

A change of pace for the School of Business

by Matthew Golden

Change within any large institution usually takes time, but in academia the pace is often glacial. In the last 18 months, however, The College of New Jersey's School of Business, has overcome that tendency. Since accepting its interim deanship in the summer of 2004, Emmanuel Osagie has injected a do-it-now spirit into the school and launched a number of innovative programs that are dramatically upgrading the quality of its academic offerings.

TCNJ's School of Business was first accredited in 1998 but has struggled to craft an identity in the years since then. Though individual academic programs have excelled, changes in leadership and direction have prevented the school as a whole from gaining a strong foothold in the northeast region of the country or establishing a reputation equal to the talents and accomplishments of its students and faculty.

With the prospect of reaccreditation looming in 2007-2008, Provost Stephen Briggs asked Osagie, then his vice provost for research and faculty development, in the spring of 2004 to accept the school's deanship on an interim basis. "The provost wanted me to come in, for at least a year, and help build a strategic plan that would provide clear direction as to what type of business school we would aspire to be," Osagie explained. A national search for a new dean would follow, so he agreed to try what he thought would be an exciting assignment.

"The first thing I did," Osagie said, "was to ask a seasoned business school dean from another institution to spend time with a number of key individuals from our school and develop a white paper that contained proposals regarding how a school of business

should operate." This Strategic Design Group, as it was called, shared the product of its efforts at a June 2004 business faculty meeting. That gathering produced some animated discussions and varying opinion, but no true consensus.

"I said, OK, this is healthy," Osagie recalled. "Then I asked who would be willing to come back to campus and continue the debate in July. The level of interest was tremendous, so we held a retreat during the summer that provided the basis for a strategic plan."

Osagie, who had officially become interim dean on July 1, also changed the leadership structure of the School of Business by creating program directors who serve in an advisory capacity to the dean. "I didn't think the existing structure fit my leadership style, which is essentially grounded in participation," Osagie said. "I wanted each program to have a way to articulate concerns directly to me, so we established program leaders rather than the division heads that previously oversaw multiple areas."

During the early portion of the fall 2004 semester, the preliminary components of the strategic plan were reviewed by various stakeholders. Concurrently, Osagie recruited a prestigious roster of business executives to serve as a Board of Advisors for the School of Business. Agreeing to join the board were Virginia Bauer, secretary of the New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission; Rex Corlett, executive director of Educational Testing Service's International Division; Jules Frankel, partner at Wilkin & Guttentplan, CPAs; Steven Hill, financial controller for Tibotec Therapeutics; Bill Hogan of the Hogan Leadership Group; Craig Howie, vice president of American Re-Insurance Co.; Mark Iorio,



Dean of the School of Business
Emmanuel I. Osagie

president/CEO of the MegaGroup; Gregory Kubikowski, partner at Pricewaterhouse Coopers; John S. Watts, senior vice president/global managing director for ORC International; David Stryker, assistant treasurer at Bristol-Myers Squibb; Michael Rambert from Parker, McCay & Chriswolo, PA; Terri Flanagan of Harris Interactive; Luis Perez of Modell Ventures; and Will Mayhall, president/CEO of Princeton Financial Systems.

"I asked them, the faculty, the provost, and student groups to review our strategic plan, and I also set up an employer reception, where the companies that most frequently hire our students could come in and review the plan and provide feedback," Osagie explained.

By mid-fall, a clear direction had been established, with the central premise being a desire to build connections between the school and the business community that could bridge the gap between theory and practice. A primary focus will be on providing all students matriculated in the School of Business with the opportunity to experience an internship in their area of study. Increasing the number of students who gain international experience,

whether through study or internships abroad, is another goal. "I think this is important if our students are to be able to understand business issues on a global scale," Osagie explained.

By late fall, it was time to recruit a permanent dean. The position was announced in January and advertised nationally, but, by mid-spring of this year, the search had failed to yield a viable candidate. At that point, the search committee asked Osagie to consider accepting the deanship. Jayne Zanglein, a former associate professor at TCNJ and now visiting professor at Western Carolina University, said, "Those of us on the search committee could not arrive at any real consensus, and delaying the search for another year would have made the accreditation process much more difficult. Our discussions ultimately led to the question: What type of person do we want representing the school?"

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A native of Nigeria, Osagie earned a bachelor's at Southern University and A&M College and a master's and doctorate in economics at Louisiana State University, both in Baton Rouge, LA. He joined the TCNJ administration in August 2000 as director of academic grants and sponsored research and in 2001 became vice provost for research and faculty development.

Working under the new dean's leadership through the spring and summer, the School of Business launched several significant, new initiatives with the opening of the 2005–2006 academic year. A Freshman Executive Colloquia series has brought CEOs and other senior executives to campus to share professional



Before a Freshman Executive Colloquium session featuring Dow Jones officials on marketing got under way in November, some of the students chatted with the leaders.

From left, those standing are Stephanie Major, strategic partnership manager; Mark Campbell, business manager for educational marketing; Alfred Pelham, TCNJ associate professor of business and the colloquium director; and Chuck Reilly, eastern sales representative for education.

experiences and take first-year students through the complete lifecycle of a business. The concept is that, before asking 17- or 18-year-old students to decide what specific path they want to pursue, they should be familiar with the entire business system. Now freshmen exploring a business major are exposed to the many phases of business, from startup to expansion and maintenance to sunset or closing down or selling, early in their academic careers. The individuals taking them through that cycle are business people experienced in those phases. This fall, executives from Wal-Mart, Saturn, and the Trenton Thunder were among those participating in the series.

The 2005–2006 academic year also has seen the inauguration of a Business Scholars Program. Designed to provide an especially challenging experience for the most gifted students and to develop future business leaders, it offers opportunities for mentoring relationships with faculty members and an accelerated, interdisciplinary curriculum. Honors students have the flexibility to develop individualized programs of study, allowing them to take advanced courses as freshmen. An honors seminar during each semester of the sophomore and junior years is designed to improve critical business skills, such as strategic thinking. On-site visits to corporate facilities and leadership training are added components.

The School of Business has further established an Executive-in-Residence position for an individual with extraordinary professional experience and ties to the business community. This person will work closely with the Business Scholars Program and the Freshman Executive Colloquia series,

serve as a student adviser, teach classes, and cultivate relationships between the school and the external business community.

The subject of ethics has moved to the front burner in much of the corporate world, and Osagie hopes to use "...a holistic approach to the integration of ethics education throughout our curriculum, including a stand-alone course that, I hope, will become a core requirement. I would also like to establish a student honor code system." As part of a biannual visiting speaker series that Osagie began last year and hopes to continue, students discussed business ethics with *Wall Street Journal* writer and editor Ron Alsop.

The changes at the School of Business may not qualify as an overhaul, but they certainly have been dramatic by academic standards. And the flurry of activity is not without reason. "We are up for reaccreditation in a couple of years, so we are being very intentional with our planning," Osagie noted. "There are specific needs that must be addressed, but we have the caliber of faculty and students to become a premier undergraduate business school."

Matthew Golden is assistant director of college and community relations at TCNJ.

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