

QUALITY ASSURANCE FACULTY WORKSHOP SPEECH

June 13, 1986

This institution has undergone an extraordinary evolution in just a few short years. While we began essentially as an initiative to evaluate and assess experiential learning, we have emerged as the centerpiece of a statewide system of higher education for the adult learner. What I would like to do with you this morning is to outline the institutional context in which you will be working. I would like to tell you a little bit about this College's present, and a little bit later about how we see the unfolding of our future.

Thomas A. Edison State College currently enrolls over 5,000 students studying in 4 baccalaureate programs and 6 associate degree opportunities. We currently have students pursuing coursework in virtually every public and private college in New Jersey as well as academic institutions in every state in the Union. Through our Statewide Testing and Assessment Center, we are providing expert services to 28 colleges and universities in the state. Through our Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction, we have permanent relationships with over 37 corporations, and provide the assessment of noncollegiate instruction for the American Council on Education within the State of New Jersey. Through Directed Independent Study of the Center for Learning and Telecommunications, the College is awarding credit in its own name through instructional services offered directly by this institution. The character of the College has been transformed in that this institution plays an active role in the acquisition of new learning and not just the evaluation and assessment of prior learning.

On the national scene, this institution's leadership has been recognized and sought out for prominent involvement with the commission on Higher Education and the Adult Learner of the American Council on Education, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, National University Continuing Education Association, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Minnesota and New York, as well as the governments of England, Canada, and Scotland, have called upon this institution to provide leadership and guidance in developing assistance for the benefit of adult learners; and when the Middle States Association sought to develop general standards for the assessing of experiential learning, Thomas Edison State College was sought out to assist in the drafting of that association's standards on these matters. Our growth in size and influence has been steady and dramatic, and you gathered in this room have been an essential ingredient in the development of this institution.

The nature of our model empowers the ability of your institutions that serve adult learners, and your willingness to serve this College has produced for this institution the most distinguished faculty of any college in America. The best faculties in this country teach our students, evaluate and assess our accomplishments, as well as ensure the integrity of our processes through participation in the Academic Council, Directed Independent Study, and as prior learning assessors. If it seems that I am clearly proud of us and you, it is because I am.

In my annual report to the Board of Trustees last year, I indicated that maturity was the operational word which characterizes this institution in 1986. I further added that young Tom Edison has fully grown up. While the past has been noteworthy and the present certainly is exciting, we stand on the brink of a future of extraordinary new development. On Friday last, I transmitted to the Department of Higher Education this College's request for participation in the Governor's Challenge Grant initiative. In that document was a full and complete description of a project we call "The Computer-Assisted Lifelong Learning Network." Simply stated, this initiative, if funded, will allow us to deliver virtually all of the opportunities of this institution to distant adult learners in an interactive mode via computers. This process has as a long-term objective the availability of high quality collegiate instruction to adults independent of site and time. The potential impact of this initiative on this institution and on American higher education is revolutionary.

I am certainly mindful of the dangers and pitfalls of raising expectations on something as speculative as a proposal submission, but the direction and vision for this institution as outlined in that document represents a commitment to which we are wedded whether we receive funding or not through the Challenge Grant process. What we have done is created and articulated a vision of the future that is appropriate to our mission and essential to the nature of the clientele we serve. Our success or lack thereof in the Challenge Grant process will dramatically affect the when and the how, but not the if.

So, in short, what you are coming to today is not just a college, it is a collaborative process involving all of the colleges and universities, faculties and resources, of the state and organizing them around the needs of adult learners. This institution is more than a college, it is the keeper and leader of an educational movement. I appreciate and applaud your conscientious involvement in it. We invite your suggestions and comments; we even appreciate your criticisms where they are constructive and point the path to a better way.

The day ahead of you has been well planned, and we hope you find this visit productive. On behalf of our students, I wish to thank you for your commitment and excellent service to this noble purpose.

Thank you.