

Opening Address 2008
President R. Barbara Gitenstein
August 27, 2008

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the 2008-2009 academic year at The College of New Jersey. Before I present the challenges for next year, I will provide a high-level review of 2007-2008, another remarkable year at The College of New Jersey.

Our *Barron's* ranking still holds—a ranking in which we joined the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the College of William and Mary, and the University of California at Los Angeles as the ONLY state-supported institutions among the 75 schools that *Barron's* lists as “Most Competitive.” We have been judged by *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* as one of the top 25 values in American public higher education. Just this past Friday we learned that TCNJ, again, was ranked as the top public master's college in the northern region by *U.S. News and World Report* (a standing that we have held every year since the inception of the survey). In this year's ranking, we were again recognized as a highly competitive institution with our freshman class being composed of the highest percentage of students from the top 25% of their high school graduating class of any master's college in the northern region. We were also recognized as an institution that meets students' expectations well in that we have the highest freshman to sophomore retention rate of any regional master's level institution in the ENTIRE country. This year *U.S. News and World Report* added a new feature to its annual rankings by issuing a list of “up and coming” institutions. Of the 70 institutions on that list, TCNJ was the only institution from the state of New Jersey.

Last month, TCNJ was rated by the *Princeton Review* as one of the 368 best institutions of higher education out of the more than 2,500 four- year institutions in the nation. Our students continue to be recognized as some of the “happiest,” in the nation and our library was rated as #4 in the nation, behind the libraries of Harvard, Princeton, and Duke. Being the egghead that I am, I will continue to believe that there is a relationship between these two ratings!

The reason we continue to receive these third party validations is because we have never rested on our laurels. Rather, we achieve great things, collectively and individually—every single year. A couple of recent successes indicate this institutional character. For instance:

- According to the most recent National Survey for Student Engagement, TCNJ bettered the average of its Carnegie Foundation peers in a number of categories, including the level of academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment.
- The Corporation for National and Community Service named The College of New Jersey to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll With Distinction for exemplary service efforts and service to disadvantaged youth.
- TCNJ received full funding from the National Science Foundation to support “PERSIST in Biology and Chemistry,” the goal of which is to increase the number of students from underserved groups seeking careers in STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

- More than 5,000 alumni made gifts to the College and one secret admirer donated \$1 million.
- We inducted 67 new members into TCNJ's Phi Beta Kappa chapter.
- Four of our physics majors were accepted into the highly competitive NASA program, Microgravity University.
- A TCNJ faculty member was named one of only 20 new Carnegie Scholars and another has been awarded a Fulbright Grant to lecture and conduct research at University College Dublin in Ireland.
- Our athletic department proved to be among the best in the nation. We were ranked #3 out of all Division III athletic programs in the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Cup standings. (Only Williams College and Washington University in St. Louis were ahead of us). This year's accomplishment follows a long tradition for us—having ranked in the top 10 of the NACDA Cup for the last 13 years. Of course we got this recognition based on the success of our individual teams, with another year of participation at the highest levels of national competition.

I could go on and on, but I will let these impressive examples serve as illustrations of the quality of TCNJ's faculty, staff, and students.

While the weather did not cooperate on their big day last May, the class of 2008 left TCNJ with a wonderful spirit of celebration. This is the class that will be remembered for many things, not the least of which was the wonderfully revised and revitalized Senior Week. During their days together, the graduates reaffirmed their class identity and left Ewing with old and new memories of their four years at TCNJ that will last a lifetime.

I was very proud of the leadership of this class and I have full confidence they will achieve the same kind of success their predecessors have in their careers and in their contributions to the communities in which they live. The results from our survey of the 2007 graduating class, our most recent statistics, suggest that the 2008 graduates will have a daunting record to follow. The report indicates that 96% of the 2007 class were either employed or in graduate school within 12 months of graduation. Top employers of these new alumni included such corporate leaders as Merrill Lynch, Johnson and Johnson, and JP Morgan Chase as well as the state of New Jersey. The average salary for the graduating class of 2007 was up 4% over the year before and some 30% of the respondents indicated that they were attending graduate or professional school, almost 5% higher than the year before.

The data regarding our incoming freshman class portends the same kind of accomplishments in the years to come. We saw applications to our 2008 freshman class rise by 13%; out of state applications increased by 17%. The SAT average for the generally admitted students rose to 1288, higher than last year, but still not as high as Fall 2006 (the last year of the state supported Outstanding Scholar Recruitment Program). In addition, we are continuing to see a growth in the diversity of our student body: 27% of the enrolled freshmen self-identify as Hispanic, Puerto Rican, African-American, or Asian. Almost 50% of the incoming class were varsity athletes in high school; and 32 of our new freshmen are Eagle Scouts. The class of 2012 is also a group of world citizens—having visited some 26 other countries and representing speakers of 12 languages other than English.

