



**“A Great State Must Have a Great State University”
Annual Address to the University Community**

President Richard L. McCormick
Friday, September 16, 2011

For a state to be great, it must have a great state university.

Students, colleagues, and friends, this is my final annual address. This afternoon I want to speak from my heart about Rutgers' future and the most important things we can do, this year and beyond, to achieve our mighty potential as The State University of New Jersey. They are countable, concrete things: the acquisition of an academic medical center, higher student achievement, more endowed professorships, a greater return on our research, a deeper global impact, and more high-tech academic facilities. In combination with the strengths we already have, they can bring us the greatness that Rutgers has for so long come so close to achieving.

I will return to these priorities in a moment, but first I want to acknowledge with gratitude Professor Panayotatos, the University Senate, and everyone who is here today. Let me thank in particular the members of our governing boards and representatives of our alumni and parents associations. My thanks also to the women and men Paul introduced who have accepted new roles as deans, directors, and vice presidents. Welcome to our newest faculty, staff, and students, and congratulations to our newly tenured faculty; we take pride in the achievements that have earned you a permanent place on our faculty. Rutgers is also glad to welcome secretary of higher education Rochelle Hendricks, New Brunswick mayor Jim Cahill, and Piscataway mayor Brian Wahler.

Sharing Pride in Rutgers

As I begin, I am filled with pride in our Rutgers family. I have read deeply moving novels and profoundly important works of history written by our faculty. I have watched you announce life-saving discoveries such as liquid bandages for soldiers on the battlefield and projects as promising as entire bridges built from recycled materials. I have seen this community make passionate arguments on both sides of campus reorganization, fill the stadium for an unforgettable morning with the Dalai Lama, and make veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan feel at home on our campuses.

I have walked among the 75,000 visitors awed by your presentations at Rutgers Day, watched exhausted students in the final hours of the Dance Marathon, and I will never forget the day I met our first Rutgers Future Scholars, seventh graders full of excitement, all wearing red T-shirts emblazoned on the back with “Rutgers Class of 2017.” I have seen our undergraduates advocate eloquently for federal aid on Capitol Hill, reinvent student government, unite to mourn a fallen classmate, and rally around a remarkable young man facing a life-changing injury. I have watched faculty design a whole new undergraduate curriculum for the first time in a quarter century.

I have seen you reinvigorate Reunion, bake pies for Rutgers Against Hunger, and—just three weeks ago—provide shelter and compassion to hundreds of evacuees of Hurricane Irene. Even more recently, I was stunned by the 7 million visits to the *Rutgers Law Review* website, from 173 different countries, for its audio files on the flights of 9/11. You have moved me, amazed me, challenged me, and inspired me. Together, you have accomplished so much for yourselves, for Rutgers, and for the many communities we serve.

Consider this boast: I doubt if any university anywhere does better than Rutgers in producing academic scholarship that is both highly regarded and practically useful, while also providing educational opportunity to a student body that is economically and ethnically so diverse.

The Challenge to Be Great

But for all this, Rutgers is not yet where it needs to be.

Earlier this year governor Chris Christie issued the *Report of the New Jersey Task Force on Higher Education*, whose chief author is New Jersey's former governor Tom Kean. It is a masterful, insightful report, and it provides wonderful guidance for our colleges and universities and for our state. The report calls on the state to reverse decades of underfunding and neglect of higher education, and it challenges the institutions to be accountable for fulfilling their distinctive missions.

Today I want to take as my theme just one of the report's hundreds, maybe thousands, of sentences. It says: "For a state to be great, it must have a great state university." That is the opening sentence of the section on Rutgers. And the pages that follow are chock full of informed observations and thoughtful suggestions for Rutgers. If you have not already done so, please go online and read the report.

But today I am going to share my own thoughts on how Rutgers can become that great state university which Governor Kean summoned us to be. Please don't get me wrong. There's a *lot* to be proud of already. Some of that has occurred on my watch as president, so I am among the proud. And you should be, too.

For one thing, there has never been more demand for a Rutgers education. Enrollment has reached 58,000, an all-time high. Record numbers of students are arriving here as Presidential Scholars, our highest academic scholarship, and leaving here on Fulbrights and other prestigious fellowships. In between, they are receiving an education that has been rated as one of the best values in the country. In New Brunswick, undergraduates have been empowered to live anywhere on the campus and pursue the widest range of academic programs. They now have countless new opportunities—including undergraduate research and service learning in many disciplines, small-enrollment Byrne first-year seminars, and a rich core curriculum in the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences with Signature Courses on climate change, extinction, and other topics of enduring importance.

