

STATE OF THE COLLEGE REPORT, 2007

NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA

Gordon E. Michalson, Jr., President

At the August Board meeting this year of the Leroy Collins Institute, a public policy organization at Florida State University, the Collins Board engaged in lively discussion of the problems surrounding the funding and governance of higher education in the state of Florida. With the recent downturn in the state's revenue projections, several Board members expressed skepticism that Florida possessed either the political will or the financial resources to promote a system of higher education of genuine distinction. Suddenly, Board member Buddy Mackay, the former Lieutenant Governor, said: "We all know we can build quality if we really set our minds to it. Just look at New College."

As someone present on that occasion, I not only experienced considerable pride on behalf of all those associated with New College, but I also realized that the Lieutenant Governor's remark implied the completion of the College's transition to full independence. New College of Florida is no longer in the process of administrative and physical separation from the University of South Florida. Instead, it is the example to which informed observers point when seeking instances of the state doing something right. Consequently, the state of the College today resides in the combined effects of its completed transition to independence *and* the opportunity New College now has to focus on fulfilling its institutional mission with even greater distinction.

Today at New College we feel the dynamic interaction among capital improvements, strategic planning, and self assessment. The *capital improvements* are evident in the completion or near-completion of five new residence halls. In addition, state funding has

been secured for construction of a 30,000 gross square foot classroom and office building to be constructed in 2008, while private funds have enabled us to initiate planning for an international studies center. The combined effects of these capital improvements include better integration of student life and academic affairs and forward movement on the overall campus Master Plan, with a view to the long term design and environmental health of our beautiful campus.

The heart of our current *strategic planning* process resides in Provost Samuel Savin's work with the faculty in the development of an Academic Master Plan that will not only shape the educational program of the future but also guide the physical campus Master Plan. As a natural extension of the planning process promoted some years ago by former Provost Charlene Callahan, the current planning effort will provide guidance for the enhancement of our educational programs, including the addition of ten or more tenure track faculty positions, as we seek to achieve a 10:1 student/faculty ratio with an enrollment of 800 students. These new faculty positions will reflect the College's best collective wisdom about the shape, scope, and depth of the liberal arts and sciences curriculum in light of severe tensions between tradition and a rapidly changing global scene. Moreover, such particular issues as the facilitation of interdisciplinary programs, the growing impact of computational technology, the relation of Environmental Studies to the overall curriculum, and the best ways to enhance the creative and performing arts at New College are all on the table for our consideration. As we look ahead, the specific issues requiring our concentrated attention will also include the continued viability of the College's divisional structure.

Throughout the planning process, the challenge will be to draw on the College's traditional commitment to innovation, active learning, and personal initiative in ways that are responsive to the complexities of a new century. However difficult these issues may be when taken as a whole, the tasks ahead constitute a more creative way of devoting institutional energies than the administrative effort required by the College's transition to full autonomy.

Finally, the opportunity for sustained institutional *self assessment* resides in our candidacy for reaffirmation of the College's accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Despite its origins in 1960, New College's accreditation in 2004 as an independent entity (rather than as a unit of the University of South Florida) occurred under guidelines designed for newly established institutions. Not unreasonably, these guidelines require a follow-up assessment and reaffirmation after five years, rather than the usual ten. Thus facing our second accreditation process in five years, we anticipate a site visit by a SACS team in October of 2008, with a view to a reaffirmation of accreditation in 2009. The documentation and preparations required prior to the site visit are considerable.

Fortunately, the administrative burdens associated with reaccreditation are accompanied by some welcome opportunities – opportunities for self assessment, refined planning, and improved integration of strategic aims and resource allocation. To their immense credit, the faculty initiated a critical part of institutional self assessment last year, by beginning a review of the four “Educational Principles” informing the College's approach to undergraduate education, such as the principle that “each student is responsible in the last analysis for his or her own education.” While the reaccreditation process inevitably involves considerable attention to highly detailed administrative and financial matters, the heart of the process requires clear-headed attention to the simple question: “Is the College truly doing what it claims to do?” Colleges and universities can all too easily fall into the trap of advancement through buzzwords alone...with “excellence,” “quality,” and “growth” serving as common examples. Consequently, in an era of heightened concern for accountability, nothing could be healthier for an institution than to look beyond its own slogans in an honest appraisal of its guiding principles and highest aspirations. Indeed, nothing less would be fitting at a College that places such a premium on accountability for its students. The faculty's willingness to examine the very presuppositions of the College's educational aims is a sure mark of institutional strength.