Students are not the only new members of our community. The College will welcome 18 exceptionally qualified new faculty of diverse backgrounds but with the common interest of becoming fully engaged in the life of the College. Our newest faculty have completed their doctoral work at institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, the University of Texas, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Boston University. For the second year in a row, we will be welcoming back a former TCNJ undergraduate, now a newly minted Ph.D., to add to our complement of teacher-scholars.

In addition, we are fortunate to have added quality administrative leadership in many areas of the college: in legal affairs, campus police, and academic administration. I welcome all of you to TCNJ, but particularly, I welcome Dr. Carol Bresnahan our new Executive Vice President and Provost.

Last year, with the support and leadership of the Board of Trustees, we turned our attention to how best develop The College over the next 5-7 years. On October 31, 2007, I announced 5 strategic initiatives to guide that planning and implementation. These initiatives were conceived, not as ends in themselves, but as vehicles for assuring the successful integration of the academic and the student affairs transformations. A full report of last year's impressive accomplishments has been posted on the Web, but let me cite several highlights:

1. Our first initiative was to position TCNJ such that we continue to have the authority to chart our own future.
To support that initiative,
 - a. We continued to work closely with New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities to heighten the awareness of the quality and successes of the public institutions in the state of New Jersey.
 - b. We have more strategically engaged our alumni in advocating with state leaders regarding their alma mater.
 - c. We have developed a preliminary document that proposes a reciprocal agreement between the state and TCNJ.

2. Our second initiative was to continue to diversify revenue streams.
To that end,
 - a. We created partnerships with local/regional entities, including Ewing Township.
 - b. We combined Public Affairs and Conference and Meeting Services with Development and Alumni Affairs to create an Advancement Division which will create a single message for the institution.
 - c. We raised \$4.5 million in private contributions (above our goal of \$3.7 million) and our endowment grew from \$15 to \$17 million.

3. Our third initiative was to continue to enhance our facilities and campus physical plant.

In support of this initiative,

- a. We completed our housing and academic administrative master plans.
 - b. We broke ground on the Pennington Road Student Apartments and the Art and Interactive Multimedia Building.
 - c. We began the first stage of updating dining facilities, beginning with the Brower Student Center food court this summer.
4. Our fourth strategic initiative was to assure institutional accountability and transparent engagement with our stakeholders, including the general public.
 - a. We were the first institution in New Jersey to sign on to participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability, VSA (the program of data disclosure developed by two national associations: American Association of State Colleges and Universities and National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges). And we were the first institution in New Jersey to post our VSA College Portrait on the web.
 - b. The Center of Institutional Effectiveness (CIE) was extremely active in responding to requests for institutional research in support of program review, accreditation self studies, budget and enrollment planning, and legislative inquiries.
 - c. Compliance initiatives included action on a series of board policies and the development of a “whistle-blower” website and an ethics website.
 - d. We were chosen as the only public institution of higher education to participate in the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) “cost study,” a study to develop best practices in the creation of budget documents for trustee decision-making.
 5. Our final initiative was a commitment to enhance our role as the middle partner in the P-20+ discussions, expanding access to postsecondary education.

In order to support this initiative,

- a. We continued to enhance our partnerships with the K-12 system, beginning with an audit of all existing initiatives.
- b. TCNJ has signed “agreements” with organizations to help assist in preparing students for post-secondary education (Wight Foundation of Newark, Operation Link-Up of Patterson, College Prep Incentive Program of Jersey City and Plainfield, and Young Scholar’s Institute of Trenton).
- c. In order to increase graduate and professional school attendance, particularly to the most competitive post-baccalaureate programs, we have enhanced support for student research programs (Mentored Undergraduate Summer Experience, MUSE) and Career Services has enhanced programming for introducing students to graduate education.

I am extraordinarily proud of what we accomplished in this first year of implementing our strategic initiatives. I am even more excited about our plans for the year to come.

Over the summer the President's Advisory Council, along with faculty, student, and staff leadership (from the Faculty Senate, the Staff Senate, the Student Government Association, Planning and Priorities Committee, and the Board of Trustees) met to discuss goals for this year and helped to articulate an ambitious agenda in support of the strategic initiatives. Considering our exceptional success last year, I am confident that we will accomplish most of what we propose.

In order to enhance the recognition of TCNJ's distinctive position and niche in higher education, we will assume a more deliberate approach in communicating with our important stakeholder audiences. We will craft a single message regarding the quality of our academic experience, our commitment to the undergraduate residential experience and civic engagement, and our desire to maintain affordability; however, this message will be adapted to resonate with individual audiences. In communicating with these different audiences, we must become more attentive to a range of communication media, such as social networking sites. We will be able to evaluate the results of specific strategies by growth in alumni giving, growth in out-of-state enrollment, success in faculty recruitment, and (we can continue to hope) stabilization of state support. This year, we will conduct a series of surveys of the focus audiences to inform our strategies and provide a baseline for assessing our success. I will set as a goal to meet personally with more than 30% of the state legislature and representatives from all of New Jersey's delegation in the U. S. House and Senate.

