

Fall 2009 Colloquium
Thursday, September 3, 2009

Jon H. Larson, Ph.D.

Good morning on this lovely September day and welcome to what I know is going to be the most vigorous and challenging and fulfilling year ever at Ocean County College.

I am most happy to greet our guests and to see everyone here today, each and every one of you, and deeply pleased and proud to report that the state of our college is in so many ways truly excellent and that we are more than ready to continue improving as we meet all the challenges that our astounding growth and success will require of us.

Two items of note initially: First, enrollments, as I know you are aware, have increased over the 2008 fall semester, as of this morning, by more than 10 percent, and credit hours are up close to 10 percent. So we continue to decisively increase our student body and the number of courses and course credits they are taking. This single factor is the best of all measures of success as students and their families vote with their feet and their wallets and choose OCC—choose us.

Also, just last month, we dedicated the John C. Bartlett, Jr., Hall, our beautiful new 17-classroom instructional building, and it will soon, beginning with this fall's Quick Term, become a part of the Ocean County College teaching-learning experience for students and faculty alike. If you haven't yet had the pleasure of seeing this facility, I invite you to take a walk through it. Dr. Parrish is arranging Friday afternoon tours, starting September 20. I guarantee you will be charmed. It is a fitting commemoration of Freeholder Bartlett's constant and supportive friendship to the college for almost forty years. With its 400 usable class periods, sufficient to potentially accommodate 9,240 students for more than 27,000 credit hours across the schedule, Bartlett Hall will help us in a major way to address the enrollment surge we have been and will continue to experience.

The various college departmental reorganizations and the hiring of new personnel to key staff positions that I described for you in detail at the spring 2009 Colloquium are all but complete, and we will be introducing you to all of our new staff members at the conclusion of my remarks. I know that in the coming days and weeks, you will make all these wonderful new members of our OCC family feel welcome and provide them with your friendship, your help, the fruits of your wisdom, your expertise, and your generosity whenever necessary.

I also want to update you on and acknowledge the progress made on our Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year Experience project following Dr. John Gardner's visit to our campus at last spring's Colloquium. More than 80 faculty, administrators, and staff have been busy throughout the spring and summer examining all aspects of the OCC students' first year experience. The Executive Report is in its final stages of development outlining our goals and efforts, a philosophy statement is being written that will be prominently displayed on the College website by the end of the fall 2009 semester, and a committee is being established with the charge of developing an action plan to implement recommendations from this most intensive self-study. I would like all 80 of the participants to stand—I commend all of you for your outstanding commitment to the success of each student who enrolls at OCC. I would also like to

recognize the exceptional leadership of the project's co-chairs, Don Doran and Maureen Reustle. Thank you all!

Joan Didion, author of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, wrote “character, the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life, is the source from which self-respect springs.” I’d like to talk a bit about collegiate “character,” institutional “respect,” culture change, and what we must do at OCC to remain relevant, viable and healthy in these very uncertain times.

The Colloquium theme for today is behavioral intervention preparation, and we are pleased to have with us as our guest speaker this morning Mr. Scott Lewis, a partner with the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management and a faculty member at the University of South Carolina. This is two in a row for South Carolina—John Gardner last spring and Scott Lewis today—who knows, there may be a “northern branch” of USC forming here at the Jersey Shore before long! Mr. Lewis’s remarks will, I know, be intriguing to all of us, particularly given our intense institutional concern with security and civility.

I would like to ask you to consider this morning, however, a broader view of risk management in higher education, about a way of perceiving our college as poised in a posture of readiness and preparedness for risks of many varieties, using the broadest possible definition of the idea of risk.

We all know that life itself is “risky business.” We are acquainted with the warning that the only way to avoid risk is not to get up in the morning—and most of us have at some point tried that. We also all know that sometimes “bad things happen to good people.” But if asked or polled on the subject, Americans would hardly describe a college or a university as a high-risk place to work or to attend. Even with the horror of the Virginia Tech tragedy still glaringly etched in our memories, even with the word *Columbine* now in our dictionaries spelled with a small “c”—meaning “senseless killings” – we still tend not to associate the concept of danger with the concept of education. After all, it is only a little learning that is a dangerous thing, so we’ve been told.

