

SPRING SEMESTER COLLOQUIUM
January 21, 2003

FEEL THE WIND

Jon H. Larson, President

Buongiorno! [Buonasera!]

Benvenuto a primavera semestre! Ciao tutti nostra professori e personali, e grazie per il vostri partecipare in nostra secundo instituto superiore Colloquia!

Good morning [evening] and welcome to the spring semester! Hello everyone, and thank you for participating in our second College Colloquium!

In case you are wondering about my Italian greeting, I have just returned from Italy where a group of 14 faculty, staff, students and friends, e de capo Dottoressa Marilyn Kralik, enjoyed 12 glorious days visiting museums and architectural monuments in Rome, Siena, Florence, Verona, Venice, Ravenna, Assisi, Sorrento, Capri and Pompeii. OCC offers such marvelous programs through our International Education office! Did you know, during the break, in addition to Italy, we sponsored a trip to Spain that traced the footsteps of Cervantes, and a trip to London where the participants experienced a blitz of exposure to British dramatic theater? International Education is an area OCC intends to emphasize as we strive to achieve distinction and distinctiveness as a premier collegiate institution.

My role this morning [evening] is to set the stage for the Colloquium and pose some thoughts for us to ponder as the activities of the day [evening] unfold. The purposes of the Colloquium is to create a sense of community, build enthusiasm and commitment to our common purpose, and provide an opportunity to share thoughts and information as we begin each new term. You are doing such a wonderful job that our challenge in planning this program was not in finding topics to discuss, but in how to devise an agenda of manageable proportions!

Charles De Gaulle once remarked wryly about his role as the President of France, “How can you be expected to govern a country that has 246 kinds of cheese?” This is such an insightful quote because it pithily communicates so much about France, its history and its people. And, our own history and culture as an academic institution underlies and supports our present reality, our “existence,” and in a similar way will continue to color our future. One of our tasks today involves assessing how our history and culture can be adapted to accommodate the compelling forces of modern life, new technologies, and the emergence of a truly global village where our competitors and peers are not merely local, nor regional, or even national.

It is for that reason, the need to change intelligently – retaining our institutional role in preserving the knowledge of the past, exploring and discovering new knowledge, and defending the standards of quality essential to our fundamental mission as a learning institution during an era of change and growth – that we convene here today “in colloquium.”

Some of the key issues are discernible from a review of the excellent program organized by Sandy Carine and the Colloquium Planning Committee. Their names appear on the back page of the program. It takes significant effort and skill to pull together the details of a program such as this and we owe Sandy and the committee members our gratitude. Thank you all!

From assessment of learning outcomes, to using the Web for learning and research, our program is a reflection of the change we are experiencing in this, the greatest era of innovation and expansion of learning opportunity in the history of mankind. At noon, Sister Rosemary Jeffries, President of Georgian Court College, will speak about the Future of Higher Education, referencing the same planning model we at OCC are using to develop our academic master plan.

The symbolic significance of Sister Rosemary’s appearance here today is impossible to overlook. Traveling through modern day Italy, the evidence of the impact of ancient and medieval structures and institutions is everywhere apparent. The roots of the modern American university derive from the academic institutions that emerged in the early Renaissance, largely supported by the Church, and following a pattern of retirement from ordinary life of the

marketplace to a sanctuary where contemplation and study of the ancient classics was the primary curriculum.

But, providing a secular opportunity for higher education beyond secondary school for virtually every citizen is a very recent development. This principle, making higher education nearly universally available, is embodied in the American Community College concept. We have gone beyond the walls of the university, into the forum and the shops and workplaces and spas, to provide learning opportunities for our friends, our neighbors, the children and grandparents of our communities. And at OCC, we are designing further modifications to this model, modifications that permit those still attending the secondary school to also begin college study, that offer study abroad to those who wish to take a semester, a summer, or a two-week immersion in another culture as an enhancement of their collegiate experience, all the while allowing our students and faculty to remain connected via the Internet or to actually carry out their coursework via Web technology.

Our discussions today are focused on how we can do these new things while retaining the best of what makes the traditional higher education experience rewarding and beneficial. No longer is the issue whether we will change, but rather how we will guide our transformation, as we preserve the best of the past and improve upon it with the wondrous advantages that modern life and our role as an innovative learning institution make possible.

So, as you go about the business of considering our future, I ask that you reflect upon these questions:

- How can we evolve a culture that preserves our OCC tradition of great teaching, high academic standards and empathy for the needs of our students in the emerging world of online or Internet-based learning that surrounds us today?
- How can we retain and strengthen the sense of community on campus that has evolved in recent years so that we grow together and ensure a nurturing place for our work and study, free of enervating distractions?

- How can we document the excellence we know pervades the learning experience here at OCC, and make adjustments where needed, to assure that our forthcoming re-accreditation evaluation is not merely successful, but exemplary?
- And, as we grow, how can we continue to be nimble, innovative, and responsive to opportunities to serve our community without losing sight of our foundational commitment to excellence and without becoming too rigid, too complacent, or too exclusive to allow learning innovations to find fertile ground for germination.

Certainly, we are a work in progress. So let us all become engaged in inventing our future. In this journey, we need all hands on deck ... some to grind the windlass, some to navigate the way, some to furl the sails. But we all can feel the wind! We all can shout out our vision of the future and join the song of this sea of change upon which we are tossing together!

So today, let's hear some shouting! And let's remember our goal in doing it, in Woodrow Wilson's elegant words, is "...to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. We are here to enrich the world..."

Once again I thank each of you for your dedication and hard work; for seeking out and finding opportunity in every difficulty we encounter; and for coming together here today in support of each other and in support of our destiny as an academic institution of greatness.

Thank you, Ocean County College!