

Spring 2010 Colloquium Remarks

January 22, 2010

Dr. Jon Larson, President

Welcome to the spring 2010 Colloquium. As we begin the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is certainly our time to celebrate at Ocean County College. Although these are in many ways the worst of times, for us these are the best of times. Things are good. We grow, we improve, we innovate, we fulfill our mission in unique style, and, because in all these ways we prosper, we are deeply appreciative of each and every one of you who gives us your all every day. In recognition of the dedication and great work being done by each of you, please reach out to your right and then to your left and shake your neighbor's hand. Go ahead; shake! Now, give yourself a round of applause.

Thank you!

It's great to have everyone back together again and to make visible the true spirit of community that defines our college. We don't ignore our differences. Those exist; they are bound to; they must. But we engage in conversations to reconcile them and the history of this decade shows that we always have—and as long as I am President, we always will. (There's no message there—just commitment! I'm here until they wheel me out—and as many of you know, I am still only 50!) But, enough of that—let's get down to business!

Welcome to the Spring 2010 semester. And my especial welcome this morning to our honored guests.

It is my pleasure to speak with you today for a short while about Basic Skills. Not the kind of basic skills those words might initially conjure up in your mind, but, in this usage, a much more expansive and transcendent view of a college and university curriculum.

It has become fashionable these days, perhaps it has always been somewhat fashionable, to spend a lot of time discussing what's wrong with higher education, to critique us, to bust our chops a little—or a lot. The journalists and the writers are involved opining and punditing their way to the unemployment line, it seems. According to the *NY Times* and the *Asbury Park Press*, higher education needs a new funding model (and that puts us on the same page!). According to Jim Collins, author of How the Mighty Fall, we need a new corporate model. Bradberry and Graves, of Emotional Intelligence 2.0 fame, think we need more Emotional Intelligence, while Daniel Pink suggests what we really need is A Whole New Mind in Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future.

The politicians are also into the blame game. That should be no surprise since criticizing the opponent and negative advertising is the “mother's milk” of politics. President Obama is

offering up twelve billion dollars (if he can find it) to help community colleges help students reduce the time it takes for them to reach degree completion. The President also wants us to get busy and start training people for green jobs, the definition of which still remains a bit elusive. George Bush wanted us to leave no child behind, even if the dollars with which to fund this mandate were left behind, and, just recently, Governor-elect Christie indicated that higher education will be expected to find a way to begin rejuvenating the state's economy by training and putting people back to work in New Jersey.

At the December 2009 annual conference of the Middle States Commission of Higher Education, plenary speaker, Mark David Milliron, called for colleges and universities, in the face of continuing transformational change, to move to something he called "Transcendent Learning," a form of curricular reform that he claims recognizes what truly will be required of our graduates in this brave new, economically and technologically transformed world.¹ In the face of what he terms "dramatic change," Milliron calls for an "education transformation" where the core academic skills, the real "basic skills," if you will, are redefined to be: 1. critical learning, 2. creativity, 3. social awareness/engagement, and, most of all, 4. courageous learning—that is, the courageous acceptance of the fact that the learner will never be "learned," but, rather will always be learning. As Eric Hoffer has noted, "In times 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." Justification aplenty why all of us—faculty, administrators, and staff—must be fully-engaged life-long learners.

At first blush, Milliron's hypothesis seems like just another clarion call for change. Or, as David Friedman put it, "if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." We have heard about curricular transformation before, those ever-new forms of learning that will bring students closer than ever to the twin nirvanas of success and happiness. When you really stop to think of it, we have been threatened with our future for decades: Future Shock, Alvin Toffler's paradigmatic text of them all, has been followed by Richard Watson's Future Files, George Friedman's The Next 100 Years, Howard Gardner's Five Minds for the Future, Richard Laermer's Trendspotting for the Next Decade, Thomas Lombardo's Contemporary Futurist Thought, and dozens more. We have been a generation of readers peering into the crystal ball of tomorrow and trying to control the years ahead with as little real success as any other band of futurists at any other time.

