

The College of New Jersey

Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience

Preliminary Report

This preliminary report of the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Experience focuses on the activities of the group during the Fall 2002 semester. 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 a list of steps to be taken in Spring 2003 to complete the work.

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 Goals and Proficiencies in areas related to the Task Force's charge.

Towards a Mission-Driven Cross-Cultural Experience for TCNJ Experience

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 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 a culture 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 Three 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. Three phases of engagement comprise the model.

- **PHASE ONE: ENTER**

Phase One is an initial, shared experience for all entering TCNJ students, with 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. A full-day, planned experience focused on direct community involvement and followed by a reflective feedback session is anticipated.

Examples of additional activities related to Phase One and occurring in the first year are campus cultural events, academic courses, curricular opportunities, such as service learning or community engaged work, some First Year Seminars, and co-curricular experiences that introduce students to members of communities different than their own and provide for short-term, sustained involvement. Each student initiates the development of a portfolio of activities (and related assignments and reflections) related to the Cross-Cultural Experience requirement.

- **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 occur during 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. For instance, involvement in a course that has a community-based service component, requiring sustained involvement in community work would be an appropriate experience to include in the student’s portfolio. A global

experience, e.g., study abroad, tied to a course and providing for ongoing activity and reflection, would also be appropriate as would be language proficiency that also is tied to enhanced understanding of the culture (s) that speak the language. It would be the goal during Phase Two that every TCNJ student participate in an experience outside of the local community, either at a specified national or international site for a period of time no shorter than one week. The completion of a language proficiency requirement or a focused program of study coupled with a study abroad experience (e.g., Gender, Nation, and Democracy) would fulfill the requirement for this phase. Alternatively, a package of shorter experiences tied together by a student through a written rationale would be acceptable.

- **PHASE THREE: IMMERSE**

Typically occurring in the senior (or junior) year, Phase Three is a sustained, in-depth cross-cultural immersion experience built on previous work. 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 others to be designated or created, e.g., intensive intersession experience or leadership development program directly involved with diverse communities.

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. Faculty, staff, and student support are critical if a program as comprehensive and pervasive as the one proposed is to be implemented.

Governance

Articulation between the recommendations of the CAP Report and the Task Force Report needs to occur. The Task Force created the preliminary plan based on its ability to complement or, in some instances, directly meets recommendations included in the CAP Report. In addition, discussion with department/program areas needs to occur if the majors are to be a source of experiences related to instilling cross-cultural competence across the community. Ultimately, the plan should be open to campus discussion and approved through governance channels.

Administrative Organization, Collaboration, and Advisement

Coordinated, integrated services (e.g., a single organizational structure or built-in connections between multiple organizational structures) and continual dialogue among a number of TCNJ offices would be required to implement the model. These include the Offices of Undergraduate Global Programs, Graduate Global Programs, Service Learning, Records and Registration, and Admissions, among others. Mechanisms for assisting students in understanding the nature of the requirement, selecting options for each phase, preparing the portfolio, and creating a summary document also need to be identified. Faculty and staff development to promote support of the program in these areas will also be needed.

Cost Analysis and Budgetary Support

Many of the experiences and opportunities that would comprise the TCNJ Cross-Cultural Experience already exist but need to be organized and made available in a single site (virtual and real). Other experiences need to be created and supported. A full cost analysis and sources of support now need to be identified.

Next Steps: Spring 2003 Semester

During the Spring 2002 semester, members of the Task Force on Cross-Cultural Competence will focus on the following four tasks:

- Obtain additional and broad input from the campus community, to include: appropriate governance units, such as the International Advisory Council, the General Education Advisory Council, the Committee on Academic Programs, and the Student Government Association; other Task Forces, particularly the one on the First Year Experience; TCNJ faculty and staff, e.g., Office on Service Learning, Office of Admissions, and others; and individual faculty, staff, and students.
- Specify detail on existing and new options to meet the needs of each phase of the program and provide further elaboration on the means of monitoring its implementation.
- Complete discussion of and generate a plan for the administration of the Cross-

Cultural Experience and its integration into the ongoing work of the college, i.e., through ongoing operations of Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Academic Services.

- Collect and analyze information related to cost and identify sources of budgetary support.

A final report containing specific recommendations will be submitted to President Gitenstein at the end of the Spring 2003 semester.

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

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