

## **State of the College Address**

Dr. Jon H. Larson

Fall Colloquium

August 31, 2005

Welcome to the start of the Fall 2005 semester and to an academic year that I know is going to be our best ever. With our collective energy and commitment, how can we fail!! I'd like to share with you this morning some thoughts I have about our college community and the nature of our ongoing mission. My thoughts this morning focus on the idea of community and how we work on a daily basis to strengthen its bonds.

In his book, Against All Enemies, Richard Clark, former Chairman of the Counter Terrorism Security Group (CSG) in the Bush and Clinton administrations, concludes that, among other things, the failure to integrate the information known about threats to America by our twenty-two separate security agencies in great measure explains our lack of preparedness for the events that transpired on September 11, 2001. The 9/11 Commission Report reinforced Clark's conclusions, focusing in particular on the failure of the FBI and CIA to cooperate with each other and to share information, the collation of which would have contributed in a major way to a clearer picture of terrorist activity and threats against American security. On June 29, 2005, these findings were acknowledged when a Presidential order was announced requiring a variety of reforms within America's intelligence community, which were designed to alleviate further intelligence failures due to a lack of cooperation among and between America's major intelligence-gathering groups.

To the average American, these findings are almost incomprehensible. Is it really possible that the internecine competition, distrust, and stubbornness of government agencies designed to protect us against foreign threats could actually put us at greater risk as a result of their refusal to cooperate for the common good? Richard Clark comments: "In this era of threat and change, we must all renew our pledge to protect the Constitution against the foreign enemies that would inflict terrorism against our nation and its people." (xxvii) The failure to do so, the need for a presidential order designed to secure this vital cooperation among these enormous and powerful bureaucracies, seems to most observers to be so appalling, so petty, so foolishly self-absorbed, and inappropriately egocentric—that it is hard to believe that, almost four years after the Islamic terrorist attacks that murdered over 6,000 Americans and destroyed the World Trade Center, we are still, in the simple but poignant words of Rodney King, asking the very fundamental question, "Can't we all just get along?"

That may seem like a naïve question if you read political scientist Samuel L. Huntington's 2004 book, Who Are We, which explores the vast differences in Islamic and western cultures. Indeed, one glance at today's headlines convinces us of the opposite, of the fragmentation of our world. Consider: "Seething Unease Shaped British Bomber's Zeal," "Misjudgments Led to Space Shuttle Woes," "Dreams Suspended by Segregation," "Uzbeks Order US from Base," "Irish Loyalist Gangs Battle One Another," "Charges of Aggravated Homicide Filed," "Bomb Kills Two Guards," "Anti-Mubarek Protesters Clash with Police in Cairo," "Suspect Carrying Bomb in Train," "Immigration Raid at Plant Leaves Children in Limbo."

These marks of discord, violence, and tragedy represent headlines in just one section of one Sunday newspaper a few weeks ago. While I was visiting Israel with a group of College and university presidents in July, there was a suicide bombing in Netanya, a beautiful, modern resort city on the Mediterranean Sea just south of Haifa. I have a photo I took two days after the attack in which a Palestinian child killed himself and two Jewish teenagers going to the mall. These sad events and lurid headlines not only arouse fear and anger, but simultaneously reveal the pathos and futility of never-ending vendettas.

Writer Doris Lessing believes that we live in an age that she has described as "one of the great turning points of history." Critic Sandra Gilbert says of Lessing, this writer is "searching for a vision of unity that can empower the individual to survive the fragmentation of modern life, whether that fragmentation is associated with antagonism between races and religions, competition between nations, the battle between men and women, the conflicts of a divided psyche, or the dualistic thinking that sets 'them' against 'us'."

These remarks perhaps give us something to think about at the start of a year during which we will engage once again in many new challenges and opportunities, among them the challenge of exploring mutual gains bargaining as we begin our labor contract-renewing processes, providing us with the opportunity to enter into these activities with a new vision of unity and mutual purpose. Respect, dignity, and trust are the foundation upon which our mutual goals can be achieved.

First, among the many reasons to reject any form of fragmentation, one that seems fundamental, is that it is contrary to our academic environment. As E.M. Forster tells us in *Howard's End*, "Only connect! Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast will die." In my experience, academe, at all levels of higher education, seeks to foster an environment of dispassionate, disinterested inquiry, research, and discovery. The academic environment seeks to make connections.

