STATE OF THE COLLEGE
Dr. Peter P. Mercer, President
February 13, 2013

(The President’s State of the College Address is summarized below.)

INTRODUCTION
Welcome everybody to the State of the College Address.

A couple of you have acknowledged that I was decorous enough to let the President of the United States go first. I will be referring to the State of the Union address later on. But, I’d like to begin by just describing some of the wonderful things that are going on at Ramapo College. I had to choose from a rather long list of achievements that had been compiled by Brittany and I don’t want you to worry about having been left out. I had to make some choices or it would have taken too long.

DICTIONARY OF NEWFOUNDLAND ENGLISH
But, before we begin that, let’s add to your lexicon. I have with me my volume of the Dictionary of Newfoundland English. Does anyone remember the words we have learned yet? “Logy” is one and “dunch” is the other. The word for today is “pishrogue” which means superstition, incredible story, or foolish talk. I will leave it to you to determine if “pishrogue” applies to the rest of what I am about to say.

SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS
Anisfield School of Business
The College recently received a $250,000 endowment and a $19,000 gift to launch a new program entitled “Career Pathways” in the Anisfield School of Business. The gift will ensure that every graduating senior in the Anisfield School of Business devotes 15 hours of the Curriculum Enrichment Component to career preparation skills. Each senior will complete specific career counseling, have an approved resume, and complete mock interviews. Our plan is to develop this program and apply it across the College as a whole. We want it to be possible for future employers to look at a resume of one of our graduates and recognize it right away as a Ramapo College CV.

George T. Potter Library
In 2009, librarian Christina Connor, working together with Drs. Stephen Rice and Alex Urbiel, established the American History Textbook Project Special Collection in the George T. Potter Library. This project is a collection of U.S. history textbooks published from the 1820s to the 1980s. This unique and ever-expanding collection enables students to not only see the change in historical thought over time, but also the change in the education curriculum in the U.S.

Recently, Dr. Rice and Ms. Connor contributed to an Association of College and Research Libraries publication, Past or Portal? Enhancing Undergraduate Learning through Special Collections and Archives, with their chapter entitled, “The American History Textbook Project: The Making of a Student-Centered Special Collection at a Public Liberal Arts College.”
Salameno School of American and International Studies
Professor Ed Shannon’s essay “Art and Commerce in the Classroom: Teaching an American Studies Course in Comics” was recently published in *Critical Approaches to Teaching Graphic Novels*.

Six literature majors will be presenting their work at the Sigma Tau Delta Conference in Oregon this March. They will be joined by presenter and alumnus Stephanie Mauro. Three literature majors presented at the North East Regional Undergraduate Research Conference in October at Eastern Connecticut State University. We want to continue to expand this. I met with a group of parents last evening for dinner and said to them that ideally in five years we would love to be able to say that an undergraduate who leaves Ramapo with a four year degree will have research experience equivalent to that of most people graduating from Masters programs.

School of Contemporary Arts
Welcome to Reece Hughes and Jacob Abbot, who are spending the semester with us as the first students in our new exchange program with the Music department of Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, England. Three Ramapo music students are enjoying their spring semester at Anglia Ruskin in exchange.

Professor Jay Wholley was selected as the only American artist in the Societe’ des Artistes Francais international exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris in November-December, 2012.

In late fall, Professor Tobin Addington won Grand Prize for his film script “The Unraveling” in the 2012 PAGE International Screenwriting Awards, competing against over 5000 entries.

School of Social Science and Human Services
The Degree Completion program was successfully launched in the fall and exceeded enrollment expectations. Also, the proposal for a Master's degree in Special Education was approved by the Commission of Higher Education and was given an extremely favorable review by the consultant hired by the State.

School of Theoretical and Applied Science
Assistant Professor of Nursing, Julia Fitzgerald, was named the New Jersey March of Dimes Public Health Nurse of the Year 2012. Professor Fitzgerald joined Ramapo in 2011.