We celebrate, too, the excellence of our faculty and programs, expressed in the 49 Rutgers members of the National Academies or the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; in the dozen doctoral programs that are at the top of the National Research Council ratings; and in the external research support that has approached or surpassed \$400 million for the past several years. Rutgers research is acclaimed in key areas of human need such as nutrition, childhood development, materials and devices, alternative energy, and transportation. Rutgers faculty are deeply involved in the Large Hadron Collider, possibly the most important physics experiment in history. Our cluster hiring initiative has given us particular expertise in urban entrepreneurship, greater depth in research on minority youth, and one of the nation's most distinguished faculties in Caribbean Studies. This research is matched by the remarkable depth and breadth of our service to New Jersey and the world, captured most recently in the Food Innovation Center in Bridgeton that was profiled earlier this month in the *New York Times*.

We take pride in the Livingston Campus, which with its dramatically enlarged student center, beautiful new dining hall, and 1,500 residence hall beds under construction, has been reborn as a campus of choice for our undergraduates. How clear is the culture shift? This summer, for the first time, we had students complaining when they were *not* assigned housing at Livingston!

Along the way, we have shared news of the university's achievements with New Jersey and the world through powerful new means such as Rutgers Day, the online news hub Rutgers Today, and the "Jersey Roots, Global Reach" communications campaign. Rutgers is telling its story better than ever.

But rightly proud of these achievements as we are, they are not enough for Rutgers to be truly called a “great state university.” What do we need for that to be true? Certainly the improvement of state funding recommended in the Kean report is critical—but that’s only a part of it. I believe a great university has three core characteristics—all of which Rutgers now has to some degree but none of which we yet possess in sufficient quantity for greatness:

- First, the discovery and dissemination of knowledge that addresses the most important challenges, both moral and material, that humankind is facing;
- Second, influence and impact that reach far beyond our campuses and our shores and, with them, a corresponding reputation for making a difference in the state and the world;
- And finally, sufficient resources—above all, the people but also the dollars and the facilities—to achieve these things.

Men and women have written books on how universities can attain and deploy these lofty assets, and maybe someday I’ll write one about Rutgers. But today I want to focus on seven specific ways in which Rutgers can advance its greatness now and can lay the foundation for more to come:

- 1) Reunite the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School with Rutgers;
- 2) Improve our students’ academic achievement and their graduation rates;
- 3) Increase funding for research;
- 4) Extend our international reach in strategically selected countries;
- 5) Bolster our faculty by adding many more endowed chairs;
- 6) Expand and improve our campus facilities; and
- 7) Increase private giving to achieve our ambitions.

The Medical School

Foremost among all the ways of propelling Rutgers toward greatness is the proposed integration of the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School into Rutgers. Most of the greatest public research universities include medical centers. To gain an outstanding medical school would raise the academic profile and expand the reach of Rutgers more swiftly and permanently than any other change we could make. Most important, it would help our state. As the Kean report stated, this merger “is essential to the future educational, economic, and health care needs of New Jersey.”

Rutgers faculty already work side-by-side with our Robert Wood Johnson colleagues at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey, and in managing the highly successful Center for Advanced Biotechnology and Medicine and the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute. Together Rutgers, the medical school, and the UMDNJ School of Public Health bring significant strengths in areas that are critically important to the state and the nation: the basic sciences, pharmacy, engineering, computational sciences, health planning and policy, and clinical areas such as cancer. Putting these within one university would enable Rutgers to serve New Jersey’s core industries better than ever and to become among the best in the world in fields such as stem cell research, bioengineering, structural biology, medical nanotechnology, drug development, and much more.

The combined research strengths of our now-separate institutions will mean many million more dollars in federal research support every year—opportunities that now are lost because of our two bureaucratic structures.

Beyond these academic and economic arguments is a more basic one: Think what it will mean for New Jersey citizens to know that the finest biomedical education and research, and the treatments that follow, are happening *right here*. It’s not simply a matter of state pride; it’s about saving lives, improving health, and enhancing the quality of life for our families.

