January 30, 2014

Dear Colleagues and Students (sent via email),

Re: Establishment of a College Wide Forum

The 2010 Report of the Evaluation Team representing the Middle States States Commission on Higher Education "suggests that Ramapo explore the creation of a more broadly based shared governance structure that would involve all college constituencies - faculty, students, and professional staff in various categories." (p.2) Later in the Report, this suggestion takes the form of a recommendation to "establish a college wide forum as part of [a] shared governance system in which all constituencies can sit down, share information, and have substantive discussion." (p.6)

The intent of this Evaluation Team recommendation is to improve communication among the various college constituencies. By so doing, it is hoped that discussion of substantive matters will also be richer and better informed at all levels throughout the College. The underlying concept might be described as "participatory governance" with the aim of enhancing trust and broadening participation in governance.

I fully support this recommendation. Our activities as a College are becoming more complex and interwoven and internal communication is correspondingly more important than ever. As President - and this was noted in the Evaluation Team Report - I have many opportunities to communicate with internal constituencies and individuals separately. Up until now, however, there has been no physical forum through which representatives of all college constituencies could offer their comments while asking and answering questions of each other.

I suggest that the new forum be called the President's Advisory Council (PAC) and that it meet twice in the fall and twice in the spring semester with the inaugural meeting to be held in March 2014. The proposed membership is set out below. Because it is to be a communications forum, a number of administrators would be designated as ex officio as they would need to be present to respond to questions.

As its name suggests, the proposed PAC is not intended to be a formal decision-making body and its establishment would not derogate from the current decision making structures at the College. However, the fact that the PAC's function would be advisory does not mean that it would not be influential. Given its proposed membership, it is most unlikely that strong recommendations emanating from it would not be considered.

President's Advisory Council Membership:

A. Ex Officio
President (Chair)
President's Chief of Staff (Council Secretary)
Provost
Vice-President Administration and Finance
Vice-President Institutional Advancement
Chief Planning Officer
Acting Dean of Students
Associate Vice President Enrolment Management
Dean of Anisfield School of Business
Dean of Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies
Dean of School of Contemporary Arts
Dean of School of Social Science and Human Services
Dean of School of Theoretical and Applied Science
Dean of George T. Potter Library
President of American Federation of Teachers
President of Communication Workers of America

New Jersey’s Public Liberal Arts College
President of Local 195  
President of Faculty Assembly  
President of Student Government Association  

B. Elected/Appointed Members (Total of 20)  
2 elected representatives from each school (10)  
2 elected representatives from unionized staff  
1 elected representative from the Professional Staff Association  
1 elected representative from managerial staff  
2 appointed undergraduate students  
1 appointed graduate student  
1 appointed alumni representative  
1 appointed representative from the Board of Trustees  
1 appointed representative from the Foundation Board of Governors  

Only council members and specially invited guests could speak at PAC meetings although any member of the College could attend. Each meeting would, at minimum, include a brief report from the President, a formal presentation on a topic previously determined by the Council, and a question period when any member of the Council may ask questions of any other member. Matters could be brought before the PAC through a council representative. Meetings would normally be limited to two hours and minutes would be made available to the College at large.  

Obviously, some greater attention would need to be paid to procedural matters and substantive terms of reference but before going further, I welcome comments on this proposal. Please direct those comments to president@ramapo.edu over the next two weeks or stop by my office.  

Thank you.  

Peter P. Mercer  
President