

**Dr. Jon H. Larson**  
**Fall Semester Colloquium**  
**September 1, 2004**  
**The "New" Community College**

Welcome to the Fall Semester Colloquium! It is so wonderful to see everyone here today as we officially kick off our academic year. Thank you for joining us. I really hope you will enjoy the excellent professional development activities scheduled for you throughout the rest of the day.

Two weeks ago, at the College Foundation's Summer Gala, I spoke to our generous donors in an effort to help them better understand what makes OCC unique and special. I called the OCC experience a kind of "miracle"... a good thing not only for students as it fosters major changes for the better in their lives, but also for our entire community which benefits from their growth, development, and emergence as responsible citizens and community leaders. There is an abundance of things to be proud of here at OCC, but the one constant over time has been the annual re-enactment of this "miracle" in which we all have a role.

To me, as I reflect back to the start of the four-year journey Judy and I have enjoyed here, and it seems like yesterday, it is the most deeply satisfying and uplifting of aspirations to, along with each of you, have become a part of the OCC "miracle."

This year, as we reflect on the rich 40-year history of Ocean County College, we have chronicled in the Asbury Park Press 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tabloid supplement the lengthy list of "firsts" achieved here – from being the first community college in New Jersey in 1964 to being first to fully implement Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol telephone service...our new, money-saving Internet-based telephone system, which we have completed in this summer of 2004.

And so, it is this 'movement'...this 'trend' toward distinction, beginning with being the first county college approved by the voters, first to begin operations in 1966, first to receive Middle States Association accreditation, to our selection by Middle States this year as another 'first'...a model for colleges beginning their self study, that characterizes the evolution of our college...it is the metaphor of our vision of evolving into and becoming a "new" kind of community college.

These steps toward distinction include funding new full-time professional staff to lead us toward addressing within a year the six recommendations we received in our evaluation report from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. This fall, Janet Hubbs is attending a workshop in Denver on Institutional Effectiveness Planning, while Carolyn Lafferty and four academic deans are attending a workshop on Student Learning Assessment, which will be presented by Middle States on November 8 and 9 in Philadelphia.

We are letting no grass grow under our feet in stepping up to the only issues the visiting accreditation team found when they were here in April. I am so proud of our entire college for the way each of you conducted yourself during this visit. Not everyone agreed on every point, certainly; but the message delivered was that this campus is alive! This college engages itself in the issues of governance, free speech, learning innovation, intelligent uses of technology, and is seriously engaged in constructive change for the better! For that, I thank those who raised difficult and critical questions and those who offered support and praise. John Stuart Mill wrote, *"If mankind minus one were of one opinion, then mankind is no more justified in silencing the one than the one - if he had the power - would be justified in silencing mankind."* And I wouldn't have it any other way!

So, do not hang back, or hold back. We will have a full agenda of discussion about the College Senate this fall. Every one of you will have many opportunities to voice your opinion. This is the time to do it, and to enjoy the ride, to have fun doing it, so we end up with a form of shared governance that serves the needs of a \$50 million dollar enterprise with important places to go and urgent things to do.

That meeting and discussion agenda will be published soon and will be extensive enough to give everyone a full voice in assessing the bylaws drafted by several broadly participative groups meeting in committee over the summer. To be a lively, respected college, we need and want debate and reflective discussion of the issues of our day, but we need also to be mindful of the words of 18<sup>th</sup> Century lexicographer and essayist

Samuel Johnson, who wrote, *"Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must first be overcome."*

So let us work together, without rancor. This is the greatest time in the history of higher education; this is our day in the sun! Let's laugh and enjoy it, even as we disagree.

You know, during the past year we have set and held to a bold course and unfurled our sails in a full, strong wind! And, just as our fabulously successful intercollegiate sailing team has shocked the sailing establishment, we should be satisfied with nothing less in our academic endeavors, our commitment to individual students, and our pursuit of a culture that demands the best of everyone.

The Greek philosopher Ovid said, "Happy is he who dares courageously to defend what he loves." I hope all of you are as happy as I am. I don't mind saying that I love who we are and what we are doing here at OCC. I don't shy away from saying, "I love life here on the Jersey Shore, here in Ocean County." And I don't waver in my sincere commitment to our vision of the future and all it has to offer to you, to me, and to all the other truly wonderful people who have also developed a genuine love for this College.

Now I know some of you do not know very well the "non-college" people who love OCC, and sometimes we think of those with whom we are not familiar as distant, different, apart, strange, or perhaps even hostile. So let me take just a moment to share with you how much I have come to appreciate and admire some of those "non-college" people who love OCC, specifically our trustees and our foundation board members. In particular, I want to single out a couple of icons of local fame who have devoted years of their lives daring courageously to defend an institution they love, and to defend our right and opportunity to make of it the best institution we can.

