

Case Study: Ocean County College Transforms Strategies, Programs, and Culture

Summary of the Case Study: Ocean County College Transforms Strategies, Programs and Cultures. This case demonstrates the principles and tools of expeditionary strategy and new program development along with cultural change. Ocean County College succeeded in launching and leveraging a strategic planning process that evolved into a campaign that has spanned more than ten years. In the process, the college expanded its vision, mission, programs, and culture, in the face of withering competition. It was forged on the ground and virtual partnerships with Kean University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, and Jersey City University in the United States and the Middle East. It has established a significant global presence, with key partnerships in the Middle East, especially in Egypt, involving ministries, universities, and corporations.

Why Read This? Ambitious and transformative visions and missions are not just for the SNHU's, WGU's, and ASU's of the world. Transformative leadership, strong board commitment, and aggressive partnerships have enabled Ocean County College to establish a significant presence globally.

The Case Study ***(Referenced in Chapter V)***

This case describes the efforts by Ocean County College (OCC), located in Toms River, NJ, to transform its strategies, programs, and culture. The transformational approach taken by its leadership illustrates applications of the model for leading, navigating, and orchestrating transformation outlined in Chapter III and three of the tools presented in Chapter V—crafting an expeditionary strategy, deploying expedition maps, and assessing and reinventing business models.



Enrollment Challenges Began in 2010

Since its founding in 1964, OCC's enrollments steadily grew until fall 2010, when demographic changes in Ocean County, New Jersey, began to impact the College. While population shifts negatively impacted enrollment at all New Jersey community colleges, OCC has fared better than most. For example, Ocean County College experienced a 5.8% growth in 12-month enrollment from Fiscal Year 2015 through Fiscal Year 2020, while New Jersey community colleges saw an average decline of 12.3% during this timeframe. This relative success can in large part be attributed to the strategies discussed in this case study. The College offers AA, AS and AAS degrees and certificates in nearly 50 areas of study. OCC operates a substantial online program—in 2019-20, 26.3% of its credit hours were offered in that mode—and offers continuing and professional education courses and certificates. (Ocean County College, pp. 8 and 20)

Two Significant Initiatives with Transformative Potential Set the Stage

Several years before Ocean County College began the transformation expedition described in this case study, President Jon Larson instituted two significant initiatives that were transformative and positioned the College well for the current ten-year expedition (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Important Preparatory Initiatives



The first was to “go to school” on online course development in partnership with Pearson Higher Education Services. As noted above, last year 26.3 percent of the credit hours offered by the College were provided online. Nearly 23 percent of these online students were drawn from outside the campus service area. This experience has had a significant impact on the College culture. It created both the capacity for and openness to highly promising new initiatives, such as the ambitious partnership with several Egyptian institutions, discussed later in this case study.

The second initiative was to create a new academic role at the College, administrative faculty. As the role has evolved, faculty hired in this classification have both administrative and teaching roles and a calendar-year appointment. The position is not eligible for membership in the College faculty union and allows for much greater flexibility in teaching/administrative assignments, providing easier adaptation to the changing academic needs of the College. All recent faculty hires have been in this hybrid role, reducing the power of the faculty union and increasing the efficiency of and flexibility in the academic program. One salutary outcome from

this modification has been the creation of a sizeable cohort of faculty with a greater understanding of and appreciation for the need to adapt to the challenges and opportunities facing the College.

Creating a Sense of Urgency

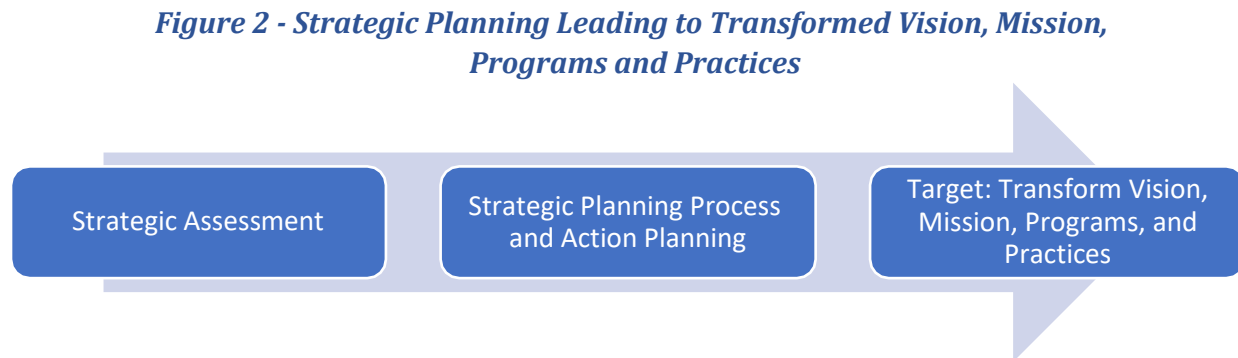
Ocean County College's transformation expedition began in 2013 and continues to this day. President Jon Larson, who had assumed leadership of the College in 2000, had the foresight to see looming disruptions in higher education well ahead of many of his peers. It was clear to him that Ocean faced three significant challenges: a declining traditional college-age population in the campus service area, increased competition from area four-year institutions, and eroding support from the State of New Jersey. On the other hand, President Larson saw substantial potential internationally, based on his considerable experience in international education. He also saw promise in partnerships with other universities in the region, technology partners, and international institutions and governments/ministries.

