STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone and thank you for being here.

This is my eleventh State of the College address and I am grateful for your attendance. When I gave my first address, five years ago, everything was new, at least to me. Today I, and you, have a wearisome familiarity with some of the continuing themes, and I will review those, but there is also renewed scope for optimism among some of the warning markers. It is an exciting and challenging time and in my view a critical one in the development of the College.

In searching for a title for this address, I recalled a Clint Eastwood film from the 1960’s. Any guesses? The Good, the Bad and the Ugly is one of the finest exemplars of the Spaghetti Western genre and its Italian title – Il Buono, Il Brutto, Il Cattivo” – is even more compelling. So here it is, my perspective on the good, the bad and the ugly at Ramapo College in 2010.

THE GOOD

Clearly, the good is Ramapo’s people. Indeed, the best feature of the College is its people. Our faculty and staff are doing great work, sometimes under difficult conditions, and we continue to attract top-notch candidates for open positions. We have the faculty and the staff to offer a first-rate liberal education.

Our freshman class is the second most highly qualified academically in Ramapo’s 41 year history. Only the 2005 freshman class was more highly qualified on average and, it is important to note, that class numbered 749, whereas our current freshman class number is 897. We have increased the size of the freshman complement by almost 20% without compromising quality.
Our alumni are very supportive and our reputation among all our constituencies is growing stronger. Of the 49 public colleges and universities in the category Regional Universities in the North, Ramapo advanced for the fourth year in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings to number 4. In the much larger general list, we moved from 27th last year to 25th this year. This is a testament to the effectiveness of the efforts of all our employees.

Sometimes our achievements might be thought to be disproportionate. For example, we received an NSF grant of over $1.5 million towards a microbiology research suite on 3rd floor of G Building. I believe we have the potential as an undergraduate institution to offer our students the equivalent of a master’s degree education.

Second in the good category are our facilities. Sometimes I have to guard against taking the beauty of our campus for granted. Our grounds, buildings and mountain view are often what lead observers to assume we are a private college. However, I equally have to avoid getting a swelled head about the excellence of our facilities; a walk through G-wing is a good antidote for that.

I am highly optimistic that this is about to change. On Monday, October 4th, the Finance and Capital Improvements Committees will recommend to the Board of Trustees approval of a plan to totally refurbish the four floors of G-wing and to construct a 25,000 square foot addition. The $54 million allocated to the project will also cover furnishing and equipping the refurbished and new space. Once completed, about two years from now, the schools of Theoretical and Applied Sciences and Social Science and Human Services will have facilities whose standards are commensurate with the excellence of their programs.

Speaking of our programs, they are point number three under the good category. Our programs remain very attractive to prospective students. To use the example of our newest, the Master’s Program in Sustainability Studies, even though it was almost June before it was approved by the CHE, we attracted 18 registrants, well above the number we needed to break even.

Fourth in our good features is our Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees spends countless hours serving on myriad committees and supporting College events. They serve entirely as volunteers and exercise their
responsibilities prudently and supportively. I am particularly grateful for the participation and advice of our Board Chair, A.J. Sabbath, from Ramapo’s Class of ’93.

Fifth in the good category is our Foundation Board. Again, this is an extraordinarily active group of several dozen individuals who are largely responsible for the fact that our comprehensive campaign, still in its quiet phase, is more than 60% towards its $40 million goal.

Sixth in the good category are our supporters. Our alumni participation rate in fundraising is the highest in the State and I can tell you that you can expect some major gift announcements in the near future. Our relationships with business are of course very important for all sorts of purposes, student internships among them. It is one reason why I have joined the Meadowlands Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Seventh in the good category are our relations with government. This is my third year chairing the President’s Council and I want to talk a little bit about Governor Chris Christie. Any of you who read Commerce Magazine, might have seen an interview with Governor Christie where he was asked the question, “As the economy improves, which areas will you focus on to enhance our state’s competitive edge?” His response was, “One thing that’s not often talked about is the “brain drain” taking place in our state. I’ve always said that New Jersey has some of the best colleges and universities in the country. I think that higher education must be viewed as a resource and a partner in our economic development efforts. Yet, we lose more of our resident students to out-of-state colleges and universities than any other state in the nation. Graduating high school students choose to get their degrees elsewhere and never come back. I believe there will be a tremendous economic benefit to our state if we can keep our brightest students here for college and have them enter our workforce after graduation. Right now, former Governor Tom Kean is chairing a taskforce on this and the other issues facing higher education, and he will be getting recommendations back to me at the end of the year.” I have high hopes for that commissioned taskforce’s report.

Our re-accreditation by the Middle States Commission was also good, but the monitoring requirement that was imposed on us was not so good. We have to fulfill that monitoring requirement by April 2012 and we will do so
through the hard work of so many of you just as we have achieved reaccreditation by Middle States.

