

STATE-OF-THE-COLLEGE ADDRESS  
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Fiscal Year 1987 will probably be marked with special significance in the history of this college. On July 9, 1986 Governor Kean signed into law Assembly Bills 1173 and 1177 also known as the autonomy bills. Nine days later, on July 18, the Board of Higher Education formally approved the awarding of a Governor's Challenge Grant to this institution in the amount of \$1,827,541. So, within the first month of the year, the College was impacted by two events of such enormous significance as to be of transforming and historic proportions.

The College successfully completed an external review of its Bachelor of Arts degree program and in June the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools granted us unconditional reaffirmation of our accreditation following the submission of our five-year periodic review report in April. The College is experiencing a period of unprecedented enrollment growth; the numbers and percentages of minority applicants continue to increase, and the institution remains on target in achieving its minority enrollment goals; the College's finances are sound; the institution has exceeded its student revenue projections; alumni giving is up, and the assets of the Foundation have doubled during the fiscal year; we have achieved a modest expansion in our physical plant; and the College's reputation for academic quality across the nation has never been higher.

The intense planning and activity necessary to implement a successful transition to autonomy has gone forward smoothly and without incident. The development of policies and the associated procedures has greatly taxed our Division of Administration and Finance. To date, they have achieved successful results and done extremely well. Your collective achievements for this institution have been extraordinary, and I am pleased to report to you that the performance of the College for the 1986-87 fiscal year has been outstanding.

While I present to you a report that is prideful in its litany of achievement, I must also share with you the development of several significant challenges which the College must face and satisfactorily address within the coming and subsequent years. These issues are related to the subjects of: 1) quality assurance, 2) enrollment management, and 3) the collegiate infrastructure.

In a real sense, these three issues are different perspectives on the same thing. Colleges, like businesses, have the capacity to expand too quickly, to grow beyond their means to manage their growth and maintain appropriate attention to quality and service. At the same time, institutions must build and maintain a solid infrastructure that serves as a platform for planning and growth which is not dependent on enrollment. There are certain important institutional functions that must be performed whether the college has 5,000, 7,000, or 10,000 students. With the advent of autonomy and the pressures of high student demand which threatens to outstrip

our resources, the balance between the infrastructure, enrollment growth, and quality assurance becomes an issue of pressing significance.

Fundamental to making intelligent judgments and informed decisions is a rational process of planning, self-evaluation, and institutional introspection. The common terminology describing this organized set of activities, standards, and measures is called "institutional outcomes assessment."

You will recall that three years ago we went through the exercise of developing a three-year strategic plan. In this plan we projected our level of activity during the period of the plan and speculated as to what the growth would be in both enrollment and staff. We anticipated a 7% annual growth in enrollment as well as some moderate growth in staff to support the larger student body. In reviewing that plan several months ago, I was impressed by our fidelity to its assumptions and the accuracy of its predictions, with one notable exception. While we achieved 100% of the staff increases for which we had planned, we harvested about 150% of the student enrollment we expected. Explosive growth has increased demand for services - a 40% increase in student requests for advisement from FY '84 through FY '87 and even more dramatic increases in student inquiries and transcript evaluations. Our current enrollment stands at 5,859 degree-seeking students with an additional 644 limited service, for a total head count of 6,503.

This dramatic increase in the demand for our services by our students is severely stressing our ability to maintain the quality of service for which we are well known and justifiably proud. In one sense we are faced with a kind of problem we want to have. Within a national context of steady state or declining enrollment, an increased interest in Thomas A. Edison State College is a direct result of the high esteem and national reputation this College enjoys, but a problem is a problem nevertheless even though there are attractive and flattering aspects of its circumstance. Developing an appropriate institutional response to this condition will be at the center of this year's agenda for attention.

In the Spring of 1987, Academic and Public Affairs held a series of meetings to collaborate and identify the current institutional questions being surfaced by our enrollment increases. Based on the issues that were identified, I assembled elements of the administrative leadership in retreat to prepare the coming year's agenda in addressing this and other pressing institutional issues. As I listened to the various discussions and competing points-of-view, it became quite apparent to me that many of our assumptions were intuitive and our standards arbitrary, more a consequence of our procedures than a reasoned qualitative judgment as to what were the appropriate expectations of the students we serve. Consequently, I have requested, and he has agreed, that Tom Streckewald join my office as Director of Institutional Research and Outcomes Assessment. It is my expectation that Mr. Streckewald will assist in providing leadership for those activities of the College

designed to gather and analyze information and develop conclusions which will intelligently inform institutional policy and decision-making.

This year we will engage in a process of standard-setting and evaluation so that we might know how effective we are in carrying out the College's mission. For each of our major programs we will set forth performance standards which describe program effectiveness. These standards will be measured, and processes will be implemented to collect, analyze, and draw conclusions from these measurements. The resultant outcomes will guide policy decisions and will provide useful feedback to our students and prospective students about the College. The mission-related programmatic activity of the institution falls into five categories:

#### **Category 1 - Student Empowerment**

This set of activities consists of the information provided to current and prospective students. Achieved largely through publications and various levels of advising, this information empowers the student to make accurate, informed decisions regarding academic pursuits. The efficacy, accuracy, timeliness, and appropriateness of Edison's communications will determine the degree to which students' expectations can be met through the Edison model.

## **Category 2 - Testing and Assessment**

The processes of reviewing credentials, administering course-equivalent examinations, and evaluating portfolios documenting out-of-classroom learning result in the award of credits. Because the Edison model requires that credits be granted only for legitimately demonstrated knowledge or skill, the quality, validity, and reliability of the testing and assessment practices are fundamental to students' progress in and satisfaction with their academic careers.

