Annual Report to the Faculty

2003

EXCELSION COLLEGE.

DEAR COLLEAGUES ON THE FACULTY,

It has been less than a year since I accepted the position as Provost and Chief Academic Officer here at Excelsior College. As can be expected, my focus has been on planning for the future of the College; yet in doing this, I have also arrived at a much deeper understanding of the history of the College. And, the constant thread that I can see running through it all is *change*. While this theme is a common one, for Excelsior, it is far more pronounced and profound. Indeed, the philosophical underpinnings of this institution have always been manifestly connected to the notion of change—changing the face of higher education to make it more accessible to those historically underrepresented; thereby providing the means for their good work to then effect change in the greater community. Because we helped to pioneer this new model of education (and it is still a relatively new model) we are also an institution that must respond quickly and decisively to a rapidly changing environment.

That change creates opportunity is a truism. The question, then, is how we position ourselves to be prepared to respond to it and seize opportunities. The 20th century American philosopher, Eric Hoffer, wrote, "In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists." While I would argue that, conceptually, learned and learner are not mutually exclusive, Hoffer's point is clear: learners can adapt and respond to change as it occurs and therefore seize opportunities. I would also add that the outcome of this adaptation and response is *innovation*. And, who is better positioned to take advantage of the quickly evolving academic landscape than an institution that focuses on the lifelong learner?

Last year, with heavy involvement from the faculty, the College completed a self-study for reaccreditation from the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. While this study reaffirmed our strength as an institution of higher learning—as you know, we gained full reaccreditation and high praise from the Middle States Team—it has also done much more. We see the study as part of an ongoing process of self-examination that will serve as a starting point as we begin to navigate through the inevitable changes taking place in higher education today.

During the development of the self-study, it became clear that the College needed to refocus its efforts to attain broader diversity among staff, especially on the executive level, in order to more closely resemble our student body. We have already made great strides in this direction through hiring. As a starting point, we have also opened up the strategic planning process to include the ideas of the various stakeholders around the College. Also, the recently formed President's Council on Inclusion, working closely with the Board of Trustees, has been identifying and implementing ways to incorporate attention to issues of diversity in the College's long-range strategic plan. Already, advising and admissions staff have attended seminars on test administration, test development, and test scoring procedures. Topics covered included accommodations for

individuals with disabling conditions and test preparation strategies for individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I welcome any of your thoughts and contributions as well. It is the access to this broad universe of ideas that I believe will leave us in a position to respond effectively to change.

What we do well and what we can learn from it

The past year has been one of the most successful years in our history. As our core programs continue to grow, new programs have begun to take root. At the same time, we are experiencing some turnover and reorganization of our operations staff, my own appointment included. With this change, we will still depend on the experience of our long-time leaders to ensure a seamless transition; but we must also use it as an opportunity to access the innovative ideas that will come from fresh eyes looking at old problems in new ways.

Mary Beth Hanner, formerly Dean, School of Nursing, has been appointed Vice President of Health Sciences. This new position gives her broad oversight of nursing as well as other programs in the field of Allied Health. In this way, Dr. Hanner can bring her wealth of experience to bear on health care fields outside of nursing, building on Excelsior's strength. Our School of Nursing remains strong as evidenced by the reaccreditation of our BS(n) program for the maximum eight years and initial accreditation of the MS(n) program for the maximum five years. Our associate-level nursing program has continued to show steady growth, with an 64% increase in enrollments from last year. We fully expect that Dr. Bridget Nettleton, the newly appointed dean and former associate dean, will bring her own leadership and energy and continue this trend.

In the mean time, Patricia Croop, Director of Grants and Research, has been working closely with Health Sciences and the School of Nursing to secure funding for the development of new and important nursing programs. The Rural Higher Education Network for Nurses (RHENN) proposal targets 23 rural counties in northern and western New York, some of the areas hardest hit by the current nursing shortage. The grant would support the delivery of a Web-based nursing curriculum, seeking to create virtual learning communities for students living in rural areas. We are also trying to establish an education initiative to assist hospice organizations nationwide in addressing the shortage of trained palliative care nurses. Through this grant we hope to ameliorate the need for hospice-provided training. We are currently writing two other important grants. One, for which we have received a Congressional earmark, will establish a distance learning certificate program for nurse managers; we are seeking similar funding for a graduate program designed to prepare individuals for the role of nurse educator—another area hit hard by shortages.

