

7 December 2011

Honorable James Beach  
1309 Route 70 West  
Suite A  
Cherry Hill NJ 08002

Dear Senator Beach:

I'm writing this note, after some delay, to thank you for paying a visit to our English department meeting in Armitage Hall a couple of weeks ago. It was a pleasure to meet you. Your visit reminded me how important our relationship with our elected representatives can be, especially now, when the talk of a possible merger of institutions of higher education in New Jersey is apparently being contemplated.

I think most of us here at Rutgers in Camden, both faculty and students, find this possibility worrisome. The main reason for our concern is that most speculation on the subject assumes that, in helping to form a much larger university in South Jersey, our campus would be formally separated from the Rutgers system. The result would be an undermining of the degrees that Rutgers Camden has already awarded, a loss of prestige and resources for its current faculty and students, and, most important, the loss of educational opportunity for the special kind of student who attends Rutgers Camden and who will do so in the future. It is this last point that is most important.

As you know, our student body here is what is called "non-traditional." It is not a homogeneous group of recent high school graduates enjoying their first experience away from home at the expense of their parents. It isn't what you would find at Gettysburg College, the College of New Jersey, or even Rutgers New Brunswick. Most have to live at home and work long hours outside of school, some of them holding full-time jobs, in order to afford a college education. Many have returned to school after some years in the work force or after raising children; some are single parents; some are war veterans; many represent the first generation in their family to go to college. For me the greatest surprise when I came to Rutgers, and one of the most satisfying aspects of my work since that time, has been the pleasure of working with this unexpectedly diverse, mature, colorful, and purposeful cadre of students.

If Rutgers Camden is dissociated from the state university, these students will lose the opportunity for a Rutgers education and all it represents. Even if they could afford to spend their college years away from home, or set aside their family responsibilities, there would be no room for them in New Brunswick, which has no plans for major expansion. The branch campuses of the great state universities across the country have a distinctive mission in creating educational opportunity for non-traditional students, and they are irreplaceable.

A Rutgers education means, first of all, access to a standing faculty with an international reputation for excellence in research, a reputation that has been built over many decades extending, arguably, to the founding of the university in 1766. Only Princeton, in New Jersey, can claim a faculty with a similar profile of research and scholarly accomplishment. If Rutgers

Camden loses its affiliation with the state university, this distinctive demographic of students will lose access to the university's resources, including a major research library, and to its prestige. And it will be many decades before a new university in South Jersey, assuming that its goals can be defined and funded adequately, can build a comparable faculty with a commensurate reputation.

I am at a point in my career when I can begin to reckon the number of years before I will retire, so my personal stake in the future of Rutgers Camden is not the issue here. It is considerably less important, in any case, than that of the generations of non-traditional students who may lose, permanently, their chance for an education at an institution of this stature. I hope you will bear their interests in mind as you consider the future of higher education in New Jersey.

With best wishes,

Timothy Martin, Associate Professor  
Director of International Studies

c: Wendell Pritchett, Chancellor  
Kriste Lindenmeyer, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Sciences