

**FALL SEMESTER COLLOQUIUM
SEPTEMBER 2, 2003
A SEA CHANGE
JON H. LARSON, PRESIDENT**

*"Nothing of him that doth fade,
but doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."*

I have titled my remarks this morning "A Sea Change," after the famous lines from Shakespeare's ***The Tempest*** in acknowledgment of the "sea change" we are experiencing... change that is transforming Ocean County College "into something rich and strange"...and, I am very certain, something wonderful and unique in all of higher education.

Welcome everyone! To our faculty and staff, Trustees and honored guests, it is a privilege to once again greet you to this exciting program of dialog and reflection...for focusing our thoughts, as we begin a new academic year, upon our direction as an institution and for reaching out to one another in support as we realize the very special opportunity fate has presented us to manage our destiny as an academic institution. I am certain that you will find the day's activities constructive, stimulating, and engaging. It is my pleasure to introduce distinguished members of our Board of Trustees who are with us today: Mr. Harry J. Levin, Mrs. Linda Novak, and Dr. Bruce Greenfield.

As I begin my fourth year as president, I am filled with confidence that we have the means, the will, the talent, the institutional culture, and, perhaps most importantly, the rarely found opportunity to seize control of our destiny and assure the achievement of a future of distinction, a future in which we will indeed become something new and grand, something rich and elegantly different from the college we are now. As the great Bard wrote,

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.
Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat.
And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."*

Last year I told you I was proud of our accomplishments to date, but far from satisfied. I confess to being a bit more satisfied now because you have done some marvelous things in the past year. But this year, we are truly embarking some wonderful new ventures! Let me elaborate on just a few opportunities we are facing...and on the reasons why we need to seize them.

First, we have one new university partner prepared to offer the baccalaureate degree right here on our own Toms River campus. Fairleigh Dickenson University President Michael Adams and I signed an agreement this summer that will be the first of several baccalaureate degree opportunities on our campus for Jersey Shore students. We agreed to explore several specific degree majors to add to the initial degree they will offer in hospitality management. Of particular interest is a general liberal arts degree and possibly degrees in criminal justice and business.

Second, we met with the presidents of Rowan University and Richard Stockton College with the same objective, offering an array of baccalaureate and master's degrees right here in Toms River. Stockton's new president, Dr. Herman Saatcamp, came here for lunch and a long and energetic discussion about degree program possibilities in the environmental sciences, marine biology, oceanography, and in the health sciences, nursing and teacher education. We have scheduled a follow up meeting for September.

Monmouth University's new president, Dr. Paul Gaffney, visited two weeks ago and offered to discuss a three-way partnership in the marine sciences with OCC and Stockton or Rutgers.

This month we will be traveling to New Brunswick to discuss how we might collaborate with the Rutgers ocean monitoring program in Tuckerton.

Our new Alternate Route teacher education program is off to a smashing start and that venture offers the potential of partnerships with the City University of New Jersey.

We received an evaluation team visit this summer from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for a major grant competition in Nursing education. OCC is the only two-year college being considered. Thanks to a masterful presentation by Dean Jim Brown and the faculty who initiated the proposal, Leah Kelly and Joan Barrett, along with hospital representatives, the visiting team expressed its strong interest in our proposal. Final word is pending, but we are very hopeful. This grant would fund all costs associated with developing and implementing a blended program of Internet-based learning technologies and once-a-week in-class meetings...a new approach that would distinguish OCC's Nursing program with a national reputation for quality and innovation and improvement in learning.

These are a few of the initiatives begun over the past three years that convince me that we can be the best ... that we can be acknowledged, not just within the boundary lines of this campus, but throughout our community and across the State of New Jersey and even the nation, as more than just an institution of distinction, but a new form of the species, if not a new species altogether...a transformation of the community college into a novel, rich, and strange form of academic institution...one retaining all the qualities that have made this a wonderful place to teach and learn and work ... retaining our local roots and local identity, our emphasis on learning, our appreciation of good teaching, our attention to each student as someone we know and love and respect ... but also one recognized for having undergone a metamorphosis that results in a community-based collegiate institution that is new in fundamental, life-changing ways.

