State of the College Address
September 26, 2007

Introduction

I would like to begin by offering a special welcome to the Chair of the Ramapo College Board of Trustees, the Rev. Dr. Vernon Walton who joins us today. Dr. Walton is Senior Pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Englewood and highly involved in the community. We are privileged to have you with us sir.

I also want to welcome Siddartha, Founder and Director of the International cultural research center, Fireflies, which is located near the south Indian city of Bangalore and with which we have an established Study Abroad relationship. Siddartha is an internationally renowned educator and we are so pleased that you are visiting with us.

Now that I’m in my third year at Ramapo, I have come to understand the historical importance of particular agenda items. In the past I have given pride of place to parking; today, however, it would be more fitting to approach matters in at a more fundamental, bituminous level. I therefore propose to discuss paving. Yes, I will make quick reference to the paving and campus beautification process that caused some of you to walk an extra distance to attend today, but the paving I am most concerned about is of the metaphorical sort meaning “the work of applying something” - in order to establish our forward path as a public institution of higher learning. Specifically, I will address:

- Our institutional landscape
- The rocky terrain of the state of New Jersey and implications for my role as President
- The Strategic Plan: the intersection of budgeting and planning
- New pathways for Ramapo College
- Speed bumps and Blinking Lights

I Institutional Landscape

Fall 2007 Enrollment Highlights

Due in large part to the efforts of our new Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management, Ricardo Ortegon and his staff, our enrollment numbers for this year are very strong. Our 902 incoming freshmen come from not only the United States but from Bulgaria, Nigeria, Lebanon, Trinidad and Tobago, Kenya and China. We are also continuing to attract students from within the United States who are not residents of New Jersey and welcome first year students from California, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia. And, once again, Ramapo houses representatives from all 21 New Jersey counties.
This year saw more than a 10% increase in applications to Ramapo with 6,458 compared with 5,845 last year. This indicates an increased awareness of Ramapo, an awareness that must continue to grow. The incoming class is 57% female and has an average SAT score of 1160 while also averaging in the top 20% of their high school graduating class. It is particularly notable, with regard to our mission as a public college, that minority enrollment in the entering class continues to increase, standing at 22.4% this year. As I have said before, my aim is to increase academic standards and minority enrollment without sacrificing one for the other. I want to take a more active role in recruitment and Chair Walton has graciously offered to assist me in that effort.

**Current Budget**

Our budget situation has not improved much since my last address in February of 2007. The College’s operating revenues for Fiscal Year 2008 (FY08) are budgeted at $117.5 million. Of this amount, approximately $35.8 million (30%) was provided by the State of New Jersey. On an optimistic note, fully meeting our FTE Enrollment goal this year, after falling short last year, has positively affected our operating budget. This is a good start, but we still will need to find approximately $2 million more in order to balance that budget. Continuing with last year’s strategies, we will again implement cost-savings measures and to find ways to lower operating expenses while increasing College revenues.

**Housing Update**

In August, as part of the Phase I student housing renovations, a contractor was constructing new roofs on two buildings that house 32 students each. You will recall that there were some heavy downpours in August and, due to the contractor’s failure to maintain an adequate tarpaulin shield, water flowed in and did so much damage that the units were uninhabitable. As a result, we have 64 students staying at a nearby hotel and thanks to the work of Dick Roberts, Pam Bischoff and Nancy Mackin and their staff, the inconveniences endured by the students have been minimal. We are working hard to continue renovating these units and hope to have students return to their units by next semester.

**Middle States Accreditation**

As we continue this semester to prepare for the Middle States assessment, I welcome the opportunity for reflection and evaluation of our programs. Judging by the solemn gaze of our Provost, Beth Barnett, when she returned recently from a Middle States Conference, much remains to be done and I am moved to ask for your willing participation and support in this self-study assessment.

**Sustainability Education Center**

Groundbreaking for the Sustainability Education Center will be held on October 22nd at 11:30am. The Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, Lisa
Jackson, will join us for that celebration. I reiterate that I do not see the Sustainability Education Center as a monument to tradition so much as a key component of Ramapo’s future, a theme that is echoed in the draft strategic plan.

A New Look

2008 will see www.Ramapo.edu adopt a newer, fresher and more dynamic look as the Marketing and Communications Office will unveil a new Ramapo website that will improve communication and website navigation for both prospective students and current Ramapo community members. Some features of the new website include:

- Ramapo Interactive, which will include Video On Demand, Expanded Virtual Tours, an Interactive Prospective Student section, and Live Chat.
- Easy-to-use and expanded drop-down menu links for Faculty/Staff, Current and Prospective Students to better locate needed information.

Campus Core Master Plan

Although the construction work being done in the core of campus between the Academic Building, Berrie Center, Birch Mansion and Mansion Drive is neither aesthetically pleasing nor convenient at present, it will yield much needed improvements. The uneven pavement, deteriorated bluestones, and old or diseased trees needed refinishing, refurbishing or replacing. The plans have been in the works for some time and the funding was provided from a previous bond issue. We expect the work to be completed by the end of November.