STUDENT AFFAIRS ACHIEVEMENTS
Athletics
The men's basketball team is currently ranked #16 in the latest D3hoops.com national poll. On Monday evening, the Roadrunners clinched the regular season NJAC championship, with a 74-64 victory over the Ospreys of Richard Stockton College. In the win, senior Stephon Treadwell scored his 1,000th career point. Ramapo has secured the #1 seed in the NJAC Post-Season Tournament. They will host the semi-final round here at the College on Tuesday, February 19th at 7pm.

The women's basketball team also defeated the Ospreys on Monday evening, improving to 17-7 overall and 10-5 in the conference. The Lady Roadrunners are just two wins shy of breaking the
Individually, senior Michelle Favre, a pole vaulter with the track and field team, recently set a new school record when she placed first overall, clearing 4.15 meters at the Bison Open. Her mark is #4 all-time in NCAA Division III, and is tied for 7th in the NCAA for all divisions. In the classroom, Favre holds a 3.9 grade point average—emphasizing what we often say about the interplay between athletic and academic achievement.

Lauren Keller, a sophomore with the swim program, finished the dual-meet portion of her season undefeated in individual events against conference competition. Keller is looking to make a push to represent Ramapo at the NCAA Championships in early March.

Residence Life
The College, through Residence Life, has contracted with ZipCar to provide our students with a car sharing service. Two ZipCars are now parked on campus and available for student use.

Student Government Association
Our SGA has also been very busy. Higher Education Awareness Week kicks off on February 25th. Three main events of the week sponsored by CASHE and SGA include the State of the Student Address & Expo, New Jersey State of the Budget Address Roundtable Discussion, and a Voter Registration Workshop.

SGA also partnered very creatively with Residence Life to formalize Village Housing Standards Agreement. As you know it is hard to come to the appropriate set point in determining how to police our students in residence. The Village Housing Standards Agreement is a program aimed at (1) creating community in the residences and (2) preventing students from having to report other students for noise violations to RAs and Public Safety.

SGA worked with Residence Life to create a contract and process that is going to be piloted this semester in the Village. One person from each room in one stairwell would be designated (for example stairwell 5 would have one resident from 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, and 5F). They would sign a contract of what they want to do if there is a noise violation. For example, the group may decide to text each other or knock on the door to ask people to be a little quieter prior to calling Public Safety. One member of SGA would be responsible for each stairwell, to help facilitate discussion if any issues occur. If the trial run is successful, then it will be implemented in the CPAs next fall and other residences in the future.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS
Board of Trustees
Speaking of the Board of Trustees, George Ruotolo has taken over as chair after two and half years of AJ Sabath’s leadership. Bill Dator is vice chair. And, we are assured by the powers that be in Trenton that the appointment process, which has been grinding inexorably slowly, will speed up shortly and we will actually have a reasonably full complement of the trustees within the very near future.

Diversity Action Committee
Continuing a legacy of thoughtful and poignant lectures, the 2013 Diversity Convocation featured journalist Juan Gonzalez as guest speaker. DAC has also been busy conducting Campus Climate Survey Town Halls to present and discuss the findings of the survey.

Facilities Management
Our rooftop and parking lot solar array, a product of the P3 legislation, may wind up being the largest system (roughly 5 megawatts) of its kind in NJ.

Institutional Advancement
The Capital Campaign now totals $44,607,505! That is 11.5% over the initial goal. Our latest capital construction gift was a $75,000 gift from Board of Governor Member Paul Miller and his wife, Holly, for a Simulation Lab in the new Adler Center for Nursing Excellence.

We are pleased to share that the Ramapo College Foundation was again ranked first in public institutions with the highest percent change in endowment market value according to the 2012 rankings of the National Association of College and University Business Officers. The national average was -1.8%, while the average for public institutions was -0.4%. The Foundation’s growth was 7.1%.

Several new endowments have also been established in honor of student Colin McNeill, Alumnus Christine Denning, alumnus Audrey Newman, and faculty member Dr. Kay Fowler. These examples of new endowments have helped us grow our endowment fund by 89% over the past four years. That, again, leads all the public colleges in the state. It, again, is hard to replicate. If we increase the endowment again by 89% over the next four years, I expect to be the new pope.

