

President's Conversation with the JSC Community April 28, 2010

Thank you all for being here, especially at what must be one of the busiest times of year. I'd like to talk with you about three things today: a review of what I believe to be some of the highlights of a very good academic year, a look at our college budget for next year, and the College Plan for the next five years—to be rolled out with the start of next academic year.

I have to say I think it has been a wonderful year—and this is a time of year when it is seasonally appropriate to take note of that. Tonight, we celebrate 100 students and their participation in Service events; tomorrow, we recognize dozens of students with awards and scholarships and a few faculty and staff members as well. Next week, we share a meal with 100 student athletes—some participating in two brand new sports at our campus. In between are senior art shows, music recitals, readings. It could be thought of as an embarrassment of riches; but , we have nothing to be embarrassed about.

Here, then, in no order are some of the highlights for the year we are closing in on. Some are very specific and tangible; others speak more to tone or feeling of this year. You may have your own list. I offer glimpses from academic, student life, and “behind the scenes” projects:

- This was a year marked by a strong and respectful nature of our community. Student engagement was high, with strong participation levels in community service, government, and student leadership opportunities, along with good attendance at campus activities and events.
- Residential Life experiences also affirm respect, and taking-care of self and others. The location and look of the Office of FYE. The Office is a busy office with many students stopping in to chat, seek advice, or ask questions.
- Creative Audience is a new graduation requirement at JSC. A class without walls, it is made up of a series of events offered throughout the academic year. These events — which may include music, dance, concerts, films, lectures, workshops, panel discussions, an athletic contest or theater production — are intended to offer yet another unifying experience for as many members of the entering freshman class as possible, sparking discussion with classmates and faculty members. The CA schedule in fall 2009 semester included 18 events. Student response cards indicate a mostly engaged and appreciative audience. Many students stop by the FY Office to say thank you...if not for the CA requirement they would have missed an awesome event.

- The First Year Office itself: a true landing and launching place for our new students to get help, advice, check in...and to come back as successful returning students to pass on their good learning
- Retention! Up 5+% points...

Some academic highlights (and Dean Regan will share more tomorrow):

- Fulbright visiting specialist Zaharom ("Rom") Nain.
- A culture of research is taking hold at JSC! 4 professors from ENS department are collaborating on a project to study the Lamoille Valley Watershed: its geology, climate, quality of water, and soil. I estimate that 15-20 students are or have been involved so far and there is room for more.
- Professors Hans Haverkamp (asthma/exercise) and Gina Mireault (humor in infants).
- Our faculty have been justly recognized:
 - Professor Kit Cooke by our Board of Trustees as Professor Emeritus;
 - VSC Faculty Fellowships for our faculty for two years in a row: 2009-2010 faculty fellow, Professor Elizabeth Dolci; and 2010-2011 faculty fellow, Professor Gina Mireault;
 - And research grants through the Vermont Genetics network for a number of faculty members in the sciences and social sciences.
 - Finally, our searches are telling us that we have a faculty that people want to be part of.

And in the arts—just a few examples:

- Professor Ken Leslie's art book *Space + Time* has been selected from a collection of more than 2,000 artists' books to represent the finest examples of contemporary book art in the United States for an upcoming catalog from the Savannah College of Art and Design.
- Professor Elizabeth Powell (Writing and Literature) gave an invited poetry reading and lecture at the University of Nebraska-Omaha in January; and more recently, in February, led a fiction workshop at an International Writers' Conference.

- Professor John Miller was commissioned for photographs about Vermont's "working landscape" as part of the "Art of Action" exhibit—as one of only 10 Vermont artists selected.

Other Highlights:

- We told our story this year with a newly energized *Johnson Views*—received with rave reviews.
- Renovation of SHAPE was completed on time and on budget. Usage of the building is up by community members, students, faculty and staff — exactly the result we were hoping for with this project. SHAPE is now a gathering space for varsity and non-varsity athletes alike.
- A building master plan was completed for Bentley Hall that outlines the renovations required to bring the building into a top-quality sciences building. Summer renovations will add a new Molecular Lab, a renovation the Earth Sciences Classroom, a student lab, another classroom renovation and upgrade of faculty offices. A third round of renovations is planned that will touch all of the remaining spaces as soon as we have the necessary funding.

And behind the scenes:

- The Registrar's Office is no longer maintaining paper files on currently enrolled students.
- Transfer students - We have revised our review process for transfer students and launched a transfer student web page. Evaluation of transcripts will be done at the point of accept which will provide students with a complete picture of how their credits will transfer in to the College. We hope this will improve service by having students clearly understand early on how their credits will transfer to JSC.

Budgets, resources, investments...

I know there is some anxiety. A little background: 26 million dollar budget; 18% of it comes from the state of Vermont....

'JSC 2010-2015: A Plan for Access, Engagement, and Success'

Committees have been working hard on our new five-year plan, which is nearly complete.

Why Bother? Why Now?

- Higher education is an extremely dynamic enterprise even while it is a sturdy and enduring social institution.
- Each generation of students comes with its own characteristics, aspirations, and challenges.
- Some of the funding entities we might turn to —public and private —insist that a college have a detailed multi-year College Plan with goals and objectives in place before applying for support.
- Planning—even with its frustrations and disagreements—is energizing and creative work and compels us to call our current practices into question and look at things in new ways.
- Planning forces and alignment of stated goals with resource allocations; it also insists on evaluating our work and sharing our results.

While we have much to take pride in, our work is incomplete. Having set ambitious goals and raised our aspirations, it was, perhaps, inevitable that we would fall short of completion. To make our work as focused as possible on the things that truly matter to JSC's future we adopted a "critical issues" approach.

Several themes endure: the success of students stays front and center, with the high quality of teaching close behind. In reality, their tight connection makes it impossible to posit one as goal without the other.

- We have also moved from believing that students simply need a good start in order to succeed. Succeeding in college is a complex process and insists, for many students, that they take on a new view of themselves, a whole new approach to their education and learning; for some students, this is learning a new language and culture. We recognize that the commitment to ongoing student success is as crucial as a strong solid start. Similarly, we have come to appreciate that transfer students, while experienced in some

ways, are new to this particular college and are likely to be starting a new chapter in their lives; they don't automatically know how to "do" college because they have tried it before.

- The goal of approaching enrollment as a means of advancing student and academic success is a relatively new concept. But it has become apparent that recruiting students who, early on, show a commitment to their own learning and an openness to Johnson State as the place with which to affiliate helps establish the community in which they—and we—will thrive. Civic engagement as a goal is not only "a good thing to do" but a necessary correlate to our commitments to assist students in strengthening their sense of themselves as learners in community, to extend the educational process beyond the classroom, and to prepare them for the lives that they will live for the majority of their lives.
- Goals that address physical and information technology as well as fundraising are part of the support system that will secure the resources to advance the objectives of teaching, learning, and engagement.

Planning cannot be episodic but must be part of the ongoing work we do. We need to keep asking and inventing the questions that will link our daily decisions with our aspirations for Johnson State College's future. To that end, we have arrived at these goals:

1. Increase academic challenge and student achievement.
2. Foster early and ongoing student success.
3. Identify and enroll more students who will thrive at JSC.
4. Strengthen JSC's contributions to Lamoille county and Vermont.
5. Align campus and technology upgrades with academic priorities.
6. Strengthen JSC's future through gifts, grants, and investments.

We will continue to share our work with all of you and solicit your feedback and ideas. As always, my door is open.

-- Barbara E. Murphy, President