The Rankings

This year we found ourselves in a new category, Universities-masters, in the US News and World Report’s popular College Rankings magazine. In this new category we rank 32nd overall and 5th among public colleges. While this may inspire questions from within and beyond the college walls regarding the quality of our education, our new competitors, and specifically the ranking of other New Jersey colleges ahead or beside us, I reiterate a point I made when I first arrived here: such rankings may generate excellent and welcome publicity (although the controversy concerning the validity of the rankings increasingly calls that into question), but are not fundamentally important. The US News and World Report Rankings look at “indicators of excellence” but do not, for example, shed any light on the essential question of what our students have learned while at Ramapo. While we should still take pride that we are among the top 5 public masters granting colleges in the North, we must continue to define the important measures of our success.

One measure which I do trust is developed by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, or CASE. Under the leadership of Cathy Davey and her Institutional Advancement Staff, the Ramapo College Foundation received a 2007 CASE
Award for Overall Improvement in Educational Fund Raising, an honor bestowed to only 17 institutions out of 482 colleges and universities reviewed by CASE.

On the fundraising side, there is much evidence to demonstrate the commitment of external donors, but also of our own faculty and staff who reaffirm their commitment to Ramapo’s mission through giving.

**Anisfield School of Business**

Let me begin by rejoicing at the opening of the Anisfield School of Business and the addition of a splendid new academic building to our campus. The largest gift in the College’s has helped to yield a 3 story atrium, twelve classrooms, two tiered amphitheaters, 74 offices, computer labs, a nurse training facility, the Roukema Center for International Education and a Master of Science in Education Technology Suite. If you have not yet had the opportunity to walk through the building, I encourage you to do so. The opening though did not happen without anxiety, and I would like to thank both the Facilities Staff and the staff of ITS (formerly CCIS) for their dedication, expertise and support in helping get the building up and running for the start of the semester.

**The Center for Business Excellence at the Anisfield School of Business**

It is always special in the life of a College when faculty members and their families contribute financially in a way that complements their intellectual contributions. I am thrilled to announce that Professor of Finance Murray Sabrin and his wife Florence have generously established the Center for Business Excellence at the Anisfield School of Business. This new center will be located on the third floor of ASB. A director will be selected in 2007-2008 and programs will begin in 2008-2009. A part of the Sabrin gift of $250,000 will support the construction costs of the new building with most of it going to establish an endowment for the operations of the Sabrin Center.

**Spirituality Center**

As you may be aware, in November we will break ground on the Salameno Spiritual Center. This new building will have the Padavano Peace Pavilion as its center piece, dedicated to both formal and informal spiritual observance and reflection. We are grateful to Professor Anthony Padavano and his wife Theresa for their most generous gift of $200,000 toward the construction of the center and to support an endowed lecture series.

The commitment of so many members of our Ramapo community continues to advance our strategic goals. I will cite just a few examples. Professor Jay Wholley is providing a gift in kind for magnificent gates for the new Spiritual Center. Professor Emeritus Elaine Winshell is helping us build our Planned Giving Program by setting up a new annuity naming Ramapo the beneficiary. Our senior director of development, Kathleen Mainardi, has established a new major insurance policy naming Ramapo the owner and beneficiary,
Professor Ellen Kaiden and her husband Jeff have recently created an endowed student scholarship, more than a dozen of our staff have agreed to serve on our Campus Annual Fund Committee to help us raise unrestricted gifts. The examples could go on and on of the many ways our faculty and staff are advancing the goals of this institution.

I therefore believe we will soon be able to conduct a feasibility study and embark upon an ambitious comprehensive capital campaign to support the needs of our Strategic Plan. Ramapo already leads the state colleges and universities with the highest level of alumni participation at 13.6%. From 2006 to 2007, support from parents increased by 28% and senior class giving increased by 41% from 2006 to 2007. Our faculty and staff participation rate is among the highest in the State. Our endowment funds grew by 49% and our long term investments had a strong return of 15.88%. Clearly we are poised for significant growth and we will achieve it.

II. The Rocky Terrain of the State of New Jersey

I have addressed most Faculty Unit Councils and other campus constituencies on the current situation of higher education in the state of New Jersey. Senator Raymond Lesniak has proposed a bill that would increase the regulatory authority of the Commission of Higher Education. A number of these proposals would in my view detract from the ability of the College to make the sorts of improvements that have occurred here in the past decade.

I have visited Senator Lesniak’s office and met with his chief of staff to present what I believe is a compelling case on behalf of Ramapo College. Though a call for greater oversight does not bode well for any institution with a specific mission such as ours, his focus on accountability is one where we could find common ground. However, while the state presses Ramapo to be more accountable, Ramapo needs to press the state for its own accountability for fair funding. Currently, we have the lowest per capita funding of any state college/university. As I continue to observe, in the space of a decade, the percentage of our operating funding that comes from the state has fallen from half to less than a third.

