

The Rowan Vision

Planning Today for Tomorrow's Leaders

By Isabelle Bruder Smith '85

Isabelle Bruder Smith '85, a journalist and senior associate at the National Center for Education and Economy in Washington, D.C., has been writing about education for 10 years.

In December 1996, the Rowan College Board of Trustees approved the five-year college plan based on the Rowan Vision. This is the story of the plan's genesis.

President Herman D. James didn't design the tower that rises from the new college library, and he's not advising the construction team working on the new engineering building. Nonetheless, it's clear he's become an architect who will change the landscape of higher education in our region and nation with a blueprint for the future of Rowan.

As the lead architect of the planning document, "Beyond 2000: The Rowan Vision," James is resolute that Rowan

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Herman D. James

prepare today for tomorrow's leaders. "Historically, the leaders in society and the work world have come from colleges and universities, and that will be true even more so in the future," he explains. That is a key reason why plans are being made to establish Rowan as "a comprehensive, regional university of national prominence."

The Rowan vision seeks to bridge the best of both worlds, says Dr. Philip A. Tumminia '69, vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the Rowan College Foundation. "We are trying to create a public college that can deliver an academically rigorous program. It's ambitious," he says, "but why shouldn't

we be? We have an opportunity, because of our history, to build an outstanding university."

The components of the Rowan plan boil down to two broad areas, James says. The first—obtaining university status—is under way. As a university, Rowan will be able to better serve the region (South Jersey, the Delaware Valley and Eastern Pennsylvania) through academic programs that focus on professional preparation. At the undergraduate and graduate levels, there are exciting previews of the vision: the Communications Department has



become the School of Communication, the School of Engineering welcomed its inaugural freshman class, and an Educational Leadership doctoral program should be in place by the summer of 1997—the first such doctoral program in South Jersey and in any New Jersey state college.

University status will bring long-awaited and much-deserved prestige to the school, says senior Jason Levin, president of the Rowan Student Government Association. It also demonstrates, he adds, a collective ambition to "progress and

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develop to become a better place of higher education. From the president on down and through the student body,” he says, “there is a common belief in student-centered advancement.”

That common belief extends to all students. For example, the planners have discussed the possibility of creating a “university college” which would offer baccalaureate degrees in selected majors for part-time, non-traditional students, adult and high school graduates.

University College will extend beyond continuing education, says Donald Stewart, chair of the Board of Trustees. “It will open doors for a lot of students who, for a variety of reasons, don’t have the [academic] profile for traditional college, but who want an opportunity to come in and prove themselves,” he says. These students would be given the option of enrolling in college after success in the university college setting.

The second broad area of focus, James says, embodies “a larger societal and global obligation” and a commitment to “the total development of individuals” by everyone who is part of the Rowan community. “There are major transformations occurring in society and the world that require leaders who understand both the bigger picture and who have a sense of [local] perspective, basic values and ethics,” James explains. He hopes Rowan will be able to help the next generation recognize and take responsibility for its role in the world.

Implementing the Vision

Dr. Carol Matteson, executive vice president and provost, emphasizes that although all seven elements of the vision plan will be addressed in this first five-year cycle, two—Life in a Technological Society and Enrollment—are top implementation priorities because they hold common threads to other areas. “This is what it’s all about,” she says. “How do we all exist better in a world that is going to be more technologically dense?”

Matteson is chair of the College Planning Committee that has established a clear path for implementation, primarily through a five-year institutional plan that prioritizes initiatives and by developing a new mission statement (see box) that “captures the essence of the vision.” The implementation also

includes thorough, annual assessments linked to institutional review and continuous improvement.

To maintain the quality of education in the vision, enrollment will be cautiously increased over the next five years by 1,280 to about 10,300 undergraduate and graduate students but only if additional state funds support such growth. Without appropriations from the state, enrollment will be held to 9,760, an increase of 740. Admissions will be selective and competitive, as already seen in the School of Engineering, where only 155 of 455 applicants were accepted in 1996 (102 enrolled).

