fully operational, parts of its standard operation should be the outreach to adjunct faculty, as well as full time faculty, and the periodic assessment and benchmarking of its utilization by the campus community.

It is equally important that we support faculty scholarship. We note that scholarly expectations have increased significantly since transformation. The SOSA and sabbatical systems provide good support for those who receive it, but both systems are currently underfunded and may be more so as we continue to hire faculty members with active research programs. Faculty members not granted support become discouraged, and the systems are essentially unavailable to faculty who have had taken a break from research to play major service roles for the campus or for personal reasons and who are thereafter in serious need of support to restart their research programs. Funding for the SOSA and sabbatical programs should be increased to meet the current and increasing scholarship needs of TCNJ faculty. Beyond these systems, there are few resources that faculty can rely on to support their research initiatives. The practice of dedicating resources for student research assistantships throughout the year should be investigated. Resources should be developed to help faculty with common difficulties in establishing or restarting a sustainable scholarship program.

Support for the pursuit of grants and writing of grant applications has not dramatically improved, and there still exist staffing challenges and dissatisfaction with the ERSPA system. The staff currently supporting these efforts is very good, and the office is poised to grow and to increase its involvement with the faculty in grant-related endeavors. The duties and responsibility of grant support personnel should be clarified and the staff augmented. In addition, the College should embrace cost-sharing strategies beyond release time.

There have been positive steps toward the improvement of faculty professional development. Formal mentoring of faculty members at the department level has been established and is coordinated with events hosted by Academic Affairs. It is recommended that processes for new faculty mentoring be reviewed and more formally embraced. Mentoring for mid-career faculty should also be explored.

A final area of needed support and mentorship is for chairs and coordinators. Under leadership from the Senate, a standard meeting time for all chairs and coordinators has been established as a regular part of the Wednesday meeting calendar. This group is working to describe the mission and job functions of chairs and coordinators and to suggest incentives for becoming a chair/program leader. The group should also study the degree to which such service is a barrier for promotion and work to clarify the separation in the functions of chairs and assistant deans. Additionally, a chairs handbook might be produced and widely circulated among the faculty.

1. **PROCESS**

A new campus-wide governance system was approved by the Board of Trustees in 2000. For the most part the system is working well, although there are significant issues with CPP and the Planning Councils, which has had a detrimental effect on strategic planning. The governance system should be utilized to provide recommendations to the cabinet on all issues involving policy, procedure, and program. We are concerned with frequent efforts to use ad hoc committees in place of the established governance system for developing such recommendations. Further, the principles of governance should govern all decision-making at the College. In particular, these principles should be extended to decision-making in departments and schools. We note that in times of financial crisis our principles of shared governance are particularly important, as the difficult decisions made at such times have significant impact on the College.

**Governance**

The current governance process is working quite well. It is a parallel rather than a linear process that engages all stakeholders simultaneously at the committee level and at the stakeholder group level, through representation. It incorporates clear guidelines, checks and balances, as well as the need for testimony, thus making it a transparent and collegial system. The governance process clearly identifies shared governance principles that should permeate all levels of governance. These principles include providing all stakeholder groups with an opportunity to have a “direct voice in the system through committee membership and direct testimony on issues” (pg. 3. Governance Structure and Processes, 2005). In addition, there is considerable transparency in the administration. The Academic Leaders meeting is a good step towards making the Provost’s office more visible. Efforts are being made to keep lines of communication open with the faculty. The principles of transparency are well established at TCNJ.

Decision making within the governance process is well defined, consultative, and transparent. However, increasingly, the faculty is concerned that decisions on issues that are within the boundaries of collegial governance are being routed outside of the governance process. This is often apparent in the formation of Ad-Hoc Committees. When decisions about policy, procedure, and program are made outside the established governance system, the decision is weaker and transparency suffers. All issues related to policy, procedure, and program must be taken through the governance process (Governance Structure and Processes, 2005). Decisions on policy, procedure, or program made outside the governance process must be reconsidered by the appropriate Standing Committee. The current efforts to keep lines of communication open should be continued. There needs to be more transparency in areas such as budget, enrollment management, staffing, and class size.

