

**President's
State of the College Address
March 21, 2002
Jon H. Larson, Ph.D.**

Thank you. I will annually be bringing a state of the college report to you at the beginning of the spring term. I am hoping we will soon, perhaps next year, be able to add a professional development and welcome day just prior to the start of the fall and spring semesters. The many other good reasons to do this also provide a venue for me to present to you an overview of where we stand with regard to our overarching vision for the future of Ocean County College, a vision we will be creating together.

Some initial efforts at defining this future have begun already. We will be adding specific task forces with faculty and staff representation to flesh out the ideas emerging from one of these initial visioning exercises, which we are calling our Long-Range Fiscal Stability Plan.

The goal of that exercise is to project the financial needs of the college, looking out twenty years. We realize that costs will be substantial. They involve campus expansion, new off campus centers, changes in the mix of programs needed to serve the citizens of Ocean County, many new faculty and staff, new equipment and physical space, and a myriad of other related issues. Therefore, we wanted a plan to present to our Board of Trustees and funding agencies that will get us there in a manner that is both fiscally responsible and reflects the quality found at all collegiate institutions of renown in the nation.

While I do not want to raise false expectations, I feel obligated to make note of one concept that has been discussed during this visioning exercise. We will be appointing a task force to evaluate the feasibility of an addition to the college's mission that would permit the awarding of the baccalaureate degree in

certain program areas not currently offered at nearby institutions. A related effort will deal with alternative solutions, including the development of baccalaureate degree completion programs on or near our campus offered by other institutions or perhaps a regional upper division college. I ask you to consider participating on this task force and to communicate your interest to Dr. Parrish.

I am happy to report that the College is in excellent shape. Our enrollment is growing, which is a good thing because that drives growth in our financial resources. Again this spring, enrollment is up by 5.6% and admissions applications for the fall semester are, to-date, up by well over 20%.

Our \$37 million budget is allowing departments to do more. The College is now able to more effectively tell the story of how well we are educating our students. There are additional funds in this budget to give our faculty and staff more options, especially technologically, in providing a quality learning experience and assisting students to develop. For that blessing, we have our Board of Chosen Freeholders to thank. Their support, especially the support of the College's liaison to the Freeholders, OCC alumnus John Bartlett, has made the difference in permitting us to tackle some issues that have for too long been on the back burner.

Faculty and staff are continuing to grow and develop themselves through participation in professional association conferences, advanced study, and a modest professional development effort on campus ... one we expect to make a major investment in during the years immediately ahead.

Over the last several months, we have said goodbye to a number of faculty and staff who have retired, and over the next few months, we will say goodbye to several more who have retired with some financial assistance from the sick leave payout program. We'll miss these wonderful colleagues, many of whom have been with the college for two or more decades. But, we have also

added some wonderful new talent. These are people who will respond to the college's needs over the next decade or two. They include Dr. Frank Wetta, Vice President of Academic Affairs; Ilene Cohen, Director of Athletics; Gloria Villalobos, Planetarium Director; Pam Gallagher, our new Budget Director; and Lee Kobus, Director of Academic Technology. In addition, we are adding a bevy of beautiful minds to our outstanding faculty, including Dr. Catherine Murphy, Science, Mary Lou Gilbert, Nursing, Patrick Mitchell, Math, and John Morrison, Humanities.

I am committed to hiring the best people, and I firmly believe that you attract the best by providing them with the best, specifically including the best facilities, the best equipment, and competitive compensation. Our vision will include such a commitment to quality, just as it does at Princeton and at Hopkins and at the flagship campus of every great state university in America. As Joe Louis once said when asked if professional prize fighting was really just about the money, "I don't like money actually, but it quiets my nerves."

The overall climate on the campus that I sense is a feeling of positive expectation. Things have settled down and there is a new trust and respect emerging across division lines. Quite naturally, this kind of cultural change never follows a straight line, but I reaffirm our commitment to maintaining this feeling and to continuing to improve interpersonal relations within and among all departments and constituent groups.

I am pleased to report that labor relations on campus are generally positive. Our efforts to address issues as they arise, including some economic issues, rather than waiting until contracts are about to expire before talking about them, have proven beneficial and will, I hope, continue.

For example, we have reached agreement with faculty regarding the teaching of and compensation for distance education courses and have

addressed several other issues of concern to the support staff that emerged from the regular meetings I hold with them to discuss how well we are doing. I am committed to establishing here at OCC a national model of excellence in mutual gains bargaining that will provide for all of us continuing opportunities for winning.

I am committed to investing in our human resources – the college's strength is its outstanding faculty and staff, so it makes good sense to build on that strength. And it is consistent with my belief in providing leadership from the heart. Booker T. Washington wrote, "There are two ways of exerting one's strength: One is pushing down, the other is pulling up." I believe in pulling up!

Starting in the new fiscal year, on July 1, we hope to establish a new professional staff development program providing opportunities for all employees to upgrade their skills, develop new courses and curricula, and enhance student experiences.

We are fortunate to have an extraordinarily able faculty and staff who are not only committed to our students, but are dedicated to our college and community. This is evidenced by the many outstanding activities that faculty and staff immerse themselves in, on and off campus.

