

**FALL SEMESTER COLLOQUIUM
SEPTEMBER 3, 2002
A BOLDER COURSE
JON H. LARSON, PRESIDENT**

The start of a new semester is always a time of excitement and high expectations, but especially in the fall when we return to our familiar rhythms and reawaken to the reds and yellows and browns of autumn. But, though happy to be returning, I am sure that some of you are wondering what precisely this Colloquium is all about, so let's take stock of what our goals for today are.

First, we had fun coming up with a name for this event. Seeking to bring everyone together to raise spirits and aspirations for the new semester, and to capture that in a crystallizing thought, we selected the word Colloquium based on its etymology, from the Latin for colloquy, a dialog or conference. The definition carries an academic coloration and connotes specialists delivering addresses on related topics and entertaining questions about them. We would like this event to become a focus for reflection and discussion and for crystallizing our collective thoughts about our organizational culture, our direction, our destiny as an academic institution. We hope you will find the day's activities constructive, stimulating, and engaging.

As I begin my third year as president, I am filled with a sense of tremendous optimism about our future. This is such a wonderful college and I am so proud of our many champions; and so grateful to our many supporters. Celebrating the beginning of a new academic year and sharing the excitement of new initiatives, progress, and growth, we can all take pleasure in the fine things we have accomplished together ... but, I must tell you, I am not satisfied.

Contemplating our extensive variety of new academic program initiatives, from Chinese Studies to Sign Language Interpreting, I am pleased, but still restless; still anxious to be on about our vitally important work. By this I do not mean merely the work of accommodating our largest enrollment in our history since the peak in 1992, which we may yet surpass before the year is over. No! Our destiny is not just to have the largest enrollment among NJ Community Colleges!

Nor do I mean merely the work of re-building our campus into a model of architectural beauty, quality maintenance and furnishings, technological sophistication and environmental responsibility, from the promenades to the parapets and from the lawns to the laboratories, which we will also accomplish within this decade. No! Our destiny is not just to build the ideal college campus of the future!

Nor do I mean merely the work of developing a strategic plan and budget with the most open and collaborative process anywhere in American higher education ... the most inclusive, interconnected, and flexible of its kind, which we will also accomplish this year and every year thereafter. No! Our destiny lays not in limiting our vision to managerial models, no matter how elegant they may be.

Nor do I mean merely the work of developing a gold medal athletics program from top to bottom, including a national championship, establishing the premier community sailing school on the East coast, and designing a world-class fitness and wellness program, all of which we will initiate this coming year. No! Our destiny is not limited to excellence in health and human performance.

Nor do I mean merely the work of making study abroad in Europe or Asia for a semester or a summer a real option for the students in most of our academic programs, nor merely making our Academy for Lifelong Learning a model of national prominence, nor merely seeing our Jump Start program for high school juniors and seniors considered as a possible pilot project for a statewide dual credit initiative favored by Governor McGreevey. No! No! No!

What I do mean by getting on with our vitally important work is much more! This is a year for which we have some big expectations! Really big expectations! Yes!

This is a year when we can cast aside all that has held us back in the past. A year when we can throw off the intolerable lethargy that bleeds the body and saps the soul of the creative energy we need to live ... to be free ... to innovate ... to try, and fail, and try again ... and to grow! Yes!

And we have come so far already ... I had occasion to walk around the campus with my beautiful wife Judy when she came in for the College picnic last week, and we were remembering our first visit here just two short years ago. We feel so blessed, so happy, and we have such grateful hearts that you have welcomed us, become our friends, our colleagues, our partners in the most exciting time in the history of higher education since the early Greek philosophers began to think deeply about learning and the meaning of life. And we thank you for that. Yes!

And yes, we do live in challenging times, as our 9/11 remembrance next week will attest. But the winds of change are blowing in higher education and we have a compelling obligation to respond ... to become what we can become ... to reinvent this institution into a new kind of college, one that twenty or so years from now we can all look back on and say: "We did that. We formed the prototype of the new era in American higher education. We built the public college of the future and we are proud! We are proud!" Yes!

So, yes, our vitally important work means completing a 20-year campus facilities master plan this year and, yes, we do mean adopting a practically-achievable long-term fiscal stability plan to guide our resource development as we grow, and, yes, we do mean seeking community support for a major Athletic, Recreation and Conference Center and a County-wide Data and Telecommunications Network Operations Center and ... a State-supported upper-division baccalaureate and advanced degree-granting public institution affiliated with Ocean County College! Yes!

