

REMARKS BEFORE THE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

December 21, 1990

By the middle of the sixties, educators began to recognize that adults were appearing on our campuses in large numbers, and in ways that could not be explained by the successive GI Bills. In trying to understand the implications of this fact, the Carnegie Commission issued reports concluding that mature adults presented differences in student characteristics that go far beyond the mere fact of age, and, therefore, recommended that higher education create a special policy context for adult learners. Three states responded by creating special mission institutions specifically mandated to serve this new and expanding clientele: in 1971 Minnesota created Metropolitan State College, New York created Empire State College, and the following year New Jersey established Thomas Edison State College.

The source of our unique character comes from the fact that whereas other institutions start with a faculty and then make decisions about the students they choose to serve, in our case the mission requires that the student is the given and everything else must be referenced against the requirements and characteristics of our clientele.

Thomas Edison State College students have several defining characteristics: they are confronted with barriers of time and location, they bring considerable college-level learning with them when they come to the College, and they are involved with lifelong learning in a number of forms and forums outside the confines of the traditional college campus.

Today, Thomas Edison State College enrolls approximately 8,000 adults with an average age of about 40 years old. I like to think of us as the only R rated college in New Jersey. We won't let an 18 year old near the place. We offer 10 separate degrees with over 100 areas of study at the undergraduate level. Our students have four basic options in satisfying what are very traditional degree requirements. One is traditional classroom instruction taken at other accredited colleges and universities, another is through the assessment of learning that may have been acquired experientially, another is through the excellent series of technology delivered courses offered by the College, and another is through independent study culminating in an examination.

Since its inception, the College has been recognized as a pioneer and national leader in the assessment of learning outcomes. Every summer in July, faculty come from all over the United States to study in our National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning, and the standards promulgated by the Middle States Association were largely and literally written by Thomas Edison State College. Through our Statewide Testing and Assessment Center, we service the students of 38 other New Jersey colleges and universities by providing them with the opportunity to satisfy their degree requirements through academically rigorous assessment processes while matriculating at their host institution.