Admissions records show that academically talented students have responded well to Rowan’s selectivity. In just the last two years, Rowan had a 59 percent increase in applications. Tumminia says Rowan is currently in the top 10 percent in the country of selective colleges, based on our acceptance of less than 50 percent of freshman applicants. Admitted freshmen post strong academic credentials, with a mean SAT score of 1137 and class rank in the top quarter. “Everything we focus on goes to the need to improve our standards for students,” he says.

Matteson adds that it is fundamental “to provide everything necessary to support high quality teaching and learning.” Technology is seen as a key tool to create that high quality environment.

Technology, Matteson says, is an umbrella that covers “academic and administrative functions, with ready access to information resources” for all system users. Memorial Hall, for example, will be remodeled to accommodate a range of instructional technologies, including “smart classrooms” for use by students and faculty.

Technology-related initiatives for the next five years include:

- providing all faculty and staff with a networked computer capable of access to the World Wide Web
- requiring students to demonstrate technology competency
- providing high-speed network access in every academic and residence building on campus and in satellite campuses
- providing resources to the Center for Teaching

Excellence to make sure that faculty there are able to use technology in the curriculum

- establishing a 24-hour computer lab
- upgrading support services and completing the fiber-optic network to all academic and residence buildings, including wiring for data, voice and video access.

Into the 21st century

Rowan promises to look very different in the next decade. James says, “We want students to be as immersed in their collegiate experience as possible,” inside the classroom and out, and all efforts are aimed at connecting an extensive learning environment.

Rowan is “becoming part of the 21st century,” says Kathleen Matteo, president of the Alumni Association. “These are things we haven’t had in this part of the state. We’re proud of where the college has been and where it’s going.”

That direction is a source of pride for current students, too. The SGA’s Levin, who has been part of the vision planning process since his freshman year, says “it’s comforting for me to leave and know, for students coming in, the college is really committed to their growth.” The proposed changes, in enrollment, technology and elsewhere, do not mean that students will “lose those interpersonal, one-on-one experiences” with professors, says Levin. “There is the opportunity,” he says, “to develop intellectually and emotionally here.”

Making that opportunity a reality, Tumminia points out, requires “a partnership between the faculty and staff, the citizens of New Jersey, the state government and legislature, the students—our most important group—and alumni and other friends of the college. I think we all have an understanding of the need for society to change and improve,” he adds, “and most people are aware that education is the key.”

President James goes one step further, challenging the entire Rowan community—past, present and future—to “establish the kind of environment that leads to the total development of the individual, above and beyond issues of competencies in professions or in academics.” To forge the partnerships that will help make the vision a reality, the College is investigating the feasibility of launching a capital campaign. James adds, “We are talking about the obligation and commitment of the current generation to provide support for the needs of future generations. Our society and our world will be at a great disadvantage” if that commitment is not upheld. ■

Vision Elements

- Enrollment will follow a planned growth to about 10,000 students by 2001;
- Life in a Technological Society requires creative and innovative use of technology;
- Degree Programs will be geared toward meeting regional needs;
- New Campus Culture will be characterized by a commitment to the development of the whole student and by a high level of interaction among students, faculty, staff, and across academic fields;
- Learning Community will establish a community of scholars dedicated to the concept of an integrated learning experience and will prepare students for life in a technological society;
- Civic Responsibility will develop a commitment among students to improve their society and the world at large; and
- International and Multicultural Understanding will help students develop an understanding and appreciation of persons with different cultural backgrounds.

Rowan Mission

Rowan provides an exceptional environment for achievement and fulfillment in a dynamic society through rigorous intellectual effort and vigorous personal interaction among all members of its diverse learning community. As a regional public university committed to teaching, Rowan combines liberal education with professional preparation and offers undergraduate through doctoral programs. The Rowan ambition: knowledge through study; responsibility through service; and character through challenge.

The Rowan Vision

Rowan is a continually emerging societal resource, developing as a community of learners with a curriculum that integrates professional and liberal education. We strive to develop values, shape character and to enhance the capacity for a personally fulfilling and socially responsible life in keeping with the ideals of the American Dream. Our graduates will be prepared to assume positions of leadership within their communities and professional fields.

