

## A Special Class of Academic Opportunities President's Address to the University Community

Richard L. McCormick, President

September 10, 2004



Good afternoon and thank you for being here. My special thanks to the University Senate for enabling me to speak directly with the Rutgers community about the opportunities we share in the coming year. I am proud to see so many members of our Board of Governors, Board of Trustees, and Board of Overseers, including the chairs of two of those bodies, Bob Laudicina and Mark Hershhorn, as well as the many Rutgers students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends who are here this afternoon.

It is a pleasure to introduce to you two new members of the university leadership team: Greg Blimling, Vice President for Student Affairs, who came to Rutgers in July; and Jeffrey Apfel, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, who is now completing his first week on the banks. Kim Manning-Lewis is not a new member of

the leadership team, but she has recently had a richly deserved promotion to Vice President for University Relations.

To the members of the New Jersey Legislature who are with us, to State Treasurer John McCormac, and to elected officials from our local communities, we say thank you for joining us today and for your interest in the future of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Friends and colleagues, when I addressed you a year ago, the university was preoccupied with some very difficult issues—another round of state budget cuts, the proposed restructuring of the research universities, and the contract negotiations with our faculty and staff. There will never be a time when Rutgers is free of all such challenges. We continue to grapple with safety and security, resources, and facilities. But compared to where we were a year ago, we can now focus more confidently on the horizon, our own horizon. Today we have a chance to articulate and discuss a Rutgers vision for Rutgers. But do not think that I have an isolationist agenda for our university. On the contrary, a Rutgers vision for Rutgers connects us more deeply than ever—through our academic missions of teaching, research, and service—to communities and opportunities beyond our campuses.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of spending many hours in conversation with faculty, staff, students, and alumni—around my dinner table, across the campuses, and around the state. So the agenda I'll set forth today is not a personal agenda. It is gleaned from the hopes and ambitions of countless members of our community. I take seriously my responsibility as president to be a voice for that vision.

Some of those conversations took place last May on a five-day, 540-mile, bus, train, and ferry trip around New Jersey. Thirty-three new faculty members and I saw our state and, through it, the tremendous promise of this university as an academic instrument for public good. The New Faculty Traveling Seminar, as we dubbed it, took us to the communities where our students come from, to cities, farms, schools, and industries.

We talked with cranberry growers, mayors, casino managers, corporate leaders, urban high school students, and their teachers. We saw the tremendous variety of New Jersey's people, geography, and challenges. We saw our state's glorious and too-little-noted beauty. And as much as we learned about New Jersey, New Jerseyans learned about us. Our faculty made strong connections wherever we went and saw how their work could play an

even larger role in serving the state.

We visited a vast, family-owned nursery in Cumberland County whose owner showed us how labor-intensive and costly it is to move plants through the huge greenhouses as they grow from seedlings to final products. Professor Tobias Rossmann of our Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department looked at the problem and thought that maybe his students could solve it. So this year they will design an automated system to move plants through the greenhouses safely and swiftly. This project illustrates how Rutgers research, with hands-on involvement by our students, can benefit the people of our state.

The bus tour also brought forth unexpected interdisciplinary collaborations. Aboard the light rail that took us from Trenton to Camden, Professor Rick Duschl of the Graduate School of Education talked with David Madigan of the Statistics Department about Professor Madigan's work in Bayesian analysis. As a result, they are now teaming up on an NSF grant proposal with the Educational Testing Service in Princeton to design an array of new middle school science assessments for use at the state, district, school, and classroom levels.

Professor Kathe Newman of the Urban Planning and Policy Development Program in New Brunswick and Professor Tim Raphael in Visual and Performing Arts in Newark want to help small farmers target their produce for urban and immigrant communities by setting up festival farm marketplaces. Their students will, of course, be involved. Professor Elizabeth Leake in the Italian Department is working with some of the people she met on the bus tour to establish a New Jersey literary prize to be awarded annually by Rutgers, in cooperation with the state's Council on the Humanities and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

These faculty and students, and many, many more, are reaching out across disciplines to the people of New Jersey. Their teaching, research, and service are entwined. Their Rutgers is co-terminus with the boundaries of our state and really the world. Their work is integral to our future as a great public research university.

