STATE OF THE COLLEGE  
Dr. Peter P. Mercer, President

February 12, 2014

Hello everyone and welcome to the State of the College address.

This is my eighteenth such address since assuming the office of President in 2005 and I believe the College is in good shape, despite the “polar vortex” afoot.

SCOFF, SCREECH, SCUFF

To begin, I’d like to note the wintry blanket outside and add that in 2000-2001 Newfoundland experienced 21 feet of snow. With the forecast being what it is for even more snow here in the Ramapo Valley over the next several days, I’d like to share three relevant terms from the Newfoundland English Dictionary. Those terms are:

Scoff: A cooked meal often as part of an impromptu party

Screech: A cheap dark demarara rum

Scuff: A dance usually held at someone’s house.

In Newfoundland, people would decide spur of the moment to have a scoff and scuff and at times would indulge in screech as part of those festivities. I share this with you only, should we have a snow day this week, to remind you of just a few of the many ways in which you can enjoy this weather and your time at home.

WARNING SIGNALS

I would be remiss to not note some of the non-meteorological warning signals.

As I sat across from the Governor at his State of the State Address earlier this week, I waited in vain for some mention of higher education. This is disappointing but not altogether surprising given some of the other matters currently requiring the Governor’s attention.

I noted earlier that the College is in good shape. The Faculty Assembly Budget Committee and the Financial Sustainability Task Force identified several causes of and strategies to ameliorate our largely structural budget deficit. Again, we are in good shape, because while the path ahead may be difficult at times, we are equipped with the tools to navigate it.

For example, at an upcoming meeting of the Board of Trustees I will be recommending a significant draw-down from our reserves to pay down our debt. Taking such a step will require us to be even more vigilant moving forward but in exchange it will yield us approximately $3million per year in savings.
GOOD SIGNS

There are also many other good signs that merit our attention.

Demand

Demand for a Ramapo College education is very strong. We are on track to realize the largest applicant pool in the history of the college.

Retention Efforts

64% of our faculty have participated in Connect, the new early alert system for student retention. This engagement by our faculty exceeds the national average by more than 20%.

Winter Arching

The College expanded upon its Arching tradition with the introduction of Ramapo’s first winter welcome Arching Ceremony for transfer students. Almost 300 students shook my hand as they processed up Mansion Road.

2+2 = China

The College is partnering with Suzhou University near Shanghai to pilot 2+2 programs in ASB and CA. In recent Years, Suzhou has been ranked in the top 30 universities in China (out of 3,000 universities), putting them in the top 10% of universities across China. The University, in recent years, has established scholarships of close to $5million to encourage students from China to spend significant time studying overseas.

The idea of the 2+2 program is that Suzhou students will take 100 credits before arriving at Ramapo College, and we will then, in similar fashion to NJ Transfer, provide them with their final 64 credits to complete an undergraduate degree at Ramapo College. These students will also live in the residences and thus also help fill the empty beds we have on campus. Huiping Li, Edna Negron, Chris Romano and Lew Chakrin have been instrumental in bringing these programs to fruition.

Further, the College also recently signed an agreement with Shanghai Normal University and CIPL/ASB to bring a group of their students here over the summer to take a 2 credit course delivered through ASB and immerse themselves into US culture. At a time when facilities are not heavily used, this generates additional net revenue to the College. Three other similar programs are in the works.

Board of Trustees

I am pleased to share that Vin Colman will be sworn in to the Board in February. Trustee Colman, a Vice President with PWC, has served on the Board of Governors for five years and now brings his talents to the Board of Trustees.
I do regret to report that Trustee Vernon C. Walton will be departing the Board of Trustees in May. Dr. Reverend Walton has served on the Board for eight years and has been a strong and highly effective advocate for a Ramapo College education.

Also, the Board has established five goals for itself this year. Those goals are available on the Board’s Web site.

President’s Advisory Council

Many of you have written to me with you feedback on the Advisory Council. Please continue to share your ideas with me. The first meeting of this group will likely be March 14. More information regarding membership on the Council will be forthcoming.

Kiplinger’s Recognition

Ramapo was again named to Kiplinger’s Personal Finance’s list of 100 best values in public colleges for 2014 for ninth consecutive year. We are one of only three New Jersey institutions of higher education on the list, ranking 66 for in-state tuition, up a slot from 2013’s list.

Mahwah Named Safest Community of the Year

New Jersey’s safest community for 2014 is Mahwah according to a ranking published by security organization SafeWise: a Utah-based company that reviews safety and security products.

SafeWise security analyst Alexia Chianis said: "...the 50 safest communities in New Jersey share one critical, crime stopping characteristic: community cohesiveness", a quality evident in the township of Mahwah. SafeWise also lauded the Mahwah PD for its connectivity to the community.

Efficiency Improvements

The P-card program has resulted in a cost avoidance of $187,000 so far this fiscal year.

The college recently purchased Adaptive Insights which will provide a more comprehensive solution for budgeting, financial forecasting, improved analytics and reporting needs. College units will be trained over the summer on the new budget process and software system.

