

Faculty Senate Academic Excellence Committee
2007 - 2008
Summary report - respectfully submitted on 5/1/08

The Academic Excellence Committee (AEC) of the TCU Faculty addressed two major issues during the course of the 2007 - 2008 academic year. In the first half of the year the committee reviewed, and suggested changes to, institutional learning goals as articulated by the Quality Enhancement Council (QEC) of the university. The second part of the year was taken with a detailed study of issues surrounding our current course retake policy.

Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, executive Director of the TCU Office of Assessment and Quality Enhancement, requested that the Senate review and comment upon a document which articulated “cognitive and ethical capacities” for TCU graduates. These were, in essence, goal and outcome statements through which one might assess and evaluate the extent to which TCU was succeeding in the education of its students. It was also clear that such statements might be used to provide direction in planning for initiatives relative to achieving these goals.

The AEC reviewed this document and made suggestions relative to consistency in the wording of these statements. In addition the committee decided that the TCU Core Curriculum Goals, Outcomes, and Action Step statements met and went beyond the items articulated in the document under review. It was also decided that, since all of the TCC-CC had been vetted and approved at all university levels it seemed wise to co-opt appropriate sections of the document for this purpose.

The committee then undertook to correlate and support items from the QEC document with related statements from the TCU-CC documents. This step proved to be worth the time as the committee produced a document that represents the faculty’s educational priorities, and which is useful to the QEC as it moves forward in the process.

At the end of this document are appended the original QEC draft and the AEC response.

The committee then turned its attention to the course retake policy issue. Much work had been done last year, but it was decided that additional information was needed. We discovered that this issue had been reviewed several times over the last 15 - 20 years and that some of the concerns expressed earlier would be helpful to our deliberations. The following questions, passed on by the AEC from 2006 - 2006 and modified by this year’s group, served as a framework for our discussions:

Course Retake Questions to Ponder

1. Should we have a grade restriction on retakes? e.g., Only courses with a grade of D+ (or C-, etc) may be repeated.

2. Should we limit the number of retakes of a given course? e.g., No more than two retakes (3 attempts total) or perhaps only allow one retake.
3. How should we handle GPA calculations? e.g., All grades will count toward GPA. (or only repeat grade, or only highest grade)
4. Should all grades still appear on the transcript?
5. Should items 1 and/or 2 require permission of the instructor? (and/or someone else)

In addition the committee took the following steps with the goal of more fully understanding this matter:

- 1) AEC looked to make a comprehensive comparison between TCU's policy and that found at other institutions. To this end we have compiled a list of over 50 institutions with comparative data relative to course retake policy. (list appended at the end of this document)
- 2) Since it was clear that these matters should and must involve representatives from the student government, we established communication with to the Academic Affairs Committee of this body. They were kept apprised of our deliberations, provided with the same data we saw, encouraged to share thoughts and information, and brought in to participate in our final meeting of the semester. Candace Ruocco, chair of the student committee, met several times with the chair of the AEC.
- 3) The committee met with Pat Miller, the TCU Registrar, to discuss how possible changes in the course retake policy might impact grade distribution, course offerings, transcript evaluation, and our position relative to other institutions. Mr. Miller was extremely forthcoming in providing a wealth of very important information germane to the aforementioned issues as well as evocative of new one's important to consider.

It is difficult to summarize the findings completely but certain things stood out as important in our deliberations (documents prepared by the registrar are appended to this report):

- a. A very small percentage of TCU students retake courses
- b. An extremely small percentage of students retake courses twice
- c. An even smaller percentage of students retake courses in which they first received a grade of B.
- d. The vast majority of courses retaken were found in a limited number of disciplines.

- e. Although course retakes usually had beneficial impact upon GPA there were some cases where this was not true.
- f. The registrar stood ready to support the academic mission in whichever way was considered best.

Although relatively few students are impacted, the committee decided that it was important to continue forward because it was felt that the policy, regardless of impact, should be representative of our mission and beliefs. In addition, for those areas where the retakes are concentrated and concern is present, the committee is interested in providing any suggestions that might prove helpful.

4) The committee met with Mike Scott, TCU Director of Financial Aid, to discuss the impact that possible changes in the retake policy might have upon eligibility for academic scholarships. Although there might be some impact it is projected to be minimal and impact situations where students are “on the brink”. In those cases the Scholarship Advisory Committee is able to review the facts and make adjustments should the student be negatively impacted by a change in policy. The discussions also lead to the conclusion that, as will likely be the case with the plus/minus policy, students will adjust to the new standards over the course of several years.

An additional issue that arose from these discussions was consideration of GPA requirements for academic scholarship renewal. Any change in course retake policy would be impacted by changes in GPA/ Scholarship standards. The committee recommends that future AEC deliberations take this into account.

5) It was discovered that professional graduate programs found in Law Schools and Medical Schools recalculate GPA's from school which do not average retakes in their calculations. In addition, AEC discovered that TCU recalculates course retakes relative to GPA in evaluating potential undergraduate transfer students.

