

**Task Force on Community Building and Communications
at The College of New Jersey
Final Report**

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair – Ann Marie Nicolosi, assistant professor of history/women’s and gender studies
Convener - Matt Manfra, human resources coordinator

Craig Blaha, assistant to the chief information officer

Pat Coleman-Boatwright, director of community and college relations

Nicole Davis, operations manager TSC corporation.

Ann De Gennaro, director of campus wellness

Laura Delucia, junior / major: political science

Mark Kiselica, professor and chair of counselor education

Richard Kroth, director of concert facilities, music department

Marc Meola, humanities librarian

Anntarie Sims, associate professor of communication studies

Marcia Taylor, director of the governor school of the arts

Christopher Tuohy, sophomore / major: chemistry

Jeanine Vivona, associate professor of psychology

Jayne Zanglein, assistant professor, school of business

CHARGE:

The Task Force on Community Building and Communication will explore means of improving the sense of a cross-cultural community at TCNJ through inclusive communications and decision making. Questions such as the following should be considered:

- How do we define *community* at The College of New Jersey? What is our common purpose?
- What are the prevailing perceptions, conditions and behaviors that influence the sense of community (e.g. diversity, pride in the physical beauty of the campus, strong athletic teams, communication styles within leadership, opportunities for upward mobility among staff, school spirit, bright, high-performing students)?
- Is there institutional agility to mirror institutional culture changes (such as the use of new technology, the incorporation of ideas by new leaders, and the implementation of the curriculum transformation) while at the same time maintaining a strong sense of community?
- Are there ways to enhance (not necessarily increase) communication, soliciting broad input in institutional analyses of options, while at the same time assuring that decisions are made?
- What impact do campus subcultures have on genuine interaction between members of the community?
- What successful structures/programs exist at peer institutions that encourage and celebrate community?

- What is the role and responsibility of each stakeholder in building our sense of community? How is (or should) this expectation be communicated?

While these questions serve as a useful foundation, the charge of the Task Force is to propose an action plan that can be implemented in 1-2 years to improve the campus sense of community.

METHODOLOGY

The Task Force refers to the *Task Force For Community and Campus Climate* report for its definition of community: “The term community, as a metaphor for “institutional culture,” allowed the Task Force to view community in the context of both a product and a process. As a product, our community reflects the interactions of our history, people, traditions, and structures. As a process it shapes and is shaped by the interaction of all individuals or stakeholders involved.” Using this definition to frame the complex nature of TCNJ’s community, the Task Force on Community Building and Communications builds on the findings of the previous task force to understand ways in which to create a more inclusive and stronger sense of community among the members of the TCNJ family. The Task Force extends this definition of community to include participation in a collective identity as invested and valued members of said culture. A successful collective identity would include all current members of the institution and especially alumni and emeriti.

Since receiving the president’s charge for the task force in September, the task force has met several times during the year, together and in three subcommittees: communication; subcultures; and TCNJ community identity, especially as members of the campus community. Each committee focused on its specific charge in relation to the general presidential charge and ways in which to integrate their findings into said charge.

FINDINGS

The findings of the subcommittees were brought to the entire Task Force on Community Building and Communications to be examined, correlated and studied. The following themes and suggestions have emerged in response to the questions detailed in our charge:

1. Encouraging responsibility and a sense of entitlement for all members of the campus community that allows for individuals to participate in campus-wide celebrations and a sense of input and ownership in major changes in institutional policy.
 - a) The Task Force agreed that the present practice which restricts some staff from attending campus-wide events not only fails to contribute to a communal spirit, it prohibits unity and creates a perception that some members of the campus community are more valued than others, which in turn leads to anger and discontent. There needs to be some way to address this problem of inclusiveness, while still tending to the daily operations of the college. The Task Force

acknowledges that the president continues to express the expectation that all employees should have access to events. However, it is clear that this is not practice. The Task Force agreed that this is of paramount importance in building and fostering a strong sense of community.