Rutgers and New Jersey cannot let this moment pass. We are optimistic that the governor's advisory committee on medical education, chaired by Dr. Sol Barer, will soon recommend bringing the medical school and the school of public health into Rutgers. We have already begun preparing for the integration of new people and programs into Rutgers and for taking full advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Improving Student Success

The medical school is our top priority this year because of its timeliness and its potential power to elevate our university and benefit our state, but our enduring priority remains our students. Greatness demands ensuring that Rutgers attracts high-achieving students from New Jersey and beyond, and that every student who enrolls here receives—and completes—an outstanding, affordable education.

Rutgers is doing a better job than ever of retaining our students and seeing them through to graduation. But we are only average among AAU public universities in freshmen retention, and we are a step below average in our graduation rates. We also fall far short of our AAU peers in attracting students from other states and countries, students who add so much diversity to everyone's learning experience and who expand Rutgers' reach and potential.

Working with faculty and deans, vice president for enrollment management Courtney McAnuff has developed recommendations for improving retention and graduation rates and for recruiting more out-of-state and international students to Rutgers. Improving student retention will require, among other steps, deeper attention to the first-year academic experience, including an early-warning system in the first few weeks of school, which research has shown to be very effective in ensuring student success.

Improved retention is one of the reasons why total enrollment has grown again this year. While Newark and Camden have more room to grow and intend to do so, New Brunswick is now at its full capacity, some would say over capacity. We want to make sure there are enough classrooms, buses, and student services to provide a first-rate experience. So next fall Rutgers will reduce the size of the entering first-year class in New Brunswick by about 4 percent, and we will likely close the admission process on this campus earlier than in the past. This will not shrink total enrollment, especially as retention continues to improve, but it will contribute to preventing the further overcrowding that could compromise a Rutgers education.

As we pursue excellence, Rutgers will safeguard the qualities of access and diversity that distinguish us. The vast majority of our students are here on some form of financial assistance; in fact, 55 percent qualify for Pell and other federal grants, a measure in which we lead all other AAU public universities by a wide margin. This aid has helped Rutgers to maintain the economic diversity that, along with our racial and ethnic diversity, is a point of pride for Rutgers and for the state.

We are the alma mater of opportunity: nearly a quarter of our students are the first in their family to attend college—and that will be all the more true as the students in our Rutgers Future Scholars program enter college.

We need to honor this legacy of access and opportunity. As I have seen in emails from parents and students, even in this year when tuition has risen only slightly, many Rutgers families are struggling to pay tuition and having to borrow more than ever. Every dollar in student grants is important, and so we have increased the aid that Rutgers itself provides by \$2.5 million this year, and we plan to increase it by another million dollars next year.

Expanding Research and Reach

To become great, Rutgers must also expand the excellence and the reach of the new knowledge our faculty create. The most commonly accepted measure of research distinction is the amount of funding that is awarded to a university through competitive programs.

Funded research leads to innovations that propel our society forward, and it generates economic development—something New Jersey and our nation urgently need. Yet New Jersey is underperforming in this area: we trail not only the Californias and Michigans in attracting federal research funding but also less populated states like Colorado, Wisconsin, and Tennessee. Bringing the medical school into Rutgers will help, but as the state's flagship university we must do even more to increase the share of these dollars coming to Rutgers and New Jersey.

This year we will make critical investments in Rutgers research, including more grant-writing support, and we will offer new incentive grants to faculty for up to \$25,000 for individuals or \$50,000 for joint projects. Under vice president Michael Pazzani's leadership, we are also aligning Rutgers more closely with our state's business community so they will increasingly turn to us for their R&D projects and more easily find the people and the expertise they need.

Creating new knowledge is important for its own sake; indeed, that is one of humankind's most distinctive and enduring achievements. But putting research to work in the world and, yes, commercializing it, is also a critical measure of an institution's importance and greatness. So this year we are providing the funds to dramatically increase the number of patents we file and, equally important, the technologies we market and license.

A great state university has *global* reach and influence. Its research and academic programs have international impact, its faculty members collaborate with colleagues around the world, it attracts students from countries near and far, and its students have wide-ranging opportunities to learn other cultures and languages. Rutgers does much of this very well. We conduct research on every continent, even Antarctica. Our students now have more study abroad choices than ever, including several new international service learning programs.

