

## The College of New Jersey

### Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience

#### *Final Report*

June 1, 2003

This final report of the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience focuses on the activities of the group during the 2002-03 academic year. Included are the charge, principles identified to address the charge, a description of the plan generated by the group for the consideration of the campus community, and recommendations for the administration and integration of a significant cross-cultural component to enhance the educational experience of TCNJ students.

A preliminary report was submitted to President Gitenstein in January 2003 and subsequently made available to the campus community. In March, an electronic call for feedback was requested from the college community. In addition, key constituents were targeted: Committee on Academic Programs, General Education Advisory Council, Faculty Senate, International Advisory Council, Students Government Association, Admissions, Career Services, and the First Year Experience Task Force. The Chair of the Cross-Cultural Experience Task Force addressed the Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association and fielded questions. Following receipt of feedback, the Task Force met during the spring semester to formulate its recommendations.

#### **Charge**

In September 2002 President R. Barbara Gitenstein created five *ad hoc*, cross-functional task forces to examine specific areas of institutional commitment and report to the community on means through which those commitments may be realized. The task forces are designed to inform the work of the standing governance committees and other institutional decision making processes.

Specifically, President Gitenstein charged the Cross-Cultural Experience Task Force “to develop a proposal for affording every undergraduate student at The College of New Jersey a substantial cross-cultural experience, including opportunities for study abroad, second language acquisition, and appropriate community engagement.” She asked that the plan consider the differing challenges of the various curricula on campus and provide information on costs. This charge fits squarely with TCNJ’s *Mission Statement* that affirms the “transformative power of education” and upholds the challenge of being a “national exemplar in the education of those who seek to sustain and advance the communities in which they live.”

Three of the six *Guiding Principles for Student Learning* developed to put the mission statement into operation also specifically support the charge of the Task Force by underscoring the need for students to:

- understand the complexity and connectedness of the world and the value of divergent points of view;
- participate actively in the life of the campus community and seek ways to improve this and other communities in which they live and work; and
- recognize that learning is a self-directed endeavor and accept responsibility for defining a path of intellectual and personal growth.

Further, the Report of the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP), *A New Design for Liberal Learning*, within the context of the transformation of student work, recommends an integration of general education and major programs that includes a focus on Diversity and Proficiencies in areas related to the Task Force's charge. Indeed, the recommendations put forth in this proposal were aligned with CAP's proposal.

### **Toward a Mission-Driven Cross-Cultural Experience for TCNJ Students**

As the Task Force began its work, members expressed a strong and unanimous view that a substantial cross-cultural experience should help meet the institutional goals expressed in the *TCNJ Mission Statement*, *The Guiding Principles for Student Learning*, and *A New Design for Liberal Learning* by fostering a greater understanding of others and of oneself as a citizen of varied, complex, and interconnected communities. In addition, members agreed that the term "cross-cultural" should be broadly conceived in order to embrace both local and global communities, drawing students from the comfort of the culturally familiar to the challenge and excitement of the unfamiliar. It was further agreed that the nature of the experience should be varied and allow students wide latitude and choice in selecting and crafting experiences that are personally meaningful and engaging.

Thus, rather than defining a single or singular "cross-cultural" experience, the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience concentrated on identifying principles to guide a set of experiences that would be consistent with institutional goals and curricular transformation initiatives.

The principles identified were that the cross-cultural experience be:

- **Developmental**

If TCNJ students are to attain deep understanding of cultures other than their own, the nature of the experiences should encourage movement from one level of understanding to another that is more complex and integrated.

- **Sustained**

Consistent with TCNJ's mission to create leaders who influence their communities, the cross-cultural experience should occur over the course of the undergraduate experience to encourage its continuity after graduation.

- **Active and Reflective**

The most effective learning, and related performance, is based on active experiential engagement and related, planned, and guided reflection.

- **Multiple, Varied, and Infused**

Several experiences, with a variety of options connected to existing programs of study (e.g., majors, liberal learning) and co-curricular activities are more likely to promote learning and personal growth.

