

The College of New Jersey
Welcome Back Address
President R. Barbara Gitenstein
August 29, 2007

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to another promising academic year at The College of New Jersey, and to be able to do so this year back in Kendall Hall.

Because our plans for the future build on our past successes and challenges, let me first reflect on last year. Accomplishment, both institutional and individual, marked 2006-2007 at The College of New Jersey. Together, we achieved great things. TCNJ, again, was ranked as the top public master's college in the northern region by *U.S. News and World Report* (a standing that was reaffirmed once again this fall). In that ranking, we continue to hold the highest freshman to sophomore retention rate and graduation rate and the highest selectivity rate within that category. We joined the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the College of William and Mary, and the University of California at Los Angeles as the ONLY state-supported institutions among the 75 schools that *Barron's* lists as "Most Competitive." Additionally, TCNJ was selected as one of just 15 colleges and universities nationwide to win the 2007 award for the Merck/AAAS Undergraduate Science Research Program, sponsored by the Merck Institute for Science Education and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. And just two weeks ago we were again listed by the *Princeton Review* as one of the 366 best institutions of higher education out of the more than 4000 in the nation.

Our new Career and Community Studies program gained national acclaim as a model that opens the door to college-level liberal learning for students with certain cognitive impairments. The Alfred Harcourt Foundation doubled the number of scholarships it awards to exceptional TCNJ students. Perhaps most impressive of all, the Phi Beta Kappa Society awarded a chapter to The College of New Jersey last fall. Only six institutions of higher education were awarded chapters last year, and fewer than 10 percent of all colleges and universities nationally have ever received that honor.

Affirmation of our efforts was mirrored in the support of alumni and friends. TCNJ raised \$8.5 million in the last fiscal year, thanks in large part to the generosity of Tom and Carol Loser's record \$5 million gift annuity to support the Nursing program. Even without that monumental donation, TCNJ would still have exceeded our fundraising goal for the year. Alumni gifts to the College increased by 28 percent, while faculty and staff gifts rose by 31 percent. I applaud and thank all of you for your support of this wonderful institution and its students.

Though successes are the result of a collective passion and excellence, we are also a community of individual achievers. A couple of examples from 2006-2007 will suggest that excellence. Professor Catie Rosemurgy, of our English Department, emerged from more than 2,000 applicants to garner a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her colleague, Jess Row, was named to *Granta's* "Best of Young American Novelists" 2007 list, which is published by the literary magazine every 10 years and includes only 21 distinguished young writers born after 1970. Civil Engineering professor Nabil Al-Omaishi was named "Educator of the Year" by the American Society of Civil Engineers' Central Jersey Branch. Dean Susan Bakewell-Sachs was selected for the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson

Executive Nurse Fellowship, one of just 20 nurse leaders chosen nationally for this program. Women's lacrosse coach Sharon Pfluger joined the 50th class of the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame, and Sports Information Director Ann King was presented the Irving T. Marsh Award by the Eastern College Athletic Conference Sports Information Directors Association. Bob Anderson, Assistant Provost for Liberal Learning and Advising, was named an Outstanding First-year Student Advocate by the National Resource Center for First-year Experience and Students in Transition.

In keeping with the prowess of their mentors, our students had individual and team success as well last year. TCNJ's women's soccer team advanced to the Division III national championship game, for the second year in a row; a group of civil engineers placed first in aesthetics at the American Society of Civil Engineers and American Institute of Steel Construction Steel Bridge competition; Bonner Scholar Neil Hartmann Jr., a communication studies major, was named the Outstanding Student of the Year; and Jess Kohut was the 2007 recipient of the 19th annual Honda Inspiration Award for her courage and determination in returning to the softball diamond from a frightening injury the year before.

I could go on and on, but I will let these impressive examples serve as illustrations of the quality of the TCNJ faculty, staff and students.

With mixed emotions, we bid farewell to the Class of 2007 in May. That extraordinary group of young men and women will be missed on campus but are now a welcomed addition to our alumni family. I have full confidence they will achieve the same kind of success as their predecessors have in their careers and in their contributions to the communities in which they live. The results from our survey of the 2006 graduating class, our most recent statistics, suggest just that. The report indicates that again 96% of the class were either employed or in graduate school within 12 months of graduation. Top employers included such corporate leaders as Merrill Lynch, Johnson and Johnson, and PricewaterhouseCoopers as well as the state of New Jersey, and of course, TCNJ. The average salary for the graduating class of 2006 was up 4% over the year before and we continue to see between 25-26% entering graduate or professional school within the first year of graduating from TCNJ.