Following the 2004 review of the governance system, advisory councils were replaced by the Planning Councils and Program Councils. The Planning Councils were conceived as working in “conjunction with a planning officer and linked to CPP” (pg. 6. Governance Structures and Processes, 2005). The purpose of these Councils was to address the “need for improved coordination and communication regarding the College’s planning process (pg. 1. Governance Structures and Processes, 2005). Many planning councils appear not to be functioning as intended. Faculty have reported that some councils are not meeting and not all Planning Councils are reporting to CPP as required. The campus does not understand the role or relationship of the Planning Council structure to campus-wide strategic planning. The role and purpose of Planning Councils needs to be reevaluated in order to ensure that they are closely integrated into the current governance system and are functioning as intended in the original vision.

In addition, the role of Committee on Planning and Priorities needs to be revisited. CPP was conceptualized as a strategic planning body for establishing long-range strategic priorities (Governance Structures and Processes 2005). Unfortunately, CPP has not had the opportunity to fulfill its original charge, tending instead to become mired in minutiae. It has often taken on a more reactive rather than a proactive role. CPP needs to be redirected towards its original charge.

Finally, while the college governance structure clearly identifies the key committees and councils on campus and their relationships with each other as well as their place within the larger governance structure, there are still some committees such as CCIC, the Faculty-Student Collaborative Activity Committee, and IRB that are not linked to any of the councils or standing committees. These new committees need to be placed under the current governance structure.

**Strategic Planning**

Locally, strategic planning seems to be progressing fairly well. It appears that most departments have a strategic plan or are currently in the process of constructing one. Some schools and departments are working more effectively on honing and revising their strategic plans.

While progress has been made in the area of strategic planning at the school and department levels, the role of the Committee on Planning and Priorities at the college level needs to be revisited. CPP should embrace its role as a strategic planning body for establishing long range strategic priorities (Governance Structures and Processes 2005). More generally, the college needs to develop a “mature culture of strategic planning” as recommended in the Self Study of 2004. The 2004 TCNJ Self Study included several recommendations in the area of strategic planning such as periodic reviews of strategic plans, prioritization of needs and goals by each area, development of both medium and long term strategic plans, submission of annual reports by each department or school, and the institution of a central repository for strategic plans (Summary of major recommendations from TCNJ’s self study to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2004). We believe that these recommendations are relevant even today. Thus, CPP should take leadership in creating a strategic planning process that clearly identifies long-term and short-term strategic goals and incorporates a cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation.

In addition, there needs to be more communication and transparency with respect to the strategic plans instituted in various departments and schools across campus. This communication needs to be present at different levels including across departments and schools, between deans and departments within a school, and between CPP and the various schools. Again, CPP should take a leadership role in establishing clear reporting processes, perhaps instituting a central web based repository for all campus wide strategic plans as recommended by the 2004 TCNJ Self Study.

Some departments and schools are continuing to do strategic planning despite the current constraints. There needs to be more institutional support available to schools/departments for implementing the outcomes of their strategic planning. We should develop a new, “user friendly” set of guidelines for strategic planning and reporting.

**Decision-making outside the Governance System**

According to our governance principles, the faculty is primarily responsible for the academic enterprise, whereas the administration is primarily responsible for strategic planning and developmental priorities. However these arena are not disjoint: the planning and priorities set by the administration will inevitably affect the academic enterprise. Thus it is imperative that all planning and decision-making be done with required involvement of the faculty and other stakeholder groups. Denying faculty and other stakeholder groups the wide opportunities for input afforded by the governance system leaves the campus with administrative fiats and ad hoc committee reports; these are not accepted by the campus community as official positions of the College and cannot be used as the basis for decision making. We are particularly concerned with the recent use of ad hoc committees charged with investigating issues of policy, procedure, or program. The governance system should provide the basis for all recommendations made to cabinet members regarding these College-wide issues.

