

TASK FORCE REPORT ON  
INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Presented To: Dr. R. Barbara Gitenstein, President  
The College of New Jersey

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Adler  
Katrina Bledsoe  
Patrice Coleman-Boatwright  
Robert Drake  
Mary Helmich  
Dawn Henderson  
Linda Lengyel, Chair  
Alfred Quinton  
Rhelda Richards

Date: May 13, 2003

**RECEIVED**

**MAY 13 2003**

**OFFICE OF  
THE PRESIDENT**

## **INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT**

### **I. THE CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE**

To develop a process for soliciting feedback and productive comment on major issues that would have substantive impact on the Campus or surrounding Community, and effective incorporation of such suggestions into institutional decision making. The Task Force members should recommend strategies for increasing the campus awareness of the value of good communication. In addition, this process will include a revision of the staff and evaluation procedures to assure support of the change in the valuing of such communication.

### **II. METHODOLOGY**

The Interactive Community Task Force used both qualitative and quantitative methodology to gather information. Specifically, we relied on three strategies.

- Interviews with various campus and community constituents.
- Reviews of survey data collected from several TCNJ sources.
- Archival/document searches of written materials from TCNJ, the Ewing Township, and comparison communities and schools.

Using these methods, the Task Force collected information from the following sources:

- TCNJ Athletic Department
- TCNJ Music Department
- TCNJ Library
- TCNJ Campus Security
- TCNJ Service Learning Experience
- TCNJ College Relations Department
- TCNJ Career Services
- TCNJ Art Department

The Task Force also conducted the following:

- Comparison investigation of other colleges' and communities' methods in disseminating College information to communities, media, and the public schools systems.
- Review of survey data of a student led, faculty supervised community survey.
- Review of survey Data on faculty/staff community involvement
- Assessment of township and college involvement with students living off TCNJ's campus.
- Investigation of other colleges' and universities' relations with their respective surrounding communities.
- Participation at a forum held between the Ewing Township and TCNJ to discuss College and Community issues.

**III. THE TASK FORCE CONCURS THAT THE FOLLOWING DIRECTLY IMPACTS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COLLEGE AND THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY**

- Despite the many positive things that TCNJ does in the community, there are local residents who have a negative image of the College.
- In many ways, the College has isolated itself from the surrounding community, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This is likely a legacy of the past, when there was a lack of direct personal contact between members of the campus administration and members of the community.
- The College has taken a passive approach to alerting community members of activities on campus that are open to the public. Therefore, there has been an inability of the College to attract the neighboring community to attend and participate in College events.
- There is a lack of coordinated planning by the College toward communication efforts directed to the surrounding community. This hinders the effective flow of information from the College outward. For example, although it has been an

important priority of TCNJ, there is a dearth of community awareness that the College has taken major steps to regulate off-campus student behavior.

- There is an absence of user-friendly access to the campus, including; limited staffing of the Information Booth; inadequate signage, lack of maps, deficient parking information for visitors, insufficient coverage of the main College phone line.
- There are community misperceptions about the economic impact of the College. Notably, that the College drains local financial resources and that the College does not make financial contributions to the local community.

#### **IV. THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING GOALS FOR IMPROVING INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION**

- Cultivate greater external appreciation of our role as a center for community life.
- Lively Outreach – assure greater accessibility to the campus events; continue consistent, genuine communications and interaction with the surrounding community to intentionally engage the local area in the academic and cultural life and traditions of the College.
- Develop collaboration with the community to promote/publicize our College as a distinctive resource to the community.
- Achieve status (external to the College) as an asset and catalyst for economic development planning and education.
- Solidify our influence as “expert” educators and resources in response to the expressed interests of our public.
- Engage in projects and partnerships with agencies that enrich and educate, while supplying the academic needs / interests of the College.

**V. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE**

- The Task Force endorses the recent restructuring of the Office of College Relations. The new office of College and Community Relations must be positioned within the College structure in order to centralize and address communications between the external and campus community.
- The Ewing leaders group (Mayor, President of the College, Superintendent of Ewing Public Schools, Representative of the Business Community) be continued.
- Consolidation of various committees now reaching out to the surrounding community into one unit (Campus Police should be represented)
- Distribution of a newsletter to the community describing the activities and events going on at the College or have a College insert in Ewing People newspaper (similar to what the Ewing Schools are doing).
- Marketing the Gold Card more widely in the community to attract more students to local businesses.
- The College should have periodic meetings with members of the Community: adjacent neighbors, business leaders, religious leaders, senior citizens council, Ewing Schools, service clubs, Veterans organizations, township government.
- Encourage continuation of Community Fest (the community should be informed of the major contribution of the College to this event).
- Serious consideration should be given to the impact of eliminating the Service Learning First Year Experience, as it will take TCNJ students out of the community and impact directly on the work of community non-profit agencies.
- Utilize the Ewing Public Schools to disseminate information about College events (they have expressed a willingness to do this)

- Create a calendar of upcoming events to be distributed to the community.
- College officials should meet with affected citizens to advise of College plans when they will impact on the community.
- Small Business Institute should have community outreach.
- An informative brochure about the College should be available to the community and visitors to the College.
- The College hosts a variety of events on campus. Encourage the community to attend and participate by offering the following incentives:
  - Offer discounts on College events to the local community.
  - Offer free admission to community groups (local sports leagues, etc.) to sporting events
  - Use the PDSN (Professional Development School Network) for outreach to local families and possible offer special discounts to families and seniors for art and music events.
  - Distribution of press kits for the Art Gallery exhibitions to the local press and the involvement of the Art Department in the process.
  - Offer refreshments at cultural events.
- College should review front line information dissemination services. Installation of a call box at the Information Booth linked to Campus Police for information and assistance when the Information Booth is unattended. The Information Booth should be staffed on a regular basis and be open longer hours, install a map of the campus at the Information Booth, install better signs to indicate the location of the Information Booth, small handouts with a campus map should be available to the community and visitors.