Clearly last year was another banner year and it provides foundation for my confidence that the College will continue to thrive. Our vibrant freshman class for the fall 2007 is our largest enrolled class in more than a decade, and their records of achievement are impressive. More than half are National Honor Society members, and 5 percent were ranked either first or second in their high school class. They are a diverse group in terms of ethnicity and talents, including a nationally ranked BMX racer, a Miss Teen USA competitor, and a dancer with two Lincoln Center performances to her credit. We will be introducing the community to some of their individual stories in the September issue of *TCNJ Update*, so please take a few moments to get to know and welcome them to TCNJ.

Students are not the only new additions to campus. The College will welcome eight exceptionally qualified new faculty of diverse backgrounds but with the common interest of becoming fully engaged in the life of the College. They represent a variety of disciplines including psychology (2), business (2), biology (2), physics and communication studies. 75% of these faculty are women and 50% come from underrepresented groups. Our newest faculty have

completed their doctoral work at Penn State, Temple, University of Akron, McMaster University, Syracuse, University of Michigan, and Washington University. We are pleased to welcome home one of our new faculty members, a TCNJ alumna from 1999.

In addition, we are fortunate in the quality of new leadership in many areas including John Costaldo as Interim Athletic Director, Patrick Donohue as the Director of the Bonner Center for Civic and Community Engagement, Magda Manetas as Assistant Vice President for Student Services. The energy, intellect, and dedication of these leaders will add special verve to the coming year.

Last spring, we sought campus-wide feedback on our facilities master plan. This feedback has been incorporated into an ambitious vision for facilities at TCNJ. This year we enter the planning and design phase of several projects, including programming for the Brower Student Center and athletic facilities, as well as a renovation to Decker Hall, stabilization of the Green Farm House, and a roof repair initiative for Packer, Music, and the Cogeneration Plant. We will replace the Science Complex roofing and break ground on the new Art and Interactive Multimedia Building. And, keep your fingers crossed, we will see construction begin on the new student apartments.

We are also taking an aggressive approach to environmental consciousness. Last year, we saved more than \$1 million through your efforts in energy conservation, and I recently signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which pledges that TCNJ will reduce and, eventually, eliminate the College's global warming emissions.

Because of some of the very difficult budget decisions we made over the last several years, we are now at a point where we can begin to make strategic investments in facilities and programs. Targeted investments will allow us to address some maintenance and information technology needs this year. We have begun a transformation within the Division of Student Affairs that will significantly enhance the student experience at TCNJ. We will continue to invest in our academic experience, particularly this year in the support of the engaged learning opportunities so integral to our academic transformation. In keeping with our mission and recommendations from an ad hoc campus task force, we will be investing significant resources in improving the department of campus police in its delivery of a true community policing program. We hope that a new police chief will be joining us this fall.

In response to the realities of an environment of increased scrutiny and heightened expectations, we will be adding resources to support our commitment to be an accountable and transparent institution. The Center for Institutional Effectiveness, a joint responsibility of the Provost and the Vice President for Information Technology and Student Enrollment Support Services, has been established. And we are hoping that a new General Counsel, who will also serve as our Ethics Liaison to the state Ethics Commission, will join us during the fall semester.

In the face of dwindling federal and state support, we will explore opportunities to diversify revenue streams and generate supplemental revenue in an effort to maintain our affordability and address the mounting financial strains that college students are experiencing throughout the country. To accomplish this goal, we are reexamining our enrollment plan and expanding our out-of-state student population. We are considering options for more effective campus and

resource utilization, particularly during summer and extended break periods. External partnerships and new programmatic endeavors that will bring added resources to our core enterprise must also be part of such a plan. We must continue to improve our partnerships with feeder high schools and community colleges from which we recruit our undergraduates as well as consolidate our relationships with the graduate schools to which we send our graduating seniors. And of course we will continue to expand our outreach to our alumni and grow our development of private contributions to support the mission of The College.

