



The Transformation of Rutgers

With the New Brunswick Campus's rapid growth following World War II and the emergence of separate colleges on different campuses, Rutgers became entangled in academic and administrative red tape—and confusion. However, the ambitious reorganization of the liberal arts curriculum in 2007 and the establishment of the School of Arts and Sciences have set Rutgers on a course to fulfill its promise as a premier public research university whose assets are now available to all students.

By Bill Glovin

For years, Barry Qualls and Michael Beals would meet prospective high school students and their parents at recruitment events and brace themselves for the inevitable: an avalanche of questions about the separate college system on Rutgers' New Brunswick Campus. The system, unique to higher education in the United States, had turned admissions and graduation requirements, as well as student centers and student services, into, what a task force report called, an "incomprehensible, arbitrary, and unfair" process.

"It seemed like the more we talked, the more we confused them," says Beals, vice dean for undergraduate education for the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS). "We wondered if things would ever change."

In March 2006, "things" finally did when the Rutgers Board of Governors voted to adopt a plan to reinvent undergraduate education. Implementation of the plan has already begun to move Rutgers–New Brunswick forward in ways that were once inconceivable. In late June 2008, a Middle States Commission on Higher Education team, reaffirming Rutgers' accreditation, praised the university for its efforts to improve undergraduate programs on the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick campuses. "This was a major step toward realizing [former Governor] Tom Kean and [former Rutgers President] Ed Bloustein's vision in the 1980s, which was to build Rutgers

into one of the nation's top public research universities," says Qualls, vice president for undergraduate education. "When our students step up to the podium to receive their undergraduate degrees, they'll know that they had all the advantages a great research university can offer."

The most significant part of the plan merged the liberal arts colleges—Douglass, Livingston, Rutgers, and University—into a single School of Arts and Sciences. Cook College, the state's land-grant college since 1864, was renamed the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences to better define and convey its mission. Douglass retained its women-centered academic and cocurricular programs and became Douglass Residential College, the only residential college established under the new system.

The initiative also called for a new Office of Undergraduate Education to address the academic needs of students, engage faculty, and create exciting opportunities for intellectual growth across the New Brunswick Campus. A new core curriculum was adopted that clearly defines the common experience and knowledge that make up the root of a Rutgers education. The curriculum, which continues to evolve, offers a distinctive vision of how undergraduate education is connected to the work of a major research university.

In the old system, autonomously operated colleges led to confusion and produced an unwieldy bureaucracy. In the new system, SAS faculty members set

common criteria for admissions, general education, and graduation policies. Student services such as advising and registration have been streamlined and centralized in offices on each of the campuses in New Brunswick. And campus learning communities are now designed to maximize the strength of individual departments and encourage collaboration. "Social action and entrepreneurship are at the heart of what we are attempting to do with many of our programs," says Matthew Matsuda, dean of the College Avenue Campus. "We want to integrate student life issues and academics in a way that will encourage students to go out and make this a better world."

The system of separate colleges in New Brunswick dates back to 1918, when the New Jersey College for Women (now Douglass Residential College) was established. Following an extensive internal reorganization, the trustees authorized the adoption of the title Rutgers University in 1924 and, a year later, established separate colleges of arts and sciences, engineering, agriculture, and education—referred to collectively as the "Colleges for Men." In 1957, at the urging of Provost Mason Gross, the four colleges were reorganized back into Rutgers College. By then, Douglass College had become one of the largest women's colleges in the nation. It received its own state appropriation and had its own campus, student services, and business offices.

Following World War II, Rutgers became the State University of New

Jersey, and the student population exploded because of the educational opportunities afforded by the G.I. Bill. By 1951, the University of Newark (now Rutgers–Newark) and the College of South Jersey (now Rutgers–Camden) had merged with Rutgers. The university further expanded in the 1960s when Camp Kilmer, a former U.S. military base, was bought from the Department of Defense. The 540-acre Kilmer Campus was going to house three liberal arts colleges; however, by the time Livingston College opened on the Kilmer site in 1969, student activism had swept the campuses of



H. Cook, the natural resources pioneer and a former professor.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, visionaries such as university presidents Mason Gross and Edward Bloustein and Vice President Alec Pond, as well as Provost Norman Samuels at Rutgers–Newark, encouraged a creativity that forged new academic departments and disciplines, an alchemy of inspiration that coincided with a growing New Jersey economy and the commitment of the state legislature and a financially supportive public.

The economic boom of the 1980s

institutions in North America, invited Rutgers to join its organization—a watershed moment for the university.

Several attempts were made to reorganize the separate college system in New Brunswick. A significant change occurred in 1981 when the faculties from the four colleges merged into a single Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). The new system, which allowed students to take courses at any New Brunswick college, was a major step forward.

Throughout the 1990s, Rutgers continued to flourish in its academic and research pursuits. The university recruited world-class scholars and scientists and built national cell repositories to promote research in proteins and genetics—both cutting-edge areas in medical research. Centers of distinction were established in neuroscience, drug delivery, and cancer. By the new millennium, the largest building project in Rutgers history opened in Newark: the Center for Law and Justice. In Camden, more than a dozen undergraduate and master's level programs were added to the curriculum. Across all the campuses, a \$100 million initiative of President Francis L. Lawrence, RUNet 2000, unified the technological infrastructure, enabling Rutgers to leverage its resources in ways that had once been impossible.