Joe Citta will be leaving the board this year when his last term as a gubernatorial trustee appointment is up. In my four years as president, Mr. Citta has been generous financially to the college and the foundation, giving millions of dollars to make scholarships and loans available to young people who, like him, emerged into adulthood with great promise but little money. His recent establishment of a center for the study of marine sciences in the name of his son, Phil, is the public face of a man whose 40 years of involvement with OCC reveals an even more impressive side of this near-97 year old man whose support for what we do has been unwavering. Like the other icon of our community college system whom I have come to respect and admire immensely, Senator Bill Hiering, Joe is very wealthy and could easily have served more established institutions. But Joe and Bill chose us, and have stood by that choice with pride and deep satisfaction.

Bill Hiering is, hands-down, the best Board Chair I have known. There is no more intelligent, decent, knowledgeable or dedicated trustee on any board. At his relatively junior age of 88 years, he puts in a full day as an attorney, board chair, and, just now, extra duty caring for his wife Barbara who is in a tough health battle. Always the picture of dignity and grace, he yet finds time to help a relative novice like me navigate a course through local waters that takes us where we believe OCC needs to go. Neither Mr. Citta nor Senator Hiering is able to be here today, but we are fortunate to have such strong and gracious friends who have courageously defended and supported OCC for so long. I don't know if they are William Faulkner fans, but I know they would find common ground in Faulkner's admonition, *"Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself."*

In this, our pursuit of destiny, I believe we are on the verge of founding something, or at least articulating a cohesive thesis of a vision, that, in later years, as we look back, will permit us to say, "We were there at the dawn of a new era, and we were, once again, first." I was interviewed recently by Ubiquity, an on-line magazine and forum for technology topics, because they were interested in how we are *"weaving technology into the fabric of academic culture"* at Ocean County College. And surely, the uses of technology to improve learning and help students gain access to tutoring assistance, counseling, and advising in ways that make use of contemporary technologies, save time, add flexibility, improve service, and make life simpler, more convenient, cheaper, and all-in-all better for faculty and students characterizes an aspect of this "new" community college model. But there is a lot more, too.

During OCC's short 40-year lifetime, tens of thousands of people have passed through our doors -- each for his/her own reasons, each pursuing his/her own dream. Every one of these students, patrons, and friends traveled a unique path that led to OCC; and they left with a more finely-developed sense of their aspirations in life and greater confidence in the pursuit of their own personal accomplishments. I am very proud to be associated with a college that has given so much opportunity to so many people. This quality, reduced to an absurd level of simplicity, is what we categorize under the rubric of student services; but, the quality of the

experience requires that the underlying values pervade the institution and become so ubiquitous that all of us are wedded to them and are conscious of our special dedication to them. And by and large, that has been true here at OCC for the tens of thousands of students who have attended college at this campus!

Now, when I attended the University of Maryland, while I did find many things of value, I did not find this "quality of life-on-campus" value, which focused attention upon me as a person who was growing and learning. And we all know this is not unique to my graduate alma mater. It is the all-too-frequent norm in most institutions of higher education which have become so fragmented in their focus on specialization, and so inured to the demands of career success that taking time out simply to be personally engaged with students, genuinely interested in them and their passage to learning, is a lower order priority. But, we have not lost sight of our roots in this regard, and it is a hallmark of our culture as an institution in which we should take pride and around which we should formalize our vision for the future...so we do not lose touch with it.

In their infancy, community colleges were built on a foundation of ideals that truly reflected the times. The 1960's was a time of opportunity, a time of revolutionary ideas in education, a time when we truly worked as a nation to provide access to higher education to each and every one of our citizens. The community college made this dream possible, and over the last 40 years, millions of Americans have gotten their start at community colleges.

Since our beginning in 1964 when Senator Hierung and his colleagues crafted the legislation that made OCC possible, OCC has grown and adapted to the needs of our students as they have changed through the decades. Although our formal institutional mission has remained the same, our vision has gone through a metamorphosis as we've gone from a college with a mere few hundred students to one headed toward 9,000.

Listen to a few of the achievements reached in the past year that illustrate the continuing vitality of this great college:

Our new Employee Training and Development staff headed by Debbie Robinson ran about 20 different programs for 926 employees this year. They included a Team Building Regatta, Preparing and Conducting Performance Evaluations, Establishing Expectations and Taking Corrective Action, Better Understanding of Yourself and Others, Minding Your Own Business, Strategic Planning and Goal Setting, Management Institute Orientation, Developing Management Skills for Support Staff, Dealing with Conflict, Understanding Team Behavioral Styles, Drug Free Workplace Compliance Training, Sexual Harassment Prevention Compliance Training, and a host of other helpful training programs for our staff.