Ninth in the good category is our development under the Strategic Plan. I would like to make reference to the Strategic Priorities Incentive Fund, a way in which we have budgeted for the last three years, as an example of how we are making strategic decisions with the resources we have. There are other ways in which we are making strategic decisions. We are the only school in the state of New Jersey that is not pursuing a growth strategy at the undergraduate level. We are instead focusing on capping our undergraduate enrollment where it is now, building our graduate enrollment, and enhancing academic quality. I believe that is the right strategy.

Tenth in the good category is my perception of a renewed focus on the value of a liberal arts education. I gave an address to the in-service of Ramsey high school a couple of weeks ago. There were teachers from all over the region and their major focus was on building a curriculum around liberal arts education principles—breaking down the components, for example, of critical thinking skills. There is also a good deal of economic evidence that a liberal arts education serves graduates well in the workplace. And, I think it is needed societally. We are at a time where more members of Congress lack a passport and brag about it and where there is a considerable impetus to make English the exclusive official language, I sometimes wonder if at graduation, instead of giving our students a piece of parchment, we should instead give them a replica of the jawbone of an ass (that is a classical reference which some of you with a liberal arts education will understand).

**THE BAD**
Leading off the bad category is the financial climate. We know it is bad; there is a several billion-dollar deficit in the state. We are going to have to look everywhere to bridge the gap by raising revenues where can and cutting expenses.

The other bad element of that is our level of public funding. We are still near the bottom and I am hoping the Kean Commission will help solve that.

**THE UGLY**
Just one moment, I have a prop. Does anybody know what this is? Come on, students. Four Loko. What is in Four Loko? Wormwood is, and that would be one of the more benign ingredients. What is the percentage of
alcohol? 12%. What is the size of the tin? 23.5 ounces of premium malt beverage with artificial flavors, tuarine, guarana, caffeine, and FD&C Red #40, which I guarantee, even not knowing much about it, is not good for you.

I am making light of this because it is so ridiculous. But I can tell you that we have had a student already this semester that was taken to the hospital with a blood alcohol reading of .4. That is five times the legal limit. The student reported having had three tins of Four Loko which is the equivalent of three beers each, and twelve shots of tequila in an hour. At a .4 alcohol reading, one’s bodily functions begin to shut down and indeed if not caught sufficiently early, will shut down for good.

I therefore want to tell you about some of the measures which are going to be taken in the next few days. These measures are being taken at my direction with the consultation of the Cabinet and with the SGA. These measures are important because the number of alcohol related incidents has gone up, particularly those involving students from off campus. As of tomorrow, all such drinks like Four Loko will be banned. The mere possession of them on campus will be an alcohol offense.

We also will be taking steps to change the way in which we treat guests on campus. Anyone staying after 11:00PM will now need a guest pass. It will no longer be called the “Overnight Guest Policy”; it is just the “Guest Policy.” Furthermore, anyone who is found so intoxicated that they have to be taken to the hospital will have a 48-hour interim suspension. They will not be back within a few hours or even the next day. Anyone caught providing alcohol to a minor in hosting a party will be suspended from housing. The South Gate and the Bradley Gate will close at 11:00PM and the only entrance will be through the main gate. All fines will be doubled for alcohol-related offenses. As of November 1, we will have floor attendants in our residences from 11:00PM until 6:00AM. These are all steps that we are taking to preserve the health and safety of our students. These steps are not meant to be punitive. They are obviously serious. I am serious.

The Mahwah Police have expressed great concern to me about the amount of time they spend responding to calls at Ramapo College. We do not want to lose their confidence and support. Now, why is this happening? I don’t know exactly, but I can tell you that the belligerence index has gone up.
Students, when confronted by our own public safety or by police, seem to be more resistant. And, I want to emphasize this is a very small number and in many cases it is not students at all, it is people from off campus. But, I do know that the big nights are Tuesday nights and Thursday nights—and why is that? Some sort of Druid coincidence? It is because we have very few classes on Wednesdays and Fridays. I’d like you to ask yourselves: For whose convenience is that an operational reality? Are we putting our students first?

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I want to say to you that I think Ramapo College is at a turning point similar to the one that occurred when it transformed from a commuter to a residential campus. In my view, that transition made Ramapo more truly a College. However, I believe there is another transition to be made, having to do with the culture of Ramapo.

The word “culture” is rooted in the Latin “colere” which means, “to cultivate”. What are the norms that we wish to cultivate? Are they the norms, behaviors and activities of an academically serious and challenging college with high aspirations or are we resigned by default to a mediocre slouching toward the corn-fed life of the non-reflective. That is a question that I will have more to say about throughout the semester.