As a history professor, department chair, and dean of FAS–New Brunswick before leaving Rutgers in 1992, Richard L. McCormick understood the separate college system. When he returned to Rutgers as president in 2002, one of his first initiatives was to tackle the “RU Screw,” the derisive moniker that explained the problems ensnaring at least three generations of New Brunswick students as they attempted to navigate the murky multicollge system. A series of forums with students, faculty, and staff brought a deeper understanding of the frustration faced in almost every aspect of a student's Rutgers experience. McCormick, initially believing that the problems mostly involved service issues, didn't expect to hear so many concerns about academics, such as a lack of faculty advising and the student body's sense of



The reorganization of the curriculum and the establishment of the School of Arts and Sciences led to the introduction of the annual convocation, which took place at Rutgers Stadium last fall and welcomed all first-year and transferring students to the New Brunswick Campus.

Rutgers and, as a result, the mission came to emphasize diversity and, unlike Rutgers College, coeducation (Rutgers College graduated its first coed class in 1976). After much debate, it was decided that like the other New Brunswick colleges—Rutgers, Douglass, and University—Livingston would have its own budget, faculty, educational policies, and graduation and admissions requirements. In 1971, the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences became the campus's fourth residential college, and it was named after George

greatly benefited Rutgers in pursuing its mandate as a research university. New Jersey voters approved the \$90 million Jobs, Science, and Technology Bond issue in 1984 and the \$350 million Jobs, Education, and Competitiveness Bond issue in 1988. By 1989, Rutgers was an “institutional goliath,” serving more than 47,000 students. Its growing army of graduates was making significant contributions to every field and having an impact worldwide. That same year, the Association of American Universities, which comprises the most respected

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK ROMANENKO

Changes on the New Brunswick Campus

Yesterday

Douglass College
Livingston College
Rutgers College
University College

Today

A unified School of Arts and Sciences

Cook College

→ School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Separate college admissions standards

→ Uniform admissions standards

Separate college graduation requirements

→ A single set of graduation requirements

Undergraduate honors programs available through each of the four colleges

→ A single undergraduate honors program available through the School of Arts and Sciences

Individual college orientations

→ A single convocation for all new students at the beginning of the fall semester

disconnection with senior faculty.

In 2004, McCormick and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Philip Furmanski appointed a task force to examine every aspect of undergraduate education on the New Brunswick Campus, pinpoint problems and inconsistencies, and provide recommendations to improve the system. Qualls, a beloved English professor who had served as humanities dean of FAS–New Brunswick and chaired committees that had examined undergraduate education under previous administrations, headed the effort.

Following nearly 40 hearings, forums, and meetings organized by university groups, the task force produced a 178-page report, which led to McCormick's sweeping restructuring proposal to the Board of Governors. The plan, called by McCormick "one of the most comprehensive ever attempted by a university," was adopted. The president then appointed a Steering Committee on Implementation, comprising faculty, staff, and students, which began work in summer 2006.

By summer 2007, offices were consolidated, services were transferred to a central office, and new advising centers were opened on all of the campuses. Educational Opportunity Fund programs from the colleges were reorganized, and a fellowship office for advising students on applying for distinguished national fellowships was opened. Beals credits the fellowship office with steering four Rutgers students into applying

for and winning Gates Cambridge Scholarships, among the most prestigious awards in the nation. "We never had an office that singled out outstanding undergraduates and encouraged them to apply for these types of awards, and we matched Harvard in the number of students winning Gates scholarships," he says. "What a difference this new office will make in the lives of these students—and others."

One of the first programs that reorganization created was an annual convocation for first-year and transfer students enrolling at the New Brunswick Campus. More than 7,600 students attended the inaugural event, which was held at Rutgers Stadium in September 2007. They heard from administrators, faculty members, and student representatives and got a crash course in Rutgers' history. A few days later, many of the students were enrolled in new 1-credit courses—Byrne Family First-Year Seminars—created to expose them to myriad academic disciplines while introducing them to senior faculty as well as academic and research opportunities. In their final year at Rutgers, the students will be encouraged to tackle a capstone experience—such as a senior thesis, a research project, or a public-service learning experience.

The new advising centers include an office on Busch Campus, a respite for students who had to travel to College Avenue for this critical element of their undergraduate education. "We've also

located registrar offices near the advising centers and implemented software called Degree Navigator, which allows students—many who change their majors and minors several times during their undergraduate experience—to more easily understand course and degree requirements," says Julie Traxler, assistant dean of first-year students and director of the Busch office. "Now we have time for much richer conversations with students, to talk about how an elective might have an impact on their choice of major."

Muffin Lord, a dean and administrative director of the SAS honors program, says a level playing field is a big benefit of reorganization. "In the old world, an incredible disparity existed in awarding scholarships, merit aid, emergency assistance—and even taking honors courses," she points out. "The new campuswide honors program offers the same courses to everyone. The idea that students from one college may have been favored over students from another college has been eliminated."

When Dean Matsuda learned that filmmaker Ross Kauffman, winner of the 2005 Academy Award for Best Documentary for *Born into Brothels*, had accepted a speaking invitation from Rutgers' Writers House, he and his staff saw a chance to create a social action fair around his appearance. "Being one school allowed us to pool our resources and energies and create something special," says Matsuda.

"We invited groups like Amnesty International, UNICEF, and the Institute for Women's Global Leadership to give students the opportunity to learn more about poverty and perhaps get involved in poor regions of the world. This was a prime example of the new Rutgers at work. Before, the word 'university' was mostly a symbolic ideal. Now university means something."

