

## Listening Tour Report

1 message

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To the Campus Community:

I'd like to thank the many of you who participated in my "listening tour" this fall. The conversations were spirited and the feedback was incredibly helpful. I am especially grateful for your willingness to work together to position TCNJ for continued excellence while ensuring our financial sustainability. Your input, questions, and suggestions played a major role in the formulation of the plans outlined here.

As I've communicated previously, the college is facing a projected budget shortfall of approximately \$9-10 million for the coming fiscal year. Salary and fringe growth, inflation, and the desire to limit tuition increases are among the contributing factors. Because we've been through several budget-trimming efforts since the pandemic, the easiest cuts have been made, leaving us with difficult choices. In putting together a plan for FY'25, we are focusing on a mix of initiatives aimed at generating new revenue and reducing expenses. These are summarized below:

### New Initiatives

- **School of Continuing Education and Professional Studies:** Guided by proprietary research, we will develop and execute a comprehensive business plan for a school that consolidates our graduate and continuing education efforts and grows our presence in these markets. This plan will build on the work already being done by Dean McCotter, her team, and academic leaders across campus to develop new programs that meet the educational needs of the region and grow revenue.
- **Three-Year Bachelor's Degree:** Public interest in a three-year undergraduate degree has been growing. While this isn't practical for many of our areas of study, we have the opportunity to create high-quality, three-year degree offerings in some of them, thereby furthering demand for a TCNJ education.
- **Community College Partnerships:** Through formal partnerships with select New Jersey community colleges, we will provide more opportunities for students at these schools to learn from our faculty, participate in our programs, and complete their Bachelor's degrees at TCNJ.
- **Special Programming:** Across the campus I heard excitement for the potential of expanding our reach in the areas of pre-college, gap-year, and other learning readiness efforts. These programs will enhance the pipelines of students considering the college for post-secondary education and will allow us to strengthen the preparation of these students for advanced study.
- **Housing:** We are aware that educational partners in our area have a need for short- and long-term housing. This gives us potential new uses for the excess capacity in our housing stock.
- **Enrollment Incentives:** By revising our pricing structures, we can create enrollment incentives for audiences we seek to grow, such as public sector employees, and those in select industries. Through creative enrollment management strategies, such as streamlining the acceptance of transfer and AP credits, redefining the college core requirements, and enhancing experiential learning and internships, we will increase our ability to recruit and retain talented students who bring a diverse set of experiences to TCNJ.
- **Monetize Underutilized Real Estate:** Through the Trenton State College Corporation, the college's portfolio contains properties that, for a variety of reasons such as size and location, are unsuitable for our purposes. By selling them outright and/or through innovative partnerships with developers, we will aim to build new revenue streams and enhance the usefulness of our real estate holdings.

### Efficiencies

- **Vacancies:** For the past six months, we have been holding open most vacant positions as a way of achieving salary savings. We will extend this strategy moving forward to capture additional dollars from our largest expenditure line.

- **Academic Reorganization:** A majority of the potential cost-saving opportunities identified during my tour come from the academic areas of the college, which is perhaps not surprising given this is the largest portion of our budget. Some suggestions include pivoting to a higher teaching load (which will require a renegotiation of local contractual agreements such as “MOA 62”), modifying requirements such as writing and foreign language, reducing our reliance on adjunct faculty, and examining our library operations in the face of ever-changing technology. Each of these areas have the potential to streamline our educational delivery and reduce expenditures.

- **Administrative and Support Functions:** Faculty, staff, and students agree that we have reduced most staffing levels across the administrative areas to levels that have begun to weaken our ability to appropriately support faculty and students. I believe, however, there are certain further steps we should examine that will allow for additional consolidation and/or enhanced efficiency. In doing so, we will also need to understand this will be accompanied by necessary reductions in services and expectations.

Earlier today I had the opportunity to meet with shared governance leaders and the members of the Faculty and Staff Senates to discuss these plans. These conversations were robust and fruitful. I also outlined how our community may be helpful in executing these initiatives to assist in facilitating a “right-sizing” of the college’s budget. With regard to administrative functions, work to manage the impact of personnel vacancies and address changes in workflow will continue with the goal of realizing additional cost-saving measures throughout the spring semester. With regard to academic reorganization, I have asked governance leaders to engage in conversations around revisions to the college core (including current requirements), pivoting to higher teaching loads, and reconfiguring delivery of library services. I expect this work on academic reorganization to begin in January 2024.

I recognize that achieving these objectives asks more of you at a time when you’re already going above and beyond for our college. I also know we all share a deep love for this institution; we all embrace the desire to build and maintain a strong foundation for the future of TCNJ. I am resolutely confident a successful pursuit and implementation of the initiatives and efficiencies outlined here will enable us to reach that goal. Together.

With best wishes and regards...



**Michael A. Bernstein, PhD**

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