

Remarks to the Commission, 10-26-07
OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE: Moving Forward
Dr. Jon Larson, President, OCC



Thank you, Chairman Downes, members of the Commission, my fellow president, Ed Yaw, and our friend and colleague, Jane Oates. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, and the faculty, staff and students of OCC, it is my pleasure to welcome you, and the Commission staff, to our beautiful campus here in Ocean County.

With us today are our Board of Trustees Chairman, Van Thulin, Chair of our Foundation Board, Dave Wintrode, senior members of our leadership team, and colleagues from Kean University.

It is with deep pride that I speak to you this morning about the rapid growth and development of Ocean County College, a very fine academic institution, a college moving forward, a phenomenon that we believe strongly affirms the commitment that the State of New Jersey has made over the last forty-plus years to its public two-year colleges, a commitment that needs to continue to keep pace with the growth of this vibrant, creative and responsive sector. We realize and appreciate the depth of your commitment to our vitally important mission.

This growth is a phenomenon that also identifies a profound change in our sector and defines the emergence of a “new community college,” one which seeks continuously to broaden its intellectual mission, to improve and strengthen its academic quality; one that carves out new territories, and impacts our fundamental *raison d’etre* as we face our responsibility for addressing the educational needs of our county, state, and nation.

As noted in a 2007 publication titled, “Tough Choices OR Tough Times,” issued by the Commission on Skills of the American Workforce, utilizing research from the National Center on Education and the Economy, “This is a world in which a very high level of preparation in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, science, literature, history, and the arts will be an indispensable foundation for everything that comes after for most members of the workforce, who will have to be ... good at both analysis and synthesis, [and be] creative and innovative, self-

disciplined and well-organized, able to learn very quickly and work well as a member of a team and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes in the labor market. It is a world in which comfort with ideas and abstractions is the passport to a good job, in which creativity and innovation are the keys to the good life, in which high levels of education – a very *different* kind of education than most have had – are going to be the only security there is.” All of us involved with New Jersey higher education, but especially community colleges, are responsible for responding to this challenge—through continuous growth and adaptation.

One of the simplest measures of our growth at OCC is the exceptional enrollment increases that we continue to experience. Over the past seven years, we have seen an almost 29% increase in student enrollments during the regular academic terms and far greater increases in Quick Terms and several summer sessions; this fall our traditional semester and Quick Term topped 10,000 students for the first time in the college’s history. Our credit hours in the Kean@Ocean program have increased 95.3% in the past year and our Kean student numbers have swelled from 369 to 594, or 61%. Along with a copy of my remarks, I have provided you with a detailed report on the progress of our unique partnership with Kean University through the Kean@Ocean Alliance.

And, with the largest number of NJ STARS students in the state last year, we have increased that number this year by 28% to our current total of 574 STARS students, still an all-New Jersey high. While these are impressive numbers, and speak strongly of the success of our college, they are characteristic of the extraordinary success of the entire community college sector in New Jersey and of our ability to fulfill our missions and meet the evolving needs of our students with quality programs and superior teaching. We are privileged to have a New Jersey STARS student and an OCC graduate enrolled in the Kean@Ocean degree completion program here with us today. Please welcome STARS student, Molly Rose, and Kean@Ocean student, John Richards.

Naturally, having more students means that we need more space, and so we have undertaken an ambitious facilities development plan that includes new construction, facilities renovation, and increased attention to major deferred maintenance needs. Though we are engaged in far too many projects to describe in detail here today, a comprehensive report is available on the college’s web site. While the construction will create a modicum of inconvenience and temporary dislocation for us, our efforts will, in the end, dramatically expand

our campus and enlarge our service areas. And this comprehensive capital improvements plan—ours and those of all New Jersey community colleges—identifies one of the areas of greatest need: funds for capital construction.

By February of 2008, Ocean County College will have completed a new Facilities Master Plan which will provide guidance for construction, renovation and site work on roads, parking, infrastructure, building locations, environmental permits, transportation impacts, signage, and athletic fields for an entirely new campus footprint essentially **doubling** the current developed campus area.

Currently in progress is the first of three phases of the already-planned construction in the expansion of our Fine Arts Building. The first phase is the construction of a new academic wing and is scheduled for completion by July 2008. It is a 15,000 square foot addition housing seven new instructional spaces as well as faculty offices, lobbies, and support space. The second and third phases will renovate the east and west wings including theater renovation with final completion scheduled for April 2009. The new structure will be outfitted with photovoltaic cell panels on the roof to provide free electric energy from the Sun.

We are also planning the construction of a new academic building, a 31,000 square foot building with fourteen hi-tech classrooms, two lap-top classrooms, and one PC computer lab as well as faculty offices, a faculty lounge, and a student lounge. The structure will have additional parking for faculty and staff, a wireless environment and, like the Fine Arts Building, will be ADA and LEED compliant, utilizing various “green design” features. Occupancy is planned for fall 2009.

In addition, plans are under current review by the NJ State Department of Environmental Protection for the construction of the J. Phillip Citta Community Sailing Center, primarily funded by former trustee Joseph A. Citta, in a near-by river front county park, in support of the college’s championship sailing program. Our sailing team was the recent winner of the Penn Regatta where we defeated host University of Pennsylvania, Fordham, Drexel, Villanova, Delaware, Monmouth, Army and George Washington University. We anticipate final approval very soon and construction will begin shortly thereafter.

As well, if you parked in front of the Fine Arts Center today, you may have noticed a new building near the North end of the tennis courts. It is the new Ocean Inc. Child Development Center, a state-of-the-art facility for the children of our county and our college community.

Construction of the Verizon wireless communication cell phone tower is due to begin in spring of 2008, to be located East of the Facilities Maintenance building, from which we will have the ability to provide a wide area wireless network covering the entire campus mall, as well as to permit Verizon to film a TV commercial on our entrance road, asking “can you hear me now?”