The School of Business and Technology has a new dean, Dr. JoAnn Rolle. In addition to focusing on strategies aimed at increasing enrollments and maintaining accreditation status, Dr. Rolle will also be responsible for the development of a master's degree program in business. Her experience in distance education and online course delivery, combined with her entrepreneurial expertise, provide unique perspective to a program that is poised for growth. Already, we

have commissioned a market research study through the University of Wisconsin, developed a matrix of potential offerings, and begun the process of re-certification. The School of Business and Technology is also undertaking its own self-study to develop a strategic plan, which will be submitted to faculty for review in the next year.

Our Criminal Justice Program is a prime example of how the College turned change into opportunity. There has been a call for some time for the professionalization of the criminal justice workforce. So we built a degree program—a logical response to the shifting priorities of the profession. But, we also launched our Criminal Justice Training Assessment Project—an innovation designed to ensure that law enforcement personnel gain the college credit they deserve for training and experience. After securing a \$1 million grant from the Department of Justice, we began to assess state and local criminal justice training facilitates. The grant calls for 30 assessments total; we already have 30 scheduled with 12 more on a wait list. We will be seeking additional funding to enable us to assess many more programs for their college-level equivalency.

Partner building not competition

Our experience with the military has taught us the value of building partnerships. Over the past year, our connection to the military has grown even stronger. We are now part of eArmyU, SOCCOAST, and the Navy Distance Learning Partnership Program, which together, have increased our access to a great number of adult learners. It also means that service members who enroll in Excelsior through these programs are adding value back to the military by becoming better educated and therefore more professional.

Recently, we have begun to build partnerships in other areas. By combining our own expertise with that of other organizations, we can all deliver better products and services more effectively and learn from one another. We are in the process of developing the Community College Articulation Project. The articulation agreement would make the transfer of credits seamless between participating community colleges and Excelsior. We gain access to a larger pool of students; community colleges can offer the promise of easy transfer into a four-year degree program; but most importantly, the students can concentrate more fully on the business of learning without the worry of whether their hard-earned credits will transfer.

We have also extended our partner-building efforts to the corporate arena as well. In May, we learned that Tyson Foods, Inc. had chosen us as their distance education partner. Tyson has an immediate need to help approximately 10% of its middle management attain baccalaureate degrees, and we will help them achieve this goal.

Partnerships can also serve to strengthen our student services. Take for example the Excelsior College Virtual Library (ECVL). Built on a partnership agreement, the ECVL has given our students access to the world-renowned resources of the Sheridan Libraries at Johns Hopkins University. In turn, it has given the Sheridan Libraries valuable experience in delivering electronic collections and services to students. Recent enhancement to the ECVL can be found in the Learning Services portion of this report.

In the end, we must remain student focused; the one partnership that matters most. One current initiative, which we call re-engineering, is putting to good use a broad range of ideas from around the College to enhance this relationship. The Re-engineering Task Force has been charged with developing a framework to support the continuous improvement of student services. Beginning the process by envisioning the ideal student experience, the task force has mapped out and is now working to see how close we can come to delivering a much higher and more personalized level of service—from the moment of inquiry to enrollment through graduation to alumni status. At the same time, we are investing a great deal of time and resources into converting our Web site to portal technology. This technology will allow us to capture more detail about individual users in order to offer them a richer and more customized user experience each time they log on to our Web site. Through these two initiatives we are continuing to learn about the most important subject of all—our students.

Through your association with Excelsior, you have shown that you welcome the challenges and the opportunities brought on by change. I am proud to be associated with such a fine faculty and thank you for your contributions and support. Kathleen Norris, an American poet and farmer, once wrote "...disconnecting from change does not recapture the past. It loses the future." In the context of these words, our mission to help educate those historically underrepresented by higher education necessitates our own commitment to embrace the changing educational landscape. We often refer to our students as lifelong learners; but we also must be learners who understand the past and are ready for the future.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Jolly, PhD

Provost and Chief Academic Officer