But, I suggest to you this morning, ladies and gentlemen, that the colleges and universities of the 21st century are indeed at risk, perhaps now more than ever in the history of American higher education, and only those institutions that come to better understand how to assess and manage their risks will survive and flourish—without experiencing wrenching and debilitating change as disruptive technologies, processes, and economies force us to become more productive, more responsive, more adaptive. We have entered into a new era, not yet fully defined, but more demanding, more competitive, and, yes, more risky.

Current thinkers are prone to define institutional “risk” as “any impediment to accomplishing institutional goals” (AGB, 3) and often talk about four major types of institutional risk: environmental, strategic, operational, and financial. Risk assessment, they contend, must be applied to forces both internal and external to the campus, forces which can cause or exacerbate any of these four major risk areas. I would like to examine each of these with you this morning and, in particular, focus on some potential impacts that these risk factors might have on our institutional goals. I would also like to propose, more importantly, how these risks can be turned into rewards for our college ... if we demonstrate the character necessary to take control of our institutional life and commit to a culture of collegiality and caring.

The first risk category is environmental, and this incorporates all aspects of the physical campus world that we all share and for which we are all, to one degree or other, responsible. Whether we talk about recycling, campus smoking prohibitions, green buildings, environmental sustainability, or campus security, we are touching on issues that present potential risks—but potentially also great rewards for our students and our colleagues.

The single most obvious concern in this risk category is campus security. How well prepared are we for an emergency and what are our greatest opportunities for improvement? Under Dr. Jim McGinty's leadership as Executive Vice President in charge of security, Ocean County College commissioned a security assessment by an external firm with specific expertise in March of 2009 and, while many recommendations were made for tightening security, many of which were minor and most of which are already under implementation, some of the major strengths of the college security system were cited as follows:

- Senior campus leadership has a clear interest in improving the security posture of the campus and has taken a measured and proactive approach to security issues posed by expected campus growth;
- The college has an emergency plan that is very advanced compared to similar institutions;
- The college employs appropriate personnel to direct and manage security;
- Emergency call systems are installed in buildings and in parking lots;
- A uniformed security force provides patrol, response, and monitoring services;
- There are imminent plans for an outdoor alarm and PA system;
- Security cables for computers and associated equipment are used; and
- Electronic security measures such as access control and video systems are deployed.

But, naturally, there is more to be done.

Later this morning you will be meeting Bob Kumpf, our new Director of College Security, or, as Jim McGinty calls him, our “top cop.” We are pleased to have someone of Bob's impressive capabilities and experience to oversee our campus security program, and we are considering him our new greatest strength in protecting the campus, eminently capable of implementing our primary opportunities for improving campus security. In addition, consulting with Bob Kumpf on specific issues of Homeland Security and serving as my representative to the campus Safety and Security Committee will be Bray Barnes, new Assistant to the President, whom you will also be meeting later on. While I'm on this general subject, I might also add that Vice President Richard Strada, Dean Benny Castillo, and Bray Barnes will also be working in collaboration with The Richard Stockton College to develop a unique 3-1-1 articulated master's degree program in Homeland Security. So we are coming at this area from many different angles to create many opportunities from which our students will stand to benefit.

We also continue in-depth conversations with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection concerning our Mill Creek Sailing Center venture and our Center for Environmental Sustainability program.

And, on other environmental fronts, we have recently been in communication with the Commission on Higher Education in New Jersey about the development of several “green” job training and academic programs and we continue to build green in all our new campus construction. We are also looking into stimulus dollars available for the development of green initiatives. A recent article in USA Today noted that: “With an increased interest in the environment and growth in the ‘green collar’ job sector, colleges and universities are beginning to incorporate sustainability into their programs. From MBAs in sustainable business practices to programs that give students the technical training necessary to operate wind turbines, students have an increasing array of options to choose from.” (USA Today, 8-2-09). Well, wind turbines tend to run pretty well without operators—but you get the point. We are already a leader among our peers in this field and we intend to remain so in this growing field of study.