The committee intends to bring a summary report on the change of grade policy deliberation to the Senate in the fall. This might be in the form of a motion for change or as a recommendation that no change is needed at this time on the University level. The committee does intend to continue involving a variety of stakeholders and experts in these deliberations.

At this time the changes being considered by the committee involve grade delimitation for retakes and averaging of grades received in courses for the purposes of GPA calculation. We are committed to remaining objective in these matters as we continue gather and process relevant data.

Many thanks to the excellent people serving on the AEC. Real progress was made in fulfilling the charges given to the committee

Cognitive and Ethical Capacities for Texas Christian University
Draft – 04/23/07B

All TCU graduates should demonstrate the following cognitive and ethical capacities:

Knowledge of and Ability to Act as an Ethical Leader, including:

- Demonstrating leadership, including the ability to solve problems in a way that positively contributes to the community
- Articulating an appropriate leadership philosophy or style
- Being aware of the change process and the ability to initiate, evaluate, and manage change.
- Managing time effectively in order to accomplish goals
- Developing a core of knowledge within a discipline of choice in order to provide leadership to others

Interactions in the Global Community, including:

- Creating informed opinions about global issues
- Appreciating the interconnectedness of society, culture, and individual identity
- Knowing and understanding the impact of world religions and cultures
- Engaging perspectives that are different from their own
- Being involved in diverse cultural activities
- Describing the advantages and challenges of a diverse society

Recognition and Articulation of Elements Included in Civic Literacy and Community Engagement, including:

- Demonstrating informed and ongoing participation in civic discourse and decision-making at the local and global level
- Participating in relevant governance systems
- Recognizing the need to challenge appropriately the unfair, unjust, or uncivil behaviors of other individuals or groups
- Participating in service and/or volunteer activities
- Understanding the economic implications of personal and social choices
- Understanding and acting upon factors that impact personal health and well-being

Effective Communication of Ideas and Facts, including:

- Influencing others through writing, speaking, or artistic expression
- Making meaningful and appropriate presentations or performances

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, including

- Thinking critically using tools from literature, the humanities, fine arts, mathematics, and the natural and social sciences
- Using complex information from a variety of sources
- Applying knowledge and concepts to a new situation or setting
- Learning new skills in order to deal with the constant change in a complex society
- Using appropriate methods of inquiry and analysis

Cognitive and Ethical Capacities for Texas Christian University Reconciled to the TCU-CC

All TCU graduates should demonstrate the following cognitive and ethical capacities:

Knowledge of and Ability to Act as an Ethical Leader

- Demonstrating leadership, including the ability to solve problems in a way that positively contributes to the community
- Articulating an appropriate leadership philosophy or style
- Being aware of the change process and the ability to initiate, evaluate, and manage change.
- Managing time effectively in order to accomplish goals
- Developing a core of knowledge within a discipline of choice in order to provide leadership to others

TCU graduates will demonstrate an understanding of individual rights and responsibilities and an ability to assess critically the intentions and consequences of personal, professional or societal actions.

This competency statement for CSV would apply to bullet three above.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of theories and practices of leadership.

This outcome statement for CSV would apply to bullet two above and possibly bullet five as well.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of one or more traditions of normative inquiry and an ability to assess the ethical dimensions of individual, professional or civic life.

This outcome statement would apply to bullet one and possibly bullet two above.

TCU graduates will demonstrate a critical understanding of the processes that create change over time in the human experience.

This Historical Traditions Competency statement applies to bullet three.

As for bullet four, we feel it belongs in the category below: “Effective Communication of Ideas and Facts”

Interactions in the Global Community

- Creating informed opinions about global issues
- Appreciating the interconnectedness of society, culture, and individual identity
- Knowing and understanding the impact of world religions and cultures
- Engaging perspectives that are different from their own
- Being involved in diverse cultural activities
- Describing the advantages and challenges of a diverse society

TCU graduates will demonstrate knowledge of trends, issues, and opportunities that impact the global community.

This competency statement for GA would apply to bullet one and five above.

Students will demonstrate critical awareness that problem-solving in the global community requires the integration of a variety of perspectives.

This GA outcome would apply to bullet four above.

Students will demonstrate the ability to develop informed judgments about global issues.

This GA outcome would apply to bullet one above.

TCU graduates will demonstrate a critical understanding of cultural phenomena.

This competency statement for CA would apply to bullet two above.

Students will demonstrate knowledge of one or more disciplinary approaches to issues of cultural differences.

This CA outcome would apply to bullet three above.

Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze diversity within (or) across cultures.

This CA outcome would apply to bullet six above.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectedness of society, culture and individual identity.

This CA outcome would apply to bullet two above.