It is not realistic for Rutgers to expect to have influence and impact everywhere—no university can do that—but we should concentrate on areas that are globally important and where Rutgers already has programs on which to build. Working with faculty, we have identified five countries of particular focus. One of these is Liberia. Rutgers is leading an effort there to build inclusive, gender-sensitive centers of excellence in agriculture and engineering at the University of Liberia and at Cuttington University. The University of Liberia is headed by our Rutgers colleague, Dr. Emmet Dennis, who is here today. President Dennis, thank you for joining us. The other countries of focus for Rutgers are India, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world; Brazil, where we are involved with an initiative called Science without Borders; Indonesia, where a new U.S.-Indonesia Higher Education Committee has been formed; and, of course, China.

A year ago I first discussed with you our opportunities in China. Our still-evolving agenda includes creating partnerships with leading universities, expanding our China-related studies through new faculty appointments, and making Rutgers the number one choice on the East Coast for Chinese students. While many universities are looking to China, we are building a strategy that plays upon Rutgers' distinctive strengths and expertise. I am now preparing for a visit to China later this semester, and we are exploring the possibility of hosting a campus of a Chinese university here at Rutgers. Given China's growing economic might and influence, Rutgers simply must have a strong and well-developed relationship there.

Enhancing Faculty and Facilities

All of these are steps toward greatness at Rutgers, and all of them depend upon resources: people, facilities, and dollars.

It starts with a superb faculty. The 149 scholars who have joined Rutgers this year have remarkable credentials and will add to the already high quality of our faculty, and we warmly welcome them. Some of us remember what the effort led by president Ed Bloustein and vice president Alec Pond in the 1980s did for the reputation and quality of the university. To build on our success in recruiting and retaining the best faculty, having more endowed chairs will be essential. The very best universities have far more endowed chairs than Rutgers has—and that is why our fundraising campaign has made professorships such a priority.

It was, therefore, with pride and gratitude that I announced this week that Rutgers has received a \$27 million gift, the largest in our history. Together with matching funds, this gift will establish 18 new endowed chairs in a range of disciplines from business education to the sciences. While our donor wishes not to be named, I want to publicly thank this individual for an extraordinary expression of the highest values of philanthropy. Combined with an earlier gift, most of which will help fund construction of the business school at Livingston, this donor has now given Rutgers \$40 million.

Great universities have distinctive campuses that meet the academic and research needs of the community. Thanks to prudent investments, Rutgers has completed essential capital projects on all our campuses—the law school in Camden, Newark’s business school, the science buildings in Piscataway, and the health education facilities in New Brunswick, to name a few. True to our commitment to sustainability, our solar installations are reducing both costs and carbon emissions, and we are building more. And as we prepare to break ground for the business school, the Livingston Campus will soon fulfill its destiny as a hub of professional and business education. But we must do more across all our campuses to equip our faculty and students for the bold academic ambitions we have set.

Rutgers is not alone in this regard. As the Kean task force observed, every public college and university in New Jersey is in desperate need of state support for its facilities. In the past, the state’s residents have voted overwhelmingly to fund building projects on university campuses through bond issues. But there has not been a higher education facilities bond issue in New Jersey since 1988. In that time, the college student population in our state has increased by 46 percent—another 140,000 men and women—and the need for high-tech academic buildings has increased exponentially. Just as significant, every campus is trying to patch leaky ceilings, crumbling buildings, and cracked sidewalks. We need help.

My colleagues in the New Jersey Presidents’ Council and I have been meeting with leaders in Trenton in the hope of seeing a higher education facilities bond issue reach the ballot in November 2012. No question, this is a sensitive and difficult issue because legislators and voters are understandably reluctant to increase the state’s debt, but we have a compelling case and I am optimistic.

Increasing Private Giving

Finally, besides people and facilities, we need dollars to pursue greatness, and as I have said before, our destiny is in our own hands. It won’t be easy; it never has been. Just like our students do, Rutgers will have to achieve greatness not on entitlement but on merit. Our accomplishments have always been hard-earned, and so will the dollars to become truly exceptional.

Thanks to innovative faculty and deans, revenue-generating academic programs such as continuing education, off-campus degree completion, online courses, and specialized master’s programs are growing, and that’s critical. So, too, is private giving.