So what is the vision here? It's about breathtaking research and teaching in our core academic fields, about boundary crossings between disciplines and between the university and society, about our students' engagement in research and other forms of experiential learning, and about the conscious propulsion of our discoveries and our learning to wherever they can be useful, starting right here in New Jersey.

As I observed last year in my inaugural address, there is a paradox. We serve our state best when our aspirations reach far beyond its borders. It is the national and international distinction of our faculty and our research that makes us most valuable to the people here at home, starting with our own students. And so our university's top two goals are deeply connected and consistent with each other: Enhancing our distinction as a research university and, wherever it is appropriate to do so, putting that academic excellence to work beyond our campuses.

What would Rutgers look like if it achieved these goals? The evidence is close at hand, in Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick-Piscataway. Let's take a look at a few of our most interesting and exciting programs and then ask what characteristics they share.

Take the Rutgers Institute for Law and Philosophy in Camden. Led by Professors Kimberly Ferzan and Dennis Patterson, it draws upon two outstanding programs—the Rutgers-Camden School of Law and New Brunswick's Philosophy Department, ranked number one in the nation. The Institute's scholars ask "what is law?" from perspectives such as naturalism and analytic philosophy, and they inquire into topics with which our legal system grapples every day, such as the concept of self-defense.

Consider another outstanding program: Rutgers in New York. Created by Dean George Stauffer of the Mason Gross School of the Arts, this program enables students in music, theater, visual arts, and dance to perform or exhibit at a major venue in Manhattan. Last year it was dance; this year it will be music at Carnegie Hall. Rutgers in New York takes experiential learning to the highest level, and through it our students perform on the world's

biggest stage. It is also a conscious effort to bring the results of our work to the larger community.

Next take the amazing film, "Volcanoes of the Deep Sea," the first giant-screen production by a university. Entrepreneurial faculty from our Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences, especially Professors Rich Lutz and Peter Rona, had a vision for showing a global audience something it had never seen before—the deep sea environments in which the key to life's origins may be locked inside the fiery cores of superheated volcanic chimneys—and Rich and Peter raised a lot of money to realize that vision. The result is a film that has now been seen by hundreds of thousands of people, many of them at the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City. Grounded in strong research across several fields here at Rutgers, "Volcanoes of the Deep" shares that research with the world.

Now, what do these Rutgers programs have in common? Although they are spread all across the university and are very different from one another, they share some characteristics and they make up a special class of academic opportunities.

What are those characteristics? First and foremost, these programs depend on our strengths in the core academic disciplines—in the arts, humanities, social sciences, mathematical sciences, and the natural sciences. But they depend, too, on extensive collaboration across the disciplines. They exploit comparative advantages that Rutgers has because of history, location, or the availability of partners. They are programs, in other words, where Rutgers can become among the best in the world. Each meets a need or seizes an opportunity beyond the university; it could be a New Jersey-based problem or a global challenge. These programs are driven by entrepreneurial faculty, by partnerships with people and organizations beyond our campus, by the interests of our students, and by a commitment to experiential learning. And for each there is the potential availability of the necessary resources.

These bold initiatives, writ large and analyzed in their fullness, point in the direction where Rutgers is and should be headed.

Let me say a few of these things more clearly. Our achievements will always rest on excellence in the basic disciplines of history, chemistry, business, political science, education, biology, music, engineering, and so on. These are the fields in which our students must be liberally educated in preparation for all that their lives will hold and in which basic research and teaching will always occur. These fields form the foundation of every great university and of everything that Rutgers wishes to be.

