

Colloquium Speech
Spring, 2008
“Managing Our Success”

Good morning!

It is once again a genuine pleasure to welcome all of you to the renewal of the academic cycle with the advent of our spring 2008 semester.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year to everyone and best wishes for a productive and challenging spring term.

This morning, we are honored by the presence of several members of our distinguished Board of Trustees. Please welcome: Van Thulin, Chair; Bruce Greenfield, and Linda Novak.

Thank you.

We are indeed living in good times! And it is my privilege to bring you the glad tidings and good news that comes with good times.

As a college, we have arrived at the enviable point in our history when we can honestly say we are realizing our unique potential and purpose as an academic institution! Indeed, “...this is the hour” ... this is our time!

While our goal of becoming the premier public college in NJ requires a continuous commitment to improvement – and that means we have an attendant and ambitious schedule of new goals and aspirations yet to fulfill – by and large, it is fair to say that we have reached our rightful place among the top tier of the nation’s community colleges.

And for this reason, this is the hour, this is the time for us to take stock of our deeply satisfying achievements ... to enjoy the moment, because it is a rare moment in the life of any academic institution when it can state with credibility that it has achieved legitimacy as a top tier institution among its peers in higher education. But, *we* can make this claim!

We have the numbers and the ‘indisputable visual evidence’ (as they are fond of saying during Bowl Championship Series instant replay reviews) that others believe in us as an academic institution and accept us as legitimate and respect us for our quality – in short, that we have arrived! We have done this!

We are at a place we have been journeying toward perhaps for the entire 40-plus year life of our college, receiving recognition for our efforts and our achievements! And, now, it is our happy challenge to determine how to deal with this extraordinary success; to build

a culture that is a lasting legacy to our efforts; “now is the time to create *our* community.”

Aspirations we share of fulfilling the noble purpose of the community college and bringing meaning to our collective efforts in this endeavor, of achieving new records of excellence in enrollments, partnerships, a diverse curriculum, a talented and scholarly faculty, and an expert administration and staff, all these achievements ... and the promising prospects for the future which any objective observer can see in each of these measures of institutional quality ... all speak to a right that we have, a well-deserved right, “to stand together,” to take comfort in and feel good about who we are and where we are going!

Our ambition to be regarded as an exemplar of institutional quality in, 1- planning the expansion of our facilities, 2- reaching out to our Ocean County and Jersey Shore community, 3- developing model programs and practices in developmental education, 4- student leadership training, 5- outcomes assessment, 6- one-stop online student registration, 7- services for students with developmental disabilities, 8- intercollegiate sailing, 9- interpreter training to serve the deaf community, 10- achieving financial security through innovative financial management and creative uses of capital, 11- philanthropic fund raising, 12- seamless transfer to our 4-year university partner Kean University located right here on our campus, and a host of other best practices too numerous to mention ... is an ambition we have realized and we can take great satisfaction in that!

And, I ask you, where else? ... **Where else** is there a comparable community college that can make such a claim? Ladies and gentlemen of Ocean County College, *you* have done this! And, as a result, *we* have arrived!

Each of us knows someone sitting nearby us here this morning who exemplifies the best in us and is one of those responsible for getting us where we are today ... who loves what they do and does it well and deserves a ‘high five’ or a pat on the back or a standing ovation. So, right now, let’s take a moment and give them the accolade that they so richly deserve for loving what they do and doing it so well!

Now, lest we appear *immodest*, it is imperative that we walk the walk and not just talk the talk ... that we have genuine **proof** of our accomplishments documented in verifiable measures. Institutional quality is a garden requiring constant tending and constant assessment because it is constantly on display.

And, lest we appear *naïve*, it is imperative that we also understand we can never take success for granted, because it can be as fleeting as youth, as ephemeral as the first flowers of spring. And, so, we must continue to have the courage to “let go of the shore,” to keep our eyes riveted on the evidence, and our minds constantly open to new insights, constantly seeking validation of our achievements, so we may secure our place among the *optimus ad optimum*, the ‘best of the best.’

So, let us take a moment to focus on the evidence. First, we are now identified, by almost every standard and measure applied to community colleges, as a **large** community college (as in small, medium, or large enrollment). We have, as you all realize I believe, one of the largest land areas on which to develop our main campus of any community college – over 1,000 acres of land dedicated to environmental preservation and Ocean County College development.