However, a recent article in the journal, *Planning for Higher Education*, put things in a clearer context for me. The article identifies the following twelve trends that colleges and universities must consider planning for in the future. These so-called future trends, however when considered carefully, seemed to me to be more about time present than time future. I repeat these twelve items this morning because, to paraphrase Pogo, "we have found the future and it is now." Here is our present:

1. The influence of globalization

¹ Milliron, Mark David. Closing Plenary Session, MSCHE Annual Workshop (December 11, 2009). Philadelphia, PA <http://www.MSCHE.org>

2. The requisite for inclusive, holistic learning
3. Experiential learning for the “Digital Native” student
4. Colleges and Universities doing more with less
5. Technological change
6. Interdisciplinary learning
7. Students taking greater control of their learning portfolios
8. Older, more diverse student populations
9. Increased competition for students and resources
10. Institutional involvement with regional economic development
11. Multiple types of employment relationships between educational institutions and faculties with the expected resulting tensions; and
12. Increased accountability and assessment tools to define institutional effectiveness.

So, as trends replace traditions and contexts replace trends, all reshape themselves in an unbroken cycle of change. Still, we must be able to continue to identify our priorities as we gaze at the horizon and are reminded of the poet T.S. Eliot’s simple advice: “Teach us to care. . . Teach us to sit still.”² We must care about what counts and sit still long enough to recognize it. Perhaps it is best to simply understand, as our grandchildren do, that we can live in a world of dramatic change without culture shock or paralysis and that we can both adapt to change and sustain our basic values amidst these adaptations. These ideas might not be inherently contradictory at all.

Are you following this? If not, I can go back and repeat it.

I was watching a TV show a few weeks ago in which a young couple was seeking to purchase a new house, looking at all sorts of properties in their quest. The wife kept saying, “of course we’d have to modernize the kitchen.” And I kept thinking, why? It looks nice, it works; what’s so magical about granite counters?

Viewed in this light, it is possible to view the notion of Transcendent Learning, not necessarily as something new (like granite counters), but as something stable, something functional, and in some lights, as something quite old, quite traditional.

Let’s think about it this way: If we are looking to avoid what not to focus on in the ideal college curriculum, we might do well to remember Daniel Pink’s oft-quoted trilogy: Abundance, Automation, and Asia. Pink makes the socio-economic argument in A Whole New Mind that, these days, nothing that matters is scarce or scarce for long. Consumers have many choices—too many choices. So, what is there for students to offer to future employers? What can they do that can’t be done by a million other people, by a computer, or by outsourcing to Asia? Thus the phrase “Abundance, Automation and Asia” implies a diminished role for aspirants to the world of work, the world for which we train our students.

To survive, compete and succeed in such a world, our students, some argue, will need that particular set of skills identified as Transcendent Learning. But is this a new idea? It’s not a

² Eliot, Thomas Sterns. “Ash Wednesday, Part I.” (1930)

new word, certainly. It echoes the 19th century American concept called Transcendentalism, defined as “a group of new ideas in literature, religion, culture, and philosophy that emerged in New England.” But while Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay *Nature*, published in 1836, is often cited as the moment when this “revolution in human consciousness” emerged, it has been closely associated with the 18th century philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the school of German Idealism. Kant’s interest was not so much in the nature of reality itself, but in our mode of knowing reality, in *epistemology*, or the study and understanding of how man knows. Certainly the transcendentalists and idealists of centuries ago would be interested in how the act of knowing shapes both an individual’s world view and his ability to live within this world he has at least in part invented; which brings us back to Mr. Milliron and his sense of the new basic skills for the new curriculum; or, as I see it, identifies a throwback to the universal skills that we continue to rename, with new words, but that are really just old wine in new bottles, rediscovered and re-cherished.