Increasingly, however, our faculty teach and do research across the traditional boundaries of their disciplines. Because so many intellectual problems and human challenges do not fit neatly within any one field, this is the right thing to do. But interdisciplinary work demands great strengths in the disciplines themselves. There should be no thought of bypassing the basic academic areas, only of bringing them together whenever it is appropriate to do so.

The Rutgers future I am describing requires some other elements as well—specifically the conscious creation of instruments, typically centers, bureaus, or institutes, that can collect interdisciplinary research, refine it for practical application, and transmit it beyond our campuses to where it is needed. The anthropology or management or physics departments are not inherently designed to do this, nor should they be. We can, however, create entities to make sure the larger society benefits from our interdisciplinary research. We already have. The National Institute for Early Education Research in New Brunswick, the Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs in Camden, and the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies in Newark do exactly this.

From centers like these come real-world results: the training of nurses with special distinction in clinical trials, improved curricula for pre-K literacy, transportation systems that employ information technology to keep cars moving on our highways, new methods for maintaining the purity of our tidal estuaries, contributions to the revitalization of our cities. These results speak to the impacts we can have on New Jersey and the world. And they embrace both of our top goals for Rutgers—greater academic distinction and more significant service to

humankind, starting here at home.

To state what I hope is by now obvious, the Rutgers future I am describing includes our students, too, and has major implications for their education. Increasingly their learning is grounded in research, or internships, or community service. This has long been a characteristic of graduate and professional education at universities like Rutgers; now it must become central to the education our undergraduates receive. They, too, can be partners in discovering new knowledge and in propelling that learning to where it is needed in the world. Our students will spend the rest of their lives creating and applying knowledge; we must get them started while they are here at Rutgers. The opportunities I am placing before you today are also opportunities for our students.

So what are some of the areas in which this Rutgers vision can become a reality? Well, for one, we have remarkable strength in the field of transportation, a serious, daily problem in New Jersey. Our expertise lies in civil engineering, policy studies, mathematics, computer science, business and environment and natural resources. What's more, we have two dynamic instruments: The Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation (CAIT) in the School of Engineering; and the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center in the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. There, faculty and students apply Rutgers research to the challenges of preventing crashes on local roads, improving the flow of freight, and promoting alternative forms of transportation. In our vision for Rutgers, CAIT and the Voorhees Center will work more closely with each other and with other schools, departments and centers, and with their state and federal partners, to make Rutgers among the most respected players in the nation in the field of transportation.

We have equally high aspirations for the New Jersey Stem Cell Institute, a joint endeavor of Rutgers and UMDNJ. The establishment of the Stem Cell Institute is owed directly to the remarkable work of Dr. Wise Young and the Rutgers Center for Collaborative Neuroscience. It also builds on our strengths in related disciplines, such as biology, chemistry, physics, and engineering. In this case, the real-world results include potential treatments and cures for Alzheimer's, spinal cord injury, diabetes, cancer, and other previously intractable diseases. If any of you have not yet taken the time to learn about the extraordinary potentialities of stem cell research, please do so. The scientific and moral challenges are momentous, but so are the opportunities for human health.

Rutgers is also becoming a leading voice on children's issues, with widely regarded research into early childhood literacy in New Brunswick and childhood studies in Camden. It is a working combination of faculty and students in so many Rutgers disciplines – education, anthropology, criminal justice, psychology, nursing, law, and more— and potential linkages with pediatrics at the Robert Wood Johnson School of Medicine in New Brunswick and the School of Osteopathic Medicine in Stratford. The result we seek is for all New Jersey children to grow up healthy, safe, and well educated. That's an outcome to which a premier public research university, like Rutgers, can contribute.

The academic opportunities I am describing cannot be realized without effort and will not occur overnight. They will require thoughtful, determined action. We will have to be proactive in promoting interdisciplinary research, conscious in redesigning our curricula, and deliberate in creating instruments for transmitting the results of our research to the wider world.