In FY 2000, the total **student headcount** for all semesters was 17,667. Last year, it was 22,765. This change is a **28.86%** increase in the number of students we serve annually.

In FY 2000, the total number of **credits generated** was just under 140 thousand; last year it was almost 190 thousand. This change is a **35.71%** percent increase. Not only are these numbers phenomenal, exceeding state and national growth figures, but there is no indication that they will materially abate any time in the near future. Enrollment increases for the spring 2008 term continue to astound and were at 9.8% this morning.

I am comfortable that we will be able to continue our enrollment growth and accommodate it with a first-class faculty and first-class facilities because we have **three qualities** that we must guard jealously and renew constantly: **One**, we are genuinely committed to being student-centered; **two**, we provide the best pathways to career and transfer of any college in the state; and **three**, we are committed to productive change. These are the conditions that have led to our success to date; these are the conditions of which we must remain ever mindful.

Next, at Ocean Count College, we aspire to **quality**. From its founding, the college never accepted author Steven Swerling's denigrating definition of the community college as "second best," as a place to park aspiring hopefuls to cool down their hopes and dreams through inertia and inattention, diverting their curricular desires in directions designed to service market needs. Not us. From our founding we have been a college dedicated to academic excellence.

This founding tradition is what pointed us toward our current success. We honor the achievement of our students in countless ways, never overlooking the developmental help that some need along the way, as all of us do from time to time as we encounter new challenges, new experiences, new knowledge, new technologies. We offer multiple supports to the professional development and scholarly interests of our faculty, valued in the thousands and thousands of dollars each year. And, we endeavor to reward faculty achievement as a means of celebrating faculty commitment to continuous improvement and deep dedication of mind consistent with our vital community college mission.

I am comfortable that we will continue this tradition of scholarship and academic excellence because it is rooted in the very fiber of our institution. It is woven into every policy, every practice, every procedure, every assessment, and into each of us individually.

We say, as John F. Kennedy once said, to “friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed . . . and we will pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe” in order to ensure that we continue to be what we have become.

We are the best because we **want** to be the best, each of us, at what we do. Indeed “...This is the hour ... We are the ones...”

VIDEO “We Are the Ones,” taken from A Message from the Elders, Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona

In support of our future, we have developed a comprehensive **Facilities Master Plan** designed to account for our success and growth, aligned with our Kean partnership and our dedication to providing all students with both the access and the capability to go as far educationally as they are able and desire, right here in Ocean County. In this commitment, we continue to enjoy and deeply appreciate the unwavering support of our county and its leadership, the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders. We are, truly, the county’s college and our county has been with us every step of the way to our success.

So, how do we manage all of this success? How do we keep up, make the most of our greatness, and avoid being lulled into complacency by what has taken us almost half a century to achieve? We could do no better than to adopt the theme from this year’s 90th annual meeting of the American Council on Education that, fittingly, is: Taking Charge of Our Future. Accordingly, let us examine **four major processes** that we should engage in to take charge of our future.

We want to start to manage our success by shifting our emphasis from Institutional Effectiveness, “IE,” to **Institutional Quality**, “IQ,” and I hope we will begin to engage in this effort almost immediately. We can start right now by asking everyone to think: IQ; IQ ... Institutional Quality. Let that be the new mantra!

As a **first practical step** toward sustaining our success, we ask each of you to continue to do what you have been doing so well—to be super-conscious of your own work situation. Look around you. **Look hard**. Try to maintain your unique insight into your professional environment.

The experts call this “**situational analysis**” and by this they mean gaining **superior insight**, not in order to predict the future, but in order to understand the present. Now, I think we have a firm grasp on the present. We know and must continue to know what our students need and want, now, today, and how we can best respond to these needs. Sometimes—often—we intuit this before our students articulate it clearly. These needs are curricular, but they are also financial, social, psychological, intellectual—complex and holistic. We are attuned to them all.

We also must sustain our success by continuing to envision our own institution and its situational dynamics within the broader community. We know that our own institutional realities do not stop at Hooper Avenue or Church Road but are impacted by the

educational community within which we function, as well as by the social, political, and economic environment of our state, our nation, and this flatter and smaller globe on which we all work for mutual survival.

