In both the budget presentation and my blog, I have referred to the need to “stay the course.” In today’s State of the College address, I will expand on what I mean by that. What does it mean to “stay the course”? 

I certainly do not intend to encourage complacency - we won’t be able to deal with the challenges before us merely by maintaining the status quo. Instead, by “staying the course”, I mean that we must continue to develop and pursue a course of action that will achieve our vision, set forth in the Strategic Plan, to be the “premier public college in the greater New Jersey/New York Metropolitan area providing a high quality education across programs whose curricula are founded on a commitment to the liberal arts.”

And pursuit of that course must be bounded by the three goals of the Plan: enhancing academic excellence, investing in the future and enriching college life and community presence. Let me begin by reviewing specific initiatives that we have achieved in furtherance of these three goals since the Strategic Plan was approved by the Board just over one year ago. I will then refocus on those goals through a different lens; one that appreciates the reality of the financial constraints facing both the college and our students and addresses the question that is, to some degree, facing all of higher education: can we do a better job of recruiting, retaining and graduating the students we are targeting?

A. SPIF First Go-Round

The hallmark of the approved Strategic Plan is the purposeful integration of planning, budgeting and assessment. After a year of working towards that integration, it is fair to ask “have we achieved that integration”? I believe we are well on the way to doing so. Two weeks ago, the Cabinet and I reviewed the Institutional Effectiveness Committee’s recommendations for allocation of the Strategic Priorities Incentive Fund (SPIF) for fiscal year 2009.
And I cannot stress how important this first go-round was to the utility and validity of our planning model. By division, 50% of the SPIF funds went to Academic Affairs, 16% to Institutional Advancement, 19% to Student Affairs and 15% to Administration and Finance. I thank the Institutional Effectiveness Committee members for their work not only in evaluating the requests, but in reviewing the survey and anecdotal information that informed their recommendations. Naturally, as with any first-time enterprise, there were some kinks, but I believe that strategic planning and budgeting will continue to evolve and strengthen. In fact, the IE committee is taking a break from their three day retreat to review FY10 requests, in order to be here for this address.

**B. Enhancing Academic Excellence**

**AACSB Accreditation** - In early December we received word that the Anisfield School of Business’ progress report was accepted by the Initial Accreditation Committee of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business or AACSB. That Committee determined that Ramapo is ready to proceed with accreditation. The IAC will appoint a Peer Review Team Chair who will provide consultative assistance as we develop our Self-Evaluation Report (SER). We remain at least one full year ahead of the usual schedule and I commend Dean Chakrin and all of the members of ASB for their dedication to this crucial accreditation enterprise.

**Middle States Accreditation** - While ASB has been primarily concerned with AACSB accreditation, most of you on campus have been involved one way or another with our work towards Middle States Accreditation. The Middle States Steering Committee and Study Groups are continuing their work on the institutional self-study with draft study reports due to the committee on March 15th. The Steering Committee will be hosting an Open Forum on March 11th to update the College on its progress and the accomplishments and challenges that are emerging from the self study. Details regarding the forum will be in a future Daily Digest.

I am also pleased to announce that Chris Dahl, President of SUNY Geneseo, has accepted the invitation to chair the accreditation review team. I have spoken with him twice in the last month and he is looking forward to being with us. SUNY Geneseo is a COPLAC institution and Chris will do a superb
job but we’ll have to be well-prepared and we will be. I ask that you continue to offer your support to Miki Cammarata, Jennefer Mazza and the Steering Committee as we look forward to the site visit later next year.

**Master’s in Sustainability Studies**- I am pleased to announce that on February 13, we initiated the approval for the Masters in Sustainability Studies program by distributing to all the Presidents of New Jersey Colleges and Universities our program announcement. As the announcement says, the proposed MA in Sustainability Studies will “teach sustainability literacy and the fundamental methods for sustainability analysis”. The home for the program will be in the newly constructed Sharp Sustainability Education Center. I am personally receiving inquiries about this program already.

**Master’s in Educational Leadership**- At the February Board of Trustees meeting, we will also request approval of the Master’s in Educational Leadership program.

The progress of these two programs is significant. Their development and on-campus approval reflects and reinforces the principles that master’s programs must:

1.) build on the strength of our undergraduate programs but not dilute them; and
2.) they must respond to a societal need

The early responses to these programs are very encouraging.

**C. Investing in the Future**

In the life of any college, the quality and complement of full-time faculty is essential to its future. This is particularly so at Ramapo College. Though we have made significant cuts to cope with the reduction in state appropriations, the College has since my arrival remained committed to adding 5 new faculty lines per year. In the past two years, we have hired over 40 faculty and currently have over 20 open searches for faculty positions.

As you know, on the eve of our 40th anniversary, we are making plans to announce a $40 million comprehensive fundraising campaign. Recently, Blackbaud consulting completed its screening exercise, which included an in-depth analysis of our donor database. I, along with Cathy Davey, will be meeting with consultants in the coming weeks to develop our narrative and test our key themes for the campaign. The potential key themes are to:
- Renovate and upgrade our science facilities
- Name and endow an academic school
- Strategically build our endowment for scholarships
- Strategically enhance and endow academic programs
- Build resources for faculty development and undergraduate research

And I know what some of you are thinking- given this economic climate how could they possibly think it is feasible to pursue such a campaign? And it is a good question- a question that Cathy and I have posed to many of our loyal donors, alumni, parents and community partners and the response is always the same. They tell us that we have a great story- one with which people can identify and one that people are willing to support. And so, unless any external indicators strongly encourage us to abandon our goals, we will press on.