Student Achievement

Ramapo’s SGA initiated and hosted the first conference of its kind in January with SGA leaders from across the state’s colleges and universities. More than 40 students traveled to our campus for a series of workshops facilitated by our own Student Government. Sessions focused on governance, advocacy, and identifying organizational strengths/weaknesses. Students from Rowan, Rutgers, WPU, Princeton, Centenary, Drew, Caldwell, and Stockton braved the weather and participated. SGA president Vin Guinta said, “We all learned that every school is certainly
unique but we all share many similar challenges.” Stockton plans to host the next conference in the fall.

Student Tina Iraggi was recognized by the Order of Omega, National Honor society for Fraternity and Sorority members, as the recipient of its Patrick W. Halloran Scholarship for excellence in Scholarship, Leadership, and citizenship.

Eight students in the Communication Arts major have been accepted to present their research at the Eastern Communication Association annual conference in late April in Providence, RI.

Nursing student, Joy Abma, was recognized by the Wyckoff YMCA for her life saving intervention. While at the Y, a member went into cardiac arrest. Joy, along with two other Y members, provided emergency services. Shortly after, the Wyckoff Police and Ambulance Corps arrived and later reported that because of the fine efforts of Joy and the others, the gentleman survived and has an encouraging prognosis.

Dobromir Yordanov, a Computer Science major, recently secured a summer internship at Google.

While it is early in the season, so far TAS students have been accepted into the following medical and dental schools: Boston University, Rutgers, NYU, Jefferson Medical College, Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, New York College of Osteopathic Medicine, and West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine.

TAS reports that many of its students have been recognized for their undergraduate research, noting that five students have earned summer REU (research for undergraduate education) fellowships, one student has been published in a peer-reviewed journal and one is pending publication, five students conducted poster presentations at national conferences, and four students conducted poster presentations at local conferences.

School of Contemporary Arts

Ben Neill has produced the sound tracks for several national TV commercials in Cadillac's new advertising campaign. A special two-minute one will be aired during the Olympics.

John Peffer received a writing grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that will support work on his new book on African photography during the 2014 calendar year.

Beba Shamash will offer a new study abroad program in summer 2014, "Fashion and Costume in England," that will take place in London, Stratford-on-Avon, and Bath.

School of Theoretical and Applied Science

G. Elaine Patterson presented a paper on "Malaria - on the Rise in the US" at the Annual Conference of the Black Nurses Association in New Orleans in August 2013
Professor of Nursing Julie Fitzgerald was named the 2012 NJ March of Dimes Public Health Nurse of the Year.

School of Social Science and Human Services

Professor of Clinical Psychology James Morley was recently appointed the editor in chief of the Journal of Phenomenological Psychology.

Assistant Professor of Social Work Stephanie Sarabia successfully held and supervised a National Institute of Drug Abuse’s Drug Facts Week event at Teaneck High School. She brought 15 Ramapo students enrolled in the substance abuse minor to actively engage the high school students.

Professor of Psychology Robert Becklen hosted an event that featured a screening of “The Big Sting,” a documentary covering an elaborate art heist and a Q&A session with his brother, Rickard, the chief conservator of paintings at the National museum in Stockholm, Sweden. While there, he personally participated as the authenticator for the museum where the famous artwork was stolen from.

Anisfield School of Business

Professor of Physics Philip Anderson and Professor of Business Law and Information Systems Cherie Ann Sherman co-wrote an academic article, “What Students and Independent Inventors Need to Know About the America Inventors Act,” which was published in The Southern Law Journal. It focused on how obtaining a patent now proves to be more difficult and expensive than it was in the past.

Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies

Associate Professor of Spanish Niza Fabre won the Henry Shaw Award for Outstanding Scholarly Contributions from the African American Culture section of the Popular Culture Association Conference.

Institutional Advancement

Three of our four Distinguished Citizens Dinner honorees are Alumni this year! They include Don LaGreca ‘92, Glenn Messina ‘85, Tim Finley ‘94, and Reza Rafizadeh.

The monthly Alumni newsletter Arch Connections underwent a redesign recently. The newsletter is distributed to over 11,000 recipients and, so far, it has an open rate that exceeds industry standards!

We are pleased to share that the Board of Trustees approved at its September 30th meeting to increase the original announced goal of $40 million for the Further Our Promise Comprehensive Capital Campaign to $50 million and added one additional year to the time-frame. I am pleased to share that as this time, we are at $49.7 million. We anticipate surpassing the $50 million mark
and being able to provide needed support for some of the new initiatives in the College’s Strategic Plan.

This December, Dr. Angela Cristini – who has assumed the role of Assistant Vice President for Office of Grants and Sponsored Research, renewed the $1.7 million grant with the Meadowlands Environment Center. This grant not only provides incredible educational outreach programs to 23,000 school children, it also provides significant overhead to the College. $136,000 is contributed to faculty salary support at the College, two scholarships are awarded to environmental studies and environmental science students, a post-baccalaureate position, and four to six co-op students are funded. As well, each year 60 to 80 teacher education students fulfill a requirement for Methods of Teaching Science at the Meadowlands site.

Our endowment continues to grow now over $14.4 million and thus far this year earning a return of 11.5%. What this means for our students and faculty, over $640,000 will be awarded through over 330 awards.

Question and Answer