- **Self-Documented**

In order to encourage students to assume increased responsibility over time for their own development and learning as well as to make this experience efficient and cost-effective, students should play a major role in defining, monitoring, and marking the completion of the cross-cultural experience. This would include the creation of a proposal, portfolio, and summary document.

### **A Model for Promoting Cross-Cultural Competence in Four Developmental Phases**

The model proposed to meet the charge to the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Competence reflects the five principles presented above and presents a program of experiences conceived developmentally and defined in increasingly integrative states. Four phases of engagement comprise the model.

- **PHASE ONE: ENTER**

Phase One is an initial, shared experience for all entering TCNJ students, with all planned activities occurring in Orientation and Welcome Week and throughout the First Year Experience in residence halls and through academic programs. An initial experience in Phase One introduces the Cross-Cultural Experience requirement, articulates its purposes and describes the processes through which it may be met. Students would be offered a variety of options for completing an experience of direct involvement in local communities rich with racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity.

Examples might include the following:

1. Welcome Week
  - A. Small Group Community Outreach Projects – Students select from several placements concentrated in the local community, particularly urban

Trenton and neighborhoods in Ewing. Service sites include non-profit community agencies, schools, and other community building organizations. A corps of trained student leaders would lead guided reflection during and following the outreach project.

- B. Community Action Day – A designated day that would concentrate service activities in a one-day program during Welcome Week, including multiple local projects. Faculty, staff, and student leaders would be invited to participate in service and guided reflection. The Community Action Day could easily be coordinated with the summer reading. For example, students would be assigned a specialized summer reading focusing on issues related to civic responsibility, social justice, community problem-solving, citizenship, etc. Faculty and staff discussion leaders would be invited to participate in both the service and discussion components.
2. Academic Year Activities – A variety of activities related to Phase One and occurring in the first year would be programmed to support and reinforce the Enter Phase. Additional activities include: campus cultural events, designated academic courses, curricular opportunities incorporating service learning or community engaged work, co-curricular experiences that introduce students to members of communities different than their own and provide for short-term, sustained involvement, such as the International Student Association and the Exchange Student Organization. Opportunities should be provided to students for multiple and varied placements in diverse communities throughout the academic year. Students might also propose and craft individual projects focusing on social issues or unmet community needs that are particularly important to them. A designated Coordinator would assist students in developing proposals and approve project plans. These students would be assigned to guided reflection discussions appropriate for their project.

In sum, Phase One objectives for cross-cultural competence are met through an introductory component that is an integral part of the First Year Experience. All entering students would participate in a shared cross-cultural experience followed by reflection and would be encouraged to continue involvement through a variety of additional opportunities. In addition, students would initiate the development of a portfolio of activities (and related assignments and reflections) related to the Cross-Cultural Experience requirement. Students will continue to add to the portfolio throughout their undergraduate years.

\* **PHASE TWO: ENGAGE**

Phase Two encourages student development to a more active, focused, and individualized program of experiences in cross-cultural competence that involves engagement beyond “learning about” another culture. This phase will typically bridge the first year to the sophomore and junior years. To

the extent possible, students will use academic and co-curricular experiences provided through their programs of study during this phase. Since some of the means to fulfill this Engage Phase are a significant part of *A New Design for Liberal Learning* proposed by CAP, students should be able to complete this phase within their respective degree programs. Examples of activities comprising engagement with another culture include:

1. *Completion of the foreign language requirement* (recommended by CAP for all TCNJ students to the degree that their programs of study permit, and to be phased in as college budgetary resources allow.) Proficiency in a second language is a gateway to the appreciation and understanding of another culture. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* emphasize the 5 “C’s” of language study—Communicate in another language, Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures, Connect with other disciplines, Develop insight into the nature of language and culture, and Participate in multilingual communities, which speak quite directly to the goals of the cross-cultural experience.

