

*State of the College Report*

*New College of Florida*

**August, 2011**

**Gordon E. Michalson, Jr., President**

Our changing campus landscape sets the tone for the new school year, as New College begins the fall semester with our Academic Center in full use and the adjoining Koski Plaza nearing completion. These enhancements appear to have met with broad approval from the College community, and day-to-day campus foot traffic patterns have already changed noticeably. A serious and well thought-out plan has come to fruition. Within the context of sobering financial challenges affecting all of American higher education, these signs of institutional vitality offer a welcome framework for the tenth anniversary of New College of Florida's independence.

We of course observe this milestone against the background of the past year's successful celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the College's founding. The entire campus community owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to the many people who performed the hard work of planning and overseeing the events throughout our anniversary year – beginning with the members of the Planning Committee, co-chaired by Suzanne Janney and Jake Hartvigsen. I am grateful as well to all those who joined the "1960 Society" to help underwrite the costs of the celebration, and to New College Foundation President Andrew Walker and his colleagues for the special efforts they brought to the anniversary year. It is a particular privilege to thank the nearly 1,500 New College alums and their families who brought back to campus their personal links to our institutional history during our celebratory weekend in February. Vice President for Alumnae/i Relations Jessica Rogers worked wonders handling all the details associated with the strong turnout of alums.

Notwithstanding our multiple reasons for institutional celebration, it has to be said at the outset that four consecutive years of reductions in state funding – reductions now totaling just under \$5 million in New College’s case – are taking an increasingly severe toll on the institution. We face a serious strain on reserve funds and on our capacity to fill critical staffing needs in areas of rapidly expanding workloads, such as Admissions and Financial Aid. Toward the end of the 2011 legislative session, an unexpected diversion for other purposes of state funds dedicated to need-based financial aid for our entire University System resulted in a loss of about \$270,000 from New College’s financial aid budget. It goes without saying that this occurred at the very moment when family financial needs are only increasing, placing a premium on need-based financial aid dollars.

In addition, although we have successfully protected tenure track faculty positions through this downturn, we have now adopted a strategy of leaving unfilled certain vacated tenure track lines, hiring instead visiting faculty and adjuncts until such time that it appears prudent to commit to permanent replacements. We have enjoyed excellent results in hiring for these positions, thanks largely to a tough job market for highly qualified people. Nonetheless, at an advising-intensive institution such as New College, excessive reliance on visiting faculty and adjuncts can have a negative impact on a growing number of students, especially as they approach their senior thesis year.

Within this general context, it is most regrettable that state government leaders chose this moment to create a co-payment system for retirement plans for state employees. This decision has resulted in a 3% reduction in the salaries of our entire faculty and staff. Belt-tightening is one thing, but the experience of going backwards is another thing altogether and very problematic with respect to campus morale. Moreover, as SUS presidents and provosts discuss such things among themselves, there is the sobering acknowledgement that any efforts to re-structure campus budgets to improve faculty and staff compensation will be viewed by some as clear evidence that the universities’ budget problems are not as severe as advertised and that there still remains fat in the individual budgets. Such are the times.

Against such a background, the past year of student achievement as well as faculty and staff productivity is not simply heartening, but genuinely remarkable. Our eight Fulbright Scholars in the graduating class of 2011 tied our institutional high and represented a broad range of fellowships and recognitions garnered by New College students. It cannot be emphasized too often that student achievement here is the reflection of uncommonly strong teaching and mentoring, additional evidence for which is conveyed by the strong and warm ties many New College graduates maintain with their professors. We witnessed fresh proof of this fact at our anniversary celebration in February, when presentations by current and retired faculty proved to be a very powerful draw, with standing room only in some cases. Moreover, with respect to faculty publication and outside fellowships and grants, the College enjoyed an unusually productive year, with at least four books and a long list of journal publications, conference presentations, art exhibits and other professional accomplishments reflecting sustained scholarly engagement and broad connections with the wider scholarly world. New College is doing more with less, though it would be a serious mistake to take for granted the dedication and professionalism lying behind such effort.