The next risk area that colleges and universities must consider lies in the area of strategic planning and thinking. This involves the college’s high-level goals that are aligned with and support our major mission as a collegiate institution. One of the major risks inherent in strategic planning is to ignore basic planning assumptions that serve to align planning with mission and goals. We are currently in the process of developing the college’s new strategic planning document for 2010-2015, based on the following general assumptions:

1. Institutional growth will continue to a maximum total of 20,000 students on the main campus (developed to 30 percent of its land mass) by 2025, 8,000 students at the SEC by 2025, and an estimated 4,000 at other extension sites to be developed by 2020 for a total college enrollment of 32,000 students. Again, the time frame for that growth is 15 years—not so far away that we can afford to rest on our laurels.
2. The major mission of the college will continue to be to serve the transfer needs of our students using specialized career and jobs programs, work partnerships, certificate programs, and voc-tech alliances to serve the career needs of the county, as they present themselves.
3. The major academic partnerships the college pursues will focus on making transfer baccalaureate and master’s programs available on the college’s main campus or create alliances with schools that offer our graduates distinct academic advantages. We will continue to work to arrange articulation agreements that allow our students to transfer seamlessly to quality schools with financial assistance opportunities. Naturally, seeing our burgeoning partnership with Kean University mature and flourish will be at the top of this agenda.
4. The major value of the college will continue to be academic quality, variety and excellence of teaching/learning, seeking a national reputation for the academic preparedness and success of our graduates.

5. The educational delivery modes will continue to blend traditional classroom education with cutting edge technology in distance learning modes.
6. The college will continue to partner with the county and with business enterprises to develop resources that benefit the students and the citizens of Ocean County.
7. We will continue to affirm a culture of assessment leading to improved accountability, transparency, and overall institutional quality.
8. Increasing globalization will require further internationalization of the curriculum.
9. Social and cultural change in the larger society will continue to place demands on the college for organizational flexibility.
10. We seek continuing fiscal support from the state and county, but we recognize the need to expand the college's capital position through effective and low-risk leveraging and sustained growth.

From these assumptions we will develop the strategies that will carry us forward for the next five years. We are developing the mission and goals statements through a series of what we are calling “strategic conversations” with various campus groups in order to give the planning document wide exposure and receive representative feedback. Through this transparent and collaborative process, we hope to avoid the risk of developing a plan that is counterintuitive and unrealistic. Indeed, we hope to identify and implement specific plans to sustain a relevant, viable, healthy institution resilient enough, honest enough, tough enough to navigate the uncharted waters we are about to enter, and emerge as a true family, a fully functional family, a family that cares for one another.

The third major area of risk lies in the operational, day-to-day activities of the institution. It is crucial that our management processes produce the desired outcomes and that they are fair and consistent throughout the workday and across the college community. We run the risk of disorganization and, at some point, of organizational collapse, if we do not assure that we achieve synchronicity in management operations. As you know, we have just completed a very thorough and in-depth reorganization of many college departments, and we implore each of you to set about acquainting yourself with how the new operational structures specifically affect your own work responsibilities. From the details of knowing someone’s name and title and job function to the larger framework of understanding new reporting structures and work processes, each of us is responsible for making this reorganization work effectively for the college.

I believe that the new organizational structures will provide great rewards for the institution and will not create significant risk—because I have confidence in everyone’s ability to both collaborate and transform. Like the proverbial woodland pond which, when a pebble is tossed in reverberates all over, so we at Ocean County College are all changed by any single change and with this reorganization, I believe, changed for the better.

The final, and perhaps the most complex, area of risk to which colleges and universities are subject is financial. While we have been financially secure for these past ten years, enabled

by sound fiscal practices to afford both facilities and staff improvements and expansions without crippling increases in tuition (and no increase in tuition or fees for FY 10), we must continue to be ever wary in our current changing and challenging economic times. We are, naturally, acutely aware of the current fiscal crisis in the State of New Jersey, a looming deficit of eight to ten billion—that's billion with a "b"—dollars, without ... now, listen to this ... without federal stimulus funding next year to use for bail out dollars. How much is New Jersey's total budget? Who knows the answer? Well, it's \$30 billion. The current projected deficit is nearly 1/3 of the total State budget! Scary!

And, we are also aware that County tax revenues will no doubt decline as the value of real estate falls. This decline, in turn, will alter the county's financial position. As a result, we must assume anything might happen, from a "best scenario" of flat funding to truly draconian budget cuts at the state level and perhaps, for the first time in a decade, no increase at the local level, and we must begin to prepare immediately. I have told the Vice Presidents to plan "as if" there will be a hiring freeze, in the hope that there will not be—but conscious that there might be. We are not currently thinking we will need furloughs or 'rifs' or any of the other cost-cutting measures which many other colleges and universities have been forced to employ—because we are growing and have managed costs well. But we must prepare for a "worst case" scenario, and we will.