- Regular monthly meetings should be held between Campus Police and Ewing Police.

## **VI. APPENDIX I. RESULTS OF STUDENT SURVEY**

## **VII. FINAL COMMENTS**

The Task Force recommends that further study be done regarding the communication process within the campus community. We further recommend the examination be done when the new staff evaluation instrument is ready for review.

The Task Force feels there is one integral connection between the communication process and identified problems and perceptions between the College and Community. We feel that without question, better lines of communication will open up the ability of both the College and Community to acknowledge each others presence, air concerns, and generally much better understand each other.

## **APPENDIX I**

**TO: Dr. Linda Lengyel, Professor  
Presidential Task Force on Interactive Communication**

**FROM: Lindsey Anderson, Carmen Diaz, Jessica Jeremback**

**SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF LAWJ487-01**

**This document represents a summary of our findings as a result of a survey we conducted within the Ewing Community. The individual surveys have been submitted to Dr. Linda Lengyel, our professor, who supervised this project.**

According to the mission statement, the College is dedicated to achieving excellence, service, diversity, and community. The College has openly recognized that part of what makes the institution a success is its interaction within its community: the students and the Ewing residents. Despite this already existing objective to enhance community, there has been a long standing feeling of disconnect between the College and the Ewing residents. This disconnect not only prevents the College from reaching its maximum potential as a nationally recognized institution of excellence, but also deprives the College of having the opportunity to serve the Ewing community it values. Throughout the past semester we, as a group, have been dedicated to identifying the possible causes of this detachment and have been dedicated to identifying the possible causes of this detachment and have explored potential solutions. Throughout the entire project, it has been our goal to try to find productive suggestions to improve communication between the College and the community, increase interaction, and to intensify unity.

In order to identify causes for the detachment between the College and the Ewing community, surveys were distributed to in many areas of community life. Amongst these organizations were: several senior citizens clubs, several religious groups/organizations, the Ewing Kiwanis club, The Ewing Lions Club, The Ewing Elks Club, The Ewing Knights of Columbus, The Ewing American Legion, and parents from the Ewing public school system. It was our goal to survey a large and diverse a pool of individuals to get a general feel of the community's sentiments toward the College. Of the 324 individuals surveyed, 210 of them lived within 2 miles of the College. However, only 180 individuals out of the total number of individuals surveyed reported having interaction with the College at all. While almost every individual surveyed was able to indicate some sort of constructive criticism and/or change they would like to see the College make, most of the responses tallied were positive:

- 136 people indicated that they would characterize their interaction with the college as pleasant.

- 11 individuals indicated that they would characterize their interaction as neutral or unsure.
- 10 individuals surveyed commented that their interaction with the College community was unpleasant.

While the numbers appear pleasing, there were still a number of complaints and concerns voiced during our research. These will be touched on later on in this report.

The group felt it was important to identify what kind of interaction the Ewing residents were having the College in order to identify which aspects of community relations the College needs improve:

- 133 individuals identified having contact with the College through the uses of its facilities.
- 50 individuals identified having contact with the College through interaction with students living in the neighborhood.
- 20 individuals identified having interaction with the students via business.
- 52 individuals surveyed actually interacted with the College by taking a class.
- 47 individuals surveyed identified their interaction as being acquired by living within the vicinity of the College neighborhood.
- 84 individuals indicated other types of interactions which ranged from having graduated, attended a graduation, and attended a community day at the College, or having once worked at the College.

## **SUMMARY OF ISSUES**

Overall, Ewing residents shared many of the same concerns. Perhaps the most widely expressed concern is that of the College's lack of communication with the town residents. Many individuals complained the college routinely makes decisions that affect the community without their consideration. Residents expressed concerns about the College's lack of prior notice to residents of decisions that are made prior to their implementation (i.e. buildings). Many suggestions were offered to ameliorate this problem. First, the residents suggested have a Ewing resident sit on the College Board so

that they could be represented when making decisions. They also expressed an interest in having an appointed College-Community liaison that would be responsible for relaying important information.

Residents also expressed an interest in increasing the communication between the College and the town. Many individuals admitted that they were well aware of all the wonderful things for which the College's students were responsible. However, because only negative attention makes the local papers, many residents are given a false impression. It was suggested that the College better publicize all of its accomplishments and services. A better link to the College's website was one suggestion of helping to get the positive attributes of the College out. In addition, it was suggested that perhaps distributing *The Signal* at various locations throughout the town (7-11, supermarkets, churches) would help the community see the "other side" of TCNJ.

The second problem widely discussed throughout the study was the increasing presence of students renting houses and living within the community. Residents commented that while many of the students are respectful, the sheer difference in the life styles between College students and families does not lend itself to a realistic mix. The residents expressed a strong interest in the college providing more on campus housing for students so that the number of students needing housing would not be so large. In addition, they commented that the College should be involved in controlling the College students living within the community. Those students who are "trouble makers" are the ones who give the College a bad name. Thus, the College should have some sort of sanctions for those students who throw loud parties and completely disregard the community around them

Finally, the residents expressed concerns about the Colleges' practice of purchasing houses within the community for College use. They feel that the College does not consider the residents needs when doing so. Thus, they are left feeling as is the College only does what they think is best for the College, and not the community. While, it is unreasonable to assume that the College would choose not to expand any further simply because some residents do not like it, perhaps seeking the community's advice, ideas, or comments on the matter would be wise in the future.