For example, consider the work of James Watson and Francis Crick whose story of unlocking the mysteries of DNA and founding human genome science in 1953 is chronicled in *Under the Double Helix*. Or, Werner Heisenberg's formulation of the Uncertainty Principle in 1927, a concept that challenged one of the basic assumptions of physics and an element of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, regarding the predictability of the behavior of subatomic particles, namely that the position and the momentum (mass times velocity) of a subatomic particle, such as an electron is indeterminate. This relation has profound implications for such fundamental notions as causality and the determination of the future behavior of an atomic particle.

Now, we do not often deal in challenges to the laws of physics, or unlocking the secrets of nature here at OCC. We do have the Frankenstein exhibit on display in the Library, but that is a different order of magnitude on the scale of scientific seriousness! Nevertheless, we are just as committed to learning and discovery as these great scientists. Let us recall that first among our formally stated institutional values is our commitment to "the freedom of

intellectual pursuit” and I am immensely proud that so many at OCC have translated this value into achievement during this past year.

For example: We commend Professor Karl Kleiner for traveling to Xi’an International University in China, where he shared his knowledge and expertise with students there by teaching several courses in Business Studies. For Karl, this was both a challenge and an enormous success, and we are exceedingly proud of this international partnership. We commend Professor Karin Gargone as she celebrated her 20<sup>th</sup> season as Principal Accompanist for the Monmouth Civic Chorus. Past recipient of a Fulbright Grant to study at the Academy of Music in Vienna, Karin has performed throughout Europe and the eastern United States on the grand organ in such places as St. Thomas Church in Manhattan, Salisbury Cathedral in England, St. Stephen’s in Vienna, and St. Peter’s at the Vatican.

Professor Kaaren Finberg recently published a mathematics textbook, *The Wonder of Math*, and this summer accepted an invitation to teach a course on historical mathematics at Farleigh Dickinson University. Dr. Xiao-Ming Yang has completed his latest book, *Literary Criticism: Theory and Practice*, which applies various critical approaches to the study of *Hamlet*, *Finnegans Wake*, *The Metamorphosis*, and other works.

We also call attention to our swim coach, Steve Stout, who was recently inducted into the CRHS Athletic Hall of Fame and to Debbie Robinson, Director of the Center for Business Education and Training, who was able to offer 81 courses for 246 participants through the New Jersey Community College Workforce Development Consortium. We

are thrilled with the emergence of new associate degree programs in Digital Mass Media, Interpreter Training, Technical Studies, and our one-day per week online Nursing Program. Dr. Virginia Reilly received a Bank of America Grant with which she was able to run five workshops on economic education for ninety-five public school teachers, and Professor Benny Castillo continues to serve as a resource expert in the martial arts for both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and NJ State Police.

We all look forward to enjoying the many wonderful activities organized by Dr. Mary Ellen Carr for the aforementioned campus exhibit that examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its many interdisciplinary implications. You are all invited to attend the "Monster Interlude," Mary Shelley Circle and Dessert reception at 2:30 this afternoon in the College Library...it's sure to be an electrifying experience! Also be sure to take advantage of the wealth of activities scheduled by Dr. Carr throughout the month of September. Also from the English Department, we congratulate Dr. Maysa Hayward on two newly published articles on gender studies in the *Culture and Natural Environment Journal* and *The Proceedings of the Middle Eastern Studies Association Journal* and we congratulate Professor Arthur Waldman, as he never ceases to surprise and delight us with theater productions like last year's *A View from the Bridge* and *Life Times 3*. We continue to take enormous pride in our sailing program and are pleased to announce that Ocean County College has been formally invited to host the 2007 National Collegiate Sailing Championship Regatta, a prestigious national event with strong media coverage.

We applaud this wonderful array of achievements, each of which speaks clearly in the language of discovery. Indeed, continuous questioning, tolerance for and open-mindedness toward new ideas have always been the hallmarks of the academic mindset. Imagine if the people responsible for all of these fine accomplishments had rejected that intellectual commitment and had instead considered only two options, two choices (yes or no), two alternatives (either-or) and rejected all other nuanced contemplation. It would have meant death to their creative thinking and innovative achievements.

Second, to my thinking, we at Ocean County College are genuinely committed to collaboration and service. In our college vision statement, we pledge “to be an institution of distinction where an exceptional faculty and staff serve to awaken students to a love of learning.” This theme of service to students has driven many of our achievements at OCC during this past year.

Certainly Dr. Judith Icklan’s expansion of our highly successful partnership with Kean University, providing the opportunity for our students to complete the baccalaureate degrees in Nursing, Criminal Justice and Elementary Education here on OCC’s campus, is a striking example of serving our students’ desire to learn and grow. It is strong confirmation of OCC’s excellence that Kean University has provided funding to renovate three classrooms in our Instructional Building for its use and hopes, in the not-too-distant future, to construct an academic building on our campus to offer a full array of upper-level courses. This begins a major new chapter in both Ocean County College’s operations and Ocean County’s response to the educational needs of all of its citizens.