There are countless areas to which Rutgers can apply this approach. One is nutrition, building on our strengths at the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research, Cook College (which long ago established the first Nutrition Department in the country), genetics, chemistry, pharmacy, psychology and more, as well as on collaboration with UMDNJ. Nutrition is a major public health issue; it crosses the boundaries from basic laboratory science to public policy; it interests large numbers of our students; and it invites collaboration with the private sector, especially the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. Another emerging field is global and ethnic studies, which builds on Rutgers' long-recognized strength in women's studies and gender issues; its emerging distinction in such areas as South Asia; the international diversity of New Jersey's population; and, not least, our inescapable obligation to prepare our students for lifetimes of global citizenship. These examples are illustrative, not exhaustive. There are many such opportunities.

So I ask our faculty and students: Think about your own work in this way. Each area is different, and one size does not fit all. But there is truly a special class of academic opportunities at Rutgers. They are characterized by strong basic disciplines, interdisciplinary research, experiential learning, and outcomes that meet human needs. This is where Rutgers' future lies.

But every great public research university has its version of these same goals: academic excellence and public service. What will it take for Rutgers to achieve them? How will we make this vision a reality?

The list of things to do is long, but it is not infinitely long, and most of the tasks are already under way. Better still, there are plenty of Rutgers programs, some of which I have named today, upon which to model our future efforts. So while our goals are ambitious, and rightly so, and while reaching them will not be easy, the ways and means to do so can be enumerated and achieved.

Many of the key decisions rest with our faculty and deans, who bear responsibility for the academic programs. They must ask: In what areas does Rutgers have unique opportunities for excellence of the kind I have been describing? Where are the talented, entrepreneurial faculty leaders—some of whom are already here, others of whom we will have to recruit to Rutgers—who will be utterly focused on advancing those programs?

Last week I had the privilege of hosting a reception at my home for the one hundred plus new members of our faculty. From music to molecular biology, from finance to philosophy, they have come from the best graduate programs or from faculty positions at other outstanding universities. They have come to Rutgers. They are all excited to be here. They are ambitious, collaborative, and interdisciplinary. Someday soon they will identify the next generation of academic opportunities and lead Rutgers to greatness in their fields.

Their success, and everyone's, will depend on reducing the barriers to collaboration across disciplines at Rutgers and significantly increasing cooperation with the other research universities in our state. Last year's restructuring proposal was far too complicated and expensive to enact, at least in the form it was then presented, but the restructuring discussions alerted us to the great potential for synergy with UMDNJ and NJIT. The Stem Cell Institute is a good example. To facilitate similar developments, faculty and administrators at all three institutions are working to tear down the walls and blow up the silos that have prevented us from realizing the full potential of our state's multiple public research universities. This is an important project for the year ahead.

There is another project I want to highlight, another formidable task on the list of things we must do, another key responsibility of our faculty—and that is undergraduate education. I have already noted the importance of undergraduate research and other forms of experiential learning. They are intrinsic to the opportunities before us and to the future of Rutgers. But we must think even more fundamentally about undergraduate education.

How can we attract the very best students, from New Jersey and beyond? What should a Rutgers undergraduate learn and what should his or her degree mean? How can we realize the full potential of the undergraduate colleges in New Brunswick? For our New Brunswick-Piscataway campuses, these and other questions are now being asked by the faculty and student members of the Task Force on Undergraduate Learning and Life that Executive Vice President Phil Furmanski appointed last spring. Professor Barry Qualls chairs that Task Force. Its recommendations, when they emerge, may be far-reaching and will warrant careful deliberation by the entire university community. Our Camden and Newark campuses are equally committed to ensuring the best outcomes of undergraduate education.