I remind you of the recent faculty furlough and other major budget cuts at the nation's largest public university system, California State University system, which currently faces a \$584 million deficit. As noted by the Associated Press: "When California college students return to campus this fall, they'll find crowded classrooms, less access to faculty and counselors, fewer campus services and more difficulty getting classes they need to graduate—while paying higher fees. . . . Faced with steep declines in tax revenue, states are reducing funding to public colleges across the country." (AP, 8/6/09). Is it even reasonable to think that New Jersey will find a solution its financial crisis that can possibly avoid severe cuts in State funding for higher education with no federal stimulus dollars in FY2011?

Now, furloughing faculty and implementing other radical cost-saving measures are not the kind of things we want to do or even think about at Ocean County College, but the predicament at Cal State, just like the predicament at General Motors, reminds us that more than ever, we must plan for an economic future that will probably, for good or for ill, be changed forever from the economic past that we have known, those years from 1946 to the present of almost uninterrupted prosperity and certainly the "boom" years for higher education. It is my sincere belief that we have entered into a new phase of economic reality for higher education in America and those of us who are not braced to acclimate ourselves to it will be looking at Cal State's fate—crowding, reduced services, higher costs, layoffs, turmoil. A 20 percent or greater reduction in state support may soon also be a reality in New Jersey where the state budget deficit is potentially proportionately greater than that in California. And it is hard to see a restoration of funds anywhere in the near future. That will mean that colleges and universities will have to work out their own financial destiny, turning risk into reward and finding better survival models.

It is my guess that we will soon see, across the higher education spectrum, expanded parameters of productivity, more intensified utilization of space and time, new modes of delivery for online learning, changes in our definitions of class size, changes in our definition of the work year, more sharing in employee responsibilities for standard benefits, and fewer frills benefits

across the board. These are the simple economic realities of our time. If colleges and universities don't look at changing the paradigm and continue to put themselves at risk by attempting to continue "business as usual" in a failed or failing mode, they will be taking the biggest risk of all, the risk of financial collapse.

In its long history, the national college self-study process and the various Commissions on Higher Education who make accreditation decisions across the nation have most often failed to grant re-accreditation to a college for one primary reason: financial difficulty. Commissioners recognize that many institutional difficulties can be overcome, but when a college or university cannot find a way out of financial difficulty, just as a business, it must close its doors. It does not even have the luxury of a bankruptcy declaration. We will see many, many changes in the lives of academic institutions of higher learning in the next decade; but our scenario at OCC will be growth and prosperity—not collapse— (pause) provided we all recognize the risk and pull together ... provided we willingly accept responsibility for our own life as an institution. Therein lay the wellsprings of institutional self respect—if we have the collective character to do it, to see it through.

One very specialized area of financial risk comes in the form of what risk managers call "tort liability," which is defined as "a civil wrong, other than a breach of contract, for which courts will allow a damage remedy." Colleges and universities are particularly susceptible to this type of liability because they deal with students and courts can often require a higher standard of care for students than for the general public, ruling, on occasion, that the institution is actually obligated to prevent a foreseeable harm (Risk Management in Higher Education, <http://www.answers.com/topic/risk-management-in-higher-education>). Several common sources for institutional liability stem from alcohol use and campus crime, particularly sexual assault. As a result, the college needs to increase environmental security to reduce the risk of financial jeopardy through legal negligence, and with the assistance of Bray Barnes, who is an attorney, that process is underway. But, let me say it again—we can't leave it up to Bray, or Bob, or Jim. We all have to pull on an oar.

There are other forms of legal-financial risk beside tort liability such as contract liability, lawsuits, and compliance issues (which grow increasingly complicated every year). The college can and does take every precaution against such risk, but it must budget carefully to allow for ever-intensifying legal and procedural costs. These dollars tied up in litigation and potential litigation sadly subtract from what can be spent on teaching/learning, our major mission. Thus, one of our goals for financial stability is to carefully monitor this area of risk and attempt to reduce unnecessary legal and procedural costs.

