

[OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT HOME](#) | [LETTERS TO THE RUTGERS COMMUNITY](#)**Status Report on Proposal to Restructure Higher Education in New Jersey**

April 1, 2003

## Members of the Rutgers Community:

Members of the Rutgers community are appropriately interested in the status of the Report of the New Jersey Commission on Health Science, Education, and Training. Some have asked about Rutgers' position on the restructuring plan put forward in the Report, particularly in light of the recently proposed cuts to state higher education funding. I want to give you a summary of developments since the Report was issued, even as the deliberations about the Report and discussions about the budget continue.

Last October the Commission recommended establishing a single research university system encompassing three largely autonomous universities based in Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, and Camden/Stratford. The current campuses of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), and the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) would be included in the new system. The university has established a web site that contains details about the Report and links to other related sites.

In the weeks immediately following the release of the Report, Rutgers' faculty, staff, students, and alumni participated in many meetings and discussions across our campuses. Most of the preliminary observations voiced at those meetings cited significant potential benefits and opportunities to be gained through the restructuring proposal, but they also called attention to a number of risks and concerns. That basic pattern of Rutgers reactions — major opportunities tempered by risks — persists to the present. Having participated in many of the ongoing Rutgers discussions of the Report, I can attest to the seriousness of purpose and thoughtfulness with which members of our campus community are addressing these proposals.

The potential benefits of the restructuring proposal are considerable. They include:

- Collaborations in teaching and research across those disciplines, including the health science disciplines, that are characteristic of the best research universities in America, and the elimination of impediments to such collaboration;
- Opportunities for Rutgers' students to study and conduct research in fields to which they would not otherwise have access;
- Increases in research funding from the federal government and the private sector;
- Growth and development for our state's knowledge-based economy, due to expanded biomedical, scientific, and engineering research; and
- The focus and concentration that three regional research universities would bring to their respective geographic areas of New Jersey.

The discussions on our campuses have also revealed some risks and concerns associated with the Commission's proposal, especially in the areas of structure, governance, and funding. Among the questions being asked are: Could the goals of the Commission Report be obtained with less structural change to the existing research universities of New Jersey? How can the politicization of a new governing board be prevented? Will the costs of operating University Hospital in Newark diminish the resources available for academic programs? These and other questions have been asked in good faith, and they deserve thoughtful responses.

Many members of the Rutgers community are now engaged in several important processes and deliberations that should enable us to grasp the benefits and opportunities of the restructuring proposal while mitigating the risks and concerns. The web site I mentioned earlier includes a detailed listing of the various statewide and university-based committees focusing on the Report and its implementation. These include the Review, Planning, and Implementation Steering Committee appointed by Governor James E. McGreevey and chaired by Dr. P. Roy Vagelos, as well as the Rutgers representatives serving on these bodies.

Various university groups are also discussing this important subject. The University Senate continues to devote considerable attention to an analysis of the Commission Report and has addressed it in a recent resolution. I have also appointed a universitywide advisory group of faculty, students and administrators to counsel me on specific impacts of restructuring and to serve as a conduit for community concerns.

The Board of Governors, which makes the final decisions on important policy matters for the university, and the Board of Trustees, which plays a central legal role under the Rutgers Law of 1956 designating Rutgers as The State University, have discussed restructuring many times over the past few months and have held meetings over and above the normal schedule specifically for that purpose. In addition to appointing a study group of their members, the Boards commissioned analyses of the possible outcomes of restructuring for Rutgers by a nationally recognized consulting firm.

The Board of Governors has affirmed the university's interest in continuing the dialogue with the steering committee with the goal of maximizing the potential benefits to Rutgers while eliminating or mitigating the potential risks. It is the sense of the Board that our continuing participation in the process should be based on the following additional principles:

- That we maintain the core principles embodied in the Rutgers Law of 1956, which are intended to shield Rutgers from undue political interference, and to protect academic freedom, while ensuring state support for our mission;
- That any new structure speak to mission differentiation and to the overall needs of higher education in the state;
- That we focus not only on biomedical research and training, but also on the impact of restructuring on our full range of academic programs including our teaching, service, and land-grant missions; on student access to Rutgers; and on the many areas of study at Rutgers that are less well represented in the Commission Report; and
- That tangible implementation steps proceed only as adequate funding becomes available.

We will be guided by the principles and policies expressed by our governing boards as we participate in the ongoing discussions about the restructuring proposal.

The issues raised by the Commission Report are challenging and multifaceted and will therefore take some time to address. Many of you may be concerned that the Commission's recommendations are on an inexorable fast track. In fact, however, Dr. Vagelos, with Governor McGreevey's support, has stated that the review and planning is probably going to take the better part of a year, and that if the recommendations — or some version of them — go forward, then the implementation will take even longer. Everyone agrees that this task is too far-reaching, too complex, and too important to the future of New Jersey to rush.

Concerns have also been raised about the state's current budget difficulties and some have suggested that the planning process should stop. While funding is a serious consideration, especially given the unprecedented magnitude of the proposed cuts, our plan is to stay involved in the discussions of the restructuring proposal with the goal that the state's fiscal situation — and its funding of higher education — will improve over time. We will spend the coming months working to convince state officials of the importance of adequate and predictable funding for public higher education, with or without restructuring, and not just for the next fiscal year, but also for the years ahead.

At the same time we are addressing the funding issue, Rutgers will use the processes under way to realize the benefits and opportunities of the restructuring proposal and diminish the risks. Many members of the Rutgers community are making significant contributions toward that effort. I look forward to your continuing input and pledge to keep you informed of the developments through meetings, oral presentations, periodic written updates, and the newly established web site. You can also send [email](#) about the proposed restructuring, or any other subject.

Sincerely,

Richard L. McCormick

President  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

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