2. *Community Engaged Learning requirement* (recommended by CAP for all TNCJ students.) Students are required to complete at least one community engaged learning experience requiring at least 15 hours of community work and a reflective component. This may be satisfied by a course, series of courses or equivalent experience approved by GEAC or its successor. For a course to satisfy a *cross-cultural* community engaged learning experience, it must involve interaction with a cultural community that is significantly different from one’s own.

3. *Course with an embedded study abroad component.* A number of courses already exist which provide for the sustained study of another culture coupled with a short term experience abroad, such as the Gender, Nation and Democracy project which included a trip to Eastern Europe, the Honors course From Paris to New York which included a trip to Paris, two International Business courses which include experiences abroad in Europe and Costa Rica. The Task Force recommends the further development of courses of this nature which provide for intensive study of a topic, guided engagement with another culture, and reflection through writing, discussion, and other formats as appropriate.

4. *Short term study abroad.* Again, a number of short term study abroad programs offered by TCNJ already exist and provide for a sustained engagement with another culture. Examples include: the Treviso and Ravenna programs in Italy and the Montpelier program in France. Existing programs with faculty members familiar to students facilitate student involvement and should be developed further.

5. *Alternative break experiences.* The Task Force recommends that the College develop guided activities during the spring, summer or winter break periods that involve travel to a national or international site involving culturally different communities. These could be course-or service-based and led by student leaders and faculty/staff coordinators. While the development of these experiences would involve significant resources to develop and implement, locations that are closer to campus might keep travel costs in check. Examples might include a trip to a Native American community, Montreal, or Mexico.

6. *Independent Cross-Cultural Projects.* To maximize flexibility, students may propose independent projects with approval, guidance, and support from faculty and a designated campus office. These projects could be linked to the major, the new Liberal Learning program, or an appropriate co-curricular leadership program, such as AmeriCorps Community Leaders. Individualized mechanisms for guided reflection would be developed in accordance with the principles for cross-cultural learning experiences.

- **PHASE THREE: IMMERSE**

Typically occurring in the senior (or junior) year, Phase Three is a sustained, in-depth cross-cultural immersion experience which builds on students' previous experiences. While Phases One and Two are an *expectation*, Phase Three is a *goal* for all students. Immersion is an active, integrated experience that serves as both a capstone for this area of the undergraduate experience and a foundation for continued work after graduation. Examples include an extended experience (half or full semester) such as an internship, sustained study abroad experience, global student teaching, language immersion in a community of native speakers, and other programs to be designated or created, e.g. leadership development programs directly involved with diverse communities. To the degree possible, it should be tied to a student's program of study and strongly encouraged by the student's department to underscore the importance of an immersion experience and capitalize on its success

- **PHASE FOUR: CONTINUE**

Implicit in this model is the expectation that each TCNJ student will enter a fourth phase, **CONTINUE**, following graduation. In this way, the experiences, reflections, and opportunities that occur during the undergraduate experience will become the basis for a life-long commitment to an enhanced understanding of self and others and an increased ability to function effectively and assume a leadership role in affecting positive change within multiple, multicultural, and diverse communities.

## **Putting the Model into Practice**

In order to implement the phases of the model, a number of issues need to be addressed and groups and individuals involved.

### **Community Support**

Strong support in all areas of the campus community would need to exist for this model to be successful. Initial responses to the Task Force's Preliminary Report have been positive. While various individuals raised questions for clarification which the Task Force has tried to address in its final report, the overall responses received were supportive of the notion of a required cross-cultural experience and the model proposed. Nonetheless, significant buy-in from a variety of campus constituencies is essential to ensure that all students fulfill not only the expectations of the proposal—Enter and Engage, but reach its goals as well—Immersion.

### **Governance**

When the final design for Liberal Learning is approved, articulation between its requirements and the Task Force proposal needs to occur. The Task Force created its final plan based on its ability to complement or, in some instances, directly meet the recommendations included in CAP's *A New Design for Liberal Learning*. In addition, further discussion with department/program areas must be carried out if the majors are to be a source of experiences related to instilling cross-cultural competence across the community. Ultimately, the final plan should be open to campus discussion and approved through governance channels.

