

The Millennial Professor
Re-conceptualizing the Professorial Role in the Community College

Good Morning and welcome to the Spring 2007 Colloquium. It is delightful to see everyone again and once again feel the energy that marks the beginning of a new semester.

The focus for this semester's Colloquium is "the millennial professor," a continuation of our consideration of the millennial student and the millennial president, the topics we addressed at the Fall, 2006, Colloquium.

I'd like us to once again focus upon the deep cultural changes needed by colleges and universities to respond to the demands of this current student generation, about the new shape of knowledge and the new paradigms required to capture this altered universe of discourse, the millennial ontology. And, as we do so, to keep in mind Alvin Toffler's prophetic announcement in 1979 that citizens of the world's richest and most technologically advanced nations would find it difficult and painful to keep up with the incessant demand for change. As Toffler said, "the future will have arrived too soon."

If the future has indeed arrived too soon, what must we do? Certainly this question must concern each and every faculty member as much, if not more, than college and university presidents, or trustees, or any other element of the higher education community.

So, as we turn our thoughts to the various challenges facing the community college professoriate in these early years of the new millennium, it strikes me that we have a wonderful opportunity to engage in creative re-thinking of the standard paradigm and explore how we, as the premier public college in NJ, might venture to assume a leadership role among our peers to more effectively meet the needs of millennial students.

At the heart of the matter is the challenge of how we can contribute to repairing the schism, real or imagined, between the old knowledge paradigm and the new, a schism which, as I see it, has often been used as a *de-facto* standard of judgment of the community college segment, much to our disadvantage and certainly to my regret. So perhaps our most urgent task of all is to begin to redefine what we mean by the term "professional development" when the collegiate teaching profession is experiencing 'deep change' and "developing", in some instances quite literally, at the speed of light.

No longer can we think of our development as academic professionals as either a 'some time thing' or as a professional option to be pursued in a desultory fashion. We must move it to the center of our definition of what it means to be a millennial professor. We must embrace the idea of change ... deep change ... remembering that, "The

pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.” (William Ward, 1921-1994)

Over time, it has become a troublesome cliché that community colleges are “teaching institutions” with the silent (and sometimes not-so-silent) implication that community college faculty members have no need to be involved in scholarship and research, and that somehow the continuous improvement and personal growth inherent in these efforts can be divorced from their teaching. Earl Seidman, a noted scholar on community college teaching, has observed that “the false dichotomy between research and teaching” that started with the community college movement fifty years ago continues to perpetuate the belief that academic professionals “interested in research and scholarship are not interested in teaching.” (TETYC Journal, December 2006, 135)

Worse, this false dichotomy insinuates that scholarship has little to do with teaching and that teaching has little to do with scholarship. And, perhaps worst of all, this perceived divorce between research and pedagogical concerns at the community college has perpetuated the stereotype that the quality of the educational experience at the community college, and how well we prepare students for upper-division baccalaureate study, is somehow lower than the quality of the educational experience in the first two years of a four-year college or university.

In fact, just last month, as the New Jersey Presidents Council was considering the Lampitt Bill, which guarantees full faith and credit in transfer for New Jersey Community College Associate Degrees, that very argument was articulated to all of his fellow presidents by the President of a four-year university.

Now, for those of you who have been listening to my speeches and reading my published remarks for the past six and a half years since I began as President of Ocean County College, you will be aware that I agree with none of these arguments. I find them both demeaning and inaccurate. The community college movement has brought hope and re-written the futures of thousands of people who fifty years ago would not even have considered college matriculation. While we deal with a unique population of students with unique challenges, we are pledged to offer a meaningful learning experience to each and every one of them.

You will recall, I hope, my continuing and consistent statements defining the student experience at OCC as an experience of excellence. You will remember my repeated advocacy for this college as an institution of quality, of innovation, of high standards, one that strives, in the words of our Vision Statement, “to be, quite simply, the best.” Our Vision Statement begins with the proposition that “Ocean County College aspires to be an institution of distinction where an exceptional faculty and staff serve to awaken students to a love of learning.” These are not just words to me but a sincere affirmation of our high purpose.

