

**“The Impossible Made Possible:
Imagination, Aspiration, and Perseverance”**

**The College of New Jersey
R. Barbara Gitenstein
Welcome Back Address
August 31, 2005**

It is wonderful to join you here today and to welcome everyone back for the new year. The celebratory mood I enjoyed while composing this speech, however, has changed in recent days. I am still excited about the onset of the fall semester, but the unfathomable damage and loss of life that has befallen the “Gulf Coast” region of our country cannot be ignored. Like many of you, I have loved ones in the south and am shocked by the devastation that Hurricane Katrina has caused. My thoughts and sympathies are with those who have lost so much, and I want you to know that we are presently working to provide opportunities for members of our campus community to contribute toward this monumental disaster relief effort. Just as on the heels of the horrific Tsunami last December, I will recommend that we work with the major national organizations in this effort, for they are much better equipped to handle donations of money, medical and food needs than we. We will again post contact information for these relief organizations on the web.

Our Admissions Office has already been contacted by several students interested in attending or transferring to TCNJ as so many colleges and universities in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama have been destroyed by the hurricane. We are accommodating them as we can. I know that I can count on all of you to welcome them into our community and help facilitate their transitions. In addition, as soon as communication is possible, we will be reaching out to form institutional partnerships to help sister institutions and we will keep the community informed as we progress in these conversations.

On a much happier note, I would now like to take a moment to acknowledge a few individuals who have played vital roles in The College of New Jersey’s growth as it has blossomed into a national leader in higher education. Would you please stand when I call your name. I would ask the audience to wait until all are standing to acknowledge these individuals. From the Board of Trustees: Chair Patricia Rado, Secretary Robert Kaye, Darryl Armstrong, Brad Brewster, Stephanie Nieves and Daria Silvestro. From the Foundation Board, Ed Bambach, Bill Healey and John Harmon. The chair of the Sesquicentennial Celebration and former chair of the Board of Trustees: Robert Gladstone. Your dedication to and love of our school is truly remarkable. Thank you. Would you please be seated.

I would like to extend a special welcome to one of our important partners in education: Dr. Ray Broach, Ewing Township School Superintendent. Would you stand to be recognized? With your help, we have built bridges between this campus community and the communities throughout our region, and that has proven beneficial to us all.

To the faculty and staff members, emeriti faculty, and students, it is wonderful to have you back for the opening of the academic year. I hope your summer was thoroughly enjoyable. We are fortunate to have first-class facilities and beautiful surroundings here at The College of New Jersey, but you are the heart and soul of this institution.

I am particularly pleased to single out 4 of our recent retirees who were able to join us today. Would Veta Mendez, Fred Oshel, Robert Weber, and Joycelin Welch-Walker, please stand to be recognized? Thank you for your years of dedicated service to the students of The College of New Jersey. I hope that we will see you on campus often and that you will remain an active part of our community.

Before we reflect upon the past year's goals and successes, it is important to take time to remember a few individuals who are no longer with us. The College community was saddened last year by the deaths of Peggie Ann Pinkney of building services, Joan Yuhas McGowan from development and alumni affairs, Harvey Louis Edwards from dining services, and junior Daniel Tomasic. They are truly missed. Please join me for a moment of silence in their honor.

Our sesquicentennial celebration began last September with a torch run from the original site of the college, now Grant Elementary School, to a vibrant gathering in the Brower Student Center. Homecoming, Founders' Day, the Alumni Leadership Convocation, and the Sesquicentennial Commencement provided opportunities to reflect upon our distinguished past, revel in the glorious present, and look forward to The College of New Jersey's bright future. We honored the institutional history of challenging expectations with imagination and thereby making the seemingly impossible, the reality. The sesquicentennial celebration has also afforded us a platform upon which to build or renew relationships with countless members of the extended College community.