2. Getting community members to view interaction as their responsibility. How can we encourage this as a community value? How can we foster inclusion of all community members in existing traditions, ceremonies and rituals, as well as other events, to serve as points of contact for shared interaction and experiences?

- a) The Task Force suggests an innovative approach to encouraging participation in community-wide activities such as athletic events, such as designating departmental spots and holding competitions for departments, or considering community participation as part of the review process for tenure and promotion under service.
- b) The Task Force acknowledges that recent institutional decisions regarding the name change and college logo have negatively impacted community spirit. It is recommended that campus take a different approach to decision making of this magnitude.
- c) The Task Force expressed concern at the college's practice of conducting classes on Martin Luther King Day. Indeed, the committee questions the wisdom of the college remaining open on this state and federal holiday as this sends a message contrary to an inclusive community. (Although it was learned at the final Faculty Senate meeting that this will change in the near future. AMN)

3. Creating and/or utilizing more effectively our common physical space and time for points of contact between subcultures. There is a need for a common time slot so members of the campus community can interact with one another in ways that will foster more of a sense of belonging to said community. We understand that the proposed new time grids will allow for some alleviation of time constraints, but the committee expressed fears that the limited allotted time of the new grids would quickly be filled with departmental needs, effectively eliminating the desired time for community interaction. The Task Force encourages the leadership to consider construction of a facility that could fit substantial numbers of community members for major events.

4. Developing new and/or enhancing existing communal events and traditions that foster communal spirit and identity.

- a) The Task Force acknowledges that there are a number of successful ways in which TCNJ does foster a sense of community, including the following that the committee found particularly effective:
 - Ice Cream Socials
 - President's breakfast with community leaders
 - Presidential Luncheons
 - Spring Fling
 - Homecoming Events
 - Annual Staff and Variety Show

- b) The Task Force suggests the following ways to improve some of the above events:
 - Host Presidential Luncheons in different departments/locations
 - Expand the concept of Spring Fling to include all members of the campus community and to hold the event with no competing scheduled events, perhaps during the week.
 - Expand the role of students and student organizations (staff and faculty?) in Homecoming events by holding an annual Homecoming Parade through the town, which would include float building competitions.
- c) The Task Force poses the following suggestions to increase community spirit, identity and interaction:
 - Governor's school rehearsals in summer: hold weekly evening concerts "Brownbag on the Prairie" or open 1855 or Holman with food to coincide with concerts
 - Develop a spirit competition during the sesquicentennial celebration
 - Reexamine programs such as Community Learning Day to determine how to make them genuine community events
 - Employee Recognition Month/Employee of the Month
 - Lottery system enabling faculty/staff/students to dine with celebrity speakers when they come to campus
 - Provide a discount for senior citizens for college services such as the recreation center and gym
- 5. Improving campus communications
 - a) The Task Force recognizes the difficulties of efficient communication in a culture of information overload and makes the following suggestions to increase the effectiveness of community communication:
 - Create a communications style guide for campus wide e-mail communications
 - Video streaming on homepage once a week (see for example www.usc.edu "Tommy Cam.")
 - Encourage more use of the college's homepage for easy access to events
- 6. Team Building Training
 - a) The Task Force suggests that all employees, starting at the executive levels of the college and including all management, undergo some form of Team Building Training to acquire the necessary skills for creating successful inclusive environments.
- 7. Future Recommendations
 - a) The Task Force acknowledges that in the earlier years of college governance, the Committee on Quality of Campus Life was charged with addressing campus climate issues. When governance structures were revised, this priority was overlooked. Therefore the Task Force recommends that the Committee on Student and Campus Community be charged with the responsibility for assuring that there is a vitality and a presence in our commitment to "community" on campus.
 - b) The Task Force also recommends Committee on Student and Campus Community be charged with conducting a campus wide survey to ascertain which

events community members would be most likely to attend and why, and to suggest other ways and events to increase community solidarity.

- c) The Task Force recommends that TCNJ revisit the charges of the Task Force on Community Building and Communication in two years to ascertain and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of its current recommendations.