The first of the “new” basic skills of Transcendent Learning is identified by Milliron as **Critical Learning**, and is simply defined as “the basics.” These are the academic survival skills—whether we speak of the traditional basic skills of reading, writing and mathematical computing or the contemporary skills comprising computer literacy, it does not matter. We all must know what the world expects us to know and we must continue to learn it when something new appears. When Ocean County College first opened its doors, it dedicated itself to “lifelong learning.” That dedication has not changed. We learn all of our lives. In the 15th and 16th centuries when print appeared and we embarked on what Marshall McLuhan called the Gutenberg Galaxy, we had to change from an oral to a print society just as we now are transitioning to cyberspace and the flat world. Each human historical phase defines its basics; each university is obliged to teach them.

Included among ours are communications, technological literacy, quantitative and scientific inquiry, qualitative and emergent inquiry, continued reflection into the nature of self and reality, and the workings of socio-economic-political realities.

Also part of the twenty-first century’s basic skills, Milliron argues, is the capacity for **Creative Learning**. This is work in what we have traditionally thought of as the Creative Arts, discovering and developing creative talents; but it is also learning the skills of creative thinking—creative analysis and problem solving, what has come to be known in common parlance as “thinking outside the box”- (or, thinking inside it, if that’s where the best answer lies).

In his best-selling book, The Rise of the Creative Class (2002), author Richard Florida argues that if America continues to make it harder for some of the world's most talented students and workers to stay here or come here, they'll go to other countries eager to tap into their creative capabilities—as will American citizens fed up with what they view as an increasingly repressive environment. He argues that the loss of even a few geniuses can have a tremendous impact on our national culture, adding that the "overblown" economic threat posed by large nations such as China and India threatens to obscure all the far more dangerous

little blows inflicted upon the U.S. by Canada, Scandinavia, New Zealand and other countries with more open creative climates than our own.

What exactly is creativity? Why do some people seem to have so much of it? Can their secrets be learned? In his popular book, Cracking Creativity, internationally renowned expert Michael Michalko addresses these questions by accumulating research and analyzing over one hundred of history's greatest thinkers, from Leonardo DaVinci to Charles Darwin, from Thomas Edison to Walt Disney, to show readers how creative people think. He demonstrates, time and time again, that bringing multiple perspectives to the most difficult problems, walking around them instead of staring at them from one fixed point, is how the most creative minds ultimately find new solutions. In our own diverse century, it is more important than ever to educate young minds to understand convergence and divergence in order for them to become the creative thinkers we need to fulfill our national promise.

The third of Milliron's new basic skills he calls **Social Learning**, not simply sociology, *per se*, but an understanding of the self in its relationship with others on a daily basis and in multiple spheres, both social and personal. This competency includes awareness, mindfulness, engagement, collaborative learning, service learning and all the skills involved with social intelligence. This happens in the classroom or in the employee lounge, in the gym or in the bookstore, to students, faculty and staff alike. Many of these skills are referred to as the "soft skills," but there is nothing soft about human interactivity. Harvard psychologist Daniel Goleman, in his book, *Social Intelligence*, explores the notion that we are all victims of society's "creeping disconnection in the age of the iPod, constant digital connectivity, and multitasking."³ Evoking the power of social interaction to influence mood and brain chemistry, Goleman discusses the "toxicity" of insult and unpleasant social experience and warns of the dangers of self-absorption and poor attention. Conversely, he identifies the positive effects of neurochemicals that are released in loving relationships and in care-giving. He shows how social sensitivity and wisdom can profoundly reshape conflicts. I believe it is possible to shape our curricula to integrate the basic interactive skills of social learning—to model them for our students as well as including them in the learning process.

The final skill that I have included in my new list of college "basic skills" is what Milliron calls **Courageous Learning**. I think this comes very close to what I mentioned earlier as what we at the college identified upon our founding as our fundamental mission, the understanding that learning never really stops and that what we have called "lifelong learning" really defines the human condition as one of perpetual acquisition of knowledge. I think it was the author Robert Penn Warren who penned the phrase: "For the end of man is to know." Descartes said it a little more existentially: "I think; therefore I am." But even without espousing a flat rationalistic view, it is not only possible but necessary for us to see the role of the college and university in the 21st century as one which primarily teaches students how to continue to learn throughout their lives.