**d. Enriching College Life and Community Presence**

Internally, we continue to find ways to “close the loop” on suggestions for improvement that you all have made. We hold quarterly communications meetings where the discussion topics range from the amount of salt in the soup in the cafeteria to potential cost-savings or revenue generating strategies. Recently, we have undertaken three (3) initiatives in our attempts to follow through on your suggestions.

First, we created and went live with our Campus Communications website to provide one-stop shopping for all important campus communications. On that page, you will find the links to our two newest initiatives.

1. **Campus Connection** - This online communication tool gave a facelift to the former accomplishments page. Published September through May, the site will continue to provide updates of accomplishments by faculty, staff and students, but it also welcomes and profiles new employees to the College posting their name, unit and an accompanying photo. Campus Connection will also keep readers apprised of promotions, reclassifications and retirements.

2. **President’s Staff Recognition Program** is one that I first introduced at the opening reception Jackie and I held at the Havemeyer House at the beginning of this academic year. The program is designed to
recognize excellence and extraordinary effort by Ramapo College staff employees. There are two categories:

a. **Staff Leadership** - awarded to a Ramapo College staff member who, in that year, assumed a leadership role and successfully effected positive change. This will be awarded to one employee within each employee classification.

b. **Staff Excellence in Service** - Awarded to an individual or recognized group that, in that year, provided exemplary service to college constituents.

Recipients will be announced at the Annual Picnic in May, with formal presentation at the June Board of Trustees meeting. Recipient names will be included on the web on the communications page as well as the President's page. Nominations will be accepted until April 15. All nominations will be reviewed by the Staff Recognition Program committee co-chaired by Bea Cronin and Christopher Romano.

**The Ramapo Diversity Lecture Series** also kicked off its programming the last Wednesday in January with the 3rd Annual Diversity Convocation Speaker, Cherrie Moraga. While the snowstorm may have discouraged a few from attending, the powerful readings of Moraga and the thought provoking question and answer session afterward displayed an engaged campus eager to discuss roles of race, gender and sexuality. This series continues every Wednesday evening and the list of remaining speakers is highly impressive. I thank Kay Fowler, Ruma Sen and Paula Straille-Costa for their leadership in creating this series and the numerous organizations, led by the Board of Trustees, which support it.

Lastly, we continue to find ways to increase opportunities for local community members to participate in on-campus activities while promoting a campus dedicated to public safety and security. On January 6th and 7th, Ramapo hosted the Hostile Intruder Training Exercise. The training welcomed officers from the New Jersey State Police, the Mahwah Police, the Ramsey police, Bergen County police and a number of other law enforcement agencies to Overlook Hall. During those two days, each police agency ran through real life intruder and hostage simulations. To me, this sort of exercise exemplifies the third goal of our strategic plan in that we collaborated with police forces from around the State, enabling them to learn the layout of the campus and work with our Public Safety Officers on emergency protocols. I want to publicly thank Vince Markowski and his
officers for hosting the training - I know that I, along with my cabinet who were able to participate as witnesses (and by participate I mean stand in the back safely away from the whizzing dummy bullets) found the exercise eye-opening and highly instructive.

Taking all of this into consideration, I would say that one year on, the Strategic Plan has yielded significant results. However, if we are to confront the economic challenges (and the multiple other challenges that result from the economic including emotional and psychological effects), our next course of action must not only be effective, it must be efficient. And efficiency sometimes has a negative connotation in higher education because it implies introducing business principles and these are often not a good fit. Adopting as a lens Strategic Plan goal 2.1, which states that The College will operate all units efficiently and effectively in administration, communication, practices, and use and provision of human and material resources, let me quickly re-visit the three goals.

a. Efficiency as it relates to Enhancing Academic Excellence

Here, I prefer to look at the question of efficiency as it relates to our students. As the economy continues to contract and loans become potentially harder to obtain, we need to find ways to reduce the “cost” to our students - both in time and money. We know that tuition and fee increases are unavoidable although we will do our best to contain them. But there are other ways to reduce the net cost of a Ramapo degree.

Do all of our majors really require four years to graduate, or can we take measures to make it possible for certain students to graduate earlier? Are the number of credits required for graduation appropriate? While I do not suggest a one-size-fits all time-to-degree benchmark, these are the sorts of questions we need to ask ourselves. As state support for higher education diminishes and the strain placed on our students and their families by shouldering that cost increases, we need to continually ask whether we are doing what is best for our students. I know that these questions weigh heavily on the Provost and I ask that you all participate as we begin to look at these questions more in-depth in the coming months.

b. Efficiency as it relates to Investing in the Future.
When we look at ways to strategically invest in the future, I prefer to use the word responsibility instead of efficiency. As I previously outlined in my town hall budget addresses, our utility costs for the coming year are projected at $7,000,000. As the Sharp Sustainability Education Center nears opening, the Masters of Sustainability Studies gears up for its first class and with sustainability as an underlying theme of the Strategic Plan, we must find ways to reduce our utilities costs. I have proposed a 5% reduction in utilities usage for the coming year and have had many people say to me that is a conservative figure. And yet, each year our utilities cost continue to increase. We must find ways individually and as a college to be more responsible. Turning off all appliances at the end of the workday, shutting off lights when we leave rooms and closing open doors are easy measures we can take. I will be working with a number of campus leaders on this as the FY10 budget cycle approaches, but I would be happy to hear any thoughts you might have on how we can reduce our costs.

c. Efficiency as it relates to Enriching College Life and Community Presence.

It is a little more challenging to identify efficient ways of enriching college life but I urge us to focus on outcomes. What is the outcome of our students’ cumulative experience when they leave Ramapo? What are their feelings towards Ramapo when they are called during a phone-a-thon or invited to an alumni reunion? When asked on the graduating senior survey if they would recommend Ramapo to a friend, what do they say?

CONCLUSION

The state of the College is and should be hopeful, but we must stay the course