

Good morning and welcome to New Jersey's State College for the adult learner.

It is our hope that you will find this conference different in two important respects from others you have undoubtedly attended.

First, this conference will not be passive. We fully expect at the end of the day to have the nucleus of an agenda for action with the objective of increasing access to higher education for minority adults in this state. Secondly, you as conferees are the experts, and we as conference sponsors wish to learn from you. This point will become clearer during the day. I do, however, wish to take a few minutes to tell you a little bit about Thomas Edison State College and what it does. Later in this session, Vice President Ice will elaborate on how Edison does what it does.

We were created in 1972 as the ninth New Jersey state college. We were specifically created to serve adult learners throughout the state, and are therefore, unique, and different from our colleague institutions within higher education. This year, Edison will enroll over 4,000 students in four baccalaureate degree programs and three associate degree programs. The average age of our student body approximates 40 years of age. We are the only state college that has a statewide service mandate. Our administration building is located here in Trenton. Additionally, we have sites in Cherry Hill and East Orange.

The fundamental intellectual assumption guiding all of our academic activity is that learning, once achieved, is of equal value regardless of how that learning was acquired. It is fitting and proper that this college was named for Thomas Alva Edison, one of the greatest intellects of our time who learned experientially and never attended college. Students earn credits toward their academic degrees through the assessment of experiential learning, transferring of credit coursework taken at other institutions, and the evaluation of educationally relevant credentials. Our degree holding alumni exceed 5,000 graduates.

There is one important misconception about Edison. Edison does not award credit for experience. Two individuals can have the same experience - one can learn a great deal; another can learn absolutely nothing. Edison does award credit for the demonstration (and I underline demonstration) of college-level learning (and I wish to underline learning), recognizing that this learning can be achieved in a variety of experiential ways and outside the framework of a traditional college classroom. Edison also provides prior learning assessment for 20 other colleges and universities throughout the state. We also evaluate corporate training within the State of New Jersey for the American Council on Education by determining as to whether said training is equivalent to credit-bearing courses offered within traditional higher education. Edison State College's adult learners are currently enrolled in virtually every public and private college and university in New Jersey. Approximately 25% of our enrollment is scattered external to New Jersey throughout every state in the Union.

Approximately 50% of our graduates go on to graduate and professional schools, and about 90% of these are admitted to the institutions or programs of their first choice. In its 12 year existence, Edison has produced graduates that have matriculated at the finest graduate and professional schools in America, and are well represented in primary leadership positions in government, academia, business, and corporate New Jersey. This college enjoys a national reputation for its leadership in the quality of its work, the quality of its students, the quality of its degrees, and its unique responsiveness to the learning needs of the adult learner. We are well respected and much copied throughout higher education. We are also one of the best kept secrets in the State of New Jersey, within minority communities. The health of this College is good. Our public support is growing. Our enrollment is growing. If we have a shortcoming, it is our historic inability to make ourselves known in a meaningful way within the minority communities of this state.

The purpose of this conference is for you to learn about us, for us to learn from you, and then to proceed in actualizing a personal commitment of mine, and the expressed concern of our Board of Trustees and the staff of this College, that we will not have fulfilled our obligation, as a portal of access for the adult learner, until those in this state who could benefit most from the services of this College are empowered through their understanding of us to utilize this special, unique, and valuable resource

within the educational community. Frankly and candidly, I want your help and I need your help.

As you may have noticed from that very flattering and kind introduction, I came to Edison with a very diverse and mixed up background. There has, however, been a consistent theme throughout my service to higher education, and that has been and continues to be, a concern about access for the historically disenfranchised. There is no population within America as totally neglected as the minority adult learner. There are few, if any, institutions that have identified this population as being singularly significant and fundamentally important to the achievement of the institutional mission and purpose. Let the word go forth that Thomas Edison State College is here and now publically declaring that commitment.

Please help us! Have a productive day.

Thank you.

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