

Education in a Time of Chaos and Distrust: A College President Speaks



An Op-Ed by Dr. Jon Larson, President, Ocean County College

In times of chaos, mixed messages, confusions, reversals, fear and unrest, on federal, state and local levels, I wish to be clear about where we stand.

First, the members of the New Jersey county colleges stand with you, our students and the members of our communities. We always have. We offer you accessibility, affordability, and excellence. That has not changed since our inception almost fifty years ago and it will not change now. At Ocean County College, my college, we did not raise our tuition at all this year and we will raise it only slightly next year (as a result of the anticipated reduction in State Aid)—and, akin with other community colleges across the state, we will stay affordable. I cannot say it more simply: We are the least expensive and best college education you can get for the first two years. This fact is incontrovertible. Currently, more than 175,000 students taking close to two million credits at New Jersey's county colleges seem to agree with me.

Second, we stand with our sister colleges and universities across the state, the schools to which our graduates transfer. We are proud of the transfer agreements we have reached with these schools and with the quality students we send them, students who succeed as well or better than their four-year counterparts. We are particularly proud, at Ocean County College, of our partnership with Kean University whereby students at Ocean County College can effect transfer on our own campus and complete the baccalaureate degree right here in Ocean County at a considerable financial savings. We encourage a greater number of such partnerships in county colleges across the state.

Third, we stand firm in our commitment to provide every form of student assistance available. We at Ocean anticipate distributing more than \$26 million dollars to our students in student financial aid this year and we trust that the Obama and Christie administrations will stand firm in their solid promises to provide the needed funds for us to keep this promise next year as well. We are especially deeply committed to the NJ STARS program that was designed to reward positive student learning outcomes and guarantee New Jersey students who continued to perform well academically the necessary financial support throughout their college career in the public colleges. This plan has continued to encourage an influx of quality students into New Jersey colleges, starting their educations at their affordable community colleges, who might otherwise never have gone to college at all, anywhere. The more people who attend college, the better off we all are.

Finally, we stand together. Everyone in the higher education community must put aside petty differences to unite in the need for order and honor in this time of chaos. This is not the time for old complaints or sector rivalry to surface. This is the time, instead, to pledge to defend what we all believe in: That higher education is the absolute right of every American.