This development will be one of the most significant milestones in our institutional history and will not only transform both Kean University and OCC but will establish a model that will have far-ranging implications for future generations of students in Ocean and Monmouth Counties and for higher education in the state of NJ. This fall, we will schedule a number of opportunities to further define for all of our staff and faculty how this partnership will affect our operations. Quite naturally, it represents not only a potential boon for our enrollments and Kean's, but also an unparalleled opportunity for our faculty to teach in Kean's upper division degree programs. We will continue to explore innovative ways that we can join forces to mutual advantage and to achieve a premium for each institution by harnessing our individual creative energies.

In addition to our partnership with Kean, new articulation agreements continue to be pursued, as evidenced by recent signings with the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey for marine and environmental science programs, and with St. John's University, and the New Jersey City University.

We also continue to reach out to the community through continuing and professional education. Our Continuing Education staff has worked on initiatives involving the Brick Computer Institute, Community and Kimball Medical Centers, Ocean County School Nurses Association, a new curriculum in Computer Forensics, and a one-hundred percent membership increase in the Academy of Lifelong Learning thanks largely to the efforts of ALL administrator, Joanne Padrone. Professor Christine Kitchin once again offers our students the unique opportunity to study, on site, the Indians of North, Central and

South America with her college-sponsored travel this January to Mexico and the hands-on study of the world of Maya.

Additionally, my trip to Israel resulted in several exciting International Education opportunities: a study abroad agreement with the University of Haifa; an archeology summer institute through Haifa's School of Archeology; a summer homeland security institute through the Interdisciplinary Center at Herzilya, possibly coordinated by our Criminal Justice Program; and a collaboration of our Center for Peace, Genocide, and Holocaust Studies with the Arab/Israeli Institute of the University of Haifa on peace issues.

Lorett Cramer, Career Specialist, serves our students by working closely with faculty and staff in several departments to develop customized academic support in dozens of different courses, and our college health education programs have been expanded to serve both evening and SEC students. Under Mary Fennessy's leadership, we have been sending and receiving electronic student transcripts since Fall 2004 making OCC one of the first New Jersey community colleges to implement this very quick and efficient process.

At this college, we work as one united team to achieve our objective—service to the students—rather than as opposing teams whose objective is to beat the other. Competition is fine for the athletic field, but we must direct our attention to continue to insure that our cohesive college team has one goal in mind, to make our students the real winners, to give them the opportunities for excellence in learning that is the principal mission of our college.

Let me elaborate a little on what I mean by “service” to our students. First, I think we need to provide our students with easy access to learning through an efficient and technologically supported system of enrollment management. We need to make our student’s passage through the bureaucratic maze of college entrance one that achieves its ends as efficiently as possible and enables students to select their programs and courses effectively. This should not be a process that confuses them and delays their choices.

We are on our way to achieving this easy access through our enrollment management team, under the leadership of Vice President Dan Duffy and Dean Toni Clay. With the cooperation, enthusiasm, and creativity of the Student Services staff, our colleagues who work with students every day during their admissions and registrations processes, an Enrollment Services Center is being developed wherein the services of recruitment, admissions, advising, EOF/OMS, financial aid, testing, and bill payment will be integrated and fully automated for the students’ convenience. Additionally, students are now able to take advantage of online, live chats with recruiters and advisors and the exploration of OCC through virtual open houses on our website.

We also need to provide the widest possible definition of access with varied course delivery modes that enable students with diverse needs to take courses in ways that best suit their diverse lives. Most of all, we need to serve the so-called ‘Y’ generation of students by awakening them to the joys of learning in the classroom—face to face or in the virtual classroom. We need to communicate a respect for the academic experience and show our students that we are fair, accessible, knowledgeable, professional, and responsible—and we

must demand no less from them. I think these are some of the greatest services we can perform. By “service” I do not mean that we are “servile” or “servants.” To borrow a line from Gert Niers, we are not waiters, asking ‘I am sorry sir, is there a fly in your soup?!’ What I do mean is that we are mentors for what is the most important thing we do here—providing furniture for the mind that will last a lifetime. We serve to awaken minds.

In order to serve in this way, we must be creative, but we must also be practical. In his essay titled “Practical Leadership: Inspiring Action, Achieving Results,” James Clemmer has noted:

...effective leaders and staff act on a belief system that the organization exists to serve people. . . This service-style organization means closing the “we-they” gaps and bringing all parts and levels together as partners focused on improving service.