As I suggested several times during the past year, the observance of the College's fiftieth anniversary is a natural moment to reflect on the next fifty. We should of course do so with deep pride in the College's past but also with a realistic appreciation for the variables affecting our institutional aspirations. The state and national economic difficulties creating New College's budgetary problems obviously constitute one of those variables. Indeed, thinking far ahead on behalf of New College is not unlike the complexities of a good chess match – you not only have to plan several moves in advance, but you also need sufficient flexibility to respond to developments introduced by moves not under your control that might alter your plan. I am tempted to say that, in such a situation, you need the benefits of a good liberal arts education.

Now in years past, we might have assumed that, once the economy turns around and the funding of Florida's State University System returns to traditional levels, we will be able to look back on this period as a challenging moment in institutional history produced by a severe but not atypical economic downturn. Such was more or less the case in the wake of Florida's financial problems in the early 1990's, from which the SUS recovered reasonably well.

However, the severity and duration of today's economic difficulties, together with the volatile global situation those difficulties reflect, defy easy categorization and may in fact suggest an utterly new situation rather than simply one in a series of periodic downturns. In order to reflect on this possibility, just try devising a smooth narrative of our economic conditions that includes such expressions as "fossil fuels," "Arab spring," "European bail-outs," "health care costs," and "deficit reduction." In short, we may not simply be living through an economic downturn of finite duration. Instead, we may be in a moment of deep structural change that – among many other things – will permanently alter the traditional means of underwriting higher education. Adding further complexity to this economic picture is the increasing demand for accountability from all directions – state Boards, accrediting agencies, elected officials, and families, among others – that include hard but reasonable questions about the cost of a college education. For all the budgetary problems facing American higher education, the rate of increase in tuition still exceeds the annual rise in the cost of living, often by a considerable amount, and this fact will only draw greater scrutiny in the years ahead.

In our case, the net effect of such considerations should include renewed attention directed to the public-private partnership underwriting New College. Past experience suggests that, to the extent possible, the state of Florida will sustain its record of support for New College as a source of state pride and as an institution that keeps many of Florida's best and brightest students in the state, while also attracting strong out-of-state students who may well pursue their livelihoods in Florida. At just over one-half of one percent of the state appropriations devoted to Florida's SUS, New College's portion of those appropriations results in an extraordinary return on investment. As we like to say, New College's impact on higher education in Florida is all out of proportion to the school's small size.

In the years ahead, there will likely be moments when specific plans for packaging and prioritizing state funds for higher education may generate significant sums for targeted projects. Even during the current tight times, we see this in the initiatives coming out of the Board of Governors such as the "New Florida" funding and funding that is earmarked for STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). We have directly benefitted from such

state initiatives and will continue to seek such funds in the future, and certainly our more general efforts to secure additional state funds for our operating budget and capital improvements have to be sustained. After all, based on a traditional endowment pay-out rate of 5%, every \$100,000 in general revenue added to the College's budget by the legislature is equivalent to \$2 million added to our Foundation's endowment.

Nonetheless, my own view is that it would be unrealistic to count on the public sector to provide New College with the substantial additional resources necessary to take us to the entirely new level that I believe our collective long-range planning will envision. So as we devise the many ways in which we can make a strong College even stronger, we need to understand that private sources of revenue will surely be the major instrument of strategic change and improvement. This general point largely accounts for the New College Foundation's recent and very welcome commitment to a capital campaign, "The New College Promise."

Now our advantages with respect to private fund raising are considerable. Our alumnae/i body continues to grow and, if I may say so, grow older as well. Over the next fifty years, the percentage of dollars in the annual fund coming from our own graduates will increase in ways it could not possibly have done during our first fifty years. More and more alums are fashioning planned gifts for the College, which is the chief means by which our most venerable peers in the private liberal arts sector have built their substantial endowments over the course of their much longer institutional histories. Moreover, the College enjoys welcome credibility with private donors who are not graduates of New College, earned over time through the quality and distinctiveness of our program, the accomplishments of our graduates, and the national recognition and high ranking the College receives in multiple high-profile settings. We are helped as well by our small scale, since major gifts within our intimate setting have a significant and obvious impact and generate particularly heartfelt gratitude from the College community. The bond between New College and major donors is particularly tight.