The combined impact of campus capital improvements, strategic planning, and self assessment thus provides the context for New College's next step beyond the transitional

moment in its history. As always, our guiding question will concern the nature of the best possible liberal arts and sciences education we can provide our students, with a view to preparing students for productive careers, civic responsibility, and deep personal satisfaction. With major financial and organizational resources already devoted to the improvement of student life, the College has reaffirmed the central *educational* importance of having most of our students live on campus with primary responsibility for the conduct of student life activities. We have not invested \$27 million in new residence halls simply to put a roof over our students' heads. There may, incidentally, be more than sheer chance involved in the emerging correlation between the College's increased emphasis on the educational importance of student life and a growing student interest in community service.

The evidence that our students are flourishing in this setting is of course quite considerable. New College students' enviable record of garnering competitive fellowships continues in impressive terms, with this past year seeing seven Fulbright Scholars, two National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowships (plus three runners-up in the NSF competition), and a Gates Cambridge Scholarship among the more noteworthy honors our students received. A glance at the applications and supporting materials sent in by our major scholarship applicants naturally reveals the academic and personal strengths of these students. A closer look, however, reveals in striking terms the critical role played by *faculty mentoring and support*, as evidenced in the students' own accounts of their academic progress and in the detailed letters of recommendation painstakingly written by dedicated faculty mentors. New College's strong track record in such areas as the Fulbright competition is thus symptomatic of the superior "academic chemistry" on campus, which results when motivated, self-starting students work with accomplished and dedicated faculty in a highly collaborative manner. Student success is a mark of faculty excellence.

This past year is noteworthy for the wide range of special achievements by individual faculty members. Associate Professor of Biology Elzie McCord was awarded a \$200,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to develop a toxicology program at

New College, a virtually unique curricular undertaking at a liberal arts college. He also received a “Community Service Freedom Award” from the NAACP, which also recognized his colleague, Professor of Biology and Natural Sciences Chair Sandra Gilchrist, with an “Education Freedom Award.” These awards reflect the ongoing efforts by Professors McCord and Gilchrist to promote science education outreach programs for K-12 students, particularly those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For the second year in a row, New College received the “Community Partner of the Year Award” from the Sarasota YMCA, in recognition of our “Preparing for College” program designed for “Black and Hispanic Achievers” selected by the “Y.” Such recognition reflects a serious and long-term investment of institutional talent, energy and time into our community. The same point surely applies to the recognition given to Jono Miller, co-director of our Environmental Studies Program, who received the 2006 Bill Sadowski Award from *1000 Friends of Florida* for lifetime achievement in protecting Florida’s environment.

Along with Associate Professor of Biochemistry Katherine Walstrom and Associate Professor of Biology Amy Clore, Professor Gilchrist was also awarded a National Science Foundation grant in support of continuing research into animal and plant development and gene expression. Peg Scripps Buzzelli Professor of Psychology Gordon Bauer received grants from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration for his research on manatee hearing and touch, as well as dolphin hearing. Professor Bauer’s ability to involve his students directly in his marine mammal research extends to his successful efforts at securing research opportunities for New College students at Mote Marine.

Exemplifying the sheer range of faculty achievements over the past year, Associate Professor of Political Science Keith Fitzgerald has been elected to Florida’s House of Representatives, thereby providing his students with a real-life example of the connection between theory and practice. His colleague, Assistant Professor of Political Science Frank Alcock, has been named Director of Mote Marine Lab’s new Marine Policy Institute, a welcome development that strengthens the relationship between New College

and Mote while also drawing Professor Alcock's considerable expertise in fisheries policy into a wider arena. His report on the red tide problem, recently published through the Institute, exemplifies the way pressing public policy issues can benefit from first-class research. On a related note, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Julie Morris was reappointed to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, which makes her one of only four voting members from Florida on this influential Council.

In addition to receiving a \$75,000 National Science Foundation grant under NSF's "Communicating Research to Public Audiences" program, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies Meg Lowman was named an Aldo Leopold Leadership Fellow and was the deserving recipient of Villanova University's prestigious Mendel Medal for advancing the cause of science. Professor Lowman was also elected Vice President of the Ecological Society of America. Coming so shortly after Professor of Anthropology Maria Vesperi served as Executive Program Chair of the 2006 American Anthropological Association Meetings, Professor Lowman's election demonstrates the leadership role that faculty from strong undergraduate liberal arts colleges can and do play at the highest levels of our national scholarly associations.

Similarly, a grant awarded to Professor of Anthropology Tony Andrews by the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies is an acknowledgement of his leading role over many years in significant archeological work in Mexico, resulting in a long list of publications. His colleague, Associate Professor of Anthropology Uzi Baram, continues to involve students and the community in his varied and productive program of public archaeology, which for 2006-07 included supervising an underwater archaeological survey of the Manatee River and organizing a subsurface radar tomography around Manatee Mineral Spring. Professor Baram also conducted a workshop as part of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune's* "Newspaper in Education" three-part series on "Looking for Angola," a project focused on locating evidence of an early 19th century escaped slave community in southern Manatee County.