The College is also grateful to our faculty for their significant work to secure federal grants. Most recently we are pleased to recognize Professors Stephen Rice and Meredith Davis for their renewal of the prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Grant for $179,600 for the Hudson River Project with national educators.

Institutional Effectiveness
Ramapo College’s IE staff has been asked to serve on the WEAVE Software Project Development Team for the program review module that will be added to WEAVE software packages.

Strategic Plan
We will have, I hope, only one more meeting of the Strategic Planning Task Force. I say “I hope,” but is it is not because we are tired of one another but after a year and a half the exercise is wearing a bit thin. So after one more meeting we expect to send out to the College the draft that we have prepared for commentary.

Smaller subgroups of the task force will be going to individual units on campus, i.e. the Unit Councils, the union groups if they would like to have us, Faculty Assembly, the SGA, and others in order to go over the draft and take back commentary. We hope that by the end of the academic year we will have something that we can submit to the Board of Trustees.
ENROLLMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Center for Innovative and Professional Learning
CIPL is hosting the Personal Trainer Institute of America for the second time during this academic year. The program prepares enrollees for successful careers as Certified Personal Trainers and is a good example of creative use of our facilities (Bradley Center) to generate revenue.

Master of Business Administration
After meeting the enrollment target for our first MBA cohort, we are already seeing positive results in this year’s recruitment class. We are currently running about 200% ahead in MBA applications compared with the number of applications we had at this time last year.

Outcomes Brochure
The most recent WICHE report, said “the United States has hit its peak for high school graduates and the growth agenda is over.” With fewer high school students headed to College, the competition for these students is becoming tighter and tighter. Private schools continue to offer massive tuition discounts under the guise of academic scholarships, leading to more students and their parents asking tougher questions about value. In response, for this “yield cycle,” we’ve developed our first Outcomes Brochure to help illustrate real-life examples of successful Ramapo graduates and how their Ramapo education helped to connect them to their current career. We’ve also developed our first targeted Parents Brochure as they continue to be one of the most influential decision-makers in the College selection process. The piece is designed around the FAQs of parents.

Pushing Boundaries
The integration of our marketing and recruitment efforts in our Pushing Boundaries campaign, has led us to see a slight increase in quality of our total first-year student applicant pool. By continuing to convey our core attributes: faculty who teach and mentor, hands-on learning that prepares students, a foundation for lifetime success, and the value Ramapo students provide, we are on pace to meet our enrollment target of 910 first-year students by May 1. I cannot tell you how volatile the environment out there is now.

SSAIS Transfer Achievement Scholarships
The Office of Enrollment Management will launch a new scholarship program to Associate’s Degree graduates of New Jersey’s 19 community colleges that want to pursue degrees in SSAIS-type majors that are currently undersubscribed. We want to be visible in saying that as New Jersey’s Public Liberal Arts College, we are the place where students wishing to pursue those types of degrees should enroll. This program not only responds to our mission, but also aims to strategically use resources to achieve one of our foundational goals; a more balanced enrollment.

Commencement 2013
Commencement planning is underway. The ceremony will take place on May 17 at IZOD center. Nominations for Commencement Speaker may be submitted at Ramapo.edu/commencement.
And, finally, before I move to discussion of the State of the Union address, you will get a hint about who prepared these remarks with my final missive…Brittany’s son, Desmond Ellis, is awesome.

CONCLUSION
The State of the Union
How many of you watched the State of the Union address last night? So, you will have heard the President speak about education and say the following about higher education:

Through tax credits, grants, and better loans, we have made college more affordable for millions of students and families over the last few years. But taxpayers cannot continue to subsidize the soaring cost of higher education. Colleges must do their part to keep costs down, and it’s our job to make sure they do. Tonight, I ask Congress to change the Higher Education Act, so that affordability and value are included in determining which colleges receive certain types of federal aid. And tomorrow, my Administration will release a new “College Scorecard” that parents and students can use to compare schools based on a simple criteria: where you can get the most bang for your educational buck.