While 2004-2005 was a year for reflection and celebration, it was not a time to stand still. Public awareness of the College's record of excellence increased as *U.S. News & World Report* named The College of New Jersey the top public institution in the northern region of the United States for the 11th consecutive year, and I am pleased to note that we have received that distinction again in this year's rankings, which makes us the #1 public in the northeast for the 12th consecutive year.

For the first time, *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* included TCNJ in its list of the 75 "most competitive" colleges and universities across the nation. The College of New Jersey was the only public institution in the entire northeast to make that list, and one of only seven state funded institutions across the nation to be so recognized. Thus, we are now in the company of that other College of New Jersey down the road, as well as public institutions like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, UCLA, Cal Berkeley, the University of Virginia, William and Mary, and the University of Florida.

Many individual members of the TCNJ community brought acclaim to our school last year. For instance, Interim Vice President for Student Life Beth Paul's psychological

research was featured by *Newsweek* and NBC's *Today Show*; Professor Tim Clydesdale was prominently engaged in the national debate on Affirmative Action policies; junior English major Nicole Kukawski received international attention for finding a previously undiscovered Walt Whitman interview given to *The Signal* near the close of the Nineteenth Century. Nicole's discovery was the result of a research project in Professor David Blake's class.

Countless other faculty members and students were honored with prestigious citations and awards, some of whom shared their positive opinions of our institution in a June *New York Times* article that called TCNJ "The Hot College in New Jersey." And on August 11, 2005, we were one of several institutions of higher education featured on the front page of the *New York Times*.

Last year was another year of athletic success. A couple of highlights: on the strength of 13 different teams placing in their respective NCAA Championships (including the National Champion Women's Lacrosse team), our overall athletic program was ranked #10 in the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Director's cup and the program garnered 57 All-American citations during the year. We again had students recognized regionally and nationally for their academic prowess including a record 238 saluted as Scholar-Athletes at the annual Athletic Department Honors Brunch. Kevin McHugh was named Athletic Director of the year by Gen Sports Turf and one of our alumnae, Tracey Warren, was inducted into the CoSida Academic All American Hall of Fame.

There is continuing affirmation of the success of our graduates—including a recent report from Johnson and Johnson that there is an 80-90% retention rate for TCNJ alumni participating in J&J's Financial Leadership Development Program, one of the highest retention rates in the company.

These are simply a few examples of the exemplary work being done everyday in every school, program, department, and office on this campus.

Last fall, I established specific areas of focus for 2004-2005 and I am pleased to report that we made significant progress in every single area: curriculum revision; faculty and staff development; community and government relations; accountability measures; enrollment management; diversification of revenue streams; and improving the sense of an inclusive, welcoming and diverse community.

In 2004-2005 we successfully implemented a new curriculum that brought to reality the academic transformation we began to design a mere three years before. The transformation was so successful that it became the subject of an extremely positive National Association of College and University Business Officers case study, and became the center piece of their national conference. This curriculum encourages and supports mentorship and engagement of faculty with students. This kind of engagement was exemplified by this summer's highly successful residential undergraduate research program—a program that offered 54 students the opportunity to study with 25 faculty

members from 7 different academic departments and 3 different schools. Dynamic events, programs, and speaker series provided opportunities for education and entertainment beyond the classroom and extended our community, bringing thousands of visitors to campus for cultural events.

There was progress on several initiatives that have improved the quality of life at the College: a new Spiritual Center, a new parking garage, and a library that will become one of the jewels of this campus.

An Office of Anti-Violence Initiatives was established with grant funding from the Department of Justice and has already accomplished a number of important tasks, including the creation of a sexual assault survivor's guide, the implementation of domestic violence and sexual assault awareness programs, and the execution of a survey of student awareness, attitudes, and experiences. The College of New Jersey has intensified its efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in all facets of campus life and was recently recognized by the Association of American Colleges and Universities for those efforts.