## **Category 3 - The Curricula and Student Learning Outcomes**

As an academic institution, Edison State College must possess curricula which demonstrate that its graduates possess the intellectual competencies expected of a college graduate. Therefore, the College must examine the creation, structure, content, and periodic review of its curricula for validity and currency. To do this, Edison will develop appropriate methods for making these judgments, including the assessment of learning outcomes.

## **Category 4 - Directed Independent Learning**

Through a program of directed independent study supported in part by the CALL Network the College is involved in the provision of instructional opportunity and the evaluation of student learning. Therefore, evaluation of the effectiveness and quality of this activity is an important and relevant activity.



## Category 5 - Academic Networking

Edison operates the Statewide Testing and Assessment Center and the Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction; has developed more than 100 credit transfer articulation agreements; provides access to learning materials produced by third party vendors; and maintains relationships with a variety of educational, government, military, corporate, and community agencies. Through this network, Edison serves as the hub of a higher education mini-system which has been developed to provide adults with a broad range of educational options and with the linkages necessary to allow adults to take advantage of these options. The development and maintenance of this network as well as the preservation of academic validity throughout the array of options it creates are issues which address the quality of the Edison program. Edison will establish methods for assessing these issues which will result in the examination of institutional policy concerning academic networking.

The information gained from combining the assessment of these five major areas provides validation to Edison's operating assumptions while at the same time offering direction and guidance for institutional self-improvement. This exercise should also provide valuable and useful information to the ultimate beneficiary of the exercise, the adult learners Edison serves.

This process will be on-going and never really be completed. The information we will gain from the standard-setting exercise alone will give us good information as to how many students we can legitimately serve without unacceptable degradation in the quality of our work. What we do with that information then becomes rather obvious. We will manage enrollment so as to serve only those

students who we can serve well, and we will seek to increase the resources available to us to secure the kinds and numbers of additional staff and staff support to service the public expectation as reflected by our increased enrollment. What we will not do is permit the pressures of our enrollment growth to subvert the fundamental quality of the work we do, nor will we or can we make fundamental changes in the service and delivery model which has propelled this institution to a position of national leadership.

We are committed to a distant learner approach that does not require hands-on or physical presence with the students we serve. I am fully aware that the level of selfdirectiveness required to successfully navigate this model makes it inappropriate for some adults to choose Edison as a viable option for pursuing higher education. Our responsibility to these students is to be sure that we have provided them with accurate and timely information which fully explains and informs the kind of support one can expect from this institution and, maybe more importantly, the kinds of support they cannot expect from this institution. But the fundamental decision-making and attendant accountability for this decision-making must always be vested with the students. Faith in adult learners to intelligently handle this kind of responsibility is one of the fundamental characteristics that differentiates the adult learner from their more traditional-age counterparts.

We have not, nor will we attempt to be all things to all adults. Our strength has been in doing well those things we know how to do well and not attempting to expand in areas inappropriate to our model which are better left to our colleague institutions. To this fundamental principle we must remain committed.



While we will manage and limit enrollment if we must, this is not a desirable action for the College, and it certainly has negative consequences for the adult learner of New Jersey. While size is of no inherent value, serving as a portal of access for the adult learner is intrinsic to our mission. The denial of access by a College to a qualified student is the ultimate barrier to educational opportunity. It is an action that we will take reluctantly and only if there is no reasonable alternative.

Of course, the obvious way to avoid such an action is to generate the resources to hire the staff and provide the equipment and facilities to serve more students, and, over the coming year, we intend to be aggressive in our attempts to secure these resources.

This morning and in this room, the Board of Higher Education approved a budget request and recommendation for Edison State College which contained \$975,000 in new program priority requests plus an additional \$402,000 in continuation funding. This request for additional resources includes 30 additional positions for new staff. Our current resources initiative is the most ambitious in the College's history.

However, the action this morning of the Board of Higher Education in no way assures that these funds will in fact be forthcoming in the final budget which will be on the Governor's desk by June 30 of next year. Between now and then we will be actively

involved in our attempts to secure funding for as much of this initiative as possible. To give you some idea of the task we face, until this current year, the Governor has not recommended any new positions for higher education in the last six years. The increases in staff that we have achieved during this period have been funded through increased fee revenues and through special initiatives we were able to get through the legislature to fund the nursing program and which the Governor graciously signed.

While I am cautiously optimistic that the Board of Higher Education's action this morning was a strong and forceful endorsement for our legitimate needs, we have a long way to go before we can obtain for ourselves the additional resources necessary to respond to our current demand. Major decisions on enrollment will not be made until the outcomes assessment process has given us a more informed and clearer picture as to what our real capacities are, and until we will know late next spring as to what the reasonable prospects are for additional staff and resources.

And, finally, while I look forward to increasing the numbers of competent and committed educators to join our ranks, if we are able to hire them we'd have no place to put them. While occupying our east campus across the street has given important short-term relief, on-going discussions continue with the General Services Administration about solving our long-term facility requirements. You will be kept informed as things develop.

I have found it useful over my years with you to look for one word adjectives which represent the College's condition. Last year's word was maturity; this year it is expectancy, for this year will be a year of great challenge but one that also holds great promise.

The agenda for the year ahead is to implement the challenge grant program, build the collegiate infrastructure, respond to the issues raised by our explosive enrollment growth, and to establish an on-going program of institutional self-evaluation and outcomes assessment. As, in most cases, in challenges of this type there is great opportunity, and it is the timely and effective exploitation of opportunity that is the basis for institutional achievement and a major test for our collective leadership.

I look forward to the coming year with great anticipation. We will be faced with great questions whose answers will affect this College for years to come, but this institution and its people have always relished in the work of seeking great answers to important questions. I have limitless faith in our collective ability to achieve the proper results.

Thank you.