

**An Exceptional Path: Five Strategies to Support  
The College of New Jersey in its Integrated Transformation  
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The challenges that face higher education at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are daunting, and that is true no matter what your institutional aspirations. These challenges become even more daunting considering the aspirations of The College of New Jersey.

At the national and local levels, higher education is frequently viewed as disengaged from the problems of society. Criticism of higher education's perceived lack of flexibility and transparency, its silo mentality, as well as its cost and accessibility has grown increasingly prevalent. These concerns have been widely expressed in such publications as "The Spellings Report" and the 2006 Democratic Leadership Report, among others.

The recent investigations revealing questionable relationships between institutions of higher education and the student loan industry and between institutions of higher education and study-abroad providers have only heightened the public's concern. In the state of New Jersey, accusations of conflicts of interest and questionable business practices have been levied at certain institutions, and the recently released State Commission of Investigation report on public colleges and universities threatens to exacerbate these critiques.

In addition to these revelations of questionable business dealings and ethics, there is also the fact that funding for higher education, both at the national and, particularly, at the state level, is decreasing dramatically. In FY1999, financial support from the state of New Jersey represented 53% of TCNJ's revenue; in FY2008, state support will represent 37%. Unfortunately, there is no reason to expect this trend to change. Within this context The College of New Jersey has sought to establish itself not only as an exceptional educational institution, but also as an accountable and responsive one.

The College of New Jersey has been committed to mission-based planning since the approval of the College's new mission by the Board of Trustees in December 2000. The three core documents that have driven our decision-making have included the mission statement itself, the statement of core values of the institution, and the detailing of the institutional commitments.

These documents describe our intent to provide exemplary undergraduate education in a residential environment and are based on our pledge to serve the public good by educating students who will support and sustain the communities in which they live. As an accountable and engaged institution, TCNJ must value shared governance, the education and involvement of a variety of stakeholders, and respond to the economic and societal needs of the state of New Jersey and the nation. The College must accomplish these goals by depending on transparent processes and procedures that consider outputs and outcomes. We have, therefore, begun examining not just how talented our students are when they matriculate as freshmen, but also how prepared they are for life after college when they receive their baccalaureate degrees. In addition, TCNJ has challenged itself to transform from a hierarchical model of planning to a

more organic and iterative one, from a rigid and internally directed view to a more flexible one in which we acknowledge the significance of external forces and stakeholders.

As early as 1999, TCNJ knew that, as good as we were educationally, if we wanted to continue to thrive, we had to transform our core enterprises. In 2000, we began this process with significant attention paid to the academic enterprise. Over two years, we reviewed and revised every single course, every single major, and every single program in the undergraduate curriculum. The goal was to provide powerful learning experiences that would assure students are prepared to become leaders in their careers and/or highly successful in their graduate program experiences. We sought to provide more opportunities for close faculty and student interaction on research projects and self-directed learning experiences, because we knew that these types of experiences help develop the kinds of skills necessary in the competitive world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2005, we turned our attention to the experience of the student outside the classroom, to student affairs. With the energy of new leadership in the student affairs division, TCNJ has begun an exciting transformation of this core enterprise of the College. The division is supporting the intellectual, social, and developmental growth of our students in residential education, student activities, athletics and a wide range of student support services.

Now that the individual transformations of these two core enterprises are underway, it becomes even more important that TCNJ embrace the notion that transformation of either of these core enterprises in isolation is limiting and, in the long run, counter-productive. The two transformations are means to a greater end—the transformation of the college experience for our students and the transformation of a very fine public institution into a national exemplar of public residential undergraduate education. This integration will assure that we realize our mission to create the leaders of the future, continuing to push the edges of inquiry in all our disciplines, embracing the notion that outputs and outcomes are at least as important as inputs, and courageously addressing the tough issues of the day. These difficult issues are the ones that confront our community—both in and out of the classroom. These issues include the rights and responsibilities of free speech and academic freedom, the valuing of democratic principles which require our hearing what we do not like, the balancing of personal rights with institutional safety, the broadening of our understanding of humanity beyond our own personal experience, and learning to confront the social issues of the day, either at the macro level, for example, poverty, war, terrorism, and classism/racism/sexism, or at the individual level for example alcohol abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Both academic and student affairs programming have essential responsibilities in the education of our students in these matters.

Over the last 8 months, I have been in intense and deliberate conversations with the members of the Committee on Planning and Priorities and the leadership of faculty, staff, and student governance organizations to determine the best path for realizing the next step in institutional transformation. In late summer and early fall, I presented a plan based on these discussions to our Board of Trustees, seeking and receiving board member advice and endorsement of the strategic initiatives that follow. These strategies are vehicles to realize the goal of integrated transformation, and they are proposed within a thoughtful understanding of local and national contexts.

Collectively, we concluded that, in order to continue the progress of the College and to assure the integration of academic and student affairs, we had to be attentive to the following

environmental realities. First, TCNJ had to become more and more attentive to communicating transparently and responding appropriately to the various stakeholders who make up our community. Second, while we must continue to support the needs of the state, we must challenge ourselves to provide the most academically rigorous and demanding environment for our students. Third, we must attend to the wide range of our community—incorporating and growing our advocates within and without by communicating our strengths, honestly assessing our weaknesses, and forthrightly proposing strategies to address those weakness. And finally, we must do everything in our power to assure institutional financial stability, even as we learn to manage decreasing support from the state of New Jersey.