In short, clarity of mission and the quality of our endeavor are the keys to sustaining our tradition of strong private support. Creative exploitation of our hybrid, public/private heritage will be our collective challenge – indeed, a stimulating challenge for the entire New College

community, beginning with our Board of Trustees. Such will be the means by which we acknowledge that, in the new situation ahead, New College will neither rest on its laurels nor pursue business as usual.

One additional encouraging note is that the global framework serving as background to today's financial problems suggests the wisdom of New College's continuing emphasis on internationalizing the curriculum, diversifying the campus, and encouraging foreign study and travel. I have mentioned before that our impressive and sustained record of success in garnering Fulbright Scholarships is the natural outgrowth of the faculty's commitment to internationalization. While the continued enhancement of the curriculum has been slowed by budgetary realities, a framework is in place. Even within the limits of current budgetary realities, we have the opportunity to conceive fresh and stimulating curricular arrangements, such as the important relationship between internationalization and environmental studies. The career paths associated with that relationship would appear to be ideally suited to our student population.

The single most important way to strengthen our internationalization effort would be to secure the \$2.5 million private gift that would complete the funding (and bring the naming rights) for our planned International Studies Center. In addition to providing further impetus to enhancing the curriculum and promoting faculty professional development, the Center would be a natural setting for regular interactions with the substantial population of local retirees who have enjoyed productive careers within the State Department and diplomatic corps, the World Bank, the UN and USAID, and the military and intelligence worlds. Not only would such people prove to be invaluable sources of insight, wisdom, and networking for our students and faculty, but they would surely welcome the opportunity to get together with one another in an informal academic setting. Moreover, as we have just witnessed with the completion of the Academic Center and the Koski Plaza, significant new capital projects can create a sense of forward institutional movement even in the midst of a severe downturn in the operational budget.

That aspect of internationalizing the curriculum and the campus that relates to diversifying our student body, faculty, and staff continues to provide significant challenges. Thanks to the ongoing very hard work of our Admissions staff, led by Dean of Enrollment Services Kathy

Killion, we have had a substantial increase in students from underrepresented populations in this year's entering class – up to 26%. We have not done as well in connection with faculty and staff recruitment. Against the background of the departure a year ago of two faculty of color, we have initiated a program of recruiting post-doctoral fellows from underrepresented populations for one year appointments to the faculty, working particularly through the Consortium for Faculty Diversity at DePauw University. The ad hoc Faculty Committee on Diversity that oversaw this work last year was co-chaired by Economics Professor and Chair of the Faculty Rick Coe and myself. Truth be told, however, Professor Coe did the heavy lifting, kept us on task, and led us toward some recommendations concerning our procedures for welcoming and orienting new faculty that will be a permanent contribution to campus life. As a result of the work of this committee, we are delighted to welcome to campus our initial post-doctoral fellow, Iván Ramírez, who recently completed his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in Geography, with a specialization in Ethics and Development. The enrichment Dr. Ramírez brings to the campus is readily evident in the titles of his courses: “Climate, Ecosystems and Society: A Climate Affairs Approach;” and “Sustainability Science: Case Studies in Latin America.”

In a clear case of the stars lining up very nicely, the former administrator of the Consortium for Faculty Diversity is now New College's Associate Provost, economist Raymonda Burgman, who happens also to be a New College graduate. With her expertise now on campus, we expect to sustain our post-doctoral recruitment program, with a particular emphasis on identifying scholars in fields for which there is some likelihood of a tenure track position in the near term. Despite the budgetary realities, we need to sustain our efforts to identify and recruit faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds. As we were reminded last year, the competitive environment for this undertaking is severe, involving entry-level salaries that are very difficult for us to match.

It is probably not entirely by chance that there is a noticeable up-tick of interest within the student body in diversity issues, including the general question of campus climate or atmosphere. I'm grateful to Dean of Students Wendy Bashant and her colleagues in Student Affairs for their strong support of student efforts. Certainly current student leaders display a welcome sensitivity to issues of tolerance and mutual respect, in the midst of countless demands placed on them by their peers. In light of our campus traditions, it's clear that the more that students themselves can

take ownership of challenges related to student life, the more progress we will make in becoming an authentically pluralistic campus. In any case, our goal should be to have a campus that leaves every prospective student, faculty member, or staffer thinking that New College could be a good fit and positive setting for them. Based, in particular, on explicit feedback we receive from admitted students who choose not to attend New College, we are not there yet. There are parallel issues in connection with the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff.

