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Chair, BCC Committee on General Education
Report to Faculty Senate
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Item 2

This is the text of a talk presented by Professor Jean Goldstein of the BCC Student Services Department to the Council of County College Presidents in February 2003.

Thoughts on the State of Transfer in New Jersey – 2003

3 February 2003

I have to be honest with you: when Dr. Nespoli mentioned to me, in the course of a phone conversation last December, that he was taken aback upon re-reading the statement I gave to this body in December 1996, I politely nodded my head. He said he was saddened and angered because, despite the work of this group and others in higher education, there had been little change in the ease of transfer of AA and AS degrees. I was flattered that he had taken my remarks to heart, but on some level, I guess I believed that things had to have changed and moved forward since then, despite the day-to-day problems students and counselors encounter.

In truth – I just didn't remember what I had said.

I've had the chance to re-read my words, and now I fully understand what Dr. Nespoli meant.

I believe, on reflection, that as a transfer counselor, I must simply have become numb. I fear that the state of transfer of AA and AS degrees from our county colleges to four-year institutions will always be a matter of contention. I began to ask myself, "Why is this so?" And more to the point, "How did things get to be this way", and furthermore, "How did they get to be accepted as the way we do business in higher education in New Jersey?" Here's the answer I came up with:

- There is no unified system of higher education in NJ.
- There is no perception of a unified system of higher education in NJ.
- We are not unified.

- We do not have a system.
- There is no perception of interrelated parts of a whole.
- There is Rutgers. There are the senior colleges. There are the county colleges. I see sectors with common interests; I do not see, nor do I believe we work as, a functioning whole.

With all respect, you may see things differently, and I'm willing to try to understand how you see them. But I do believe that most of my colleagues in the transfer arena would not describe higher education in our state as forming a cohesive and unified whole. And I believe that may be where the problem lies.

Don't get me wrong - I'm proud to be a part of higher education in NJ. There are many excellent programs here. In fact, each county college can boast of a smooth transition to *such and such* college and *this and that* major. Individual relationships between staff in both sectors are collegial, and the faculty and staff work to ensure student success. But what has been articulated for students who attend Hudson County College, for example, and transfer to NJ City University, will not work for those same students should they transfer to William Paterson University. And students from Mercer County College will likely not find the same ease of transfer should they matriculate at NJCU. If there were a real, integrated, system, the smooth transfer would work no matter which county college, and regardless of which upper division institution.

One situation which my fellow-members of the NJTCA mentioned to Dr. Nespoli at our annual fall meeting, was the increasing numbers of majors which require specific general education courses of their students; yes, I do think there is a contradiction in terms there: specific, general education.

What this means is that the history course taken by a student at the county college, to meet a General Education requirement, may not be used at the four-year college because the General Education history course required in her major is limited to one choice, frequently offered only at that four-year college. There are some majors, for example, early childhood education, elementary education, and physical education, for which we often have to encourage students to transfer from the county colleges without degrees, as the loss of credits can be too great. Many of us are concerned that the number of majors and the number of colleges doing this will increase in the coming years.

I am realistic enough to recognize the role the economy plays in transfer policies. Just as our enrolments are swelling, so too are enrolments at the four-year colleges. Historically this has led to an rise in entry GPA requirements for transfer students, and less of a need to accommodate the community college programs. On the one hand, this is good for us - more students may remain to complete their degrees. On the other hand, if additional courses beyond the AA or AS degree are necessary to meet the general education requirements of the baccalaureate, our graduates will be justifiably angered.

I don't think it's time for new policies or new structures. We've thought it all through for the past 20 years, and written the solutions down. It's time to, somehow, make them stick.

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