

# OCC hurt by faculty cuts

## College has top-heavy management, misplaced priorities



George Perabo

Ocean County College President Jon H. Larson recently denied a contract renewal to a full-time faculty member, despite an excellent record of performance, because, according to Larson, her residence in Bergen County distances her from the culture and community of the college.

Yet on Dec. 10, Larson traveled to China to sign a memorandum of agreement to implement distance learning and to expand the OCC community to Asia — more than 10,000 miles away from the culture and community of the Toms River campus.

We think Larson's actions are inconsistent and that his priorities reflect a confused, incoherent and contradictory management style that has generated a crisis of trust at the college.

In Larson's vision for the college, ambitious extension of the academic mission to distant continents takes precedence over building a strong core of full-time educators to serve the students of Ocean County. The establishment of OCC's School of E-Learning further transfers the resources of the college from residents of Ocean County to national and international students and faculty. Passing over the in-house talent of seasoned educators, the college now employs part-time faculty who live in places as distant as Colorado and Mexico.

While Larson touts himself as a visionary champion of change, his change-for-the-sake-of-change approach has led to constant reorganizations of the academic leadership and multiple revisions to governance policies at the college. Since beginning his tenure as president in 2000, there have been four major reorganizations, involving 14 different academic deans, and frequent shifting of the lines of accountability.

Constant reorganization breeds disorganization. A vision without purpose and direction leads to chaos and a diminishing of institutional integrity.

OCC's multiple reorganizations also have led to a breakdown of college governance, and increasingly the college has failed to honor its policies through misapplication and misuse. Holding only supervised employees, such as support staff and faculty, accountable for confusing and ever-changing policies signifies a disdain for those who do the hard work of educating and supporting our students, especially when there are currently no means in place for the assessment of upper-level administrators.

One thing at OCC has remained a constant: top-heavy management. There



Critics of Jon H. Larson (above), Ocean County College president since 2000, say he has emphasized capital improvements over academic excellence, and they complain about four confusing reorganizations of college staff on his watch. STAFF FILE PHOTO: 2009

*In 2010, the college released five full-time professors, and this year is failing to renew four.*

are two executive vice presidents, four vice presidents, one associate vice president, two assistant vice presidents and three assistants to the president. There are, however, a mere five academic deans, and of these, four are new to their jobs this year, with some managing up to 300 people. When the traditional pyramid structure is inverted, effective mid-level management becomes overburdened, if not broken.

Larson also has determined that capital projects, rather than educational excellence, will be the college's priority. He has set aside more than \$18 million for new buildings, a questionable decision in a time of stabilizing enrollments.

In 2010, the college released five full-time professors, and this year is failing to renew another four. Ten years ago, there were approximately 130 full-time faculty and 4,500 students at OCC. At the end of this year, there will be only 100 faculty and approximately 10,000 students. We believe the loss in the number of full-time faculty reduces the avail-

ability of seasoned and talented professors to our students, thereby lessening the overall quality of education at OCC.

When our students recall their time at OCC, they may fondly remember their professors, but are unlikely to reminisce about the buildings and the thick layers of senior management at the college. Creating state-of-the-art facilities is a worthwhile goal, but Larson should remember that a core of dedicated teachers constitutes the foundation of the college.

Those of us who have the privilege of serving at OCC know that we have an obligation to maintain the public's faith in the integrity of our institution by exposing wrongs when we see them and by imploring those in positions of influence to address these troubling issues. Our persistent efforts to achieve these ends within the narrow channels of communication at OCC have led only to frustration; thus we are left with no option but to speak publicly about this crisis of trust.

George Perabo is an English professor at Ocean County College. This opinion piece represents the views of more than 40 other professors at the college, including Kathy Tietge, president of the faculty association.

12-8-11 APP