Bullet five above would be covered through student action steps in many of the above including the following articulated in the TCU-CC: *Students will examine how interaction between personal and social identities is manifested in everyday life.*

Recognition and Articulation of Elements Included in Civic Literacy and Community Engagement

- Demonstrating informed and ongoing participation in civic discourse and decision-making at the local and global level
- Participating in relevant governance systems
- Recognizing the need to challenge appropriately the unfair, unjust, or uncivil behaviors of other individuals or groups
- Participating in service and/or volunteer activities
- Understanding the economic implications of personal and social choices
- Understanding and acting upon factors that impact personal health and well-being

TCU graduates will demonstrate an understanding of individual rights and responsibilities and an ability to assess critically the intentions and consequences of personal, professional or societal actions.

This CSV competency statement applies to bullets one, three, five, and six above.

Students will demonstrate a capacity for informed participation in civic discourse and decision-making

This CSV outcome would apply to bullets one and two above.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of one or more traditions of normative inquiry and an ability to assess the ethical dimensions of individual, professional or civic life.

This CSV outcome relates to bullet three above.

TCU graduates will understand social environments that arise from and influence human interaction.

This Social Sciences competency statement relates to bullets three and five.

Students will demonstrate knowledge of and an ability to analyze and evaluate the fundamental social processes that characterize human experiences, using social science methodology.

This SS outcome relates to bullets three and five.

Bullets two and four concern participation and might happen through student action steps associated with individual courses. For bullet four we suggest looking at the outcome statements associated with our division of service learning. Although not a requirement it is one way our students will meet bullet four. Such activity will have clear outcomes and, presumably, be assessed.

Effective Communication of Ideas and Facts, including:

- Influencing others through writing, speaking, or artistic expression
- Making meaningful and appropriate presentations or performances

Students will demonstrate the ability to write in a range of genres, using appropriate rhetorical conventions.

Students will demonstrate competency in reading, quoting and citing sources, as well as competency in balancing their own voices with secondary sources.

Students will demonstrate facility with the language and analysis of argument.

Students will demonstrate the ability to write an argument for a specific rhetorical situation.

Students will demonstrate competency in using sources (primary, secondary, electronic) in argument construction.

Students will demonstrate the ability to facilitate interpersonal and group communication.

TCU graduates will understand the significance of the fine arts and the importance of creativity through standard coursework and/or applied study.

The above Learning Outcomes, drawn from Written Communication and Oral Communication, as well as the competency statement from the Fine Arts relates to bullet one above.

Students will demonstrate the ability to construct and deliver effective messages, adapted to the audience, purpose, and context of the situation.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the nature of inquiry in the arts. (Students will perform, create, observe, hear, critique, or otherwise experience works of art... action step)

Students will produce writing that demonstrates clarity and precision of thought.

TCU Graduates will demonstrate the ability to use writing as a means for learning and communicating in a specific discipline.

The above Learning Outcomes, drawn from Writing Emphasis, Oral Communication, and Fine Arts Competency Statements and Learning Outcomes relate to bullet two above.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, including:

- Thinking critically using tools from literature, the humanities, fine arts, mathematics, and the natural and social sciences
- Using complex information from a variety of sources
- Applying knowledge and concepts to a new situation or setting
- Learning new skills in order to deal with the constant change in a complex society
- Using appropriate methods of inquiry and analysis

TCU Graduates will demonstrate an understanding of, and sensitivity to, our shared literary heritage.

TCU graduates will apply methods of humanistic inquiry and construct relevant arguments.

TCU graduates will understand the significance of the fine arts and the importance of creativity through standard coursework and/or applied study.

Students will demonstrate the ability to apply mathematical reasoning to solve problems in a variety of contexts.

Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of some of the relationships among the natural sciences, technology, and society.

Students will demonstrate knowledge of and an ability to analyze and evaluate the fundamental social processes that characterize human experiences, using social science methodology.

The above competency and learning outcome statements drawn from literature, the humanities, fine arts, mathematics, natural science, and social science relate to the bullet one above.

Bullets 2 -5 represent an integrated approach to information acquisition, analysis, synthetic reasoning, and problem solving in these times. The ideas cross over between TCU-CC outcomes. There are many TCU-CC competencies and outcomes that address bullets 2 - 5 above. The examples provided below are select examples of these with applicable bullet number presented in parenthesis after each statement.

Students will demonstrate competency in using sources (primary, secondary, electronic) in argument construction. (2,4,5)

Students will demonstrate the ability to use computers effectively as a communication mechanism. (4,5)

Students will demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate historical discourse, and to develop evidence-based conclusions about the past. (2)

TCU graduates will demonstrate knowledge of trends, issues, and opportunities that impact the global community. (2,3)

Students will demonstrate critical awareness that problem-solving in the global community requires the integration of a variety of perspectives. (2)

Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze diversity within (or) across cultures. (3,4,5)

TCU graduates will demonstrate a critical understanding of the role of religion in society, culture and individual life. (2)

Students will demonstrate the ability to write an argument for a specific rhetorical situation. Students will produce a variety of arguments in different media (e.g. print, oral, visual,) (5)

Using an appropriate social science methodology, students will analyze and evaluate how those forces characterize and influence human interaction. (3,5)

Students will present appropriate evidence-based conclusions about social processes and human interaction. (5)