The diversity of Rutgers is also essential if we are to achieve our academic ambitions and serve our state. Thanks to decades of hard work, inspired by commitment to social justice and equal opportunity, our student body looks like the population of New Jersey. That may not have been true in 1960, but it is true today. Today's Rutgers students remain committed to the goals of justice and opportunity. Last spring, members of our new NAACP student chapter organized a program to give minority high school students a taste of university life. They shared advice on everything from applying for financial aid to what to expect from their courses. In this act of service, our students made an important contribution to Rutgers' diversity, and I applaud them today.

Our faculty and administration, however, are much less diverse than our students, and significant work lies ahead to meet this need. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences in New Brunswick has made a good start, through the work of a committee on faculty diversity chaired by Professor Mary Hartman. Its recommendations call for action by departments, by the dean, and by the central administration. I commend that report to the entire university. One of its provisions is the establishment of a presence in the central administration for the support of faculty diversity, which we are implementing. In the same spirit, I want to applaud the campus climate survey that will be undertaken this fall by the Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes, under the leadership of Dean Gus Friedrich. Everyone who comes to Rutgers should find a welcoming and supportive campus environment.

Earlier I called attention to the responsibility borne by faculty and deans for the key academic decisions, but none of our goals can be accomplished without our Rutgers staff. Last year, after listening to our students, we began a significant effort to improve the delivery of student services across our campuses, and most of that work—in transportation and parking, residence halls and dining halls, financial aid and registration, and the list goes on—is done by our staff. The student services initiative is making good progress and will continue in the year ahead. This summer I hosted nine staff receptions at my home, and at each one I welcomed and thanked approximately 100 Rutgers staff members. This fall will bring new staff development programs and the inauguration of our staff recognition awards.

The work of our university depends critically upon our non-faculty colleagues. I ask the University Senate, which now includes administrators, faculty, students, and alumni—but not staff—to consider whether the time has come to have staff representatives in the Senate.

Each of the academic objectives I have set forth—identifying programmatic opportunities and visionary leadership, connecting Rutgers more deeply with the challenges of our state, promoting interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration, improving undergraduate education, and advancing the diversity of Rutgers—will require resources. And those dollars will have to come from every revenue stream upon which the university depends—state appropriations, tuition and fees, research grants, and private gifts. This year, through the support of the Governor, the Treasurer, and the Legislature and through the support of faculty, staff, students and alumni—many of them organized through our new Friends of Rutgers Network—our base funding from the state remained level, student aid improved, and there is additional support for our salaries and benefits in the state budget. This is a welcome step in the right direction, but it will take hard work to maintain and improve that support for next year and the years ahead. I will be calling on all of you again for help with our state budget.

While our educational programs are supported by state appropriations and by tuition, much of our signature mission of research is supported by the federal government. Under Dr. Furmanski's leadership, we are undertaking a major effort to reorganize and improve Rutgers' representation in Washington, D.C. and to obtain greater support for our scientific, technological, and social scientific research. That funded research is essential to the academic opportunities I have described today, and I applaud our faculty across the disciplines for their stellar science.

For so many Rutgers programs, the difference between doing OK—which is not OK at Rutgers—and achieving excellence depends on private gifts that are generously given by individual donors, foundations, and corporations. On June 30, we completed the largest fund-raising campaign in Rutgers' history, a six-year effort that raised \$615 million for student scholarships, faculty chairs, program support, and endowment. Many of you helped raise that money, for which I thank you, and your programs and your students are the beneficiaries. We won't begin a new campaign immediately, but let there be no mistake about it: Rutgers' ability to seize opportunities of the kind I have described today will depend significantly upon privately raised funds. And when we do launch the new campaign, the goal will be very ambitious, consistent with our ambitions for the university.

Increasing our resources from the state, the federal government, and donors is important, but just as important is spending wisely the dollars we have. So I am pleased to announce a number of steps to fund initiatives consistent with our vision for Rutgers.

The Academic Excellence Fund, inaugurated last year, produced and supported many outstanding academic programs and projects. Those who submitted successful proposals have my congratulations and my thanks. For 2004-05, we will renew the Fund and give priority to excellent initiatives that share broadly the goals and characteristics I have been discussing today. Dr. Furmanski will soon issue a description of the Academic Excellence Fund and a call for proposals.