This leads me to consider the environment of hope we have engendered here at the college. We tell our own children that the world is their ‘oyster,’ that they can be whatever they want to be, and yet so often our children hear different messages from the larger world, messages of limitation, of hopelessness. Too often, our children encounter a world in which one is either a Republican **or** a Democrat, a liberal **or** a conservative, a Mets fan **or** a Yankees fan, black or white, either-or, go or no-go. There are too many circumstances like these in the world that exist to ensnare us.

As Stephen Dedalus observes about the Ireland of James Joyce's great novel, *Portrait of the Artist*: "When the soul of man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight." But don't we wish to protect our children and our students from these barriers and create for them a world in which the soul is free to fly? Don't we wish to offer an enduring message of hope? In our college's mission statement, we pledge to "work to be ever new, offering through education the perpetual hope and promise envisioned by the founders of our nation."

Frequently the defense against negative or polarized thinking is based on the argument that in between black and white, there are many shades of gray. I prefer a more colorful metaphor—something like a rainbow. I prefer to believe that between black and white there are a million beautiful colors. In fact, while we are used to the traditional thinking that a rainbow is comprised of seven colors, it is actually a whole continuum of colors from red to violet and even goes beyond colors that the human eye can see. In addition, the colors inside a rainbow are always brighter due to the refracted light from the moisture that always accompanies the 'bow.' What a marvelous symbol for possibility! And this multiplicity is one major definition of hope in the modern world, a contrast to the limiting dualism and fragmentation of the oppositional mind set. I reject the binary language of we-they, and the narrow worldview it portrays. I prefer, instead, the language of hope, of possibility. Emily Dickinson tells us that "possibility" is "a fairer house than prose," and I believe she writes of hope as a more comfortable dwelling place than fixity or inflexibility: We serve to awaken minds.

We might pause here for a moment to consider the kind of information that often feeds negative thinking. Robert R. Blake, chairman of Scientific Methods in Austin, Texas and author of many works on leadership theory and organizational management, has depicted intergroup conflict in organizations by defining one potential dynamic of group process. He notes that groups that have no difficulty working independently sometimes encounter difficulty when asked to work interdependently. Blake explains,

. . . a loyalty to the group can develop which can supersede logic. Group members develop a pride in group membership that distorts their objectivity. A “we-they” mindset feeds on this distorted group identity. Group members are more likely to believe hearsay about members of other groups than they have factual information to go on. A competitive mindset will make the situation even worse, evoke more distrust, and increase the tension, hostility and conflict.

Even if Blake is only moderately accurate here, his conclusions emphasize the need for taking great care with the information we use to facilitate both our work behaviors and our professional decisions. We are all human; we all love gossip, and we all react with some degree of emotion to almost every message we receive throughout the day. It is also the human thing to feel loyalty to our group, even more so if our membership or our group is threatened.

But, as Blake goes on to suggest, working successfully in an interdependent environment requires that we surrender some of the blindfolds, some of the win-lose thinking, and instead “foster direct

dealing between groups in a problem solving manner—finding the facts, uncovering the logic inherent in the problem, and agreeing on sound solutions.” These can and should be the bases for collaboration and cooperation as we work together improve OCC. We need to remember why we are here and whom we serve. It is not to serve ourselves, or, as Woodrow Wilson stated, “merely to make a living” that we are here. We are here to awaken minds.

I think it is also useful to tote up our achievements as an institution from time to time at events such as this, achievements for which we all can feel mutual satisfaction and a mutual pride of accomplishment. Our successes bind us and serve as meaningful examples of what our collaborations can do. We will especially want to remember, from the 04-05 Academic Year, the following:

- Ted Gordon and Kathy Tietge developed a collaborative learning course that combines Math 181 (Probability) and Phil 191 (Philosophy)
- Yuan Xu accepted an invitation to present a series of lectures on advanced mathematics at Dong Hua University, China, Summer 2005
- Lynn Kenneally regularly presents seminars in “Elder Law” for the Ocean County community
- Herb Germann is an active member of the Dover Township Heritage and Preservation Commission that oversees the protection of historical structures in Dover Township