Long-term projects undertaken by our French faculty reached completion this past year, as Associate Professor Jocelyn Van Tuyl published her book, *André Gide and the Second World War, a Novelist's Occupation* (State University of New York Press), while Associate Professor Amy Reid published her translation of Cameroonian author Patrice Nganang's novel, *Temps de chien (Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*, University of Virginia Press). Junior faculty garnering substantial professional recognition during the past year include: Assistant Professor of History Carrie Benes, who received a highly competitive National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend for research in Italy on her book on Italian city-states; Assistant Professor of Sociology Chavella Pittman, who represented New College at a Keck Foundation-supported conference on "Leadership Across the Liberal Arts Curriculum"; Assistant Professor of Religion Susan Marks, who received a stipend for a two year affiliation with the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, under a program funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.; and Assistant Professor of Visual Arts, Barry Freedland, who was awarded the Southeastern College Art Conference Artist's Fellowship, involving both a \$3,000 cash award and a solo exhibition at the 2007 SECAC Conference.

The arts continue to be a means of strengthening the College's ties with the wider community, as exemplified by Associate Professor Stephen Miles' acclaimed *New Music New College* program, now in its ninth year, and by our successful recruitment for a third year of distinguished choral conductor Daniel Moe – the "dean of American choral directors" – to direct the New College Chorus. In work that aptly symbolizes the interdisciplinary capacities of the liberal arts curriculum, Associate Professor of Physics Mariana Sendova and her students collaborate with professionals at the neighboring Ringling Museum of Art in the use of Raman spectroscopy for projects in art restoration and dating – perhaps a unique undertaking at the undergraduate level. Collaborations of this sort enable New College to leverage its small size in ways that simultaneously enrich our students' educational experience and benefit the wider community.

This sampling of faculty activity and achievement over the past year suggests the breadth and range of creative and intellectual engagement on campus – which, of course,

translates directly into educational stimulation for our students. The able students attracted to New College quickly sense what is of importance to their faculty mentors. In turn, the faculty's seriousness of purpose insures the perpetuation of those core values of intellectual rigor and engagement that have defined New College for nearly half a century.

This aspect of the educational experience at New College takes on even greater importance when placed in broader context. During the course of a student's career at New College, strong mentoring, shared experience in tutorials and thesis research, and the use of narrative evaluations instead of competition-inducing grades encourage a collaborative model of intellectual inquiry. This result is valuable in itself, as the need for critical thinking understood as a *social* rather than simply as an *individual* undertaking assumes greater importance in the strengthening of our political process and civic life generally. But the capacity for collaboration also has a direct practical benefit, for the simple reason that it is highly prized in a competitive work environment. When the American Association of Colleges and Universities recently contracted with Peter D. Hart Research Associates to determine the "most important skills" that 305 business leaders look for in college graduates, the most frequently named (44%) was "teamwork skills." Not incidentally, the next two on the list were "critical thinking/reasoning" (33%) and "oral/written communication" (30%) – suggestive once again of the practical value of a liberal arts education.

Closely related to this cluster of educational goals is a rising emphasis on "sound judgment" as a desirable aim of higher education. Robert Sternberg, long-time Yale psychology professor who is now the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University, has become a leading national spokesman for increased emphasis on sound judgment as a measurable goal of higher education. From the SAT experience onward, argues Sternberg, the test and measurement regimen is dictated by the effort to find out who is "smart." With a view to such highly educated people as the former CEO and CFO of Enron, Jeffrey Skilling (Harvard Business School) and Andrew Fastow (Tufts University), Sternberg argues that the

problem is not that those leaders aren't smart: they are. The problem is that they lack – and their colleges and graduate schools evidently did not teach them – certain important skills, attitudes, and values involved in being good citizens and successful leaders.

In Sternberg's view, conventional testing and assessment instruments neglect just the traits at stake here – defined generally as sound judgment, and unpacked by Sternberg through reference to creativity, practical thinking, and wisdom. An interesting feature of this argument is the central role played by “collaborative” models of learning in the promotion of sound judgment. Moreover, through his reference to the Enron scandals, Sternberg's account unabashedly highlights the moral or ethical element in the goal of educating for sound judgment.