You may also recall that at the 2005 Colloquium, I said: “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.’ We are here to awaken minds.”

Now, I’d like to share with you, having recently returned from the annual OCC student leadership conference in the Catskills, what an overwhelmingly positive experience it was, as it has been each of the five other times I have participated. Not only is it a joy for my wife Judy and me to share this time and opportunity for engagement with our student leaders, this experience also serves, to my mind, as a model for faculty-student interaction. As I listened to Don Doran give his famous (or is that “infamous”?) bucket presentation, I was once again struck by the how the entire conference is structured to reveal to students the value of the ‘examined life,’ of the life that is full of what is meaningful and positive.

While we participated during the retreat with only a very small percentage of our student population and watched them and their ideas grow and take shape before our eyes, our faculty have this very same opportunity on a daily basis, and day-in and day-out bear witness to the fact that we are indeed here to awaken minds. After all, it is their professors, first and foremost, that our students remember after they leave us.

You will also recall, I hope, that my normal routine in these start-of-the-semester speeches catalogues, in great detail, the remarkable achievements of many of our faculty members in the areas of scholarship, research, and contributions to their disciplines and to our academic profession. I have often repeated my pledge to maintain the appropriate balance between full-time and adjunct faculty, setting as a minimum goal the national standard, a 50:50 ratio, full-time to adjunct, of credit hours taught.

Until very recently we had an outstanding record in that area, maintaining a better than 50:50 ratio up through the Spring 2006 semester where it stood at 56:44 (full-time to adjunct). Although we have dipped to slightly below this ratio—48:52 in the fall of 06—as a result of retirements and severe state budget cuts, I have not lost sight of regaining our former position and, indeed, bettering it.

I recently called upon Dr. Wetta to establish a faculty hiring plan that will move to achieve this objective over the next three academic years.

And further, we are also putting our money where our mouth is, so to speak, in making the commitment to establish our partnership with Kean University, a partnership that articulates very clearly that we can and do provide teaching/learning excellence on a par with the first two years of four in a university context. The remarkable success of our graduates who transfer to all colleges and universities, including Kean, further attests to this equation.

Still, many factors about community college teaching have contributed to the perception of the divide between research and teaching, between “just teaching” and not “keeping up” and the alleged resulting differences in institutional quality. Some pundits

blame it on the institution itself, the community college said to be designed to extract the maximum teaching output from its faculties. Thus it is not surprising to read the cynical notion cited in a recent journal article that two-year colleges “purposely devalue research in order to justify demands for increasing course loads and class size.” (TETYC, 136)

In her essay entitled “Scholarship Matters,” Carolyn Prager says that “community colleges have not institutionalized scholarship in any form—not in terms of mission, not in terms of policies, not in terms of budgeting, not in terms of work loads, not in terms of reward systems, and not in terms of other ways that four-year colleges and universities give it substance and life.” (*Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27: 580, 2003)

Community college campuses seldom have the facilities suited to advanced research and are often situated many miles away from large university centers where such resources and facilities are available. Community colleges have also seemed content to distance themselves academically from four-year colleges and universities by defining themselves as teaching institutions only and thus have, by intention and policy, removed their faculties from the imperative of scholarly responsibility, so vital a requisite of continuing employment and advancement in the other sectors of higher education.

It has also been suggested by some observers of the community college world that prospective faculty members seek jobs at community colleges precisely to avoid the demands of research and publication, activities which they either find almost irrelevant to teaching responsibilities or, if lacking the terminal degree, of little interest. Warned of the pressures of a “publish or perish” environment, so this argument goes, some faculty members see the community college as a refuge from these scholarly pressures.

As Terry O’Banion has noted, “The unchallenged assumption was that the community college was the ‘teaching college’ and the lack of research and publication on the part of its faculty was ironically cited as proof.” (*Teaching and Learning in the Community College*, 1994, p. 4) A 1998 study from Stanford University, *Community College Faculty Attitudes and Trends*, by M. T. Huber, notes that community college faculty have enjoyed a “special exemption” (p. 12) from professional conversations about the nature of academic work, while Judith Eaton observed in 1994 that they have been “notably absent from the ongoing national discussions of the past two decades that have reshaped undergraduate education in the liberal arts and the professions [in areas] such as general education reform, general education outcomes assessment, and multiculturalism.” (*Strengthening College Education in Community Colleges*, Jossey-Bass, 1994)

Some even argue that community college faculties simply wait and accept the received wisdom of the advanced professoriate a decade after their discussions have settled matters.