For example, Patty Hall, Director of Student Life, was recently appointed to the Board of Directors of "21 Plus", a non-profit agency providing residential, adult training, and employment programs for people over age 21 with developmental disabilities in Ocean County. In addition, Mary Burke, Professor of Computer Studies, and recently appointed Coordinator of our new Faculty Innovation Center, has been a tireless advocate for the advancement of technology on campus. She was recently honored by the Board of Trustees for her outstanding contributions particularly to secondary school teachers in Ocean County engaged in instruction utilizing the Internet and a distributed network of personal computers.

We are also looking forward to opportunities for continued growth in our Tech Prep and Jump Start programs for high school students. 'Jump Start' is being aided by a Trustee Scholarship that makes enrollment for high school juniors and seniors of high ability available for only \$28 per credit. 'Jump Start' is available on campus and, for the first time this year, also offered in Ocean County high schools at the end of the regular school day.

It is too soon to say how well this initiative will be received, but the early indicators are that it will be a tremendous success. We are seeking a second order benefit from the Jump Start program in the form of an improved perception of Ocean County College by parents and college bound young men and women as a college that attracts the highest ability students.

Our new Academy for Lifelong Learning has begun offering wonderful educational opportunities in active adult community centers as well as on campus for Ocean County's population ages 55 and up, so we hope you will be seeing a growing percentage of seniors in your classes.

And, our outreach to the business community by the Center for Business Education and Training, located at our expanding facility at 150 Brick Boulevard, continues to grow. We are presently in talks with Ocean County Government about being their principal provider of training and professional development.

OCC's primary function is to serve the needs of our undergraduate students, some 70% of whom transfer to baccalaureate institutions. This is our bread and butter, and I am proud to say no one does it better. A couple of weeks ago, Admissions and Records received a call from the mother of one of our graduates. She said that her daughter had not been an exceptional student in high school. However, she decided to try OCC to see how she managed. Her daughter graduated, transferred and received a bachelor's degree, and is now in

graduate school. She called to express her gratitude, and to ask that we do the same for her son who is about to graduate from high school. These types of testimonials, which I hear wherever I go in Ocean County, tell me that we are succeeding in our most important role, the core of our mission ... serving ordinary students in whom lie extraordinary possibilities.

As we contemplate our plans for the future, we must always keep clearly in view the core values that have sustained us for nearly 38 years. One of the major planning efforts we will undertake beginning in July is the creation of a new, 20-year, campus facilities master plan. Ken Olsen will be the maestro, orchestrating a study involving yet another task force and seeking input from virtually everyone on campus.

A master planning consultant firm will be hired to provide expertise in collegiate campus development planning. This master plan effort all begins with articulating our understanding of what academic programs we will need, and what their requirements will be, over the next 20 years. So the experience of Ed Martinez and Joe Adamo, Eric Antonelli and Cathryn Murphy of our Science Department in developing a new Bio Tech program from scratch ... soon to be presented to the curriculum committee ... will be a helpful role model for other departments.

The climate within our external community, the people we serve, has never been better. Prospects for growth and development abound. We are partnering with businesses in Ocean County to our mutual advantage, such as our agreement with Sovereign Bank which recently provided us with \$25,000 and free seminars in finance for our new Academy for Lifelong Learning, aimed at the senior community.

Why are community and business partnerships a good thing? Why should we continue to grow and expand? Well, because these efforts are symbolic of

our vitality as an institution. We live in an area that is growing and changing. To remain competitive ... to be better than Brookdale, BU and Berkeley ... we must meet the expectations of our community, or our community will go elsewhere.

We succeed by building on our strengths, and they are substantial. We will stay in the game by adapting ... and one way we will do that is with our building construction programs ... \$30 million in campus renewal and construction including a new 30,000 SF Technology building for which we break ground this summer.

Our enrollment management and marketing plans will help us ensure that our student base continues to increase until we are enrolling a market share of high school graduates comparable to national norms, which should nearly double our current enrollment.

We will continue to upgrade our infrastructure, including our building and office environment. Come see the new office plan and furniture in Admissions and Records and Counseling. An updated and professional-looking environment tells visitors and students that we care, about ourselves and how we serve them – that we are a college which is successful, competent, committed to excellence ... one that can help them succeed in life.

Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.”

We all must dedicate ourselves to the habit of excellence. Our state of mind should never be to get by, to merely go along, or to settle for less than the best. The habit of excellence involves a commitment to work ... to work harder and smarter ... to be committed to continuous self-improvement. This is the essence of our journey. We travel hopefully when we have a vision we can commit to and believe in and work for.

How do we persuade the students of Ocean County to stay in New Jersey and attend college here? By providing them with a vision they will believe in ... and by communicating that vision to the parents who influence college choice. And we know how to get this done.

That is why we are going to establish a nationally ranked intercollegiate athletics program; why we are developing high-quality publications; why we are investing in professional marketing efforts including billboards, print media advertising, radio, and television commercials. This is why we will be building a brand new state of the art on-campus digital TV production studio and providing original programming service in partnership with Ocean County government; and why we will continue to expand our commitment to and investments in technology.

Not only does technology enhance the quality of teaching but it tells the community that we are serious in our efforts to provide them with the best collegiate education available anywhere in America!

This is a vision that is achievable. More than that, it is necessary. It will happen. It will happen here.

Ernest Hemingway, reflecting on his craft, wrote, "Think of what you can do with what there is." Our future is similarly a creative act limited only by our capacity to imagine.

Thank you!