

## **Letter from Dan Cook to the local press:**

November 18, 2011

### **Rumored South Jersey University Merger Could Drive Away Scholars and Dollars**

Rumors are roiling about a proposed merger of South Jersey educational and medical institutions, with decisions seemingly being made from on high at a breakneck pace. There is no doubt that South Jersey remains in need of quality higher education facilities and opportunities. The rumored consolidation of Rowan University, Cooper University Hospital, The College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Rutgers-Camden campus into single “University of South Jersey,” however, will not address the actual educational needs and concerns of the people of South Jersey.

Scotch-taping these different and disparate institutions together—as has been reported in by James Osborne in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Oct.18, 2011)—will not magically produce the kind of research juggernaut imagined. In fact, it is quite likely that unilateral and unreflective executive action along these lines will result in the opposite: a weak, third- or fourth-tier institution. Such a move would squander the already significant value and strengths painstakingly developed and assembled in Camden over the last decade. The way forward is not to diminish value but to build upon it. Such an effort begins by realizing that a research university already exists in South Jersey.

Rutgers-Camden has experienced an unparalleled quantitative and qualitative growth trajectory over the last five-to-seven years. The campus now supports the largest undergraduate and graduate student enrollments in its history. Three new and unique doctoral programs have already attracted significant national and international scholars to South Jersey and have helped to draw much national and international attention and praise to the campus with associated conferences and research initiatives. Rutgers-Camden also is home to one of the world’s premiere opera singers and, recently, to a MacArthur Fellowship (aka “genius grant”) recipient. The campus also boasts nationally ranked business and law schools. A significant number of faculty have Ph.D. degrees from Ivy League institutions, from major state and private universities like Stanford, Berkeley and the University of Chicago, and from highly regarded international universities and programs.

These achievements have been possible precisely because the campus is part of Rutgers University, a well-known world-class institution. To sever the affiliation with Rutgers in order to form a new, no-name entity will decimate the significant equity of scholarship and human capital already accumulated and invested. Scholars and dollars will not flow to the South Jersey in the amounts needed because the University of South Jersey will not be recognized as a peer institution. Indeed, it is possible that scholars and dollars will flow *out* of the region should this version of consolidation be imposed.

A hasty move like the one rumored, without the input and consultation of those involved, would be folly, resulting in a poorer educational environment than what exists now. Importantly, it is unclear how a new super-university will function without a world class library system. As it stands, the Rutgers system works quite well for the Camden campus, giving students and faculty access to materials on par with any major research university. If Rutgers no longer has a presence or stake in South Jersey, the library also will vanish. No higher educational entity or system can possibly aspire to be a significant, competitive research institution without well-funded and top-of-the-line research facilities, starting with the library. Additionally, for a single new university to be formed out of the existing ones, difficult questions and logistics would need to be addressed, including the duplication of academic departments and administrative staff, conflicts surrounding differing curricular requirements, issues of accreditation, and salary differentials among faculty and staff.

What is needed is deliberate and serious conversation among key stakeholders—educators from all the institutions involved, community leaders, public servants—to assess exactly what these needs are, to inventory the values and strengths that already exist among the campuses involved and to discuss the synergies and complementarities that can be exploited. This conversation has yet to be initiated or proposed. Perhaps the case of the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis could serve as a guide of how to proceed, where both institutions kept their names—their brand identities—and were able to create a partnership which, by all measures, seems to be working and thriving.

The motivation to strengthen higher education in South Jersey is right-headed and an important direction in which to move. But, to think that quick executive action imposed on those most intimately knowledgeable about and involved in higher education will produce the desired result is wrong-headed and, hopefully, only an empty rumor. Importantly, the decisions and actions affecting South Jersey need to be de-linked from the New Brunswick-Robert Wood Johnson Hospital merger discussions. These two efforts have nothing to do with each other, educationally speaking.

A good deal is not clear and nothing has yet to be proposed formally; what is clear, however, is that a collaborative and deliberative approach will serve all parties well in the long run.

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