Community College faculty who *have* engaged in scholarly pursuits cite the numerous difficulties they encounter in so doing, not only in terms of available time,

resources, and demands upon their personal stamina, but also in the accompanying lack of support from the professional organizations designed to facilitate faculty scholarship.

A major study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics discovered that the average full-time community college faculty member devotes 67% of the work week to teaching, 19% to departmental business, 9.5% to administrative chores, and only 4.5% to research. (ERIC Review: Scholarship in the Community College System, Spring '99, 26:4, p. 2)

Other faculty members describe the difficulties encountered in trying to get released time and/or funding from their college administrations to support their research. And many, many faculty members at two-year institutions eventually suffer the accumulated weariness, the so-called “burn-out,” engendered by the heavy teaching loads of freshmen/sophomore and developmental courses, by too many advisees, too many committee meetings, too few opportunities for engagement in active pursuit of upper-level course instruction, or just by the lack of time to pursue interests in the discipline that brought them into the profession in the first place.

If this were not enough, perhaps the most insurmountable barrier is the failure of external professional societies to permit consistent representation in the professoriate of community college faculties and their work, bodies such as the Modern Language Association (the MLA) or the Mathematical Association of America (the MMA).

Another inherent difficulty in the recombination of teaching and scholarship for community college faculty members lies in the very definition of academic scholarship itself. This is a definition which, due to the very effects of culture shock and deep change, has become broader, wider, deeper, and far more difficult to get a handle on. Definitions have been offered which run the gamut from, on the one hand, the traditional view that scholarship is “prestigious, original, published research which has changed the way people think about the discipline” down to, on the other hand, “whatever I do as a professional academician.”

Many community college faculty members will tell you that original research in the discipline has little to do with what goes on in their classrooms while others will assert that engaging students in their own research projects as subjects or as mini-assistants is a valuable teaching-learning-scholarly enterprise.

I am of the view that community colleges do have a special contribution to make in traditional, genuine academic scholarship, so let us consider some ways this may be practically applied. Clara Ford in *Community College Review* defines one such approach, action research, “as a systematic process of studying one’s own practice to find answers and practical solutions to pragmatic problems. . . . For example, one could identify problems in the curriculum, in the discipline, or in the methodology, problems that are interfering with the efficiency of teaching.”(ERIC Review, 3) Ford calls this “a form of research that is uniquely tailored to the needs of the community college,” but in posing

this focus threatens to limit the definition of community college scholarship to a narrow, second-tier status.

In further attempting to define academic scholarship in general and community college academic scholarship in particular, Ernest Boyer has identified four dimensions in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching. Boyer gives equal weight to all four categories and argues that the door should be open for community college and undergraduate faculty in general to have opportunity to engage in legitimate, practical, pedagogical scholarship at least to the extent it is consistent with institutional parameters.

Carolyn Prager suggests that every faculty member has three citizenships: within a department and an institution; within a discipline; and within the higher education community, yet notes that community college faculty members have had a difficult time asserting their citizenship within the discipline and the external academic community. She concludes by saying, “It is more than time to re-conceptualize the community college mission in ways that allow community college faculty to enjoy all three academic citizenships.” (591) And, this is my theme, my message today.

I think it is also important to note that by stressing the differences between community college faculty and those faculty members at universities and four-year colleges whose primary job is also to teach undergraduates, we lose sight of their similarities which are far more pervasive than their differences. Author Charmian Sperling has pointed out that “in many ways, community college teachers are similar to those at baccalaureate and research universities. . .” (*Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27: 577, 2003)

As most college faculty will tell you, college teaching is frequently an on-the-job-training occupation, often begun in the graduate assistant or adjunct ranks. And not only do community college and four-year faculty enter the professoriate under similar apprenticeships, they also find themselves confronted by approximately the same issues—the under-prepared learner, the increasing pressure for grade inflation, the accountability requisites, learning assessment protocols, the challenges of technology, the deconstructed classroom, and the global curriculum, to name a few. These issues do not differ very much from community college to private liberal arts college to state senior public institution to major research university.