With regard to diversifying and enhancing revenue streams, we will complete a benchmarking project to assess how other states are supporting public higher education and how other competitive institutions are enhancing funding for specific programs. We will consider the development of continuing education programs and complete a plan to grow and enrich out of state enrollment (we have set a goal for Fall 2012 of 15% of the freshmen class; we have already seen great progress in this area as we will be welcoming 8.5% of our freshman class this year from out of state, up from 5.5% last year). This next year we will develop a strategic plan for Conference and Meeting Services that will assure we are meeting the needs of our most likely markets, considering facilities, price structures, and competitor organizations. We will continue to work toward a participation rate of 10,000 alumni as donors per year; and we will raise at least \$5.2 million in private dollars. We will continue to grow our total endowment. We will accomplish these goals by engaging faculty and deans as well as staff and administrative leadership in the identification and prioritization of needs for departments and schools. The divisions of Advancement and Student Affairs will develop programs to change the institutional culture so that our current students understand their responsibility to give back to TCNJ as alumni.

Regarding the enhancement of facilities and infrastructure, we will continue to implement the Board-approved asset renewal plan, develop a funding model for Brower Student Center improvements, work with a steering committee on the creation of a plan for a town center, finalize a climate neutrality plan for the long term, create incentives for the community to carpool or use alternative methods of transportation (e.g., bicycles), and enter the design phase

for a new education building. We will open the new student apartments for occupancy during the fall 2009 semester. In line with our commitment to provide our students and faculty with state-of-the-art systems, we are in the final stages of our implementation of a new Student Administration system. Over the next year various modules of this "Oracle/PeopleSoft" system will "go-live," bringing us to full use of the system by Fall 2009.

In order to support our commitment to accountability and transparency, we will conduct a series of national surveys to assess the success of the academic transformation (Beginning College Student Survey of Student Engagement, National Survey of Student Engagement, and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement). In addition, we will revisit the initial goals of academic transformation to develop appropriate on-campus metrics and we will develop specific metrics to evaluate the success of the student affairs transformation. CIE will develop a strategic plan for assessment, and will complete the first series of retention and graduation rate studies (following up on a report we have already received from the Center for Institutional Data Exchange and Analysis).

Under the leadership of the General Counsel and the Treasurer, we will develop a program for ethics training (in compliance with New Jersey requirements), provide a plan for funding the recommendations from the security audit, complete the collection of institutional policies and creation of an on-line policies manual, and provide a plan for responding to the consultant analysis of our self-assessment of internal controls. During the FY09 budget planning process, we were successful in allocating resources to the highest level needs for the 5 strategic initiatives. During FY10 budget planning, we will continue to consider such allocations. In addition, by January of next year, I have asked each cabinet member to submit divisional strategies to support the strategic initiatives for consideration in the budget planning process.

Our final strategic initiative, which is to enhance our sense of partnership in the P-20+ pipeline, will require all of us to think beyond our areas of comfort. TCNJ academic leadership will be charged with the task of considering the value of developing continuing education programs, such as certificate programs, corporate non-degree programs, as well as "articulation type" programs for our undergraduate students with the most competitive universities for entry into their graduate programs. In addition, the academic leadership will conduct an audit of current practices by department with regard to competitive entry into graduate schools, with the goal of sharing best practices. I will be asking the provost to charge a small working group with considering specific pilot programs for next summer, to enhance revenue and to support the realization of our mission during the summer months. We will review our audit of partnerships with K-12 institutions and community colleges with the aim of improving results for our students.

Every year when I stand before you for "Welcome Back," I am awed by what you accomplish for the College, what we do together, and I am always exhilarated by the promise of the year to come. As Emily Dickinson defines it,

Exhilaration is the Breeze
That lifts us from the Ground
And leaves us in another place.

While we rarely sustain this elevated new height, we never return to the level before our aspirations challenged us to rise beyond expectations:

[for] after time
We soberly descend
A little newer for the term
Upon Enchanted Ground.

So every year, during budget season, when I surely feel that “sober descent,” I remember our ambitious plans, our past extraordinary successes, this exhilarating breeze, and I never fall as low as the news might suggest. History suggests that TCNJ’s self-reliance, commitment to excellence and combined joy and pride in this institution give me confidence in that refusal to descend to expectations.

This will be another challenging year for TCNJ, but because of all of you, it will be another outstanding one. Thank you for what you will do in the coming year for our college and welcome back.