



"Nine Strong" Pledge

Together, we will:

1. With renewed determination, find the state and private resources necessary to extend our commitment to serve more New Jerseyans; keep college affordable; keep more talented students in state; extend and expand academic programs, academic services and distance learning; and graduate more students in fields important to the vitality of the state.
2. Strengthen our commitment to provide residential housing to traditional-age students to help stem net out-migration, as well as broaden service to adult students.
3. Ensure that our degree programs permit timely graduation of our students, thereby enabling them to move more rapidly into the workforce.
4. Sustain and continue to enhance our collective rank, now number three nationally, in degree productivity for public and tuition dollars invested.
5. Expand and develop new partnerships with businesses for economic and workforce development.
6. Report on graduates' employment status one year following graduation, as an important measure of our institutions' alignment with workforce and economic development needs. ■

Six-Point Pledge Signed by Presidents of "The Nine Strong" Advocacy Websites Launched

Nine state college/university leaders stood shoulder-to-shoulder September 16th, making a pledge to expand their commitment to educating the next generation of New Jersey's students. Top priorities include expanding college access, making college affordable, enhancing productivity, and tying accountability to specific goals, e.g., graduation and employment.

The theme of the news event was Nine Strong for a Stronger New Jersey. The goal of the subsequent public information campaign is to elevate higher education to the top of the state's agenda, according to state college/university presidents' council chair Peter Mercer, president of Ramapo College of New Jersey.

A key message is how the state investment in these nine institutions is benefitting not only the 97,000 students they directly serve, but also local communities in the vicinity of these institutions through education and service, and the state's overall prosperity and workforce strength.

Much of the Nine Strong campaign includes reaching out to the nine institutions' friends and supporters and inviting them to communicate with state officials about the importance that should be placed on making higher education more accessible. See separate article on page 3 - New Jersey College Promise Action Network.

College officials explained to reporters from the *Star-Ledger*, *Atlantic City Press*, *Millennium Radio* and *Gannett* steps that institutions have taken to keep costs down while serving more students with fewer state dollars and no facilities investment over the past decade.

The news forum also gave top officials a chance to outline steps that the state can take ~ in some cases at no real cost ~ to help on the affordability front by changing policy and regulations. Areas of such helpful changes include: facilities design/construction, private sector partnerships, workers compensation, and unfunded mandates.

The pledge, signed by the presidents,
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ASCU Launches Effort to Serve Veterans: Extensive web-guide and support to expand services -- seeks to become national model

The Association recently outlined a multifaceted effort to better serve members of the military, especially veterans who are students. The recently launched effort includes a web-based guide for veterans dubbed Operation Promise for Servicemembers (OPS). The site is believed to be one of the most extensive provided by any group of public colleges in the nation. As part of this "operation," many of New Jersey's state colleges and universities are:

- Becoming Servicemember Opportunity Colleges (if they are not already), which means the institutions would establish credit acceptance policies for credit earned from other collegiate institutions and/or other documented learning deemed college-level, including military training or accomplishments. Kean University, Thomas Edison State College and Ramapo College are active Servicemember Opportunity Colleges.
- Adopting flexible policy that will allow student veterans who wish to study here to receive the benefits of in-state tuition, or at least reduced tuition, even though they may not have met the state's residency requirements.
- Establishing student veterans' services offices, allocating staff resources to help meet the diverse and, in some cases, extensive needs of retiring or separating members of the military.

The veterans' service program is part of the Nine Strong campaign, demonstrating the collective value and public service orientation of state colleges and universities. The Association hopes the new effort will facilitate New Jersey's becoming a national model for educating veterans. It will:

- Serve as a clearinghouse for information and policy facilitation related to student veterans programs, services and funding, beginning with a new website section called Operation Promise for Servicemembers (OPS), which was launched in November and can be accessed via www.njascu.org/Operation_Promise_Services.html.
- Report to the Governor, Legislature, the public and veterans groups on progress made at the nine institutions during 2009 and beyond.
- Work with the Legislature on pending legislative initiatives affecting veterans.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill ~ effective in August 2009 ~ is acknowledged as the largest scale effort to bolster services for military veterans since World War II. The federal program is expected to provide an estimated \$62 billion over ten years. The Association's OPS coordinator, Wendy A. Lang, says there are likely to be a number of coordination challenges (technical and policy-related). She says that cooperation in problem-solving to get adequate information to veterans is vital to the students' success.