Our alumni and friends have never been more generous: in spite of a weak economy, private giving to Rutgers is at an all-time high. We are receiving historically large gifts from individuals and generous grants from organizations like the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has given \$10 million over the past three years for research and graduate education in the humanities.

A year ago, we launched the public phase of our capital campaign, *Our Rutgers, Our Future*. Our goal is to raise \$1 billion in private gifts to build a stronger institution in service to New Jersey and the world. Today, I am pleased to report that we have passed the halfway mark and have now raised \$575 million. In the teeth of a recession that practically coincided with the start of our campaign, this is a remarkable achievement—and last year we set a new annual record by raising \$137 million, including the historic gift I mentioned earlier. If we can equal that mark again this year, we will top \$700 million by the time my successor takes office.

Achieving Rutgers' Greatness

Surely there are impediments to reaching all of these goals, not least of which is the economic slump that has dropped more Americans below the poverty line than at any time in the past 50 years. But if you believe in the potential of this institution as I do, we have to summon the creativity and the courage to accomplish these elements of our greatness: more students from here and abroad seeking and completing a Rutgers degree; more endowed chairs and state-of-the-art facilities inspiring renowned scholars to produce profoundly beneficial research; and the synergies and discoveries that come when a major research university includes an academic medical center. And we must do these things while providing access, safeguarding diversity in all its forms, and remaining distinctively Rutgers: the alma mater of opportunity.

In my inaugural address eight years ago, I spoke about what it would take for Rutgers to become a great state university in the tradition of Michigan and North Carolina. The state university tradition came late to the Northeast, home of so many venerable private institutions, and New Jersey has been slow to embrace it. I said then that in the troubled times of the early 21st century, New Jersey would need a great state university and that we at Rutgers will in turn expect the state to help and support us. "Rutgers and New Jersey," I said, "are not going anywhere, except with each other. Neither of us can let the other down."

I would like to say today that in the intervening years, my words had come true, but I cannot, at least not yet. It *has* been a troubled time for our state and the world. New Jersey's embrace of a great state university has indeed been slow. But in the visionary Kean report, in the signs of support we have received for the medical school and the facilities bond issue, and in the governor's declaration of higher education as a core priority, there is reason for confidence and hope. Above all, there is reason for confidence and hope because of *you*.

Fellow members of the Rutgers family, we are just five years away from a mighty milestone: Rutgers' 250th Anniversary. That year will present a special and memorable opportunity for Rutgers to rededicate itself to our values and to the state we are so proud to call home. As that anniversary looms, now is the time for us to ask, what kind of a university do we want to be in 2016? Will we be the great state university that we have been challenged to become?

I believe we will, but only if we recognize that the essential elements of our greatness are right here—not in a newspaper headline, not in a decision made in Trenton, not in any magazine's ranking, but right here, with you. It will depend on faculty and the world-changing discoveries they make; it will depend on students and their achievements at and beyond Rutgers; it will depend on staff and the expertise they bring to every area of the university; it will depend on alumni and the moral and financial support they give us.

Together, we can create those characteristics of a great university—discoveries and knowledge that advance humankind; global influence and impact; and the resources to achieve them. If we do these things, we won't have to worry about the support of New Jersey, because it will be there.

What happens to Rutgers matters deeply to me. Much of my life has been invested in this institution—as a child of Rutgers employees, as a faculty member, and as president. I learned to swim in the pool next door, and I learned first at my parents' dinner table about the transformative power of higher education. I relearned that on the Rutgers faculty and learned it again, more deeply than ever, in these past nine years as president. So I firmly believe we can move Rutgers to the top tier of universities and, in so doing, align ourselves even more closely to the needs and aspirations of our state.

We can be a university of choice for students from Chatham to Shanghai, a beacon of hope for bright teenagers in tough neighborhoods, the path to new opportunities for an enlisted soldier, a working mother, a retiree. We can be a university that creates a buzz every time we launch a faculty search or a new program. We can be that place where students and alumni brag about their favorite professor and our citizens brag about their state university. Along the way, we can achieve all the standards of excellence, and do so in service of a bigger dream for Rutgers: to be an indisputably, undeniably, overwhelmingly, great state university.

We have so much to celebrate and even more to accomplish. Let us answer the call to greatness that comes from within each of us. Together we have the power to reach higher than we have ever gone before and, with pride, truly to be Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.