



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

2017 Higher Education Symposium

October 19, 2017

Trenton War Memorial

Trenton, New Jersey

On Thursday, October 19, 2017, the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU) hosted its annual Symposium on Higher Education at the Trenton War Memorial in Trenton, New Jersey. The purpose of this annual event is to stimulate discussion among the state leaders in government, business and higher education about significant issues challenging New Jersey's public higher education institutions and affecting not only the hundreds of thousands of enrolled students, but also every resident and business in the state. The symposium is a key component of NJASCU's role as the leading voice for public higher education in New Jersey. Working in cooperation with students, faculty and campus administrators, NJASCU plays an active role in developing and proposing state higher education policy to better serve New Jersey's citizens. See [NJASCU's brochure](#).

Under the overarching theme of the 2017 event was the value of a bachelor's degree to the individual and to society. The participating university representatives made two specific recommendations: reform the State College Contracts Law, and say 'no' to a recent suggestion to bring back the Chancellor of Higher Education as a way to restructure higher education in New Jersey. ([State College Contracts Law Fact Sheet](#))

The NJASCU Symposium began two years ago to honor former NJASCU staff member Paul Shelly, who served for over 25 years as the association's communications director. "We wanted to honor our fellow staff member, Paul Shelly," said NJASCU Executive Director Michael Klein. "Paul loved policy and was a real expert about getting the word out about the value of public education and the important role public colleges and universities play in New Jersey. It's incumbent upon us to have events like this – where college leaders can meet with business leaders and public officials to talk about the issues facing higher education in New Jersey." (See [2017 Symposium Program](#))

The keynote speaker at the 2017 event was the Honorable James Florio, former New Jersey governor, who among his many accomplishments during his tenure created the New Jersey Business-Higher Education forum to develop strategies for making the higher education system more responsive to the needs of business and improving the education of a skilled workforce. He spoke primarily about the importance of the bachelor's degree in today's society. The economic value of a bachelor's degree for the individual is well documented and "obvious, but less obvious is the value of a bachelor's degree for sustaining a civil society and our democracy. The bachelor's degree provides the tools to accommodate change, to develop analytical skills, to acquire intellectual courage, to engage with and understand others Higher education is crucial to prepare a new generation of leaders," said Governor Florio.

www.njascu.org

*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*

In a statement to *Ramapo News*, the governor added, “We need to have stronger advocacy for higher education. The state has gone from funding 70 percent of a public college’s operating budget to an average of 20 percent. It’s an investment that yields great returns.” (See [State Funding to the New Jersey State Colleges and Universities fact sheet](#).)

Following Gov. Florio’s address, Dr. Klein presented him with a framed copy of the legislation that established the Higher Education Equipment Leasing Fund, a revolving bond fund that since its creation in 1993 and subsequent renewals, has provided almost \$301.3 million through 155 grants to 46 institutions to lease scientific, technical, computer, communications, and instructional equipment. The gift to Gov. Florio also honored his leadership in establishing the Higher Education Facilities Trust Fund, which since its inception in 1993 and subsequent renewals has provided over \$741.2 million through 231 grants to 47 institutions to finance instructional, laboratory, communications, and research facilities.

Governor Florio’s keynote speech was followed by a presentation from NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development Assistant Commissioner Jeffrey Stoller, who noted how important a bachelor’s degree is to our current workforce needs in New Jersey. One startling statistic that Mr. Stoller told the audience to note was the “staggering difference” in new jobs added in the U.S. between 2011 and 2016 for individuals with bachelor’s degrees (11.5 million jobs) versus for individuals with only a high school diploma or less (80,000 jobs). (See [Assistant Commissioner Stoller’s presentation](#).)

NJ Spotlight Editor and Co-Founder John Mooney, the moderator for the two panel discussions, set the stage for discussions by saying that the skills you get out of college last forever. The topic of the first panel discussion – “**The Importance of a Bachelor’s Degree for New Jersey’s Economy**” – gave panelists the opportunity to make a variety of points.

Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, who serves as chair of the NJ Assembly Higher Education Committee, emphasized her commitment to achieving excellence and affordability in public higher education in New Jersey. What is lacking in the state, said the assemblywoman, is leadership at the top and a cohesive strategic education plan from pre-K through 16.

Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker, a science educator, noted how education profoundly changed the life of a young woman who was an intern for former Congressman Rush Holt at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, where Dr. Zwicker now works. “Every dollar we put into education comes back to the state in workforce and economic benefits,” he said.

Montclair State University President Susan Cole said that “we are leaving lots of people behind,” because New Jersey has failed to put the needed resources into higher education and has failed to distribute the resources they do have in a fair manner. “We have no public policy for higher education The appropriations process is broken, the student assistance system is broken And from this moment in time, we need to undertake genuine long-term public policy so we do not leave people behind.”

Stockton University President Harvey Kesselman said “we have a moral obligation and a fiduciary obligation to provide opportunities to the underrepresented populations of higher education.”

William Paterson University President Kathy Waldron, with an acute awareness of how a college degree benefits the state and the individual, said she tackled the issue of ensuring her students graduate from college by “picking apart the obstacles to completion,” and by doing so achieved substantial improvement in the four-year and six-year graduation rate.