### **Administrative Organization, Collaboration, and Advisement**

To establish, deliver, monitor, and confirm the cross-cultural experiences on the part of all TCNJ students requires that an appropriate administrative structure be established. Coordinated, integrated services (e.g., a single organizational structure or built-in collaboration between multiple organizational structures overseen by a designated Coordinator) and continual dialogue among a number of existing TCNJ offices would be required to implement the model. These include the Offices of Undergraduate Global Programs, Service Learning, Student Life, Records and Registration, Admissions, and Career Services, among others. These offices currently provide many of the activities directly related to the cross-cultural experience proposal and have the experience and expertise in programming, delivery of services, and means of monitoring and reporting student participation that are called for. Thus, resource expenditure for administration can be kept at a minimum by capitalizing on the services already provided by these offices. Nonetheless, it is recommended that a single coordinating office or the position of Coordinator be created to effectively integrate the activities and the various entities organizing the activities. The

Coordinator would ensure that student learning outcomes, expectations, policies, and procedures are clearly defined for students, faculty, and staff, and that information is shared and disseminated widely. The Coordinator would be the chief liaison for interacting with faculty, students and external agencies to assist in the development of cross-cultural programs across campus and ensure mechanisms to measure student participation. Moreover, the Coordinator would be responsible for decision making, quality assurance, and accountability.

In addition to the establishment of the position of Coordinator, it is recommended that a consultative committee consisting of representatives from related campus offices and entities work in conjunction with the Coordinator to ensure that the programs and activities meet the definition of cross-cultural learning, that academic integrity is assured, and that there is no overlap or redundancy in responsibilities and program offerings. The Coordinator would also be responsible for establishing the activities for Phase I during Welcome Week and throughout the first year, and for coordinating staffing for guided reflection during this phase. In sum, the Coordinator should have direct experience in the effective management of experiential education programs for large numbers of students.

A crucial component of the success of the cross-cultural experience proposal is informing the entire campus community of the nature of the requirement, the many opportunities available to students, as well as collecting information in reference to the student portfolio for assessment purposes. Information technology and a central website can play a key role in this regard. A defined website outlining cross-cultural experience expectations and activities, as well as related programming, should be established and updated regularly for round the clock consultation. This task can be part of the Coordinator's responsibilities. In addition, documentation of student activities to meet the various components of the cross-cultural experience requirement including reflective pieces can be achieved through an electronic portfolio. Built into the proposal is individual student ownership of the learning process.

Phases I and II are clearly defined and embedded into the first year experience and the academic curriculum, which can be easily documented perhaps through the creation of a co-curricular program sheet. Phase III would be self-documented and self-reported. The Office of Records and Registration has been developing means of documenting non-campus learning that include the creation of an interactive portfolio. As a component of Phase I, students would be instructed how to develop an interactive portfolio of cross-cultural experiences including a reflective assessment of their cross-cultural education.

### **Resource Needs**

As noted above, many of the experiences and opportunities that would comprise the TCNJ cross-cultural experience already exist but need to be more fully coordinated and made available in a single site (virtual and real). By re-aligning

existing office structures and responsibilities, such as the Office of Student Learning (for the community engaged learning requirement) in conjunction with the Office of Undergraduate Global Programs (for study abroad), Career Services (for internships), Office of Student Life (for coordination of first year experience activities), and other related offices, staffing may be provided in a cost-effective manner without additional expenditures. Nonetheless, in order for the college to take a significant stance in offering a variety of substantive cross-cultural experiences, additional resources are needed to support:

1. faculty development in creating courses that include a cross-cultural community engagement component, as well as courses that include a study abroad experience;
2. development of alternative break activities that are either course- or service-based;
3. enhancement of faculty advisement to ensure attention to the fulfillment of all the goals of the cross-cultural experience;
4. staffing needs for the development of a cross-cultural experience website;
5. training of student leaders to support Phase I activities and serve as mentors;
6. development of increased cross-cultural internship possibilities;
7. subsidies and scholarships for study abroad activities.