A recent law suit for what is being called "educational malpractice" has broadened even further the college's risk in this litigious age. As the *Chronicle of Higher Education* stated in an article on the educational malpractice case which involved a charge of failure to teach the course described in the catalog, "Whether or not [this] argument gains any legal traction, it's certain that cases like [this] will multiply, as will pressures on colleges from other directions. Higher education's role in American society is undergoing a seismic shift, similar in magnitude to that experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. The unmistakable trend this time [is clear]: Public demand for greater accountability from colleges for the fulfillment of their core missions and a cry for demonstrable values, results, and efficiency." (*Chronicle*, 8/11/09, 1) The article continues, "... the economy has altered the relationship among students, families, the government, and higher

education. [We] have reported on the race to community colleges: Students want to stay home, cut costs, pay lower tuition, have flexible schedules so they can work, and take classes that teach marketable skills.”

If these words are not embedded in our consciousness as we assess our position in the higher educational community, they should be.

And, if the loss of college finances to fund litigation expenses is not enough, there is yet a higher price to pay. As has been noted on this topic, “the worst danger in more law suits ... would be the loss of academic freedom. Colleges already face a historically unprecedented degree of regulation and accountability. A major challenge in the decade to come will be reclaiming and redesigning academic freedom for this post-boom period.” (*Chronicle*, 8/11/09, 2). Colleges and universities have a wonderful opportunity to address this emerging educational consumerism by creating or expanding environments “that emphasize planning, assessment, intentionality, and the articulation of basic objectives. . . . helping each student create a comprehensive and personal master plan for his or her college experience,”—and, I might add, for his or her life’s goals and dreams. With our commitment to the Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College Experience, I am pleased to say we are well on our way to influencing our students’ lifelong character.

In addition, general financial risk lies in a failure to protect the college’s assets—human, monetary, and physical—and so we must always operate in an asset-protection mode. It perhaps seems hopelessly annoying to some of you when someone comes around looking for an identification tag on your PC or attempting to locate a purchase order or equipment that has gone astray. All of these functions, however, come under the heading of protecting our assets and, at the moment, the college has many, many millions of dollars in total assets—which require a lot of protection!

As we consider the four categories of institutional risk, we must also note that there are other interrelated components that cut across these risk categories. We should be aware of how each of these influences risk and our ability to manage it:

- There is the college value system, a sum total of the culture and values of the institution, that guides all actions; we must be ever mindful of these values and not allow our institutional challenges to put these values at risk;
- There is the operational setting, the various processes used by the institution to develop and implement its strategic plan; we must keep these processes efficient, cost-effective, and focused on outcomes;
- There are also internal and external events that might impact on an institution’s ability to achieve its goals; one cannot necessarily manage events or even control them, but we must make every effort to stay alert and to have a range of alternative, prioritized options with which to respond to both the expected and the unexpected; very simply, good management mitigates risk from external variables;
- We also need to share information with stakeholders; knowledge also mitigates risk;

- And finally, we need to adopt surveillance as an institutional attitude, monitoring our collegiate and external worlds on a daily basis and taking corrective action as needed to keep our community—our family—safe.

I think it is more than fair to say that we live in perilous times as we experience the “seismic shift” of which the *Chronicle* speaks and can locate significant risk around us in both the external environment and the economic world. It is therefore our supreme challenge to secure our institution against these factors and to assure success and the rewards of success for our students and our colleagues by our vigilance, by our teamwork, and by our foresight. In short, we need to demonstrate institutional “character,” accept responsibility for our own institutional life, manage and sustain a culture of self-respect that commands the respect of others in our community and the world of higher education.

I wish you all a successful and rewarding semester in these challenging times and assure you that the college will do everything in its power to keep everyone safe and protected, in as many ways as the notions of safety and protection can be defined. Thank you!

Finally, it now gives me great pleasure to announce our EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR—who through hard work and dedication is well-deserving of this honor: Terence Cleary, Acting Director of the Library.

Terry has been with the College since 1997, serving as Library Circulation Manager. Since the retirement of the Library Director in June of last year, Terry has stepped up and provided leadership to the Library operations. His personal integrity, collaborative nature, service to students, and commitment to the Library have all been praised by his colleagues, who have expressed their deep respect and admiration for him.

Congratulations, Terry....