

****Approved by a vote of the Staff Senate General Body on December 20, 2006****

2006
Report of the TCNJ Staff Senate
Ad Hoc Committee

Prepared by the Ad-Hoc Committee of the Staff Senate

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Section I—Purpose

In April of 2006, Staff Senate President Joe Hodge charged Staff Senator Ann DeGennaro with chairing an ad-hoc committee that would seek to determine the most important issues facing TCNJ staff. The committee, consisting of Susan Atkins, Janis Blayne-Paul, Ann DeGennaro, Lynette Harris, Tony Marchetti, Christina Puglia, and Matthew Winkel determined that the Staff Senate’s primary concern was with the representation of staff in the governance process. In addition the ad hoc committee determined that until this critical issue was addressed, it would not be appropriate to identify additional issues of concern to TCNJ staff. Consequently, the ad-hoc committee has sought to focus its efforts on this central issue. This document seeks to summarize the discussions of the last five months regarding the Staff Senate’s role in College Governance and to provide recommendations for addressing this important issue.

Definition of terms and statement of purpose

For the purpose of this document, it is necessary to clearly delineate the role of the Staff Senate as a group. According to Article II of the Staff Senate Constitution which provides a Statement of Purpose, “The Staff Senate is the representative voice of the college staff for purposes of college governance.” The paragraph continues on to define the term “staff.” Specifically, “the staff is defined as permanent non-faculty employees of The College of New Jersey including all classified, administrative unit, and administrative non-unit job categories with the exception of the Cabinet Officers of The College.” It should be made clear that the term “staff” in this document adheres to the definition provided in the Staff Senate Constitution and that this document discusses the problems faced by The College’s staff with this definition in mind.

Section II—The Problem

The College of New Jersey’s current governance system seeks to provide designated stakeholder groups—specifically faculty, staff, and students—with the opportunity to “work cooperatively to make thoughtful, appropriate, and timely recommendations to the administration on issues related to policy, procedure, and program”.¹ In doing so, The College provides an avenue through which those most directly affected by institutional decision-making can express their opinions and maintain a voice in the decision-making process. While the goals of the governance system are to be commended and certainly set an ideal standard for governing The College, TCNJ’s staff has been less involved in the process, both due to the current governance structure and to communication issues within the Staff Senate—the representative body of staff members working at The College of New Jersey.

In sum, the Staff Senate’s role in the College Governance process continues to face challenges. The ad hoc committee has concluded that representational inequity among stakeholders, staff representation by non-Staff Senate members, insufficient participation/communication, and inadequate education may be the most significant factors affecting the Staff Senate’s current state in the governance system. These factors are detailed below:

Factor #1: Representational distribution among stakeholder groups—The makeup of College Governance committees and councils heavily favors faculty and student representation and participation. Taking the three standing committees (CAP, CPP, and CSCC) as an example, faculty representatives per group number between five and eight and student representatives per group are between three and five. By contrast, Staff Senate representation is limited to two to three members per group.

¹ “Governance Structure and Processes 2005,” The College of New Jersey, www.tcnj.edu/~steering/gov2005-2.doc (2005).

Consequently, while all stakeholders sitting on a committee are said to have “equal rights and responsibilities concerning input, elected service, and voting privileges”², the existing composition of these committees places disproportional input opportunities and voting privileges—and thus decision-making power—into the hands of faculty and student committee members. This structure leaves staff members questioning the importance of their role in the governance of The College. At a time when The College has needed to rely heavily on the institution’s staff members to shoulder increasing responsibilities in the face of \$3.4 million of non-faculty personnel salary savings across the past four years, the lack of emphasis placed on the input of staff members is particularly concerning.³

Factor #2: Staff representation by non-Staff Senate members—The three main groups of stakeholders on TCNJ’s campus are represented by individual governing bodies: The Faculty Senate, The Student Government Association, and The Staff Senate. The single most important responsibility held by these governing bodies is to appoint individuals to represent the organization’s respective stakeholder group within The College’s governance process. In doing so, each governing body is able to ensure that (1) its respective stakeholder group is represented in the governance system, (2) it is able to maintain a means of accountability for representatives, and (3) it is able to provide support to representatives.

Under the current College Governance structure the Staff Senate is not consistently afforded the opportunity to appoint staff representatives to committees and councils. While the Staff Senate has the opportunity to recommend appointments to some of those governance groups where direct appointment by the Staff Senate is not permitted, there is no guarantee that the Staff Senate’s recommendations will be taken. Consequently, TCNJ staff members chosen to sit on these councils may not be Staff Senate members. For example, among the six Planning Councils, only 12 of the 27 (44 percent) staff representatives are members of the Staff Senate. This structure leaves the Staff Senate with very little input into concerns addressed by these councils and makes it difficult for the organization to maintain a sense of the issues being discussed among these groups. As a result, the recommendation process becomes disempowering to the Staff Senate organization.

Factor #3: Participation and communication—It is important to note that issues pertaining to the Staff Senate’s role in the College Governance process are not solely due to the current structure of the governance system. For several years, the Staff Senate has faced challenges in fulfilling its obligations as the representative body of the staff in the governance system. Attendance concerns and lack of internal reporting are among the most significant problems affecting the organization. If the Staff Senate can not ensure that appointed staff will regularly attend and participate in Governance committees and councils, the Administration would certainly have cause to appoint its own staff members and to keep the number of staff representatives low. Additionally, if the Staff Senate can not create an internal reporting structure that ensures the sharing of pertinent information with organization leaders and the senate body, the organization will be unable to direct its own efforts.

