

President's Colloquium Remarks

January 18, 2006

Happy New Year! Welcome to the Spring 2006 Semester.

As we begin this New Year and this new semester, I'd like to focus with you this morning on the subject of global technology, not only as it affects our College, but as it affects our lives, our communities, our society, and the future of our children.

If you have not yet read Tom Friedman's book, *The World is Flat*, let me recommend it to you as a stunning portrait of how digital technology is re-configuring the world. The convergence of globalization with explosive advances in digital technologies has, in an historic instant, changed our world in ways that some of us cannot even imagine—but must, nonetheless, integrate into our lives and into the way we live those lives. The introduction of the Netscape browser made possible, directly or indirectly, all of the following amazing tools in just the past ten years: work-flow software, open-sourcing, outsourcing, off shoring, supply-chaining, in-sourcing, in/forming, and the wireless connectors for mobile technology. In addition, the entry of India and China and many other emerging nations into the global digital economy has, in the blink of an eye, changed the economic, social, and political boundaries that defined the twentieth century.

As Friedman notes, whenever fundamental change occurs in human systems—like the rise of the nation state or the Industrial Revolution—the whole world changes in profound ways; but, he adds, “there is something about the new technological change that is going

to be qualitatively different from other such profound changes: the speed and breadth with which it is taking hold. . . . And that is why the great challenge of our time will be to absorb these changes in ways that do not overwhelm people, but also do not leave them behind.”
(46)

Friedman refers to this change as “flattening the world,” and describes it as a horizontal and collaborative way to do the world’s business, a very different paradigm from the vertical hierarchies of most of the capitalist structures of the twentieth century. The great challenge to America in this brave new world, as it is to all the other nations of the world, is to stay competitive without sacrificing the safeguards and protections that we as a nation have come to depend upon as integral to a modern liberal democracy. This is no mean task and is a challenge to every institution within our society, not the least of these, the institution of education—and the schools, colleges and universities that comprise it.

As I try to apply some of the global analyses of Friedman’s book to our local circumstance at Ocean County College, I am persuaded that the following six ideas need to have currency, not only in our general awareness, but also in our vision, our strategic planning, and our day-to-day operations:

First, we need to be aware of the multiple new paths open to us in the delivery of learning opportunities for our students. Not only do we need to consider the array of distance learning venues made available by the new technologies and the combinations of learning options that meld traditional delivery with digital resources, we must

also look globally for linkages, training opportunities, collaborations, virtual practices, and new specializations that will further prepare our students for 21st Century realities.

Second, we have arrived at a new era in man's evolution where the imaginings of Marshall McLuhan's Global Village are not only practical realities, but essential necessities with which we must equip our students. So, we need to be aware that for our students, job security will come, in the main, from the ability to train and re-train for new work situations. Maintaining skill levels commensurate with the emergence of new markets will guarantee our students lifetime employment, if not a life-long job, as in the past. Thus, we must continue to teach content, but we must also educate our students to be intentional learners—and, "how to learn." This will become their most valuable skill.

Third, we need to be aware that America is currently failing to produce the number of scientists and engineers that soon will be needed to provide the brainpower in the digital world. The National Science Board recently reported that the number of Americans who receive science degrees has fallen to seventeenth in the world (we ranked third 30 years ago). Science and engineering degrees now represent sixty percent of all bachelors degrees earned in China as contrasted to thirty-one percent in the United States. Factoring out the science degrees, 46 per cent graduate with engineering degrees in China, while only 5 percent graduate with engineering degrees in the US. Even though China is playing catch-up, it will not be long before the relative numbers will shift and so we must be alert, encouraging

our students toward math, engineering, science and computer science learning.

Fourth, we must also be aware that when jobs are sent abroad to foreign workers, businesses not only save 75 per cent on wages, but gain 100 per cent in productivity. (260) American colleges and schools need to be thinking of ways to train our students to be more enthusiastic learners so that they will also be more productive learners and, eventually, more productive members of the work force. The new technologies require energy, innovation, and productivity and these are traits that can and should be learned. In his book, Friedman quotes a Texas computer science professor who is also an IT systems designer, as follows: "I taught at a local university. It was disheartening to see the poor work ethic of many of my students. Of the students I taught over six semesters, I'd only consider hiring two of them. The rest lacked the creativity, problem-solving abilities, and passion for learning." (261) But we hold in our hands the ability to change all of that by cultivating in the students we recruit and teach awareness of these values so crucial to their academic and work-life success.

Fifth, we must also look to our own daily work processes and take advantage of the multiple opportunities to do our jobs more efficiently and cost effectively. There exist some work functions for which there are simply no shortcuts, but there are also many that might benefit from the collaborative spirit of the new technologies, whether through outsourcing, in-sourcing, or through the convergence of better hardware, better work-flow software, and innovative restructuring of work processes. I invite all of you to become analysts of

your own office systems and be alert to opportunities for process improvement while maintaining or improving cost effectiveness.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, I think we all need to think about the five action themes that Friedman advocates in this age of transition that is upon us. He calls upon all Americans to consider the following, both to maximize the benefits of and provide the necessary protections for the inevitable changes of the flat world era:

1. Elect political leaders who understand the flat world;
2. Press the government to forge tools that will guarantee employability for all, creating legal and institutional frameworks for pension and health care portability, as well as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid stability;
3. Investigate new systems that will provide legitimate wage insurance;
4. Consider collaborations between social and environmental issues and corporate issues seeking win-win solutions to potential moral conflicts;
5. Find ways to develop strategies for a new generation of parents who can work to prevent the socially disruptive shock of the flat world. As David Baltimore, the Nobel-Prize winning President of Caltech has said, "I look at the kids who come to Caltech and they grew up in families that encouraged them to work hard. . . and to understand that they need to hone their skills to play an important role in the world." (303)

As Friedman tells us:

On such a flat earth, the most important attribute you can have is creative imagination—the ability to be the first on your block to figure out how all these enabling tools can be put together in new and exciting ways to create products, communities, opportunities, and profits. That has always been America’s strength, because America was, and still is, the world’s greatest dream machine. (469)

I believe that we, too, at Ocean County College, have the ability and the energy for just this type of creativity. Armed with awareness and skill, we can be what we need to be for our students. We CAN be their dream machine.