Let us sing the praises of Debbie Robinson and Alba Sanchez, both of whom work only part-time in this program but, through hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit, have been able to bring to our staff a truly wonderful array of learning opportunities! Really, for the first time, we are investing in our own employees. Bob Seymour, thank you! Debbie Robinson and Alba Sanchez, thank you!

Congratulations, Yvonne Huacuja and the entire Library staff for implementing a wholly new, on-line research and reference technology. The new SIRSI system we have purchased and installed is the same system used by Rutgers, Georgian Court, U.C. Berkeley, Maryland, Indiana, and...well, you get the point! Anyway, the Library invites all of you to join them to celebrate the unveiling of the new SIRSI system.

Our College Relations program has been busy implementing an integrated marketing strategy for image enhancement and student recruitment, working hand-in-hand with student services. Maureen Conlon has redesigned and redeployed our website. Check out the neat new graphics and great photography by Glenn Foster. RoseAnn Durso has created *e-notebook* and *Ocean Views* – on-line and print news magazines. Tara Kelly and a committee of thousands arranged for our new staff directory to be available on line on our web site. This year our press coverage increased by about 50%, virtually all of it positive! Dave Wolfe officially joined our fund raising leadership team as our liaison for governmental and community relations and Dave is doing a great job!

Judy Icklan was able to assist the Brick Computer Science Institute students in completing their programs and, in the process, acquire 120 new computers and quite a few students. Our need to spend capital funds to develop the SEC diminished tremendously as a result of our partnership with the OCVTS, which will build a 50,000 square foot Marine Academy for Technology and Environmental Science at our Manahawkin site,

and become available to OCC every day from 4 p.m. on. We are also cooperating to bring the performing arts academy program now located at Navy Lakehurst to the OCC campus.

Richard Parrish and Ken Olsen are working hard to keep up with an expanding capital improvements program. We believe the County will match new State funds available this year which will enable us to carry out up to \$50 million in campus renewal and new construction over the next six years.

Already funded projects coming on line this year include the new TV Studio – for which we have just received \$700,000 in support to purchase digital TV equipment. The Ocean County Freeholders stepped in to pick up where our partnership with Comcast ‘gang a’gley’!

Next month, we will dedicate our new \$6 million Technology Building, filled with some \$250,000 worth of computers obtained with a federal Perkins instructional technology program grant. And we will complete \$4 million in deferred maintenance projects, including replacement of the Kable Russell Building roof, window replacement, and HVAC upgrades. We are also launching a systematic replacement of outdated and worn out classroom, office, and laboratory furniture and equipment, a project that will progress throughout the year. So every faculty and staff office will have brand new, high quality office furniture!

A complete \$6 million renewal of the Instructional Building will be undertaken in the summers of 2005, 2006, and 2007.

A connecting mall from the Hering and Technology Buildings to the main OCC mall is in the works, as is a \$13 million major Fine Arts Center renovation and addition, coming in 2007. That will be followed by an \$11 million expansion and renewal of the College Center, starting in 2007.

We’ll begin major parking expansions in lots 1, 2, and 3, and road extensions, widening, and safety measures this year as well, along with a number of projects which will enhance the beauty of the OCC campus; e.g., a new Fountain to be built with funds raised by our alumni.

Dr. Icklan has been busy negotiating higher education partnerships this year. For example, several hundred area teachers are currently taking graduate courses through Kean University here on the OCC campus. They are able to achieve advanced degrees in education right here. Similarly, this summer another 52 college graduates entered the Alternate Route to Teacher Certification offered through New Jersey City University. They take courses on the OCC campus and gain 15 credits toward a Master of Arts in teaching degree. OCC is one of three sites in New Jersey where the full MAT degree will be offered. And, this year, some 60 students took courses from Fairleigh Dickinson University toward the Bachelor’s degree in Individualized Studies.

This year, almost 6,000 OCC students were able to attend college near their home at one of the 22 off-campus locations and the Southern Education Center operated by OCC.

Our Department of Continuing and Professional Education now offers 60 programs that can be completed in short, intensive time frames, and that carry local, state, or national certification, and lead to new careers.

OCC’s participation in the NJ Workforce and Economic Development Consortium has also opened the doors to statewide training opportunities for us with organizations such as the Division of Youth and Family Services, Loew’s, and Home Depot.

The Planetarium, now celebrating its 30th anniversary, has, thanks to Gloria Villalobos, added laser shows, children’s birthday parties, and an expanded gift shop to provide some new features for its many thousands of visitors annually.