Factor #4: Education—If members of the Staff Senate are not properly educated regarding the responsibilities expected of them, the organization will not be able to establish a solid roster of active and involved senators. To date, the Staff Senate lacks a structured process of orienting and educating new senators. The result is a group of new senators who are unaware of what it means to be a senator within the Staff Senate.

² “Governance Structure and Processes 2005,” The College of New Jersey, www.tcnj.edu/~steering/gov2005-2.doc (2005).

³ “TCNJ Reacts to Drastic State Budget Cuts,” The College of New Jersey, www.tcnj.edu/~ccr/news/2006/budget/TCNJReactstoStateBudgetCuts.html (July 2006).

Section III—Formulating Solutions

The Staff Senate—as the representative group of The College’s staff members—must take significant steps to rectify the problems outlined in the previous section. To this purpose, The College of New Jersey maintains a system through which the governance process is reviewed on a regular basis. The last review of college governance took place in 2005—resulting in College Governance 2005—and so we can expect a new review of the process in 2010. It will be at this time that the Staff Senate can address issues pertaining to lack of representation and non-staff senate representation. However, it is imperative that the Staff Senate use the time remaining before this review to resolve internal concerns. We can assume that unless the Staff Senate learns to take full advantage of the role in the governance process already given to us, there will be no foundation from which to request additional representation within the governance structure. The following steps may work toward ensuring that the Staff Senate participates to its fullest ability in TCNJ’s decision-making process:

Step #1: Refocus organizational efforts—Participation in the college governance process is the most important responsibility of the Staff Senate. The Staff Senate’s mission statement confirms the essential nature of the organization’s participation on these committees and councils by stating that “The Staff Senate of The College of New Jersey contributes to the advancement of the College’s mission by serving as the official representative body of all non-faculty staff and *by actively participating in campus governance.*”⁴ A refocusing of the Staff Senate’s efforts to highlight the important nature of participation in the governance process would be essential toward improving the organization’s standing among TCNJ’s stakeholders.

Step #2: Establish means for accountability—Currently, the Staff Senate provides no means of oversight or accountability for those appointed to participate in the College Governance process. It would be in the organization’s best interest to create an internal system that ensures accountability and oversight. The following methods could potentially be used to achieve this goal:⁵

- ★ Oversight responsibilities distributed among the Staff Senate’s Executive Council
- ★ Oversight responsibility given to the Staff Senate’s Vice President
- ★ New position created to assume oversight responsibility

Step #3: React as a unit—Whenever possible the Staff Senate should work to respond to college-wide issues as an organization. The Staff Senate must return to presenting itself as a cohesive representative body with the organizational ability to formulate decisions and provide recommendations. Reacting as a unit has a number of benefits, including the following:

- ★ Staff opinions can be made both formal and tangible, therefore ensuring that the views of the institution’s staff are recorded and reviewed by the Administration
- ★ Through discussion/debate, the views and opinions of the entire Senate body can be solicited and incorporated into the “organizational voice” of the Staff Senate
- ★ By making recommendations and decisions as an organization, the Staff Senate can present itself to the administration and the campus as a cohesive, representative group

⁴ “Staff Senate Mission Statement,” The College of New Jersey Staff Senate, <http://www.tcnj.edu/%7Estafforg/>

⁵ It should be noted that none of these scenarios would necessitate additional meetings—as time is certainly a concern for members of the Staff Senate. Rather, those individual(s) given oversight responsibility would simply focus their role within the Staff Senate toward ensuring that the organization as a whole is participating fully and actively in the College Governance process. It should also be noted that “oversight” is a flexible term that can have a variety of meanings. For example, “oversight” might be as simple and unobtrusive as tracking the governance reports given at meetings or as complex as following up with those staff senate members who have not been attending governance meetings. In other words, what is important is *not* necessarily “how” we oversee the process but that we maintain some means of accountability.

Furthermore, the Staff Senate should systematize its communication with The College's leadership, other governance organizations, and staff members. Sharing the organization's decisions and actions with the campus community on a prompt and consistent basis will be essential towards realizing the benefits of reacting as a unit.

Step #4: Create an orientation process—In order to properly acquaint new Staff Senate members with the organization, the Staff Senate should establish a formalized orientation process. This process would clearly delineate the responsibilities expected of every senator, educate new senators regarding the internal structure and purpose of the Staff Senate, and ensure that new members understand The College's governance system. For example, it may be beneficial to provide new senators with copies of the Staff Senate's constitution and Governance 2005 and to review these documents with new members. Additionally, the Staff Senate may wish to consider a "contract" which would list senator expectations, allowing new members to agree to the responsibilities they have undertaken.

Section IV—Moving Forward

In an effort to take an action-based approach towards correcting the problems outlined in Section II and implementing the steps described in Section III, the following timeline should be used by the Staff Senate and its members:

- ★ **Debate and Vote:** Following a review by the Staff Senate's Executive Board, the ad-hoc committee would like the opportunity to present this document to the Staff Senate for an official vote at the earliest possible meeting of the organization.
Timeframe: October/November 2006.
- ★ **Distribution of responsibilities:** Based on the decision of the Staff Senate general body, steps approved in Section III should be distributed to the appropriate internal groups of the Staff Senate or to individuals capable of completing those goals. The President of the Staff Senate should coordinate this distribution and oversee the completion of these goals.
Timeframe: November 2006.
- ★ **Checkpoints:** Staff senate members who are designated to lead the efforts of completing the distributed responsibilities should regularly inform the Staff Senate President of their progress. The Staff Senate's general body should also be updated when necessary. A formal update to the Staff Senate general body should be provided within 3 months of responsibility distribution.
Timeframe: February 2007.