I find it rather dispiriting to read that because it has such a narrow focus on the vocational aspects of education. There is also something grating about being told that the problem of costs escalating on the tuition and fees side is virtually exclusively the fault of the colleges. It is the political equivalent of someone murdering his parents and then asking for leniency on the basis that he is an orphan.

The Social Value of a Liberal Arts Education
Why does the President believe the costs have gone up? Might it have something to do with the fact that the appropriations to colleges and universities have gone down and we simply had to transfer them? Of course, that is true. It leads me to say that, and we are guilty of this ourselves, we spend too much time focusing on the nuts and bolts reasons for a liberal arts education and not enough on the social value. Lately I have been reading the work of the American educational philosopher, William James, and I am quite taken by his writings now several decades old.

For James, the principal aim of education in a democracy was “to prepare students to become responsible citizens of high moral character who help to counter the avarice influences of popular culture, corporate practices, and powerful media.” Goodness knows that in 2013 there is an awful lot in popular culture, corporate practice, and media presentation that calls out to be countered.

An important role of colleges and universities, James wrote, is “educating young people and guiding students to create, pursue, and test worthy ideals for themselves while helping to provide them with the best means to achieve their goal.”

Indeed, James was quite lofty in his aspirations. He said the purpose of a college education is to enable students to lead a life worth living. He recognized of course that if choosing for themselves alone, individuals will tend to choose what primarily appeals to their self-interest or satisfies their hunger for excitement or both. Voters, for example, often elect leaders that promise them immediate personal benefits and who rouse their interest with convincing rhetoric and dazzling
showmanship—so that what makes the popular university popular is that it provides amusement rather than illumination—something that I think we worry about falling prey to ourselves.

Helping students to bring new ideals in view to enrich their lives and those of others; in other words, to create for themselves significant lives, is an important role that we play and one that we fail to advocate enough. It always falls to the background. But ask yourself, why do we have this structure where students, for four years or sometimes longer, are abstracted from the world in a community called a college where they have relatively unfettered access to knowledge and the opportunity to learn from faculty members without having to worry about their own welfare in other ways. It is an extraordinary opportunity but it can’t be simply about having a four year vacation for the arduous work of the workplace and it can’t be about simply qualifying for a job.

James didn’t offer many examples of worthy ideals in his writing but in an essay titled “What Makes a Life Significant” he gave a hint of what some useful characteristics of a developed ideal would be:

- An ideal must be stamped as truly one’s own as a result of personal reflection of experience. It must not be imposed from the outside because a person cannot be sincerely devoted to someone else’s ideals.
- An ideal must point us in new directions – compelling us to view and experience things differently.
- A worthy ideal is something whose pursuit demands our focused attention and dedication.
- An ideal must be feasible but yet pursued with some significant degree of struggle, and that is not quickly nor easily obtained.
- An ideal is something whose achievement must alter one’s life in fundamental and constructive ways.
- An ideal’s worthiness must be judged on the basis of its consequence in experience, and is often altered in the light of new knowledge and experience.
- The pursuit of a worthy ideal must at least be compatible with others’ pursuits of ideals so that there’s an achievement of balance of goods for all those who are trying to develop them.

I am taken by that because to me it reflects what we are trying to do at Ramapo College. Whether you look at service learning or substantive curricula—this seems to me an awful lot of what we’re about even though we do not often articulate it. And I think it is all of our responsibility to articulate it more fully than we do.

Last night, as I mentioned, I had a group of parents dining at the house. Some of them were graduates of Ramapo College. Not one of them said to me, “Boy, I’m really glad I went to Ramapo. It helped me get a job.” In fact when I asked them about their jobs they didn’t really want to talk so much about their careers, they wanted to talk about the experience they had as students at Ramapo, about the people who had taught them and who had been mentors for them.

And I think that speaks much more fully to the notion of social value than it does to the notion of vocational value of a liberal arts education.
QUESTION AND ANSWER