As a result, my duty as President is to do what we train our students to do; to challenge our legislators to develop a rational and fair funding formula as I continue to present evidence of Ramapo’s need for a fair share. As the election approaches, many legislative seats are open and our opportunity to solicit support in Trenton is all the more apparent.

Similarly, our need to look to our alumni and to private donors and partners is manifest. I, along with Cathy Davey and her team, intend to do more. We are intent on meeting with alumni and others who are in the position to make significant contributions so that Ramapo will be a great place not only for today’s students, but for those of tomorrow.

Consequently, the external needs of Ramapo will reduce my availability on campus, but not my ability to be connected to faculty, staff and students. Currently, I am working on
revamping my webpage, to make it more accessible, more technologically up to date, and more communicative. I am developing a President’s Post, which I will update bi-weekly, commenting on the highlights and sore points of the past two weeks, as well as updating the campus with any other news on the state, local, or campus level. The website will also expand on the current speeches and video sites, so that when I make public addresses such as this one, there is a text and audio version for those who were unable to attend.

III. Strategic Plan

The Strategic Planning Task Force may have its final meeting this Friday morning. I want to publicly thank all the members for their superb efforts and to thank those of you who provided commentary, all of which the Task Force considered and found helpful. The next step will be to seek approval from the Board of Trustees and then to ask each unit to prepare and submit its own rolling three year plan in light of the College Strategic Plan.

This is important work. As we pave the way for the future, we need to establish a solid roadbed and this planning process is designed to do that. Once the plan is approved, all units will be asked to prepare their own rolling three year plans that will be updated each year as part of the annual planning and budgeting process. We are also at work on complementary academic, enrollment management and information technology plans.

IV. Paving New Roads for Ramapo College

Given the fiscal challenges that we continue to face, the need for innovation and operational diversity is paramount. The myopic view of operating revenue as simply tuition and fees, donations and state appropriations is not only unduly limiting financially but also hampers planning. As a College we are realizing the need to pursue opportunities that not only increase our cash flow, but capitalize on the strengths of our campus, while propelling our institutional image and reputation to the forefront of New Jersey public higher education.

Maymester

Along these lines, I note that Provost Barnett has also recently posted a survey for students on scheduling preferences, specifically with regard to summer classes. I ask that students fill out this survey so that we can learn what your needs are and how we can help to accommodate those in the coming summer.

Center for Innovative and Professional Learning

The creation of the Center for Innovative and Professional Learning and the appointment of Rosa Mulryan as Assistant Vice President of Innovative and Professional Learning reflect our commitment to expanding opportunities. Currently, the Center is working with deans to develop coursework and programs that will enhance revenue for the college; an incentive program is in place whereby 25% of the revenue will be returned to the schools who offer new and innovative programs. Ideas for summer pre-college
programs, new regular summer session courses, alternative learning formats, certification and other professional development programs should be directed to Rosa at extension 7636.

With the work of the Center for Innovative and Professional Learning, we expect to be welcoming new audiences to the campus. We will need to actively foster good relations with these new partners, offering them same positive and supportive environment we excel in providing to our students. Word of mouth is our number one advertising method. What people experience when they visit our campus can enormously enhance our institutional image or be equally detrimental in its long-lasting effects.

V. Speed Bumps

When I arrived at Ramapo, many people spoke of the need for communication. I am actively seeking to improve communication by getting out to all corners of the campus and giving College members the opportunity to convey their views and comments to me. We need more of this sort of communication.

However, there is another sort of communication that many members of the college believe we need less of and that is the idle gossip that several have expressed concerns to me about. This often comes back to me in torrents as it gathers momentum causing me to wonder whether the best way of communicating broadly would be to pin a message on a bulletin board headed “Confidential and utterly false”

I will share but two examples.

Last year a member of the College met me in a hallway and exclaimed “What good news, now you’ll be staying” Seldom have I heard seven words with so many possible implications.

“I wasn’t planning to go anywhere” I replied, “What news are you referring to?”

“Oh, your wife’s pregnancy” was the reply.

“You must have seen her since this morning then”, I said, “because when I had breakfast with her, she wasn’t expecting”

Now this example, while both puzzling and disconcerting, is relatively harmless compared to the second. That involves my receiving multiple reports that campus was abuzz with the story that my new assistant’s was over $100,000 and the equivalent of the salary for two new full-time faculty. This is completely untrue; his salary is in fact significantly less than any entry-level faculty salary would be. Why in the world would such a piece of farfetched gossip achieve such momentum? I do not know the answer but I do know that such lies are highly corrosive, breeding suspicion and distrust and giving a false and morale-sapping picture of institutional priorities.
WE have a lot of important work to do in the coming year. Let’s commit to not being
distracted by idle gossip. Call me, if you’re concerned, by all means but let’s move
forward.

Thank you for listening.