To:President R. Barbara Gitenstein

Provost Jacqueline Taylor

Committee on Strategic Planning and Priorities

From: The Faculty Senate

Date: May 11, 2015

Subject: Big Issues Confronting TCNJ, 2015

At our May 11, 2015 meeting, the Faculty Senate unanimously approved the following document: “Big Issues Confronting TCNJ, 2015.” This is the fourth in a series of Big Issues documents developed by the Faculty Senate since 1998 and shared with the President and the Provost. These documents, which are both a resource for institutional-level planning and guide for the work of the Faculty Senate, provide a faculty perspective on the current challenges facing the College. The first three Big Issues papers were written before TCNJ had a formalized college-wide strategic planning process, so their perspective was quite broad. As the College now engages in formal strategic planning, this current document is more focused and gives the faculty the opportunity to articulate areas in which we have particular concern.

We recognize that financial challenges and the ability to provide a high quality educational experience are of utmost importance. It is imperative that the College develop a sustainable financial model that will allow us to continue to flourish in the coming years. The Faculty Senate has identified three broad areas that require particular attention. These are COLLEGE IDENTITY, THE ROLE OF FACULTY, and GOVERNANCE.

**College Identity**

As new faculty and administrators arrive on campus and as the College implements new programs and initiatives, the Senate is concerned about TCNJ’s adherence to its core mission and identity. We recognize that the College must generate revenue in order to protect its liberal arts mission, and we applaud the efforts of those faculty and administrators who are dedicating themselves to creating certificate programs and expanding our curricular offerings in the January and summer terms. The faculty has long desired increased opportunities for study abroad, a more global approach to the curriculum, and an increase in the number of international students. The College has made significant strides towards achieving these goals.

At the same time, it is important that the College re-affirm its identity as a highly selective, primarily undergraduate, public institution committed to the teacher-scholar model and the educational rewards of the residential experience. TCNJ has earned its reputation by offering a transformative education through its commitment to that model.

As the College moves forward, we must ensure that peripheral programs and initiatives reflect our mission, values, and signature experiences. As stewards of the curriculum, faculty should be involved from the outset in the proposal, approval, and planning of all academic programs and initiatives. Guided by the faculty, the College should hold all of its curricular programs to an equally high standard. Academic offerings, from certificate programs on campus to programs held in different countries, should ideally be designed and taught by highly qualified teacher-scholars and take place in settings that maximize faculty-student interaction.

By following its academic principles, we can ensure that TCNJ maintains its identity as a national exemplar of public undergraduate education and continues to offer the core TCNJ experience to every member of the community: engaged students immersed in a challenging education grounded in the liberal arts. We strongly encourage the College to use next year’s strategic planning effort to preserve our mission and identity.

**The Role of Faculty**

According to our Promotions and Reappointment Guidelines, TCNJ faculty are expected “to demonstrate continuous exemplary achievement in teaching (or librarianship) and advising, scholarly/creative/professional activity, and service.” A faculty of engaged teacher-scholars who actively pursue research and creative activity are the foundation of a vibrant intellectual community. As the College explores new programs and possibilities, new expectations established without a strong faculty voice have the potential to disrupt the delicate balance of faculty responsibilities and negatively impact student learning.

The expansion of the academic year into January and the summer, as well the onset of blended and online learning, may help students graduate more quickly and generate financial benefits to the College. As we explore these new opportunities, we need to work collaboratively to identify and address potential problems. Many of these new programs and initiatives depend on faculty oversight or overload teaching. Because the teacher-scholar model is so important to the TCNJ experience, no faculty members should be pressured to participate in the January or summer terms. We especially need to protect untenured faculty from being pushed to take on these extra responsibilities. More importantly, we need to determine which courses are appropriate for the compressed formats, and we need to monitor how these programs impact learning and prepare students for future coursework. The College needs to assess whether these expanded academic opportunities necessitate an increased dependence on contingent faculty.

To support faculty as teacher-scholars, it is important that the College continue to provide resources that enable faculty to pursue their scholarly and creative work at a high level. This includes assistance for administrative tasks that may fall to faculty as support staff in many departments or programs has been eliminated, as well as more direct support for faculty research expenses, such as professional travel. We applaud the College’s commitment to faculty scholarship as evidenced by the recent increase in SOSA awards, and we are optimistic that such concrete help for faculty scholarly work will continue in the future.

**Governance**

Since 2000, TCNJ has employed a model of governance that has fostered open communication and shared responsibility. The energy with which our campus meets challenges and seizes opportunities is a direct result of the open and honest communication that has become standard practice. For this to continue, we should pay close attention to several areas of our governance system. Governance should continue to be the place where ideas are generated and discussed, rather than a mechanism for approval of pre-developed policies and processes. Our governance system works best when charges to standing committees are clearly defined, recommendations are carefully reviewed, and, when accepted, are implemented in a manner consistent with the committees’ intent. For governance to continue to operate efficiently and effectively, we need to balance the demand for ad hoc committees and planning councils with the size of the faculty. With continued commitment to governance, our system will remain transparent and collaborative, providing a voice for all stakeholders. As a complement to the governance process, we would also welcome more opportunities for the informal exchange of ideas between faculty, staff, students, and administration. The College would benefit from the creation of roundtables, panels, and group discussions of various campus issues.