Although, as you can see, we’ve accomplished much just in the past year, there is still more to do. Our vision for the future is anything but ‘typical.’ OCC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will respond as our students and community change and we will become what we are calling the “New Community College.”

We are, after all, quite different than the traditional community college founded in the 1960’s, with its heavy emphasis on occupational training in “terminal” degree programs, an open door that too often was a revolving door, and little connection to the upper division and graduate institutions of higher education. The

"New Community College" we are striving to become is, above all, committed to excellence in its academic standards, focused on our learners and their learning styles, willing to alter the traditional format, times, and modes of admitting students, selling textbooks and sweatshirts, offering counseling and tutoring, and delivering instruction...all to make the OCC learning experience truly convenient, rewarding, rigorous, and enjoyable for students with busy lives. It is an institution that keeps abreast of the times and new technology, and makes certain that its academic programs are fresh, relevant, viable, and of unparalleled quality.

As a "New Community college," we aspire to be a leader among our peers, and a learning institution that rivals the best liberal arts colleges in terms of academic quality and student experience.

I think this is realistic in part because our share of high ability students is on the rise – and it will be helped along further by the NJ STARS Program, which gives a full-ride scholarship to Ocean County high school seniors who graduate in the top 20% of their class. I hear frequently and continuously from NJ four-year college presidents that OCC transfer students are among their best and brightest students. Our students have no trouble succeeding in the highly competitive world of higher education. But while that is to be expected from our high ability students whose academic skills and drive match those of students at any four-year college or university, the truly amazing story of OCC's success is that nearly 80% of our students transfer!

Just consider what this means...many of our students begin college classes immediately after high school graduation, and something like 40% of them have academic skill remediation needs when admitted; many more of our students are what we classify as non-traditional – those individuals who look to OCC, not as a last resort, but as a second chance to make a fresh start, such as the student who did not do well in high school or is struggling economically or in a job without growth potential, but decides to try OCC, and proceeds with pride, and with your help, to make the most of the opportunity to show that he or she can make it; or the student who has put off a college education in order to work or raise a family, who gets to fulfill a lifelong dream, thanks to your commitment to treat each student as special and unique; or, the student already holding a degree and employed in a career, who through enrolling at OCC and taking on-line courses can change careers for something more satisfying, because you were there, ready to help.

Although many of our students come to us with undistinguished academic backgrounds, and many with skill deficiencies, once here a kind of "miracle" happens...they learn, they take control of their lives, they graduate, they transfer and then graduate with baccalaureate degrees, and they lead successful lives – last year, this was the story for 78% of our graduates!

I don't know about you, but I find this inspiring! Our students are literally re-defining themselves as they progress through OCC. They leave with an associate degree, but, more importantly, they leave with high self-esteem and self-confidence.

It is this achievement, this recognition that collegiate education cannot simply stop at the associate degree level, or even the bachelor's degree, because contemporary life requires us all to learn continuously throughout life, that explains why we should redefine the community college concept! The "New Community College" understands this fact, focuses upon the learner first, and takes care to provide opportunities to get each student started along the path to lifelong learning with instruction geared specifically to the learning style best suited for the personal enrichment of each of its students.

The "New Community College" remains current, and connected, taking pains to discover what is interesting and appealing to today's citizens. And, the "New Community College" uses its resources carefully and prudently, yet also plans effectively for growth and development.

The "New Community College" encourages consultative shared governance and collaboration among campus constituencies, while moving the agenda of the institution forward with dispatch to get the business of the college done.

American philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote, *"In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists."*

Armed with our vision of a "new" OCC and spurred-on by our dedication to be responsive to our ever-changing community, our challenge for the future is not only to provide our students with the best learning and enrichment opportunities, the best community service, and the best academic preparation possible, but

to ourselves become "learners" with the self-discipline to forego indulgence in the inconsequential in favor of the greatness that comes with dedication to a noble and worthy cause. I ask you to join me in that commitment. I know we are up to the challenge!

Comedian Danny Kaye said, *"Life is a great big canvas; throw all the paint on it you can."* Well, the signs of progress on our great canvas are all around us. We are putting up new buildings, enhancing our existing structures, and paving the way for the thousands of new students and community members we expect to serve in the coming years.

We can all be very proud to be part of an institution that has served the citizens of Ocean County very well for the last 40 years, and it is our duty as members of the OCC family at this point in its rich history to insure that the OCC of the future lives up to and exceeds that standard.

In conclusion, let me offer my sincere gratitude to all of you – board members, faculty, staff, administration, and students – for being active participants in the creation of the OCC of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the "New Community College." Your dedication, your hard work, your continued support will propel us forward. Thank you for your commitment, thank you for being "optimus ad optimum," the best of the best! Thank you! Have a great semester!