³ Goleman, Daniel. *Social Intelligence*. NY: Bantam, 2007.

In light of this, both we and our students need the intellectual courage to know, simply, that learning never ends. We may complete courses, get grades, achieve degrees, and finish our on-the-job-training; but what we need to know to survive in a world of drastic change greets us anew every day. This is not to say, necessarily, that we need to acquire the knowledge that entrepreneurs require of us in order to purchase and use their new products. For example, for Christmas, I got a key chain with digital photo capacity. Accompanying this innocent little gift were nine pages of instructions on how to load the photos. Help! So naturally, some things are just not necessarily worth knowing how to do (except, of course, if your grandson asks to see the photos that you loaded onto the key chain that he gave you for Christmas!).

So this is what I am calling the new basic skills—for both our students and for ourselves: Critical Learning, Creative Learning, Social Learning, and Courageous Learning. And I think as we proceed to hear the good and great news about the State of the College this morning, we will all agree that it has been through ingenuity in the practice of these skills that we have managed measurable achievements over this past year and that we enter this new decade before us poised for even greater success than we have known before. I hope you have found this provocative and will join me in continuing this discussion throughout the coming year.

Now to the state of things!

Academic Affairs has had many notable achievements that I am pleased to share with you this morning. Thanks to the able leadership of Richard Strada, after successful completion of a complex reorganization, we have moved forward on a number of important academic fronts. We have vastly expanded both new developments and new plans for our Distance Learning initiatives. Pat Fenn, Director of E-Learning, has completed the implementation of fully online degree programs in Business Administration (AS), Business (AAS), and Liberal Arts (AA)—as well as offering online certificate programs in Small Business Management and Business Studies. Pat has developed an online recruiting process for adjunct distance learning faculty and has integrated the new Wimba technology into selected distance learning courses.

The School of Communication and the Arts presented the exceedingly popular Concerts in the Tower musical series—a series so popular that performances had to be moved to a larger space to accommodate growing audiences. This not only promises future performance success, but an expansion of our music curriculum.

The college also completed the planning for the new Teaching and Learning Center that will initiate its services for fulltime and adjunct professors in the Spring 2010 Semester. This project was developed by Dr. Alfred Longo, Associate Professor of Education, and will be located on the second floor of the Instruction Building.

Dean Labollita, Assistant Dean of Social Science and Human Services, in conjunction with Stockton College, has developed a seamless transition program for students interested in pursuing careers in drug and alcohol counseling. After completing their AS Degree at Ocean

County College, the students will be able to complete both the bachelors and masters degrees at Stockton with the necessary classes offered at our Southern Education Center. Presently, Benny Castillo, Dean of the School of Social Science and Human Services and Bray Barnes, Assistant to the President, are working with Georgian Court University to provide a similar opportunity for our students interested in a Homeland Security program. The School of Social Science and Human Services has already provided professional development opportunities for professionals in the areas of Homeland Security and Drug and Alcohol Counseling to further enhance these collaborative programs.

Finally, during the fall semester, the membership of the new Developmental Education Committee of the College Senate was elected and began its work under the leadership of chairman, Mike Pezzimenti. The establishment of this committee was one of several recommendations of the Developmental Education Process Improvement Team.

From Don Doran and **Student Affairs**, we report to you with pride that the Ocean County College chapter of the *American Chemical Society has won the American Chemical Society's Presidential Video Challenge-Proud to be a Chemist Award*. The prize-winning video, prepared in its entirety by our chemistry students and college video staff, will be shown in the spring at the ACS National Conference in San Francisco.