And, I haven't mentioned our Bio-Tech program that Joe Adamo and the science department are about to launch, nor several other new developments such as our horticulture and aviation programs which Dean Ed Martinez has moved along nicely, nor our Senior Academy programs that eventually will break new ground in our definition of collegiate learning and our stereotypical thinking about "college students," nor an exploration of a gaming technologies degree by Dean Fran Polk, and similar initiatives for sailing and seamanship, wellness/fitness, an institute for

the coordination of terrorism-related education and information dissemination, a state-of-the-art technology building slated to open next summer, a new campus master plan and academic master plan, and a Volunteers Committee, illustrative of the spirit of inclusion and camaraderie on our campus, involving a group of OCC staff and faculty who have offered their time and energy to coordinate the activities of nonprofit organizations serving and making use of our campus, such as the March of Dimes and American Cancer Society.

Each of these efforts, whether it reaches fulfillment or we elect to pass it by, constitutes an important step in our process of self-reinvention, of evolution, of growth in enrollment numbers and in the quality of everything we do...especially in the attention we devote to our core values and our overriding mission of providing superior learning opportunities to our students.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: and it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

Now, we are all aware that change can be unsettling, but it is essential to our future as an institution that we embrace change and continually improve. And we are not there yet. I hope we are never..."there." Indeed, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive," as Robert Louis Stevenson noted. But it is more than just a convention of organizational strategy or a tub-thumping Colloquium speaker's fancy, this business of change. We all need it and we all do it! Each of us is different, and hopefully better in some respects, than we once were. What a sad world this would be if that were not true? How disappointed each of us would be to discover that those who knew us at the age of 18 could never envision us anything but the person we were at 18! Now, that wouldn't be true if 18 were the high point of your life! But for most of us, thank you, that is not the case.

And so we have an obligation...a duty...a mission that compels us to go beyond today...and a vision that requires us to embrace the thought. Francois Gautier wrote, "Many live in the ivory tower called reality; they never venture on the open sea of thought." Well, I am asking you to suspend your reliance on that dreariest of intellectual refuges, reality, in favor of letting your imagination soar as you think about how we can do better what we do here.

In particular, I ask that you think about how we help our students learn, with consideration for the breadth of demography that characterizes our students. I will close with mention of another opportunity in the formative stages that I hope many of you will join. It is a learning technologies initiative we are negotiating to make available to, initially, one program and two other individual multi-section courses. This initiative will provide tremendous support resources and time and funding to redesign the way we teach, making maximum use of the best of the latest learning technologies...specifically high quality digital learning objects that can be delivered via broad-band Internet connections. The nature of this initiative permits the faculty members involved to do what few faculty members at any level of higher education get to do...and it allows our faculty to think critically about, and then to design, a course that responds to how our students learn best.

No college or university in the nation will be more advanced than OCC in the application of the best that technology can offer to the learning process when this initiative is completed. I urge anyone who may be interested in having the time and resources to completely redesign a course to contact Dr. Wetta and learn more about this opportunity. Those who participate will have a genuine opportunity to become academic "stars" who are in demand, nationally. And, you will have the greatest time of your life doing it!

Thomas Wolfe wrote, "You have reached the pinnacle of success as soon as you become uninterested in money, compliments, or publicity." I might ask those of you who have reached this pinnacle to stand so we can admire you...but instead,

let us assume that, for whatever our reasons, we all have good and sufficient motives to strive to improve.

Now, that is certainly the case for a group of recent 16 year-old Tennesseans who took the SAT exam. Here is a sampling of some of their answers to the typical newest short answer questions:

“Q: Name the four seasons.

A: Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.”

“Q: How are the main parts of the body categorized? (E.g., abdomen.)

A: The body is consisted into three parts - the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs, and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels, A,E,I,O and U.”

“Q: What does the word "benign" mean?

A: Benign is what you will be after you be eight.”

And so it seems as clear now as when Will Shakespeare wrote it: “The golden age is before us, not behind us.” Can we really achieve something as utopian as a “golden age” of collegiate learning? Well, I think we can. We are, I believe, seeing at hand a “tide in the affairs” of this institution. Shall we take the tide at the high point and see if it leads to fortune?

“On such a full sea are we now afloat.” Shall we take this current now, when it serves?”

That, I believe, is our challenge! I say we sail together and navigate a course that takes us to a new world ... a better world ...a world in which we, together with our students, our Trustees, our academic and governmental partners, all of **us**, are recognized as **nothing less** than the premier public college in New Jersey!

Thank you, each of you, for your dedication and hard work; for seeking out and finding opportunities to make this a learning institution of distinction; and, once again, for coming together in support of each other and in support of our destiny as an academic institution of greatness. Thank you.