The current structure and principles of governance provide a clear framework and a vision for shared governance. However, the principles of governance need to permeate all levels of governance across the campus. In particular, the principles of governance should be extended to more local decision-making. There seem to be variations across schools on campus with respect to the extent to which decisions are based on the principles articulated in the 2005 Governance Structure and Processes document. Indeed, concerns have been expressed that some of those principles may have been increasingly overlooked, especially in decision-making at the school level on campus. Frustration with this has been aggravated by the fact that some resources and decision-making formerly controlled by departments has been moved to the school level, often resulting in decreased faculty involvement. For example, discretionary travel money, money for speakers, and IT funds are now generally distributed by schools rather than departments; departmental autonomy in hiring decisions has been reduced; and scheduling is increasingly dictated by school needs rather than by department needs. As such changes are made, it is imperative that new decision-making and budgeting procedures be transparent with wide input from faculty, following the principles of governance. Thus, schools and departments need to develop governance policies consistent with governance principles articulated in the 2005 Governance Structure and Processes.

1. **DEVELOPMENT, OUR INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY, AND AFFORDABILITY**

We recognize that the College is in the midst of an ongoing financial crisis. The President’s 2007 speech, “ An Exceptional Path: Five Strategies to Support The College of New Jersey in its Integrated Transformation,” states that financial support from the state of New Jersey constituted 53% of TCNJ’s revenue in FY 1999 and only 37% in FY 2008, and the contribution from the state was further cut since then. Thus, we encourage the administration to continue to seek out additional sources of revenue for the College. However it is imperative that this be done with the primacy of academics in the mission of the College and the principles of our shared governance system in mind. In particular, in accordance with governance principles, the impact of revenue-generating projects on the curriculum should be assessed by the faculty as part of all decision-making for new projects. We must ensure that efforts to market TCNJ do not inadvertently impact our institutional identity. Finally, in the face of declining willingness on the part of the state of New Jersey to ensure the affordability of public education, we must be prepared to make transparent decisions through campus-wide discussion regarding the balance between affordability and quality of the educational experience.

**Development**

We applaud the administration’s efforts to enhance revenue streams, but the institution must continue to develop non-state sources of income. The expansion of revenue-generating programs outside the normal academic-year undergraduate experience should provide needed funds so long as these programs are in keeping with the mission of The College and do not have a negative impact on the undergraduate experience; faculty should play a key role in helping the institution to ensure that these principles are maintained. The External Affairs Planning Council has been evaluating summer programs at the TCNJ campus and is looking for new sustainable revenue resources. Types of programs that are being considered are programs that focus on TCNJ alumni, programs for K-12 enrichment and centers that provide services to the community. Expanded summer and winter session offerings that appeal to high school students or college students who attend an out of state institution during the academic year are other possibilities. Graduate level certificates that pave the way to graduate degrees are also being considered. Summer programs need to be advertised and promoted more actively. Efforts to implement new Summer Program initiatives on the TCNJ campus require institutional support and resources that are geared to address the needs of summer programs.

The college should explore grants as a key strategy for getting revenue, while bearing in mind that we are an undergraduate institution and should have grant expectations appropriate to our mission. We need to strengthen support for faculty who are planning to apply for grants; the support systems currently in place are insufficient, as discussed in the issue “Support for Faculty,” above. Release time for faculty with grants and other incentives for grant-writing should be discussed.

The discussion of how to diversify revenue streams for the college has been confined to a small group of people. We should expand this discussion to a wider audience that includes faculty members. Faculty need to be engaged in the discussion of issues related to revenue enhancement such as alumni giving, summer programs, etc. Some faculty members have expressed concern that their desire to be engaged in this process has been ignored. Thus, there should be better channels for communicating with faculty on their initiatives on revenue enhancement.