Given the array of discrete activities occurring across campus related to issues of campus diversity and atmosphere, and against the background of very helpful discussions with last year's ad hoc Faculty Committee on Diversity, I have decided to fashion a small President's Advisory Committee on Diversity. In addition to providing me with advice and insight, this group will provide support and perhaps coordination to ongoing campus activities related to diversity, while also enabling us to identify unmet needs that could benefit from targeted efforts or financial commitments. In certain cases, these additional initiatives might require a working group for a specified period of time, and the Advisory Committee would be responsible for recruiting members of the College community for those duties. Campus veterans will recognize the President's Advisory Committee as a more streamlined version of a large campus Diversity Committee I chaired during our first several years of independence. I think experience has taught us that one large committee, besides being unwieldy, cannot be responsible for all initiatives coming under the "diversity" label. We are better off with targeted efforts designed to produce a specific result, exemplified by the Ad Hoc Committee created by the faculty last year, yet with support coming out of the President's Office. The involvement of the President also sends a natural signal regarding the institutional importance of creating a more genuinely diverse and pluralistic New College.

As it is, not too long from now my own continuing involvement with such issues will be from the standpoint of a full-time faculty member, as I return to the classroom following a research leave next year, my first since 1997-98. My sense is that the less I say about what an honor it has been to serve as New College's President the better off we'll all be, since words don't seem adequate to the task. In any case, thanks to an extraordinary team effort and despite occasional moments of disagreement, New College has succeeded over this course of time in normalizing

its presence as an independent and thriving entity within a political and governance setting on which the College depends for its existence. More specifically, thanks to our team effort we have managed to push over the hill those very large boulders that confronted us ten years ago: the creation and funding of a viable administrative infrastructure, including a governing Board; full physical separation from USF, including our own Campus Master Plan and the securing of the campus leasehold; the securing of independent accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; recognition of our standing as an independent institution and budgeting entity within the SUS; and enrollment growth to 800 students, including five new residence halls in which to house the additional campus population.

Each one of these tasks was fairly daunting in itself, let alone all of them taken as a group. Along the way, New College of Florida began seeing its name highlighted in reputable rankings and college guides, confirming the institutional benefits of our independence. *Achieving these things depended on the hard work and sustained commitment of all hands, and the entire campus community should take enormous pride in its capacity to rise to the occasion – New College at its very best.*

A year from now we will all benefit from the perspective of a new campus leader who will likely be selected due to the excitement he or she can generate regarding our prospects for the next fifty years. Although I naturally have no direct involvement in the Board's presidential search, it is obvious that the search will be one of the College's major undertakings during the year ahead – indeed, perhaps *the* major undertaking. Certainly my office stands ready to lend whatever support to this search it can offer, and I share with the entire campus community a serious interest in its successful result.

In the meantime, I'm delighted that we begin this year with our new Provost, Steve Miles, bringing his special blend of skills to a very challenging task. I thank Steve once again for taking on this responsibility when he has so many other professional irons in the fire. I also want to extend a particular word of thanks to John Martin, our Vice President for Finance and Administration, whose skill at guiding the College through the budgetary challenges of the day is matched only by his affable collegiality and his patience. Indeed, I want to thank all of my

faculty and administrative colleagues for their impressive sense of professionalism that keeps our students foremost in view and insures that we will come through this period of budgetary constraint with the College's sustaining features intact. I would simply add that my Administrative Assistant, Shelley Wilbur, not only keeps the President's office running smoothly, but she also brings genuine warmth to campus life through her commitment to our sense of shared community.

My thanks yet again to Board Chair Bob Johnson for his personal friendship and for his own uncommon commitment to New College, now extending over a period of four decades. I appreciate the trust that he and the entire Board have placed in me for one of those decades, as the College made the transition to full independence. Certainly the opportunity to build friendships with the outstanding people attracted to the New College Board has been a significant dividend of my time in office. I look forward to working with the Board in other ways upon my return to the faculty.

Finally, warm thanks to the New College student body for the curiosity, good will, and strong sense of fun that you bring to the campus and to the lives of those of us pursuing our careers here. Your vitality breathes life into the place, making the entire endeavor work.