New College is an interesting setting for reflection on such themes, partly because our style of doing things already reflects a latent sympathy for Sternberg's aims. Imaginative depiction of the links among sound judgment, collaborative learning, and the moral aims of a liberal arts education may even provide the basis for an enhanced sense of common purpose among those who work at New College, beginning with the faculty. I have indicated in a previous *State of the College* report that one of the most serious challenges facing New College is the task of replicating the sense of shared vision enjoyed by an earlier generation of the faculty, often referred to as the “pre-merger” generation, originally hired when New College was still private. That shared vision saw the faculty and College through extremely difficult times, including the private New College's near financial ruin followed by an abrupt transition to becoming a public institution. Throughout, the New College ethos remained intact due to a widely shared set of educational values.

Now, at a time when younger faculty are socialized in terms defined largely by their individual disciplines, a sense of shared purpose can be difficult to describe, let alone to experience. As our Academic Master Planning process moves forward, it will be

interesting to see if the issues associated with the goal of educating for sound judgment might provide the basis for an increased sense of common purpose that is at the heart of true collegiality. In any case, as New College approaches its fiftieth anniversary – raising the provocative question of how best and most appropriately to acknowledge such a milestone moment – the opportunity to link past, present, and future through a deepened sense of shared purpose should not be lost.

In short, this is a ripe moment for a sharpening of New College's sense of mission. External circumstances underscore such an assessment, since the new school year begins on a note of state-wide budget reductions that many predict will be a fact of life for years to come. Fortified by the findings of a consultants' report provided by MGT America, Inc., as well as by the strong support of the Board of Governors, the Chancellor's office, and our own legislative delegation, New College has successfully begun to play catch-up in the challenging process of underwriting its autonomous operations. One could in fact make the case that there is a significant correlation between the enhancement of recurring funds for New College and the College's increasing national visibility through such venues as *U.S. News and World Report*, the *Princeton Review*, and Kiplinger's *Personal Finance* magazine. Collectively, this coverage brings positive attention to higher education in Florida all out of proportion to New College's size, a parallel phenomenon to our pace-setting production of Fulbright Scholars.

Yet as this *State of the College* report reaches completion, New College, along with its sister public institutions, has already suffered a 4% reduction in its 2007-08 operating budget and has been instructed to plan for as much as a 10% reduction. In such a setting, plans for enhancing the educational experience at New College will be severely compromised and significantly delayed, undercutting our strong sense of institutional momentum. Moreover, the current budgetary climate promises to exacerbate the already serious challenge of addressing faculty and staff salaries in ways that keep pace with our key benchmark groups. Separate revenue streams designated solely for ongoing capital projects can create an impression of prosperity when funds available for salary increases and curricular enrichments are in fact shrinking, a potential source of falling morale even

for the most dedicated professionals. There would perhaps be some consolation in the fact that New College is not alone in confronting the state's uncertain financial future, were it not for the accompanying fact that the financing of Florida's system of higher education is itself entangled in an ongoing debate about the basic governance of the system.

Consequently, New College begins its post-transitional period awaiting the clear resolution of complex statewide matters largely beyond its control. The College does, however, have considerable control over developing fresh sources of private support, always a major ingredient in New College's success story. Against the background of a year that saw two major gifts of \$2 million each and one gift of \$1 million – all eligible for state matching funds – conditions are excellent for “making the case” for New College to the private donor. The past year also saw a 52% increase in funds donated by our alumnae/i – always an important indicator of institutional strength. By and large, our students make the case for private giving just by being themselves, so I look forward to additional opportunities to have our students as well as faculty more visible and involved in private fund raising settings.

In light of these developments, the New College Foundation, the New College Library Association and the New College Alumnae/i Association have all undertaken fresh initiatives to increase their fund raising capacity and identify avenues of mutual cooperation. Interestingly though not surprisingly, the public/private partnership that has already seen New College through earlier difficult transitions will remain the key to our future institutional and financial health.

I take great pleasure in concluding this report on a note of warm thanks to our students, faculty, and staff for the unique educational chemistry they create, sustaining New College as an always exciting “work-in-progress” that resists the stultifying constraints of bureaucracy. I wish to extend a special word of thanks to those who report directly to the president's office – not only do I know how hard they work, but I also know that their professionalism and due diligence result in a stronger New College.

The College also remains fortunate in the membership of its outstanding Board of Trustees. As though to signal the completion of our transition to independence, former State Senator Bob Johnson steps down this fall as Board Chair, following more than six years in that position. Fortunately, Bob will continue as a regular Board member. I know I speak for the entire New College community in thanking Bob for the tremendous leadership he has provided in guiding New College through its transitional phase. I'm privileged to thank him as well for all his personal support. Thanks are surely due to Col. Mickey Presha for his willingness to move from his Vice Chair position to the Chair's role, and to Elaine Keating – who knows the liberal arts college experience at first hand – for agreeing to assume the position of Vice Chair. Indeed, my thanks go to the entire Board for continuing to provide me the privilege of serving as president of this special institution.