ASCU institutions have already taken steps to assist active-duty servicemembers. Thomas Edison State College, as just one example, has provided specialized educational opportunities for members of the United States military for over 30 years. Through its online expertise, the College's flexible "Military Degree Completion Program" assists those in active service wherever they are stationed. ■

Facts about veterans

The Garden State is home to more than 500,000 veterans, although it is estimated that only 1% (5,000) take advantage of current tuition benefits. The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that an additional 5,000 returned to the state after completing their active military service in 2007. Experts predict that the expanded benefits provided under the **Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act** (or **Post 9/11 GI Bill**), coupled with a steady stream of veterans, will substantially increase the number of student veterans seeking higher education opportunities. The Post 9/11 GI Bill will go into effect in August 2009.

New Jersey College Promise Action Network is Up, Running, Successful With First Outing, 800 Register; With Second Outing, Over 800 More

In Spring 2008, ASCU began developing a new grassroots program to directly connect those who care about the future of the state colleges and universities and elected officials in Trenton able to help these institutions. The new program, launched in mid-September, is called the New Jersey College Promise Action Network. It is supported by a website ~ www.njcollegepromise.com.

Through the website, individuals can register, learn more about critical issues, and then take immediate action to send a message to state officials, including: the governor, their state Senator, and their two state Assembly members. The e-advocacy program also facilitates communication with Congress members. The initial "call to action" asked participants to tell officials that they support state colleges and universities and urge that officials take steps to help the nine institutions.

"Our colleges, Our voices, Our future," is the ongoing theme of the Action Network.

In response to an initial mailing sent to alumni, parents, friends, board members, faculty, staff and friends, by November 1 exactly 804 individuals had registered for the Action Network. Of the 804 who registered, about 24% went ahead and sent four letters requesting support (the system sends four customized letters simultaneously). "So far the response rate, based on the opinion of national advisors who know grassroots success patterns, is extremely encouraging," reports ASCU executive director Darryl G. Greer.

Second Activation ~ Major Results. In late November, a second activation of the Network took place. It included an alert informing Network members that the governor was in the process of preparing the FY 2009-2010 state budget and it urged message recipients to ask the governor and Legislature:

- not to cut funding for the state colleges/universities;
- to support student aid for needy students; and
- to help colleges and universities build needed facilities.

This second, more specific, call to action had major results. There were over 800 new Network registrants. By the beginning of December, just over 600 individual registrants had sent e-mails to the governor and legislators (2,400 messages in all).

The software program upon which the Action Network is based allows the Association to track actions taken by Network members and analyze which legislators were contacted, and how many messages they were sent, as part of a given action alert.

Still building the network. The Association continues to build and refine the New Jersey College Promise Action Network, and it is encouraging its member institutions to publish materials and spread the word. Participation is open to all, but strictly voluntary. Interested faculty and staff should sign up through their home e-mail and using their home residence address. According to grassroots consultant Ken Seda, there is much more ASCU can do in cooperation with its members and interested groups, including student groups, to build the network. "We expect interest and responses to continue to build," Seda said. ■

Not Yet Registered for NJ College Promise Action Network?

Register now!

Be ready to respond to the Call to Action
to keep college affordable

www.njcollegepromise.com

National Group Flunks New Jersey, For First Time, on College Affordability

States are making no progress and, in some cases, are regressing, when it comes to public college affordability. So says a state-by-state higher education "report card" released in early December by the San Jose and Washington, DC-based National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

In past report cards, issued biennially since 2000 by the policy group, New Jersey scored a poor but passing grade on affordability (D). This year the Garden State joined virtually all states in flunking, making it one of the states to lose ground in this area. In earlier analyses, the state did better than most, mainly because of a strong financial commitment to need-based student aid. In awarding the failing grade, Center policy analysts focused on the percentage of family income needed to pay tuition, and gave this state-specific illustration: "poor and working class families must devote 40% of their income, *even after aid*, to pay for costs at two-year colleges."

Upon issuing the report, Patrick M. Callan, president of the Center, stated his view that states are at a crucial point as they balance budgets and have two options: "passing the brunt of the financial stress onto students and families," or taking steps to "balance the financial burden among the state, institutions of higher education, students and families." Callan has been a participant on several ASCU panels in the past.

In other areas the report card surveyed, New Jersey stayed about the same: preparation of students for college received an "A-"; college participation opportunities among working adults and minorities rated a "C"; completion of degrees received a "C+" (down from a "B" in 2006); and benefits related to educational level of citizens received an "A-".

The story was carried in local newspapers including *The Record* and in the *Atlantic City Press*, with comments from ASCU. View stories online at www.njascu.org. ASCU has echoed many of the concerns voiced by the National Center, including the need for improved state investment and institutional productivity, but it often disagrees with some of the Center's problem analysis.