So it is neither their preparation nor what community college faculty face in their daily work that separates them from four-year faculty so much as it is what they are permitted to bring to the table when these issues are discussed by the profession as a whole and what their community college institutions and labor agreements support and encourage. It is in this absence from the decision-making process that community college professors have been denied their participation in the great educational debates raging in the face of the deep change that has impacted and will continue to impact the higher education agenda.

For example, there is currently a debate ensuing about the nature of history, its post-modern face, its relationship to globalization and, as a result, what will or should be learned and taught by the professoriate. The increasing number of Ph. D. degrees granted in Asian and African history is beginning to challenge the number completed in American and European history. What will we get to say and how will we enter this debate?

And what about the demand of students for training in electronic journalism as opposed to print journalism? There was recently a news item that told of a number of highly skilled reporters who left the *Washington Post* for work in news blogs in the belief that these represent the future of journalism. What part will we play in this debate?

In the upcoming New Jersey Edge Best Practices conferences, attention has been given to the topic “The Death of the Essay,” based on the writings, of, among others, Professor Norbert Elliot at NJIT and Professor David Punter and the University of Bristol. How will we answer the questions, “Do students still write essays? Should they?” What contributions will we make to the destiny of our curriculum in the face of these challenges?

In examining how all of this relates to our circumstance at Ocean County College with regard to faculty scholarship, I am inclined to agree with Eric Ziolkowski in his essay, “Slouching toward Scholardom: The Endangered American College,” who maintains: “It would seem self evident that to teach a subject, one must know a subject, and those who know a subject best are those who have investigated it. . . and who have dared to conceive and submit original work on it for appraisal by professional peers.” (*College English*, 58 (1996): 568-87)

Ziolkowski’s point in this essay is that teaching and scholarship are wedded, not divorced, and it is in the celebration of this wedding that faculty members are able to keep alive not only their own curiosity of mind but also the vitality of the college experience they provide for their students. Further, by active engagement with the community of scholars, we both join and influence the decision makers and avoid being relegated to the role of passive recipients of the received wisdom of those who write the books and the academic agenda.

I ask myself how well our own college has supported faculty scholarship and I conclude that like many of our sister schools, in the sector and in undergraduate education in general, we could probably do better... much better!

We do offer our faculty traditional sabbatical leaves and other forms of paid leave to help alleviate the time and money constraints placed on scholarly work. We also encourage and support faculty who apply for and receive academic study awards like the mid-career fellowship at Princeton University and the various study-abroad opportunities fostered by our burgeoning academic partnerships.

We also offer an excellent salary and benefits package which can provide faculty the luxury of reducing or eliminating summer teaching in order to take on research activities during this time. And the college has been fully supportive when it comes to granting tuition reimbursements, professional development and travel funding, and instructional development grants for proposals with merit.

With all these opportunities available, however, and some additional individual opportunities available for faculty within their respective academic departments, still it is clear that we have not managed to develop a culture of scholarship at Ocean County College, nor a pervasive attitude of scholarly curiosity, nor an eagerness to embrace research and study as an integral part of the teaching enterprise. It is clear that we have not been able to foster inter-departmental dialogues about our academic disciplines nor adequately foster intra-departmental dialogues on significant pedagogical issues of concern in the academic world.

Indeed, we have too often found shelter in the silence of our individual silos. Unquestionably, voices of discord have sometimes been noised over the quieter voices of scholarly inquiry, silencing them or masking them in part because campus politics becomes much more interesting in a vacuum of the intellectual stimulation that is the *raison de etre* of academic life.

So, I am concerned about the issue of professional scholarship; and, as I said above, about the maintenance of a vigorous faculty, both full-time and adjunct; but I believe together we can set goals to better address these concerns. I think we can work to hire highly qualified adjuncts and dedicate ourselves to further improving our mentoring and professional development of adjuncts in order to harvest the best and the brightest for full-time positions.