And for those of you who have been out of the country for the past few months and may not have heard, OCC's women's Cross Country Team captured the first-ever national cross country title for the college on November 7 at Finger Lakes CC in New York. Ocean finished first out of 17 teams with a 23-point margin of victory. We are exceedingly proud of the team, its leader Jennifer Nelson who won OCC's first-ever individual national championship, and to the runners' coach, Ed Baynes, a former outstanding runner himself and the team's greatest cheerleader.

We also want to note that the college's Athletic department received the prestigious Region 19 *Champions of Character Award* for a combination of outstanding community service, academic achievement, and athletic performance by its intercollegiate team members. Ilene Cohen, Athletic Director, is to be highly commended for this award and for her outstanding all-around performance in leading our athletic program to ever-greater heights.

From the Vice President of **Finance**, Sara Winchester, we are reminded that Ocean County College was the only two-year college (and indeed the only college or university) in New Jersey that held the line and did not raise tuition or fees during this very difficult economic period. This action is just one example of the excellent financial management that Sara provides, management that stabilizes our finances and enables us to offer multiple financial benefits to our students.

The Bookstore business model continues to adapt to the goal of minimizing the cost of textbooks. In 2009, used book sales increased 41% which resulted in immediate savings for our students. The Bookstore also bought back more than 23,000 used books from students. Online sales continue to grow as approximately 4,170 students were served on line. Over 4,200 students used financial aid to pay for their books and these students were served with no out of

pocket cost which is a service that cannot be duplicated by outside retailers and publishers under any circumstances. Overall, the Bookstore served approximately 12,000 students in 2009.

During the FA 2009 Semester, OCC engaged the services of Saint Barnabas to offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for eligible employees. The EAP is a benefit program that provides confidential counseling services to employees and their family members when they are faced with difficulties in life. This benefit is provided by the College at no cost to employees. Professional development training has already been conducted for supervisors and managers in order to familiarize them with maximizing support for employees through this program.

The Human Resource Department completed the full implementation of the paperless OCC job application system. The system is not only good for the environment but has made the hiring process more efficient. Another benefit of the new system is increased communication with all parties involved in the hiring process.

In August of 2009, the County of Ocean sold \$9 million in bonds on behalf of Ocean County College, a first in our history. The funds will be used to construct a combined heat and power plant as well as to complete the theater renovation and cultural center addition.

We should also note that, as might be expected, Financial Aid is experiencing an incredible increase in the number of students being served and the monies funded through state and federal programs. An astonishing 88% of our students were served by the Financial Aid Office this year (compared to 55% last year)—and it is estimated that these students will have received more than \$26 million in aid distributions for AY 2009-10 (as opposed to \$21.5 million in AY 2008-09). Norma Betz and her staff have done an amazing job in just keeping up with the volume and pace of the work. As of the end of December 2009, approximately 80,000 documents were scanned and worked on by office staff.

In response to this volume, an innovative service called Financial Aid TV was recently made available to students and parents to help them avoid some major frustrations and delays with the aid application process. A free service, it responds to questions via short videos on topics that can be easily searched by students or parents. It is on the college website 24-7 and there are currently Spanish and Chinese versions available in addition to English.

From Institutional Technology, we hear from Chip Stoll that the new Colleague Advancement software is up and running, replacing the old Benefactor program, for assistance to Tara and the College Relations staff. Microsoft Office 2007 was installed on more than 1500 campus machines in less than five weeks using the new “Push” technology. Disk installation would have taken one person more than 56 weeks or 2250 hours to complete this same task. What was I saying about radical change? The Bartlett Hall Technology rollout, a fully wireless environment with three laptop computer labs, has been completed on schedule, and we continue to increase the numbers of online degrees, courses, and sections offered to our students.