Also, detailed plans and specifications for the Planetarium renovation are nearing completion with a projected reopening date of September 2008. With regard to this item, I am pleased to report that the fundraising efforts for the Planetarium are phenomenal, sparked by the leadership and generosity of Trustee Stephan Leone and his wife Judi, as well as by the dedication of Trustee Judge Robert Fall, and the extraordinarily generous support of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and especially of our champion, Freeholder Director Jack Kelly. We are rapidly approaching our funding goals as we “reach for the stars.”

We are also grateful for the wonderful outpouring of community support organized by the Save the Planetarium Committee which has been very active in grass roots community fundraising. Also, as a result of the efforts of the OCC Foundation, all proceeds, more than \$200,000 from this year’s Summer Gala, were dedicated to funding the new planetarium technology.

In addition, we are engaged in an ambitious learning outcomes assessment program and an institutional planning process directly tied to resource allocation that have both been used as models for institutional effectiveness across the community college sector in the middle states region. Our developmental program in reading and writing has undergone a major renovation in order to respond more readily and rapidly to the language skills needs of our student population, and our distance learning and information literacy education continues to expand exponentially to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century learning technologies.

To respond to the heightened awareness of campus security issues caused by the tragedy at Virginia Tech University, we have formed a joint college-community task force to address the

many issues that bear on maintaining a safe and secure campus environment. This summer, as part of the combined work of college and community personnel, we staged a live shooter drill here on campus with the Toms River Police Department headed by Chief Mike Mastronardy. The drill was treated as an actual event and both the college personnel and the police responded rapidly and effectively. It served as a frightening reminder to all as to why we need to have effective readiness strategies for campus safety.

Our Task Force, made up of highly qualified security personnel from the college and the community, has already taken many actions to better secure our campus with the purchase of a text messaging system and classroom security telephones. It is in the process of purchasing other security items such as sirens, locks, additional security cameras, digital signs, and radios, to name just a few. The four sub-committees of the Task Force have submitted final reports and so the new campus security plan will be in place very soon.

We continue to offer global educational opportunities to our students, recently expanded to include exchanges with Kumamoto University in Southern Japan. I recently traveled to Japan with Dr. Dawood Farahi, President of Kean University, along with Dr. Robert Cirasa, Executive Director of Kean@Ocean, as well as with my OCC colleagues Dr. James McGinty, Dr. Frank Wetta, and Dr. Martin Novelli. This journey through Japan and to the university and our meetings with key persons from Kumamoto allowed us to add this Japanese partnership to our growing and impressive list of partnerships within a global learning network which include active initiatives with universities and cultural institutions in Israel, China, England, Italy and others.

We have taken advantage of our unique location on the New Jersey shore and within the Jersey Pinelands to offer educational programming and co-curricular activities that use the natural environment as both their laboratory and their playing field. The Barnegat Bay National Estuary Program (BBNEP) and the Ocean County College sailing team have demonstrated that there is no better ecological research source for estuarial study and no better training ground for competitive sailing than our own Barnegat Bay.

There is not enough time this morning to list for you the myriad activities that define a college on the move, a college that has viewed deep change as the fundamental energy that defines its vision. We embrace change because we must, because it is the nature of the world in which we live, because, quite simply, we change or we wither. To succeed, we need your understanding, your help, and your support in this our most important partnership of all, our partnership with you who enable and endorse our mission and our very being.

Thank you—and, again, welcome to Ocean County College.

THE COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION'S 1998 capacity study cited serious access deficiencies to public baccalaureate

higher education in the NJ coastal region. The 2003 study *A Blueprint for Excellence* exhorted **creative, cost effective solutions** to address capacity issues, provide education in underserved regions, meet high-demand program needs, and accommodate a diverse population and working adults. The 2005 report cited fiscal constraints as impediments.



Kean University & Ocean County College

Kean@Ocean

- ◆ degree completion program serving students seeking the baccalaureate
- ◆ addresses need for accessible higher education using affordable NJ institutions
- ◆ increases capacity for Kean with minimal investment
- ◆ accommodates increase in NJ high school graduates seeking NJ higher education
- ◆ addresses needs of geographically-bound working adults
- ◆ reduces outmigration of coastal region students, who leave at a significantly higher rate
- ◆ promotes economic vitality of the coastal region
- ◆ provides a better-educated workforce to attract employers to the area

Student Demand

- ◆ fall 2007 semester, 594 students enrolled in 92 sections of Kean@Ocean classes
- ◆ Kean@Ocean enrollment increase of 61.1% from Fall 2006
- ◆ spring 2008 110 sections of Kean@Ocean classes scheduled
- ◆ 350 OCC students still in associate programs enrolled in Kean Joint Admissions
- ◆ three years of OCC record-breaking enrollment, in part attributable to Kean@Ocean
- ◆ opportunity to achieve associate and bachelor's degree for less than \$25,000
- ◆ residents with geographical or financial constraints gain access to baccalaureate

High Demand Degree Completion Opportunities

- ◆ 13 bachelor's degree programs seamlessly articulated: Accounting; Criminal Justice; Elementary Education K-5, Elementary Education K-8; English; History, History-Teacher Education option; Management; Media & Film – Film Option; Nursing, Physical Education and Health; Sociology; and Special Education K-5

Cost Effective

- ◆ uses renovated classrooms and other instructional space available at off-peak times
- ◆ shared library, disability, testing, student center, and food services

Resource Sharing

- ◆ Kean and Ocean currently share a wide range of space and services that have not to date required duplication. This plan will change in the expansion to a Kean branch campus, but the current minimal investment meets the needs of Kean@Ocean students.