I think we need to continue to use the best of the best classroom technologies to deliver learning in a myriad of new ways to meet the challenges of the century and continually cultivate in the millennial professor a comfort with learning at a distance. And I think that, most of all, we have to begin to view multiple work load options and begin to re-think faculty load in a number of ways that more clearly emphasize our commitment to a culture of scholarship.

Let me be very clear about what I mean by this: I mean that the college is anxious to look very closely at the constitutes of our faculty work load and explore options that would release faculty from some part of it in order to pursue scholarly work in a regular and on-going way.

Because I believe these are deeply significant issues, well worth pursuing immediately, it is my intention to bring together in the next few weeks a group of interested persons to investigate the status of faculty scholarship at Ocean County College in order to see what more the college can do to support the reintegration of these two essential components of the professoriate: teaching and scholarship. I want to start a dialogue through which we ultimately select and clarify the definitions of scholarship that

will significantly join us to the larger professoriate and then to identify ways in which Ocean County College can directly facilitate and support these contributions from our faculty.

I am cognizant that in order to institutionalize scholarship, we will have to re-examine our mission, our policies, our budgets, our assignment of work load, our reward systems—and all other means by which we might create a climate of scholarship and the academic excitement it can bring. I truly do believe, in the words of Spigelman and Day, that “faculty at small and community colleges can and should be conducting research that informs their teaching and adds knowledge to their fields.” (“Valuing Research at Small and Community Colleges,” *TETYC*, 34: 2, 2006, 145)

I know that community college faculty members compare with the best, anywhere, and that a significant challenge for the millennial professor here at OCC is finding ways to reconnect with the scholarly engagement that will work to continuously renew his or her intellectual commitment to teaching *and* learning. I am reminded of Chaucer’s Clerk in *The Canterbury Tales*, described by the narrator as one who “would gladly learn and gladly teach.” These were words of highest praise and a circumstance that I would like to engender at Ocean County College so that we might be a beacon to the professoriate, a living and passionate example of the millennial professor, engaged, active, energized...a player.

Let me end my remarks this morning by paraphrasing the timely and relevant closing remarks of our Governor, Jon Corzine, in his 2007 State of the State address:

“OCC needs change. We have the power and the opportunity to deliver that change. We must act.

As I close with a plea for action, I am reminded of the cadet maxim from West Point that is spot on for our work in the weeks ahead.

‘Risk more than other think is safe. Care more than others think is wise. Dream more than others think is practical. Expect more than others think is possible,’

The ball is in our court. It’s time to finish...”

Yes, now is the time for each of us to step up and join the 21st century, the new millennium, and realize our quest to make Ocean County College New Jersey’s premier public college.

We can do it! “The ball is in our court!”

And now, it gives me great pleasure to present the Employee Service Awards for 2006.

30 Year Employees:

Elaine Berson

Adjunct Professor-Social Science

E. Clyde H. Crofoot	Adjunct Associate Professor-Business
Alan F. Ferraro	Adjunct Associate Professor-Social Science
Mark H. Harper	Adjunct Assistant Professor-Humanities
Scott M. Heilman	Assistant Professor-Health and Performance
Nancy Polonitza	Counselor/Assistant Professor
Irene [D.enutia] Rys	Administrative Assistant-Student Life

20 Year Employees:

Linda Atanasio	Administrative Assistant-Math
Linda J. Caltagirone	Assistant Professor of Nursing
Suzanne A. DiFiore	Adjunct Associate Professor-Business
Theodore J. Hutler	Adjunct Instructor-Social Science
Maryann McLoughlin-O'Donnell	Adjunct Assistant professor-English
John C. Mecchia	Adjunct Instructor-Business
Bridget A. Root	Assistant to Director of Registration and Records
Joseph J. Tarala	Adjunct Instructor-Humanities
Claire M. Weimmer	Adjunct Assistant Professor-English
John Weber	Currently, Adjunct Professor of English

Congratulations to everyone.