We continue to realize improvements in our relationships with our neighbors. The summer performances by our Governor's School students and the wonderfully successful JazzFest on August 21 are just a couple of examples of how the College has come to be viewed as an asset to the local community.

Our new Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Promise Award is in its second year, and we are currently evaluating its success. In addition, we received a special award of additional resources from the state EOF program for our on-going EOF program success.

While we were not as successful as we had hoped with regard to private fund raising last year, we have added talented new staff members to the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs, and are already seeing notable progress. Furthermore, last year we received significant grants from the Martinson Family Foundation, a full-ride scholarship for a Trenton Central graduate funded by Educational Testing Services, and we just recently received notification that in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education, and the Ewing, Trenton, Pemberton and Vineland Public Schools, Drs. Sharon Sherman and Cathy Liebars will serve as principal investigators on a three-year \$3.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

We faced challenges during the past year, as well. Construction on campus has necessitated that all of us go a little bit out of our way, and delays in the completion of the student apartment complexes forced many students to accept less attractive residential options than any of us would have wanted.

The State of New Jersey has struggled with multi-billion dollar deficits in recent years, and budget allocations to higher education have not been what we had hoped. This has forced tuition upward and increased the burden on our students and their families. I am particularly pained by this problem, because it is a primary goal of ours, as a public

institution, to provide access and opportunity to New Jersey's most promising students, regardless of their financial circumstance. I am very pleased, however, with the additional resources that were put into higher education during the final state budget negotiations this summer. This could only have happened with the support and commitment of leadership in the executive and legislative branches of the state government, and I deeply appreciate their votes of confidence.

In an effort to minimize the burden on our students and their families, the College has adopted an austere budget for 2005-2006 that enabled us to keep this year's tuition increase below that of almost all other New Jersey public institutions. With improved fundraising efforts and lobbying at the federal level to attract additional support, we hope to continue to moderate tuition rates in the future, but we must deliver the quality of education our students deserve.

This week we welcome new faculty, new staff, and an extraordinary new class of students. Beyond their impressive credentials, which include average SAT scores of 1310 and rankings in the top-eight percent of their high school classes, for the generally admitted, the students of the freshman class bring extraordinary talents and personalities to our campus. Two international ice dancing champions and Olympic hopefuls, a recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal—the highest civilian award given by Congress for leadership and volunteerism—many National Youth Leadership participants, and countless students with extensive community service and international experience are among those in this outstanding group.

We also welcome some 23 new faculty members with special expertise in interactive multimedia, education, biology, classical studies, finance, psychology, history, engineering, music, African American studies, technological studies, chemistry, and art. These individuals have credentials from some of the finest institutions in the world and will add tremendously to our intellectual community.

Last week we had the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of nine members of our staff recommended for the Helen Shaw Special Achievement Award. From these remarkable nominations, the committee chose for special recognition Janis Blayne Paul, Major Events and Sesquicentennial Coordinator, and Alexander Michalchuk, School of Engineering. Funded by a generous bequest from Helen Shaw, 1936 alumna, this award recognizes staff for exemplary work in support of The College's mission. Let's recognize Janis and Alex again today.

There have been thirteen new hires of administrators and staff members and twelve promotions since July 1, 2005. While these new additions do not add to the total number of employees at the College, they represent changes in every division. Last year, we saw changes in leadership to two major divisions of the college: Curt Heuring, Vice President for Facilities Management, Construction, and Campus Safety, joined us in November, and John Marcy, Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs, joined us in May.

Dr. Emmanuel Osagie was named Dean of the School of Business last spring. This fall, we welcome talented colleagues to new senior leadership positions: Dr. Beth Paul as Interim Vice President of Student Life; Dr. Deborah Knox as Interim Dean of Science; and Dr. William Behre as Interim Dean of Education. National searches for permanent administrators will be conducted for these positions currently filled in an interim capacity.