While an immersion experience requiring an extended stay abroad is typically viewed as a costly venture, this is not always the case. TCNJ is a member of the National Student Exchange which provides exchange opportunities for students within the Continental U.S., Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Canada. Of the participating institutions, 114 charge less in tuition and fees than those of TCNJ per semester. In addition, TCNJ is a member of and the lead institution of the New Jersey State Consortium for International Studies (NJCIS), which provides study abroad and exchange opportunities for students through direct relationships with approximately 40 schools in 14 countries. 19 of the 40 schools have tuition, fees, and room and board rates that are lower than those charged by TCNJ. Similarly, the College Consortium for International Studies (CCIS) provides students with the opportunity to study in over 80 schools in 31 countries. Of these, 31 have tuition, fees and room and board charges lower than TCNJ. In addition, in many instances student financial aid packages can be applied to these programs. Thus, it is indeed possible for students to participate in an immersion experience without incurring significant additional expenditures. Nonetheless, this information and the various possibilities for study abroad need to be communicated more effectively and directly to students and parents so that more

students take advantage of this opportunity to enhance their undergraduate education.

While many cost effective means exist to engage in a cross-cultural experience domestically and internationally, there are hidden costs such as travel expenses and loss of part time income locally, which may hinder some students from participating in these activities. A pool of financial resources in the form of aid and scholarships should be made available to students to facilitate their participation. To this end, the consultative committee mentioned above should explore grant possibilities and fund raising opportunities to help subsidize or underwrite significant additional expenditures.

### **Incentives**

The Task Force strongly recommends a series of incentives to promote cross-cultural experiences and highlight their transformative impact on a student's education. These are promotional and recognition activities that require few budgetary resources but would serve to underscore the importance and lasting impression of significant cross-cultural learning activities. Suggested activities include:

- \* A designated day designed as a Cross-Cultural Learning Conference, similar to the Celebration of Student Achievement. One of the roles of the Coordinator and/or Coordinating Office is to assist schools and departments in organizing a conference at which students can demonstrate their particular achievements in cross-cultural learning objectives. Students who have shown exemplary performance in achieving cross-cultural learning goals should be highlighted and receive special recognition.
- \* Awards for students who have participated in an exemplary fashion in a variety of cross-cultural experiences. Perhaps a Certificate of Cultural Fluency could be established to recognize outstanding citizens.
- \* Nomination of student "ambassadors" who have participated in an immersion experience to highlight its transformative power and serve as mentors to others.
- \* Designation on a student's transcript of completion through immersion of the cross-cultural learning experience.

### **Conclusion**

In developing this report, the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience is drawing together a number of existing programs and activities on campus as well as suggesting the development of new initiatives, and aligning them with CAP's proposal of *A New Design for Liberal Learning* to embed a significant cross-cultural experience in the TCNJ undergraduate experience and to underscore the value of learning in a culturally diverse

community. While some additional budgetary resources are needed to implement this plan, the Task Force has strived to provide an coherent and cost-effective means of “affording every undergraduate students at TCNJ with a substantial cross-cultural experience, including opportunities for study abroad, second language acquisition, and appropriate community engagement” that are closely aligned to the College’s mission and identified principles for student learning.

### **Members of the Task Force**

Chair: Dr. Deborah Compte, Department of Modern Languages  
Convener: Dr. Suzanne Pasch, Vice Provost, Office of Academic Affairs  
Members: Dr. Stuart Carroll, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education  
Professor Lorna Johnson, Department of Communication Studies  
Ms. Terisha Mears, Student Representative  
Mr. Nikolaus Mische, Assistant Managing Director of Undergraduate Global Programs, Office of Summer and Undergraduate Global Programs  
Ms. Grecia Montero, Assistant Director, Minority Scholars, Office of Admissions  
Dr. Rajib Sanyal, Division Head/Professor, School of Business  
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Ms. Octavia Smith, Student Representative