



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

QuickTakes!

Op-Ed: Deepening Our Commitment to Public Purposes of Higher Ed

NJ Spotlight
February 16, 2017



Kathleen Waldron

How can we ensure that we help young people from historically underserved communities apply, enroll, and graduate college?

University presidents have an obligation to our students to create an environment in which they can learn. We also have an obligation to our faculty and staff — as any CEO does — to steward our universities responsibly. But as higher education leaders, we share a broader obligation to the people of our state and the whole country. We are obligated to

ensure that our institutions maximize their contributions to the public good.

How can our universities carry out that obligation? First, we must ensure that our students are prepared for lives of engaged citizenship. Our democracy relies on the participation of citizens who understand public policy issues, have the skills necessary for effecting change, and care enough to stay involved. When we look at our political landscape, we cannot be satisfied with the quality of political discourse in our country or in the ability of people with differing views to work together to find solutions to our most pressing problems. We must go beyond our individual campuses as we work to prepare students for citizenship.

Second, we must ensure that the knowledge and skills embedded in our university are connected to the needs and opportunities in the communities in our state. University campuses are full of people with expertise that can be applied to building strong, healthy, and sustainable communities with equal opportunity and shared prosperity.

That's why I, along with more than 700 presidents and chancellors across the country — including 11 in New Jersey — have signed the [Campus Compact 30th Anniversary Presidents' Action Statement](#). Campus Compact and its affiliate, New Jersey Campus Compact, have brought together college and university leaders to state publicly our

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*

commitment to take collective action to deepen our positive public impact. The statement includes not only an affirmation of the principles of civic and community engagement but also a specific commitment on the part of each campus to create and publicize a plan for increasing our efforts in pursuit of the common good.

Over the coming months, we will bring together faculty, staff, students, and community members on each campus to ask and answer challenging questions about how our colleges and universities can further contribute to our communities and our democracy. How can we ensure that faculty scholarship and expertise makes an impact for our state? How can we ensure that students learn to be agents of positive change? How can we ensure that our colleges and universities create opportunity in communities that have been denied opportunity in the past? How can we ensure that we help young people from historically underserved communities apply, enroll, and graduate college?

I am proud to join with my fellow New Jersey signatories — Nancy Blattner, president, Caldwell University; Sue Henderson, president, New Jersey City University; Susan Cole, president, Montclair State University; Steve Rose, president, Passaic County Community College; Greg Dell’Omo, president, Rider University; Phoebe Haddon, chancellor, Rutgers-Camden; Nancy Cantor, chancellor, Rutgers-Newark; Richard Edwards, chancellor, Rutgers-New Brunswick; Harvey Kesselman, president, Stockton University; and Barbara Gitenstein, president, The College of New Jersey — in seeking to work with renewed dedication, focus, and vigor in pursuit of our goal of fostering civic engagement on our campuses.

Our colleges and universities are diverse — two-year and four-year, public and private, secular and faith-based. We should and will answer these key questions in different ways based on our own traditions and on the realities of the communities that we serve. Our membership in New Jersey Campus Compact, under the leadership of Saul Petersen, ensures that we each do this with the best knowledge available and in a spirit of collaboration. In signing the Campus Compact President’s Action Statement, we are making the commitment to pursue the same goal: attaining a more just, equitable, and sustainable democracy for all. The great people of the state of New Jersey deserve nothing less from their colleges and universities.

Kathleen Waldron is the president of William Paterson University and a member of the board of directors of Campus Compact New Jersey, the statewide affiliate of the national Campus Compact that promotes public and community service to develop students’ citizenship skills. William Paterson University was the first public institution of higher education in New Jersey to require undergraduates to take a course in civic engagement.

(Appeared in [NJ Spotlight, February 16, 2017](#))