To advance the goal of engaging undergraduates in research, I am pleased to announce the creation of the Jerome and Lorraine Aresty Undergraduate Research Program, endowed with an extraordinary \$4 million gift from the Arestys. Lorraine and Jerry, a Class of '51 graduate of Rutgers College, believe in enabling students to take full advantage of studying at a university whose faculty create knowledge as well as share it. Through their gift, which we will administer at Rutgers College and match with university funds, undergraduates of any academic year, major, and college will be able to seek faculty mentors, learn about research opportunities, and apply for research funding. We will rely heavily on a faculty board of advisers in organizing this program and ensuring its success. Although the Arestys were unable to be here today, I want to thank them publicly for their wonderful, farsighted gift to Rutgers.

Lastly, with regard to the allocation of resources, we will establish a fund to which faculty can apply to support their service to the state of New Jersey. A year ago I asked Professor David Guston of the Bloustein School and twelve students in his graduate seminar to study Rutgers faculty service to New Jersey, to document its nature and extent, and to make recommendations for increasing that service. Their terrifically informative and thoughtful report—based on a survey to which over 800 faculty responded—was completed last week. It is now posted on the Bloustein School web site. The report offers wonderful examples of Rutgers faculty serving New Jersey and, although it will take some time to digest all of the recommendations, I want to pursue two initiatives right away. First, as noted a moment ago, we will create a pool of money to fund and support faculty service to the state. Second, we will establish an annual award to recognize service excellence by our faculty. I will soon appoint an advisory group to monitor the allocation of the funds and the selection of the awardees.

There's at least one more thing it will take for Rutgers to achieve its goals and to make the vision a reality, and that is a far better understanding of what we do, what we believe in, and, yes, how good we are. How many times have you lamented that our university's academic reputation is not fully appreciated? That so many of the best high school students in our state choose to leave New Jersey to attend college? That Rutgers' unique strengths as the state university are little understood? These realities were recently documented through a massive survey of students, faculty, staff, alumni, business leaders, college advisors, parents, prospective students, and New Jersey citizens.

Called the Constituency Research Project, this survey has been completed, and the final report is nearly ready. The research provides a wealth of information to guide improvements in how we operate and how we communicate what Rutgers is all about. I want to thank the faculty, students, and staff on the committee that is advising this project.

The people and programs of Rutgers are excellent. The public's perception of us should match that reality. We will therefore develop and undertake a comprehensive communications campaign, beginning this year. Its components will include improvements in internal communication, advertising, and possibly the creation of a new visual identity for the Rutgers name. Our purpose will be to tell the Rutgers story better, within New Jersey and beyond. The study confirms that our faculty, students, and staff are ambassadors for Rutgers. We all play a role in telling the Rutgers story.

These are some of the things I have heard you say in our many conversations over the past two years. These are some of our shared goals for Rutgers. But a vision is always a work in progress. It is never fully complete, never fully realized. It always has some elements that are still just gleams in our eyes. Many of you, I know, are already thinking hard about how your work aligns with the class of opportunities I have described today—rooted in strong core disciplines, realized through interdisciplinary research and experiential learning, and translated into real-world results. The challenges we face cannot be minimized, but those opportunities are practically boundless.

We can realize them. We really can—and we will. Thank you.

Richard L. McCormick  
President, Rutgers University

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Old Queen's • College Avenue Campus  
83 Somerset Street • New Brunswick • New Jersey • 08901  
Telephone: 732/932-7454 • Fax: 732/932-8060  
Email: [president@rutgers.edu](mailto:president@rutgers.edu)

---

To submit a comment or report a problem with this site, please use the  
[Rutgers Web Site Feedback Form](#).

© 2006 Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. All rights reserved.

Last Updated: 07/01/2004