According to Paul Shelly, Callan was mistaken on one point he made, which "simply did not apply to New Jersey." Callan said college leaders took state budget cuts too lightly. "In fact, there have been five cuts over the past seven years and presidents and trustees have spoken out against every one of those cuts in the newspapers and in the halls of Trenton. This year, through our New Jersey College Promise Action Network, we think citizens who see they have a stake in college affordability and opportunity will lend their voices, too."

At risk if the Center's observations are not heeded by the states: fewer Americans of modest means will get a college education, and the U.S. will be overtaken by other nations in the global competition for educated workers. ■

ASCU's Key Legislative Goals ~ 2008-2009

- **Strengthen student aid to help with college affordability and improve student aid fairness through productive changes in existing aid programs.** This includes minimizing the multimillion dollar cost burden to state colleges and universities by redesigning the NJ STARS II program. Members of the legislature and higher education community have agreed upon amendments that would substantially decrease the burden, and the Governor has further recommended limiting eligibility to families earning less than \$250,000 per year.
- **Amend state law to provide institutions with more flexibility in the area of facilities design, development and construction.** Amendments providing flexibility would have dual benefits: help create more space and

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Six-Point Pledge Signed

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contained elements pertaining to expanding of academic programs and services, expanding capacity, supporting timely completion of degrees, cultivating new partnerships with the private sector to address workforce needs, further increasing productivity, and reporting on graduates' transition to employment.

To view news conference highlights, or to see more details about the Nine Strong campaign, go to www.njascu.org/NineStrongforNJ.html. ■

NJ High School Graduate Numbers Increase

The National Center for Education Statistics, this past September, released new projections for the period of 2004-2005 through 2017-2018. The numbers show that, while New Jersey may see a slight dip after the peak years of 2008 and 2009, overall there is expected to be an 8.9% increase in the annual number of public high school graduates. This puts our state's growth rate 15th highest among all states for that 13-year span. Moreover, for that period, New Jersey will be the only state in the Northeast expected to see a gain.

The trends indicated by NCES analysis are consistent with concerns voiced by ASCU nearly a decade ago that New Jersey's higher education capacity needs would increase dramatically. With no state capital dollars, the institutions responded as best they could, shouldering the cost for new and expanded facilities. New Jersey ranks 46th in the nation in public college/university undergraduate seats.

(Editor's Note: NCES states that all statistics beyond Academic 2004-2005 are projections. ■

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In Good Times and Bad, Reasons to Invest in Higher Education - - Recent Quotes

Raymond Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association (NGA) says, "A lot more governors now realize that their systems of higher education are really their major economic strategy for the future . . . that (companies) go to where you have highly skilled workers."

Source: Stateline.org. Article by Pauline Vu, February 20, 2008.

" . . . if New Jersey is going to field a home-grown workforce with the skills demanded by the future, then New Jersey families, government and business leaders must recognize the importance of our nine state colleges and universities and invest in them . . ."

Excerpt of former Governor Thomas Kean's remarks for the Nine Strong news conference, September 16, 2008.

"[State colleges and universities'] collective value is not only in preparing and graduating future professionals, managers and entrepreneurs to fill urgent needs in the New Jersey economy, but they also have a 150-year old role in preparing teachers who are also critically important in developing the future workforce. They are also economic engines in their regions . . ." *Christopher Emigholz, Director of Education and Workforce Development Policy for New Jersey Business & Industry Association, speaking at the Nine Strong news conference September 16, 2008.*

"The nation will never be able to solve the energy problems and other issues dragging at the economy without a reservoir of people educated and prepared for the task of creating a new prosperity. In the worst of times, as well as the best of times, keeping higher education affordable must be a national goal." *Star Ledger editorial, December 19, 2008.*



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COMMITTED TO COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY FOR NJ CITIZENS

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ASCU MEMBER INSTITUTIONS:

- The College of New Jersey
- Kean University
- Montclair State University
- New Jersey City University
- Ramapo College of New Jersey
- Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
- Rowan University
- Thomas Edison State College
- William Paterson University

ASCU Legislative Goals

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better facilities for students, while generating construction jobs.

- **Ensure that new legislation regarding fiscal and governance accountability mechanisms at state colleges and universities supports major steps already taken by the institutions toward operational transparency and fiscal responsibility.** The state colleges, it should be noted, already conduct internal audits, engage external auditors, and have trustee committees in place to recommend policies and consider accountability issues. The institutions, coping with a challenging and competitive environment, continue to need flexibility in carrying out cost-savings strategies. ASCU staff and presidents have talked often with the sponsors of bills about their concerns, while generally supporting steps that provide further assurances to the public of good governance and that funds are being well managed. ■