Finally, while identifying new revenue streams is critical given the current state of the economy, it is also important to note that this cannot be done with the assumption that significant numbers of faculty members will voluntarily work overtime. This overload could impact on the quality of the undergraduate program. Faculty involvement and input in revenue enhancement should be accompanied by a commitment to increased staffing and support. Finally, approaches to revenue enhancement should not be conceptualized at the cost of sacrificing the academic quality of our programs.

**Institutional Identity**

A key issue to be considered as we struggle with issues of revenue generation and marketing of the College is the identity of the institution. In recent years, the College has worked to increase its profile, and while the faculty very much support these initiatives, they have revealed lack of clarity and consistency in the institution’s identity and vision. Several different and often conflicting terms (such as liberal arts college and public ivy) are often used to describe the college. Many of these terms are of external origin, but are embraced by the institution in its own advertising. These conflicting terms reflect a lack of clear vision of what the institution is, as well as the role of certain programs within it, such as the graduate programs and the professional schools.

The faculty feel that they should be given a more central role in how the institution is both defined and marketed. We feel that the institution should be defined in such a manner that reflects both the diversity of its schools and offerings, as well as its commitment to the liberal arts. Quality and selectivity are common traits given to the college, and while these should be central to how we define ourselves, we need to move beyond them and focus on what aspects of the TCNJ experience are unique.

Initiatives to raise the profile of the institution need to take into account not only the *recruitment* of high caliber students, but also the *placement* of our graduates in top tier graduate and professional programs. To this end, we support more work to raise the profile of the institution within academic settings through advertising in venues such as the Chronicle, and by increasing support for student and faculty participation in academic conferences.

**Affordability**

Given the continuing erosion of state support for higher education, it is apparent that the affordability of a TCNJ education will continue to be a concern. Of note, the issue of the affordability of higher education is a problem that is not unique to TCNJ, or even to the state of New Jersey, but is a potential crisis for all higher education institutions across the country; nonetheless this is an issue which we cannot dismiss given our public mission. In the past 5 years TCNJ tuition and fees have increased steadily. We applaud President Gitenstein for focusing much attention on the issue of diminishing support for higher education in the state of New Jersey; nonetheless it is clear that continued and sustained efforts toward raising the profile of the College with both state legislators and the people of the state of New Jersey are necessary, such that a greater value is placed on re-instating state support for higher education within New Jersey.

If the State fails to ensure that public higher education remains affordable for state residents, the campus will need to have open and honest discussions about how to balance affordability and the quality of the academic experience at TCNJ. Continued staffing cuts and furlough programs will necessarily have a negative impact on the College. It is imperative that we make difficult budgeting choices transparently as a campus in accordance with our governance principles as we seek to preserve the quality as well as the public mission of The College.

**Appendix: Basic Principles of Governance from the Governance Document (2005 revision)**

The governance system reflects shared governance principles (AAUP 1990, AGB 1998), and is based on a structure consisting of a Steering Committee and four Standing Committees. All committee and council work results in recommendations generated through an open three-step process.

The structure will promote efficiency and facilitate the work of the College in achieving mission goals.

All stakeholder groups will have a direct voice in the system through committee membership and direct testimony on issues.

All stakeholder groups must give appropriate consideration to balanced representation across academic disciplines, schools, campus offices, and programs, including underrepresented groups, in making committee appointments.

All committee members have equal rights and responsibilities concerning input, elected service and voting privileges.

Primary responsibilities on various issues are expressed in the composition of committees; however, all stakeholders have voice on all issues in the shared right to bring a concern to the Steering Committee.

The faculty is primarily responsible for the academic enterprise.

The administration is primarily responsible for support of the academic enterprise, the institutional infrastructure and the campus community, through strategic planning and development of institutional priorities.

The student body is responsible to make recommendations regarding the nature and quality of academic offerings, campus life and community.

The staff is responsible to make recommendations regarding institutional operations and procedures.

The structure will support the President and other Cabinet members by providing an organized forum for all stakeholder groups to become informed about issues and to influence the decision-making process.

When a recommendation is received from any source, it must be acknowledged and a formal response must be provided in a timely manner. If the recommendation is rejected, reasons for the rejection must be given.