And, yes, we will be asking you to volunteer to help with committees and task forces focusing on these initiatives!

Now, you may be thinking, what was wrong with the past 20 years, with who we were and what we were? What is so intolerable that we have to change? What is so compelling about the need to become something different? Well, my response is very simple, very simple ... we had no dream. We had no dream and were divided. We were divided and in turmoil. Our

energy waned, our vision paled, our sails hung slack in the dead calm that resulted ... all hands were on deck and at their stations and I am proud of all of you who were there doing that ... but, it is imagination that rules the world! We need imagination to fill the sails of a great institution such as this ... imagination to catch the winds of change ... to make headway ... to grow! Yes!

Our inaugural Colloquium, then, is an opportunity to remember that “the past is just a good bye”. So, to it, let us say, “Good bye” and get on with the vital work of sharing and elaborating a new vision for Ocean County College. We are here to feel the wind, to choose a bolder course, and keep our hearts as open as a shrine. We will never achieve the excellence we seek with a "trickle-down" approach, so everyone who has a connection to OCC must be free to contribute ... to be a part of our metamorphosis and growth. We can never forget who we are and why we are here. Our purpose is “...to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. We are here to enrich the world...”

Our college is a uniquely American invention, based on the very values that made America a great nation. We are the modern day pioneers of higher education, a living testament to the values of hard work, volunteerism, and venturesomeness. We are the entrepreneurs of the collegiate world. We care for and appreciate the people we serve. We are a living, integral part of our community. We provide a superior education founded upon dedication to high standards and fair and ethical treatment of our students and one another. We believe in ourselves; and we believe in our future ... our destiny.

You know I have said many times that if one were to write a scenario of the perfect setting for achieving a spectacular institutional transformation, one could not improve on the situation we have right here at Ocean county College! All the conditions are in place to achieve the greatness as an academic institution that our community and you, who are the heart and soul of this institution, deserve. We have abundant resources and a growing supply of potential students. We have key support in our local government sponsor with a desire to see the institution excel. We have strong partnerships with those we serve, but with plenty of room to expand and enlarge upon the ways we connect to our community. We enjoy solid support from our legislative delegation and our State’s Governor. We have a pent up desire for recognition

and achievement within our talented faculty. Our staff is hungry to do more and to bask in the glory that comes with being first, being best. We have a new-found and deepening spirit of collegiality and cooperation and a yen for hard work, self-sacrifice, and loyal commitment to the vision of our future. It is a vision that is achievable, practical, and real.

We can be the best ... we can be acknowledged, not just within the boundary lines of this campus, but throughout our community and across the State of New Jersey and perhaps even the nation, as something novel, something unique ... retaining all the qualities that have made this a wonderful place to teach and learn and work ... retaining our local roots and local identity, our emphasis on good teaching, our attention to each student as someone we know and love and respect ... but also recognized for having undergone a metamorphosis that results in a community-based collegiate institution that is new in fundamental and life-changing ways.

I know this will happen. Others will see what I have seen in us, and they will agree, and they, too, will get on board. They will see how much our community, our state, indeed our entire nation, needs what we will become. We will once again be “the first” ... a new model of the modern community college that reaches down and reaches up and reaches out in ways that we presently do not do. And yet we will remain a local college, a public enterprise with close partnerships and alliances that bring the concept of an educated citizenry, envisioned by the founding fathers of our Constitution and articulated by Thomas Jefferson, to a level of practical reality never before achieved in this country or any other.

Without this transformation, quite clearly, we cannot survive and flourish as a nation in a dangerous world where fundamentalist ideology and hatred make a mockery of modern secular culture, bring down our architectural monuments, bankrupt our airline industry, and assault our very idea of civilization. For us, then, to see and to understand the needs that surround us ... needs for the very thing we are here to provide – educating our fellow human beings in the art of living successfully in a civilized world – and yet to simply ignore these needs, to simply turn away ... this is not a thing we can do. We simply must do our part and take on a larger role in the life of our community and become an example of a truly comprehensive institution of

learning, providing universal public higher education opportunity that goes beyond our present mission, but does not hinder nor deflect us from energetically pursuing our present mission.

How, you may ask, can this be done? That is our challenge! We must together navigate a course that takes us to a new world ... a better world ... and become nothing less ... nothing less than the premier public college in New Jersey!

Winston Churchill said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

I'd like to thank each one of you for your dedication and hard work; for seeking out and finding the opportunity in every difficulty we encounter; and for coming together here today in support of each other and in support of our destiny as an academic institution of greatness.
Thank you.