- Linda Capuano and Sandy Carine were instrumental in having OCC approved as a GED testing site, funded externally
- College Advancement has launched the college's first planned giving campaign, The Heritage Society, and Vice President Tara Kelly is meeting with Trustees, Foundation board members and our own institutional leadership, to secure their support prior to the public kickoff of this extensive fundraising campaign
- OCC's website is continually being monitored, revised, and updated under the leadership of Ms. Maureen Conlon and the College Relations team to ensure student compatibility and convenience
- The Sailing Program has begun its campaign to build a permanent Sailing Endowment
- Four OCC teams finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Garden State Athletic Conference: Women's Soccer and Softball; Men's Soccer and Basketball
- Ilene Cohen served as President of the College Athletic Administrators of New Jersey
- Dr. Beth Brierley wrote and performed in Jersey Jams, an original musical salute to New Jersey
- The Office of School Relations initiated three new institutes, each of which ran with excellent enrollments – Advanced Placement for Teachers, Reading for Elementary Children, and SAT Review for High School Students - thanks to Dr. Nancy Gerry.
- Dr. Judith Icklan spear-headed the articulation between the new Marine Academy of Technology and

Environmental Science (MATES) program and our Jump Start offerings, facilitated by the construction of the MATES academy on the OCC Manahawkin campus with plans for seamless articulation to Richard Stockton State College

- Jim McGinty and Lee Kobus are working closely with the county to outfit our TV studio and make it fully operational this fall
- The Technology Advisory Committee is continuing its prioritization of technological needs on campus and has made significant progress in ensuring the availability of current technology for our faculty and staff
- Major strides are being made in upgrading and renewing our facilities and plant operation, such as the ongoing current renovation of the Instructional Building, the building of a new parking lot, the expansion of the Fine Arts Center, the replacement of older furniture in offices and public spaces, the improvement and replacement of many of our HVAC systems – this list goes on and on! Vice President Parrish and his team are certainly busy people!!
- Strong community support for the OCC Foundation continues, as evidenced by the \$300,000+ raised for student scholarships through its annual Gala two weeks ago
- Progress is being made in attracting high school students to take courses at OCC, with 520 students, or 10 percent of New Jersey's total, enrolled in fall 2004

- The success of the OCC Bookstore grows as a result of store renovations and the creative vision of former store manager Jan Kirsten and our current manager, Carol Kaunitz.

These and many, many more examples of excellence accomplished in small ways and large, day in and day out, exemplify the rainbow of achievement that is our college. That defines why we are here. It's all about our students. We serve so that minds can be awakened.

Now, could negativism and despair happen here? Has this happened here before? Might we still produce such an outcome? I don't think so because the answer is in each of our hands. We could easily all agree, right here, right now, that a full-tilt, no-holds-barred emergence of polarized behavior is a nightmare scenario that none of us desires. We must continue to reach for the best, for our best. I ask all of us to consider one of our stated Ocean County College defining values that describes our collective spirit as "a family spirit in an intellectual community."

And, you know, I confess that I am sometimes amused by such comparison of the complex and multi-faceted organization of a college like ours to a "family." As the infamous "Ms. Mentor" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has noted, "If your workplace refers to itself as a family, you know it's probably dysfunctional." Ms. Mentor goes on to recall the Snopeses, Oedipus, Medea, and Tolstoy's desertion of his own family, after writing about all happy families being alike. Nonetheless, sometimes things that work in families can also work in larger and more complex organizational structures. Perhaps as we

begin our work for the year, we might all benefit from remembering a simple list of five steps that Project Head Start has put together for families who wish to translate conflicts into resolutions:

1. Keep your focus on what can be done in the future. Remember: What's done is done; what's past is over.
2. Each person should take turns speaking and listening carefully to the facts and to the other person's positions.
3. Resist the urge to bring more issues into the discussion. Focus on the issue at hand.
4. Personal attacks and blame will only distract from solving the problem. Remember: The problem is the enemy; not each other.
5. Prepare to give your own perspective. Do not try to define the perspective of others. Let them do it.

At the start of the summer, I issued a challenge to the Vice Presidents, one I am taking very seriously, and so I suppose they are as well, to propose at a special meeting to be held in early September at least one "brilliant" idea to energize and strengthen the operation the College or of his or her division... ideas that will ultimately enhance our services to students. This morning, I extend an invitation to you too, each of you, to use your creativity and share with your vice president or directly with me your brilliant ideas, ideas that could make our rainbow even brighter than it currently is.

I firmly believe – and I love this quality about Ocean County College – that we as a college community bring to our work a vital and energetic spirit of creativity, service, and hope in a rainbow of possibilities, with

open minds and good hearts. We can and by and large should avoid the shallow and fragmenting experience delineated by the binary language of “we-they.” So, throughout this semester, as we sit together around tables, talking about the issues that affect our college and ourselves, let each of us vow to break through the barriers that surround binary thinking—stereotypes, suspicion, and fear—and instead reach upward...uplifting ourselves to become the best that we can be, together. I am confident we can do it! Thank you! I thank you all—and wish you a wonderful and rewarding semester!