In this environmental context, for the next five years we will commit to the following strategic initiatives to support the integrated transformation:

1. We will focus resources on articulating and clarifying the position of The College of New Jersey as a fully engaged and accountable institution that embraces the value of an academically competitive mission. This strategy will assure that we have the authority to realize the integrated transformation. Specifically, we will
  - a. Partner with the NJASCU College Promise initiative to advocate for the effectiveness of the current New Jersey higher education governance model
  - b. Clearly articulate the significant outcomes/outputs of success at TCNJ
  - c. Clearly articulate the significant goals for improvement in TCNJ’s outcomes/outputs
  - d. Improve our relationships with opinion leaders and legislators to enhance public awareness of TCNJ’s successes
  
2. We will continue to diversify revenue streams. This strategy will provide additional financial resources for the integrated transformation. Specifically, we will
  - a. Create partnerships with local and regional entities, including
    1. Facilities partnerships such as a new relationship with the Marie Katzenbach School of the Deaf, a partnership with the Sypek Center, development of a town center with Ewing Township, and a “presence” in Trenton city proper
    2. Programs such as the Non-Profit Management Program with the Mercadian Consulting Group and the Professional Development Network with local schools
  - b. Manage enrollment by increasing enrollment of out of state and international students
  - c. Develop and implement enhancements to our summer academic and non academic programs
  - d. Begin the planning for a capital campaign by
    1. Continuing to build alumni involvement with the campus
    2. Continuing to grow annual fund contributions from all stakeholders, but particularly from alumni
    3. Continuing to grow major gifts to the college
    4. Completing a feasibility study
    5. Beginning to develop a list of “fundable” needs for the College

3. We will enhance the facilities and campus physical plant. This strategy will assure that we have the facilities to support the integrated transformation. Specifically, we will
  - a. Complete both updated master plans (academic/administrative and residential/student affairs)
  - b. Continue to implement our asset renewal plan
  - c. Complete plans for funding facilities improvements
  - d. Support initiatives from the Presidents' Climate Commitment Committee
  
4. We will assure institutional accountability and transparent engagement with our stakeholders, including the general public. This strategy will provide the data both to support our record of success in the integrated transformation as well as the data to direct our aspirations to improve. Specifically, we will
  - a. Establish the Center for Institutional Effectiveness
  - b. Refine and complete all school and department learning outcomes assessment plans
  - c. Continue to develop the Board of Trustees committee on Audit, Risk Management, and Compliance and the modifications to board structure begun in August 2002.
  - d. Continue to refine our internal controls, a process begun in March 2003 with our review of the NACUBO recommendations of Sarbanes-Oxley
  - e. Hire a General Counsel
  - f. Complete a plan for appropriate accountability measures that would be publically shared
  - g. Improve graduation rates overall and in subpopulations
  - h. Improve student engagement results (National Survey of Student Engagement, NSEE)
  - i. Develop additional programs to prepare the internationally literate student (internationalizing the curriculum, improving the multicultural climate on campus, study abroad, and increase international enrollments)
  
5. We will participate as the middle partner in the P-20+ discussions. This strategy will facilitate liaison with our partners in expanding access to the integrated transformation. Specifically, we will
  - a. Enhance partnerships with the K-12 system to assure that students are prepared for the higher education experience at TCNJ
  - b. Enhance partnerships with feeder community colleges to assure that students accepted through the new seamless associates' degree transfer system are prepared for TCNJ
  - c. Increase the number of our students who are admitted into graduate programs within 5 years of graduation or within the timeframe appropriate for the discipline
  - d. Increase the number of our students admitted to the most competitive graduate programs
  - e. Enhance current and develop new "articulation" programs with graduate programs for seamless "transfer" for our undergraduate students into graduate programs

- f. Develop a series of continuing education and certificate programs that provide life-long education and career-development opportunities for the citizens of the region

These five initiatives must be based on the fundamentals of the College's mission and our constant commitment to the priorities of investment as articulated at the beginning of the state budget crisis by both the Committee on Planning and Priorities and the Board of Trustees. For instance, the area of safety and security has never been compromised whatever the budget challenges of the state and The College of New Jersey. To that end, not only are we continuing our investment in safety and security, we have this year and plan for next year to add additional resources in this fundamental area.

In other words, these initiatives are not ends in themselves but strategies for us to continue to improve in delivering our mission in a safe and secure environment. Underlying the entire project is a need for us to be more proactive in telling our story, marketing and publicizing what we are doing so very very well, and sharing our desire not to sit on our laurels but challenge ourselves to be even better.

Like Robert Frost's traveler in the woods, TCNJ, long before I arrived, chose a courageous and less traveled path, an exceptional—in both senses of that word--path. That choice has led the institution to incredible success, but that success has not come easily, rather it has come as the result of hard work and collective self-reflection. As we look back, perhaps there is some nostalgia for an easier way, for the comfort of remaining in the center of the pack. As Frost's traveler put it:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference

The traveler's nostalgia, like any such impulse on our campus, is specious. Because once the chance was taken, once we chose to be exceptional, we defined ourselves as the kind of institution that will always embrace risk on our path to excellence.

Thank you.