In the coming year, we must continue to challenge ourselves with even higher expectations. We are limited only by our energies and our imaginations. As part of our sesquicentennial celebration, on September 22-24, 2005, we will welcome to our campus national and international Whitman scholars for a symposium celebrating the sesquicentennial of the publication of Leaves of Grass and we will conclude our sesquicentennial celebration with a Grand Finale Homecoming Weekend, October 28-30. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all members of the Sesquicentennial Committee, but particularly to its chair, Robert Gladstone, and coordinator, Janis Blayne-Paul. Thank you to everyone.

The beauty of our campus will become ever more apparent as we begin to enjoy our extraordinary new library, complete the new athletic facilities, and make substantial progress toward the completion of the student apartment complexes. This summer we began work on two facilities master planning projects—one for the residential component and the other for the academic/administrative components of our campus. These master planning exercises will assure us both that we are investing resources in the most effective way possible, and that the college mission drives investment in facilities.

In the very near future, I will commission three college-wide task forces to examine issues critical to the College's future. These areas of focus grew out of conversations with the President's Advisory Council and recommendations from the Committee on Planning and Priorities. One task force will study the role of the professor as teacher/scholar and the balancing act required to fulfill both of those demanding roles. A second will consider the concept of inclusive selectivity as it relates to TCNJ's admissions policies as well as retention and graduation rates of all student populations. The third task force will analyze the ways in which TCNJ's campus and facilities are utilized during the summer months. One additional area where we lead our peers is in the assessment and improvement of our internal financial controls. Though we have an exemplary record in this area, we will continue to strengthen the integrity of College operations. We began this initiative last fall, months before the spate of criticism of processes at several institutions of higher education in the state, and we are committed to ensuring the greatest degree of accountability possible.

During 2005-2006, Academic Affairs will continue to enhance and refine the academic transformation. Faculty recruitment and development, curriculum development, grantsmanship, and scholarly endeavors will be the strategies for such realization. Student Life will work on articulating the student development model that guides initiatives and services throughout the division. A critical objective of this model is the stimulation of strategic collaborations with faculty and staff in other areas of The College

to facilitate student development, and the recognition of student life professionals as essential partners in our daring academic transformation. While the focus on enhancement of diversity and inclusion must inform planning across the campus, this focus will continue to be most particularly important in the Academic Affairs and Student Life areas.

With the newly energized Development and Alumni Affairs office, we will be setting challenging goals for advancement of The College in terms of alumni relations, fund raising, and leveraging the enhanced relationships resulting from the sesquicentennial. The Office of College and Community Relations will be charged to continue its recent successes in enhancing our relationships with the local community and the region as well as our noteworthy successes in national media placements. In addition, Patrice Coleman-Boatwright will be assuming new responsibilities in support of my work in government relations.

Information Technology will be actively engaged in the progress of the Peoplesoft project and all of the facilities planning projects. Student Enrollment Services will be taking a leadership role in refining our new advising model, developing programs to enhance graduation rates, and monitoring our EOF Promise Award. And Admissions—we'll just continue to expect them to do the impossible, because the impossible just seems ordinary to them. We'll expect them to recruit another extraordinary and diverse freshman class for Fall 2006.

At 150 years of age, The College of New Jersey is flourishing. And people are taking note. An on-site evaluation team from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education offered its take on the TCNJ story last winter. The team issued a report that stated, "TCNJ is committed to offering an undergraduate educational experience that rivals the best of what is offered by private colleges, but at a public school tuition cost and from a public school perspective. . . . TCNJ is an extremely dynamic institution of higher education. . . an institution of remarkable achievement."

To quote Emily Dickinson, "The possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination." In 1855, Governor Rodman Price saw possibilities and created the New Jersey State Normal School. Past leaders of this school continued to imagine exceptional possibilities, and now those possibilities are becoming a grand reality. I wish you all a wonderful year, challenge you to imagine the impossible as we remain true to our bold mission and our mandate to serve New Jersey and the nation.

Thank you.