What I am suggesting here today is that we all remain in the vigilant state of the diagnostician, watching events carefully, seeking out repetitions that form trends, and then mapping the trends to find the story that they are telling us as an institution. This not only keeps us from the complacency that would be the death-knell to success, but it also continues to engage us with our work and makes it ever new and exciting. When our work processes become *only* habit, they have reached the first stage of atrophy, and this is as true of teaching as it is of advising or counseling or coping with students' financial aid needs or parking needs. All our students' needs are important needs and I know you all feel that way and respond that way.

As we begin our conscious efforts here to manage our success and re-examine our strategic plan for Ocean County College, we will be developing a set of questions for the college leadership, questions that will attempt to exploit situational analyses across our institution, questions that will look for diagnoses and for disaggregations that can look at parts of the whole in order to better understand the whole.

We will also look at the broader environment through an understanding of economic trends, social habits and attitudes, globalization, technology, demographics, and government policies that impact our work directly. We will launch strategic conversations and look beyond the curve of the earth. Most of all, we will build on the achievements of which we are most proud and congratulate each other as we continue to grow and to flourish.

As we answer our questions and map current trends, we will continue to be positioned to take the **second step** toward managing our success. That second step is *re-examining our focus*, because in order to reaffirm our strategic plan, we first need to reaffirm our institutional focus. We have spoken of this focus variously as our vision, our mission, and our goals. We are confident that these are leading us in the right direction. We must affirm that confidence. We must use our situational analysis to confirm our vision or to narrow it or expand it or amend it. We must read all the narratives we have been able to construct and make certain our vision continues to provide the essential plot.

In short, we must make strategic choices. These choices can be defined by three main elements:

- 1) Our **student focus**—that will reaffirm the hierarchy of needs that we serve;
- 2) Our **winning propositions**—that will reaffirm our strategies for excellence; and
- 3) Our eight **key priorities**—or what we have called our targets of opportunity—to ensure that our resources will be focused on the most important things we need to do to continue our success.

While, as a community college, we must try to continue to be many things to many people, we must also know that we cannot be all things to all people. As a result, we

must first and foremost focus on our particular students, in our particular setting, with our particular priorities, in our special time in history. We must decide what we will do and what we will **not** do.

Once we are certain that we have reaffirmed our strategic vision, we then can shape a strategic plan based on insights about our focus, our value proposition, and our priorities. An **effective** vision is simple, motivational, and realistic. If, for example, we say, ‘each and every student is important and we will provide for his or her needs,’ we continue to encourage transformational behavior and transformational outcomes without a 50-page manual of instructions!

The **third** way in which we can manage our success is simple and pleasurable. We can *enjoy* the rewards we have earned. Once we have re-affirmed our vision and know that we continue to implement it with excellence, we can take satisfaction in hearing a simple thank-you, in well-earned praise from a colleague or supervisor, in observing the growth of our enrollments, in seeing the new course or program we have developed create new realities and opportunities for our students.

We can share best practices, take pride in our expertise on key policy issues, engage in institutional debates, take on leadership roles in college governance, or watch a project succeed because of what we’ve done. Pride of achievement is one of the most satisfying of human experiences—and we deserve to feel that sense of pride! We’re entitled to it! We have earned it! So, take a deep breath. Go ahead! Take a breath and inhale some of that pride! Breathe deeply! Each and every one of you has *earned it!*

Finally, we will manage our success by **closing the circle** and continuing our achievement. We will hear shortly from our guest speaker, Dr. Malcolm Brodwick, wisdom about the connection between scholarship and teaching. This is the very paradigm I have been speaking of today.

Scholarship is just another word for the work, the life and the growth of the mind—demanding, difficult, and exhilarating – yes! And, one of the highest forms of situational analysis! The scholar probes the discipline looking for its narratives to make sense of the world in order to encounter the world with a deeper understanding. That scholarship, in turn, leads to an enhanced intellectual vision that inspires and permeates the act of teaching. The pride we take in the growth of another mind is the exhilarating outcome that guarantees the continuation of the cycle.

We do what we do because **we are good at it** and because **we love it**. Let us continue to be good and walk proudly in that understanding. Let us be happy for this moment and hold on tight to our dreams!

[**VIDEO “Hold on tight”**](#)