

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

October 23, 1986

In June of each year I present to the Board of Trustees an annual report outlining the major events of the closing fiscal year. As you may recall, this year I took the unusual step of having copies duplicated and distributed to each member of the College staff. I did so because, in my opinion, this report set forth a litany of achievement of truly extraordinary proportions. As you have heard me say before, it is important that we periodically review our collective achievement and our shared accomplishment. The successes outlined in that report went beyond the attainment of any individual office, unit, or division. It was the triumph of an inspired collective effort about which we should be genuinely proud. The state of the College is excellent.

I would like to think that the elegance of this newly appointed room is emblematic of the important stature this institution enjoys within higher education and with the general public. This magnificent collection of etchings made available to us through the generosity of Mr. Raymond Steen, the growth of our Foundation Board, the awarding of \$150,000 in private grants, and a 42% increase in applications for admission, are all tangible and measurable outcomes of the quality and esteem with which this College is held.

We reached our enrollment target of 5,320 students. Our minority enrollment has risen to 13%. We achieved our budgeted revenue target and held our expenditures within our authorized budget. We completed our new associate degrees, and 132 students enrolled in them. Our nursing peer study group program has started, and we offered 18 guided study courses. The complete Associate of Arts degree and 90% of our baccalaureate degrees can be delivered through the various programs of the Center for Learning Through Telecommunications; 107 courses were evaluated through the Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction; 1,231 exams were administered through our testing program; 2,038 credits were awarded through the evaluation of 127 portfolios; and we have awarded over 5,707 degrees.

I wish to applaud your leadership in influencing the national agenda as it relates to higher education and the adult learner. The recent Middle States policy on the assessment of prior learning and the federal Higher Education Reauthorization Act, which for the first time extends Pell Grant eligibility to less-than-half-time students and gives full credit recognition to computer and telecourses, represent initiatives stretching far beyond our boundaries which were truly influenced by us. Over the past year you delivered over 22 papers and presentations at various programs and conferences across the country.

On July 9 Governor Kean signed the autonomy legislation which represents the most significant structural reform in higher education since the founding of this college. This initiative has very special implications for this institution in that it appropriately vests the decision-making authority for major aspects of the institutional life with those entities that are accountable for guiding the direction of the institution. This initiative in major ways ends our state agency status and sets us forth in the same pattern of authority and accountability enjoyed by the rest of the higher education community of this state and nation. Simply stated, those institutional matters with regard to purchasing, travel, personnel, and fees, formerly requiring external approval will now all be made, pursuant to appropriate guidelines, within the institution. This hard won freedom carries with it added responsibility and accountability for the management of the institution's affairs. While we won't have the bureaucracy to stand in our way as much, neither will it be around to hide behind or protect us as it from time to time has done in the past.

On July 18, the Board of Higher Education awarded to the institution a Challenge Grant in the amount of \$1.8 million. You have previously been briefed as to the transforming nature of this bold and adventurous leap into our future.

And finally, on September 29 the New Jersey State Colleges, the Governor's Office, the Department of Higher Education, and the Council of New Jersey State College Locals of the American Federation of Teachers reached agreement on a three-year contract. This institution had some influence on both sides of the table during the negotiating process, and I would like to think that Ms. Fontan and I in some small way contributed to a satisfactory outcome. This is a good contract - one which can be embraced equally by all of the parties to the negotiations. It is an agreement by which we can all claim ownership.

No institution can truly become excellent without first clearly understanding who it is and for whom it exists. The strength of this College is borne from its clearly defined mission and clientele. This institution sits as a mini-system of higher education for the adult learner in New Jersey. Through us, colleges, universities, corporations, labor unions, libraries, museums all become places of learning and providers of education for the self-motivated, self-directed adult learner.

While Edison opens doors for all of the current and potential adult learners of this state, we ourselves do not pretend nor claim to be the appropriate vehicle for all of the adult learners in the state. This year the College adopted its first formal admissions statement which codifies in policy the self-selection that has been inherent in the Edison model. I would like to quote from part of that statement as follows:

"Thomas A. Edison State College was created for, and serves, self-directed adult learners by offering the opportunity to qualified persons to earn college degrees and credit. Those students best served by this institution are strongly self-motivated adult learners who have generally, though not exclusively, acquired or are acquiring college-level learning in noncollegiate settings and/or in previous college courses. The majority of our students are able to earn credit through various assessment methods for prior learning. These prior learning experiences include competencies developed through jobs, professions, or careers; through previous noncollegiate postsecondary education; through formal learning experiences acquired in business, labor, military, and leisure activities; and through special credentials. Thomas A. Edison State College students are expected to enter the institutions with sufficient preparation to benefit from and successfully participate in collegiate-level learning opportunities and college courses."

For those adult learners coming to this institution who are intellectually and/or experientially in terms of college competencies equivalent to the traditional age entering freshmen, Edison is not the appropriate institution. Our best policy for these adult learners has been, and should continue to be, referral to traditional institutions better prepared, more experienced, and better equipped to deal with this kind of learner.

The descriptive admissions criteria I just shared with you selects according to intellectual strength, experiential strength, self-discipline, goal orientation, and self-direction. There is no evidence that these criteria disadvantage any potential student as a function of race, sex, or income except at the extremes. We have achieved our special stature by identifying a unique role in American higher education and excelling at it. Our future mission is building on those aspects of the College that are special and different as opposed to emulating our older and more traditional collegial institutions.

As you can see, our pace has been hectic and our achievements have been many. I think, however, we should be mindful of the significant challenges that lie before us during this year.

We must complete our five year Middle States review. While this represents quite a taxing effort, we ought to look forward to it because we have quite a story to tell. In a real sense we face the challenge of being the victim of our own success. The orderly growth that we predicted and projected has mushroomed and threatens to rage out of control. Our volume-sensitive areas such as the transcript evaluations, academic advising, and several of our important administrative functions on the fifth floor, are in danger of being overwhelmed by the unexpected burst and demand of potential students wanting to affiliate themselves with this institution. The implementation of the Challenge Grant programs within the approved

time parameters, while simultaneously managing these other pressing issues, will test our resolve. In September we celebrated the 75th anniversary of this illustrious and magnificent facility, and while we rededicate ourselves to remaining in this beautiful building, it is a facility which we have already outgrown. The challenge of assembling the human, fiscal, and physical resources to sustain our growth is, without question, the most pressing challenge and difficult issue facing our collective leadership. We will have under strenuous review during the coming weeks, avenues for meeting the challenge of this extraordinary increase in interest by the adult learners and this state in this institution. As the nature of problems go, however, it is probably the kind we'd rather have.

We are fast approaching a point to which the positive aspects of growth will have to be weighed against our ability to maintain the highest quantitative standards which is the source of our strong reputation for academic integrity. Growth, while desirable, is not a good thing if, as a consequence, the quality of student interaction with the institution is sacrificed. The challenge is to maintain the quality of our programs and the quality of our interaction while attracting sufficient resources to accommodate our growth.

I do not believe it an overstatement to say that the year 1986 will be treated as a watershed year when the history of this College is written. Our influence and academic reputation have never been stronger. We remain on the cutting edge of innovation in aggressive responsiveness to the needs of adult learners, while at the same time perpetuating the missionary zeal that has always been the character of the faculties and staff associated with Thomas Edison State College. To be sure, we have problems, but problems are challenges and in challenges lie opportunities. If we maintain the vigor that you have shown me in the past and we rededicate ourselves to the vision we have painted for our future, I stand before you with extraordinary optimism and unbridled confidence in our future.