The Presidents Advisory Council met this summer with faculty, student, and staff leadership from the Committee on Planning and Priorities, the Faculty and Staff Senates, and the Student Government Association to flesh out some specific initiatives to meet the pressing issues of higher education in general and TCNJ in particular. We acknowledged our institutional responsibilities to respond to the national cry for higher education accountability, the national and state concerns regarding transparency and ethical engagement, the state concerns regarding responsiveness to state needs, and the reality of New Jersey's fiscal problems. We proposed a series of initiatives responsive to this national and state context. I am currently discussing these initiatives with the Board of Trustees and expect to be able to announce a plan of action early in the fall after all trustee input has been incorporated.

Undoubtedly, TCNJ has and is accomplishing many wonderful things, but this is precisely the time to ask, "As good as we are, can we/should we be better, should we do things in a different way?" The issues of institutional performance and accountability have fostered national and local debate recently, and TCNJ has embraced its role in that discussion. We know that TCNJ recruits excellent students and graduates them at a rate—86 percent—that far exceeds national averages and even places us ahead of such prestigious schools as Lafayette College, Oberlin College, and Tulane University. We know students who graduate in a timely fashion realize significant savings over their counterparts who take additional time to complete their degrees. But are we really satisfied with what is essentially a B+ in graduation rates? I am not.

We understand that *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* rates TCNJ as one of the "best values" in public higher education. And we know that, through careful allocation of resources, we have found ways to reduce costs and preserve quality in the face of dwindling state support. Are we really confident that we are allocating resources to institutional priorities? Can we do more to save in energy costs while we also minimize our carbon footprint? Can we continue to increase the number of small classes while at the same time effectively managing our limited resources?

In addition, there are questions about our learning outcomes and institutional outputs that must be answered. Are we successfully serving our role as a bridge to graduate study? Do our transfer students graduate within an acceptable time frame? How do our students' skills and knowledge bases grow throughout their college experience? To help us answer questions like these and many more, we have developed the Center for Institutional Effectiveness. The Center will partner with campus offices and committees to enhance college operations and outcomes through inquiry and continuous examination while defining and assessing strategic performance indicators.

Our goal in such a project should be very clear—not merely to satisfy external queries and concerns, not merely to improve standings and rankings, and surely not merely to collect data.

Rather our goal should be to use institutional data and resources to enhance our ability to deliver our mission. Our mission requires that TCNJ be engaged in educating the leaders of New Jersey's future, in challenging our students and supporting our faculty and staff, as together we try to provide solutions to the most pressing issues of the day. Whether the issue be the impact of global warming, terrorism, the war in Iraq, the health care crisis in the United States, the problems in our K-12 school system, the cost of higher education, the deterioration of our state and national infrastructure, the partisanship paralyzing our political system, the permeating anti-intellectualism of American culture, the escalating marginalization of the arts, or learning to live and thrive in an ever shrinking and threatening world, TCNJ as an institution and TCNJ's faculty, staff and students must be actively engaged in the difficult discourse and investigation that leads our nation forward on these matters. And we can only participate effectively in this enterprise, if we know our strengths and weaknesses and only if we continue to celebrate and reinforce those strengths while at the same time we honestly seek to address those weaknesses. I am confident that at TCNJ we have the will and intellect to do just that, but I am also convinced that we can only do so if we continue to be in control of our future and our mission. While we must be held accountable to the external publics for answers to such questions, these are not questions that can be answered by anyone but ourselves.

True excellence in anything, but particularly in higher education, requires a constant striving, a refusal to be satisfied with the current state, no matter how impressive. The institutions of higher education who have charted a path of continuing excellence are the ones who embrace change, who challenge themselves to strive for even greater goals. As Emily Dickinson has said:

Satisfaction — is the Agent
Of Satiety —
Want — [is the] quiet Commissary
For Infinity (Emily Dickinson #1036)

Satisfaction is simply another way of describing complacency and laziness. The College of New Jersey has established a reputation for excellence in undergraduate education. Maintaining that reputation requires that we continue to question and continue to work hard at improvement on this excellence. In such a fashion, our yearning for improvement becomes the bank, the commissary, for our promising future. Thank you all for your efforts, your intelligence, and your spirit in this enterprise. Together we will make 2007-2008 even better than any year before.

Thank you.