TO: Steering

FROM: Barbara Strassman, Chair of CAP

RE: Final Recommendation on Graduate Comprehensive Exams and Culminating Experiences

DATE: April 23, 2014

**Background:**

A memo was sent by Dean William Behre, noting that although there is a requirement for graduate comprehensive exams, there is no policy actually governing these examinations. Dean Behre asked that such a policy be developed and suggested a list of issues that policy might address.

**Charge:**

On February 9, 2010, The Steering Committee charged the Graduate Program Committee to review Dean Behre’s request and:

•Determine whether a graduate comprehensive examination policy is needed.

•If a policy is needed, develop such a proposed policy, drawing upon input from graduate faculty and coordinators,. This policy may include the points of concern indicated by Dean Behre, but it may also cover other points.

•Solicit testimony/input on that proposal, as described in steps 2 and 3 of the governance process.

•Send the Committee on Academic Programs its final recommendation along with a discussion of how the recommendation was developed and how testimony/input was solicited and used. A copy of this material also should be provided to the Steering Committee.

Once the Graduate Program Committee has sent its recommendations to CAP, the Steering Committee will ask CAP to review that recommendation (including its use of testimony) and send its recommendation to us.

**Testimony**

In Spring 2014, the Graduate Programs Council continued its work on the revisions to the Graduate Comprehensive Examination and Other Culminating Experiences policy. The policy was crafted to be broad enough to allow individual program flexibility while at the same time, articulating TCNJ’s graduate program standards regarding a Comprehensive Exam/Culminating Experience.

GPC sought input and testimony from various stakeholders. First, GPC invited testimony from students and faculty via two open forums on March 5th--one at 1:30 and another at 5:00 to enable increased graduate student participation. In addition to the forums, testimony was gathered from graduate students (n=42), program coordinators and department heads (n=5) via a Qualtrics survey.

Testimony from graduate students fell into two distinct categories. The first group was pleased that individual programs have a choice to offer distinct culminating experiences (exam, capstone, thesis, etc.) and this group believed that the policy is reasonable and makes sense. There was a second group of students who, instead of commenting on the policy itself, commented about their belief that one exam/culminating experience should not determine if they graduate.

Faculty indicated that they appreciated that the policy was broad enough to allow for individual program flexibility, while maintaining standards across graduate programs. In addition, one faculty member suggested a small language change in the final paragraph to change " . . . please see policy on Program Completion Limit and Retention Standards" to " . . . please see individual program policies on Program Completion Limit and Retention Standards." GPC members agreed that this language change would provide more clarity to the policy. CAP however, recommended a further modification which would include the program coordinators and program specific policies while at the same time upholding the "Program Completion" policy as stated in the graduate bulletin.

Based on the data from graduate stakeholders as well as discussions in GPC meetings, GPC has proposed the attached Policy Regarding Comprehensive Examination and Other Culminating Experiences. The primary advantage to this policy is that individual departments do not lose the flexibility to structure culminating experiences/comprehensive exams in ways that best meet the needs of their students and discipline.

**Final Recommendation on a Policy Regarding Comprehensive Examination and Other Culminating Experiences**

Every graduate degree program concludes with a mandatory culminating experience which requires candidates to synthesize and apply knowledge acquired throughout the program. Each program determines the type of culminating experience which may include, but is not limited to, a comprehensive exam, a thesis, or a capstone project. Students must meet department-specific eligibility requirements before registering for the culminating experience.

Each program will provide its students with a written description of its culminating experience, including eligibility, grading standards, procedures for evaluating the experience, and policies for students who are unsuccessful in their attempt to complete their culminating experience. These policies must be posted on the Department/Program website. Candidates who are unable to schedule and successfully complete their culminating experience during the 6-year limit to program completion (see the "Program Completion" policy statement in the Graduate Bulletin) must consult with their respective graduate program coordinator and petition for an extension from the dean of the their academic school.

A student may repeat a comprehensive exam or culminating experience only once without permission of the program coordinator.

Students who are unsuccessful in completing their culminating experience may appeal the outcome as per the College's Student Complaint Appeal-Graduate Policy (<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8682>). If the candidate is unsuccessful in the appeal process the candidate will be dismissed from the program.