

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

President R. Barbara Gitenstein

October 3, 2002

We have had a very good opening this year. Convocation and Welcome Back were wonderful events to help consolidate our sense of community and our plans for the future. In addition, on September 11, we held our campus commemoration that was very well attended by students, faculty, staff, and community members - providing us an opportunity to remember and to reflect on some of the most pressing issues of the day. During my Welcome Back remarks, I again had the pleasant opportunity to report on our great successes of last year and to delineate our plans for this next year. These plans are ambitious (as always) and continue to support our aspirations to position ourselves as a national exemplar in public higher education.

Over the summer, with the help of the executive staff, I focused my attention on methods of facilitating our continued transition. What should be our next steps in realizing our mission, continuing our commitments to the key principles that we articulated in the task forces that informed our drafting of the institutional mission statement? We concluded that the two areas for greatest focus for the next year were two areas that were identified for focus in documents shared with me during my interview for the presidency: the academic program and external affairs, particularly fund raising and alumni relations, but also including government and community relations.

Considerable faculty and academic administrative time has been spent on the concept of "academic transformation" during the last year and a half. The Provost will be providing a presentation on just this topic later in the meeting. The work so far has been exceptional and one of the reasons that there has been this success is because The College has long had a commitment to excellence and a faculty who have a history of challenging themselves and their colleagues to develop new and engaging means of enhancing the learning of their students.

The schools and departments have put together a truly impressive detailing of best practices and successes already occurring at The College; the students have presented to the community and the office of academic affairs an analysis of those practices and procedures that they, the students, find most conducive to their learning. And these materials have been shared broadly on the campus. Simply sharing this information has generated considerable faculty-to-faculty discussion about means for pedagogical improvement and methods for facilitating student learning. However, the kinds of challenges that will be facing our students in this new century, challenges in the world of work, challenges in the social and political world that surrounds their lives, challenges in the ethical structures that provide the foundation for our success - all of these challenges require that we as academics challenge OURSELVES and our current models of delivery - not merely with a goal to change these models, but to assure that the models we use are the best for our students of today.

As I reviewed the impressive work being accomplished by the faculty, deans and provost, I concluded that there were three aspects of academic life that would necessarily be modified by any significant curricular change, aspects that would have to change in order to support the academic transformation. These were aspects that would benefit from supportive input from all divisions of the campus, clearly with faculty and academic administrative leadership. Advisement, the first year experience, and cross-cultural/international experiences for our students - all are areas meant to supplement the curriculum development which is rightly the sole purview of the faculty and academic leadership. I have charged three cross functional task forces to consult broadly on campus and provide recommendations for governance bodies and later implementation on these important auxiliary aspects of academic life. Each task force is chaired by a faculty member and staffed by a senior administrator.

In the area of external affairs, I have charged two task forces, similarly structured. One will focus on improving communication processes and procedures with external and internal constituencies and the development of administrative evaluation procedures that support this value. The second will focus on the development of a marketing/positioning plan for The College, using as a foundation document the report we received from Lipman Hearne. These five task forces will be providing the campus community an update report mid-year and a final report in May.

There is much work to be accomplished during the year, but much has already been accomplished. I continue to be impressed with the creativity and commitment of the College community. In addition, I am sure that we will have our surprises - both on campus and off. The economic status of the state, international events in the middle east, and local politics will surely require institutional flexibility, sensitivity to mission and institutional responsibility, personal courage and dedication - and yes, a sense of humor.

We have such a great story, so much to be proud of. Let me just end my report with a couple of items that confirm this pride. I am pleased to report that in a letter dated September 24, 2002, The College was informed that the executive board of the New Jersey Presidents' Council, acting on behalf of the full council, had approved the redesignation of our current Engineering programs, creating three separate degrees rather than options or concentrations. Congratulations to Dean Facas and his faculty on a job well done!

Just recently we received notification of two significant confirmations of institutional excellence: The US News and World Report rankings were just published in September. Again, we were the #1 public in the northeast and #6 in overall rankings in the northeast. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this year we were the only public institution in the top 10 of the northeast region. Further analysis of the US News and World Report rankings confirm our competitive stance with regional peers across the nation, other comprehensive master's institutions, according to the Carnegie classification. For instance, this year, we can boast the highest retention rate for any regional institution in the country. Our indicator of selectivity (SAT scores) placed us behind only three private institutions in the country (Villanova, University of Richmond and Trinity; we were the

top public regional institution in this selectivity measure). We had the highest percentage of the freshman class in the top 25% of their class in our region and were second only to University of Richmond in this characteristic compared to all other regional institutions across the country.

The second confirmation is I think even more impressive. The Kiplinger report "Best Public Institutions in the County" ranks all types of public institutions, major research and masters regional. The process begins with a determination by the use of published data of the 200 most selective public institutions in the United States. In order to prune the list to 100, Kiplinger considers graduation rates, freshman-to-sophomore retention rates, faculty-to-student ratios, and institutional allocation of resources for instruction and for library resources. To rank within the top 100, Kiplinger considers cost, financial aid, and debt load issues. In the publication's judgment: "Overall, the formula place[s] greater weight on quality (two-thirds) than on cost (one-third) because 'value' is not synonymous with 'cheap.'"

In this ranking, we are competing with institutions such as University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of Virginia. The last time the report was published in 2000, we were ranked an impressive 35. And this fall, we were ranked 19 - ahead of every other public institution in the state of New Jersey.

So if we're recognized to be so good, why not simply say: "Let's stay the same. Why fix what's not broken?" For two very simple and powerful reasons. First, to continue as before, to accept complacency, will assure stagnation. And even more importantly, our faculty and students deserve the structures that facilitate the kind of work that exemplifies the best of what they already do and that provide the support for the courageous faculty and students who embrace the change necessary to prepare our communities for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.