As you walk around our lovely campus, you can see the wonderful progress we are making with the fulfillment of our current **Facilities** Master plan under the expert guidance of Dr. Richard Parrish. The opening of beautiful Bartlett Hall for the fall Quick Term was a boon to our space needs and should now be populated by most members of the School of Social Sciences and Human Services. Its appealing offices, classrooms, landscaping and campus views make it a really distinctive architectural addition to our Mall. The Fine Arts and Planetarium projects are, as you can readily see, well underway. Completion of both is targeted for summer 2010. We have also expanded available parking in Lot 2 and in the Bartlett lot by a total of 550 spaces and will continue to try to keep abreast of our parking needs, driven by enrollment increases. I am also pleased to tell you that I have enjoyed a great many—well, not too many—but many pleasurable hours on one of our six new tennis courts, a beautiful addition to the west campus and the first project of many in our anticipated new athletic complex. Finally, we are well into the preconstruction phase, including the completion of land clearing, for the new Gateway Building, our joint venture with Kean University, and the first structure to grace the new, upper campus. The visuals of architectural renderings for the building emphasize its true grandeur. At 74,000 square feet, it will be the largest building on campus, shared equally between Kean and Ocean as a symbol of our committed partnership.

From Vice President Kelly in **College Advancement** comes news that the reorganization and restructuring of the Academy for Lifelong Learning/Continuing Professional Education, with full emphasis on increased revenue and reduced expenditures, is completed and now focused on entrepreneurial success. We have expanded the use of technology for college marketing and student recruitment through the use of software for both targeted email and a robust social networking presence on My Space, Face Book, Twitter and the like. The creation of a Resource Development Department to focus on generating external revenue streams is currently implementing a renewed effort to reach out actively to more of our alumni and keep them connected to their alma mater. Also, we have submitted several major grant proposals at both the state and federal levels and have confidence in the quality of these proposals because of the assistance of our top-notch grants consultants.

Our Executive Vice President, Dr. McGinty, has informed me that enrollments in Kean at Ocean have exceeded expectations by more than 100 students and that we continue to generate course and degree offerings that both attract and benefit our Kean transfer students. As for OCC enrollments, we are experiencing another banner semester, with an increase of 9.5%--as of 1/20/10.

It should be noted that OCC's Comcast Cable Channel 20 will soon be extending coverage into Bricktown, Point Pleasant, and Point Pleasant Beach in its digital lineup, expanding the viewing population for OCC measurably. Additionally, Verizon's new FIOS television service in Ocean County has agreed to carry Channel 20 and has also designated the college as a Verizon Local Access Training Center for municipalities in the service areas. The programming on Channel 20 continues to be enhanced, most recently by an agreement with NHK Broadcasting of Japan to air live newscasts and feature programs each evening. Channel 20 will continue to broadcast German Broadcaster Deutsche Welle and its nightly compilation of news from the Middle East. The station is proud of the locally produced programming as

well, much of it a product of talented student teams from the college's Digital Mass Media Program.

About the single most dramatic management concern, campus security, it pleases me greatly to tell you this morning that we continue to upgrade all aspects of this most crucial service to the college community. The Emergency Notification System has been upgraded with a new (installed and tested) broadcast/siren system, as well as scrolling alerts on the college's cable channel, announcements on the entrance sign and the college website, and, of course, instant messaging alerts through our OCEAN ALERT system. We continue to pray that the only news we have to share has to do with snow closings—but this comprehensive system is designed to communicate life-saving information as well.

There is an increased visibility of security staff on campus including the newly-created student Community Service Officers.

The college has purchased seven AED defibrillators for installation in campus buildings and has initiated training in their use.

And, as a direct result of Scott Lewis's presentation on Crisis Intervention at the last Colloquium, the campus CARE Team has reworked some of its operational response structures. It has also recently produced a credit-card sized OCC Emergency contact information card that will be distributed to all campus personnel through their departments in the upcoming weeks.

And so, here we are, once again, at the start of a new semester at one of the best colleges in America. Doesn't that feel GREAT? Doesn't that make you want to stand up and shout?! Go ahead! Stand up and SHOUT!.....All right!

I wish you a successful Colloquium experience today and a wonderful and fulfilling term in this extraordinary environment, where there is absolutely no limit to where you creativity and commitment can lead you.

Thank you everybody!