Kean University Provost Jeff Toney said that data and numbers by themselves fail to speak to the heart of the benefits of a bachelor’s degree. “The benefit is freedom from the cycle of poverty. You can’t measure the joy of following your dreams, of finding that career that never feels like work because you love what you do. You can’t describe the beauty of a vista at the top of a mountain until you’ve climbed the path. A college degree can do all that, and more Now we have to deal with the policy issues” to ensure “that everyone has access to the keys to growing our economy.”

New Jersey Business and Industry Association President Michele Siekerka brought up the issue of New Jersey being the number one ‘outmigration state’ for young people going to college. “We need a strategic plan to make New Jersey attractive and affordable for those seeking a bachelor’s degree New Jersey has 40,000 unfilled middle-level jobs. We have to keep the future workforce here in New Jersey.”

Higher education related policy advice to the new governor from the NJASCU panelists included:

- Empower the Secretary of Higher Education who has cabinet level access to the governor, because leadership on higher education has to come from the governor;
- Say ‘No’ to re-establishing the position of Chancellor of Higher Education. “This would be a disaster,” said Dr. Cole. Dr. Kesselman said “the public institutions all demonstrated how – without the chancellor system and with autonomy – they have thrived. They are strong, accessible, serving a very diverse population, and an economic engine for their respective regions of the state.”
- The way the state supports students going to college may be generous, but it provides a disproportionate share of the financial assistance to those going to more expensive schools, said Dr. Waldron. The aid dollars should follow the students.

As an introduction to the second panel discussion on “**Institutional Strategies to Contain Costs and Public-Private Partnerships**,” NJASCU CEO Mike Klein gave a short presentation on the need to reform the State College Contracts Law. He also honored the private corporations that have partnered with the public institutions of higher education on several infrastructure and facilities projects. (See [Dr. Klein’s presentation](#) and fact sheet on the [State College Contracts Law](#).)

Senator Tom Kean, Jr., Senate Minority Leader, said the state should facilitate not obstruct the P3 (Public-Private Partnerships) initiatives. He is a proponent of reforms that enhance efficiency and cost-containment, as long as transparency exists.

Assemblyman Louis Greenwald, Assembly Majority Leader, challenged the universities to come together in agreeing upon reforms and strategies that benefit the students, which ultimately benefits all residents of New Jersey. In a statement to *Ramapo News*, Assemblyman Greenwald said, "I'm excited about the future, and when I look at some of the success we've had with urban development, and success stories we've had like Camden and Hoboken, our institutions of higher education have been the backbone of our re-gentrification in those communities."

The representatives from the universities voiced a unified theme. The initiatives that would enable the universities to thrive are available at no cost to the state and taxpayers, but require reform/elimination of some economically crippling regulations. If this is accomplished, everyone wins.

The College of New Jersey President Barbara Gitenstein noted that New Jersey needs to encourage "creativity and innovation at the higher education institutions. Yes, we need a plan, but we have to make sure that any plan in no way limits the creativity, autonomy and excellence of the institutions." The education can be more affordable by reforming the State College Contracts Law (removing the counter-productive constraints of the law) and by reinstating the ability of the institutions to engage in P3 initiatives. She cited the success of TCNJ's Campus Town P3 project. The other university presidents and representatives reinforced that theme.

Ramapo College President Peter Mercer talked about Ramapo's P3 \$20 million solar energy project as a very creative cost-containment strategy that not only financed needed roof replacement, but also will save on energy costs. The law allowing P3 projects expired (for political reasons), but "needs to be brought back to life My role is to be a nudge. We need state laws that allow us the flexibility and creativity we need to survive," he said.

Dr. Bernard McSherry, dean of New Jersey City University's Business School, said the business partnerships in real estate and construction have allowed the university to provide important academic and residential facilities for students while facilitating the revival of Jersey City.

Rowan University Senior Vice President for Facilities, Donald Moore said "we are in business of educating students – and that means access and affordability. The only way we can achieve that is by entering into agreements with developers to do projects that the school needs but cannot afford." Rowan strongly urges the state legislature to reform the State College Contracts Law even though Rowan, when it was designated by the state as a "public research university" a few years ago, no longer is constrained by the State College Contracts Law. (See [Definitions Fact Sheet](#).)

Dr. George Pruitt, president of Thomas Edison State University, began his statement on cost containment by debunking the mythology surrounding higher education governance structure of a chancellor, perceived by some as the good old days of higher education. “Under the system of the chancellor in New Jersey, the institutions were horribly restrained. When the schools were liberated from the chancellor structure, they thrived. It is naïve to think that the chancellor would be an advocate for higher education institutions. The chancellor only serves the governor.” He went on to criticize not only the state mandates that cost the state colleges money in their construction projects, but also in employee payroll. “We have no control over the salaries of public employees [because the governor, not each institution, negotiates with the institutions’ bargaining units]. Furthermore, there are laws passed by legislature which imposed all sorts of costs that the state expects the institutions to absorb.”

The participants all look forward to carrying on these conversations in a new administration – one in which, Dr. Pruitt said, “we can hope there will be policy-driven, rather than politics-driven, decision-making.”

Jessica Ryan, staff writer for the Ramapo News, contributed to this article. She is a first-year student at Ramapo College and a Student Government Association Senator-at-Large.