In Larson's view, Ocean could accept the significant reductions in enrollments and financial support that would surely follow from a passive strategy, or it could embrace dramatic, transformative change and buck the negative trend.



Embracing Transformative Change

Dr. Larson decided the College needed a jolt. With the help of an outside consultant, OCC undertook a three-month strategic assessment. It concluded that the campus leadership team needed to be reduced in size and incorporate new capabilities. Moreover, the strategic assessment recommended that the College launch a strategic planning process, based loosely on the Kotter Model outlined in Chapter III, to bring about this transformation. Larson accepted these recommendations and proceeded to execute both in an aggressive manner as portrayed in Figure 2 below.



Major Administrative Reorganization

Working with the consultants and trusted members of his leadership team, Dr. Larson defined an ideal structure for leading Ocean County College into the future. This structure was leaner and required personnel with a new array of expertise and skills better suited to the challenging times in which the College would be operating. As luck would have it, several of the incumbents were of retirement age and most transitioned out with relative ease. While it took a few years and some further personnel adjustments, Dr. Larson now has a team with the capacity to take the College into the coming decade and to assure its long-term success. Interestingly, two of these new team members were recruited from for-profit higher education institutions, where change and transformation are commonplace, to bring new perspectives to the leadership culture of the College.

Implement the Kotter Transformation Model by Forming a Guiding Coalition and a Constellation of Coalitions to Execute Strategies to Achieve the Vision

A broadly representative Guiding Coalition was formed in early 2014 to coordinate a highly participative strategic planning process that would produce a strategic plan for the College for the 2015-2020 timeframe. It created a constellation of strategy coalitions that engaged over 150 members of the College community to develop and execute the plan (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Participation in Guiding Coalition and Strategy Coalitions***Create and Communicate a Vision and Strategies for Transformation***

The Guiding Coalition began its work on developing an expeditionary strategy for the College by reviewing the existing Mission and Vision. It quickly determined that both statements should be significantly revised to reflect an institution that was transforming to address the disruptive challenges before it. A clear Vision of what the College could look like in the future began to take shape and discussions of how to get there ensued. Through collaborative efforts, the Guiding Coalition put forth eight Strategies to achieve this newly defined Vision and the framework to support it from 2015 through 2020. The resulting eight strategies are described below and portrayed in Figure 4 on the following page..

Strategy #1: Craft and Execute Transformative Strategies. This was a key strategy with six sub-strategies to define specific projects for addressing disruptions affecting existing college programs, an approach for managing those projects, a strategy for properly funding them, and a vigorous plan for communicating internally and externally about the strategies. It also included the development of a campus facilities master plan that was driven by projected programming needs and an ambitious program review process for ongoing academic and support program review.

Strategy #2: Build Resilience through Innovation, Reinvention, and New Programs. This was the bread-and-butter strategy for building new and innovative programs to enhance College service and relevance in a changing knowledge and learning ecosystem, increase enrollments in new areas and build new revenue sources. It included sub-strategies for building the infrastructure for innovation and competitiveness and strong capacities in technology and pedagogy.

Strategy #3: Strengthen Leadership at All Levels. This initiative called for sub-strategies to develop a leadership succession plan, to improve annual reviews for all employees, to enhance leadership capacity across the institution, and to strengthen informal social interaction. The leadership capacity recommendation resulted in the creation of a Leadership Academy with a focus on talent development and included a major team project completed by each annual Academy cohort.

Figure 4 – Eight Strategies for Ocean County College

Strategy #4: Understand and Meet the Needs of Stakeholders. This strategy called for the identification of key current and potential stakeholder groups, the development of market research capabilities to understand their needs, and the creation of an initiative to ensure that all employees have a strong focus on stakeholder needs and are responsive to those needs.

Strategy #5: Create a Highly Effective, Challenging, Supportive, and Sustainable Work Environment. This strategy included sub-strategies for: 1) building a human resource base capable of fulfilling the transformed mission and vision for the College, 2) developing a fair and equitable employee compensation structure, and 3) building funding that would allow for the annual investment of four percent of the College operating budget in employee professional and personal development.

Strategy #6: Leverage Collaboration, Partnership, and Sharing. This strategy focused on the forging of strong partnerships that would enable the College to serve its current and future stakeholders better. This included the development of shared services agreements with peer community colleges in the region and the development of e-Learning partnerships globally.

Strategy #7: Continuously Improve Learning Support Processes and Practices. This strategy included the creation of a common approach for continuous improvement at the College and the initiation of major cross-functional initiatives to achieve breakthrough performance, particularly regarding student success.

Strategy #8: Leverage Information and Results. Five sub-strategies were used to build and support College information and data systems; to significantly enhance the College's capabilities in information, analysis, and assessment; and to greatly expand access to and use of this information across the College.

Through the development of the eight Strategies there became a deeper awareness of how the College would be changing and evolving. It was determined that it was time for the Mission and Vision to be updated to reflect this growth. The Mission and Vision were formally revised through an institution-wide effort led by a subcommittee of the Guiding Coalition. The new Mission focuses much more on a global reach and financial sustainability for the College:

“Ocean County College, an innovative academic leader, provides affordable, student-centered, high quality educational experiences that prepare and empower diverse learners to contribute and succeed in global societies. OCC invests in and fosters academic, economic, and cultural excellence and ensures financial strength by generating new revenue streams, engaging in national and international university and corporate partnerships, and cultivating a technologically progressive and entrepreneurial spirit.” (Ocean County College, p. 8)

The new vision was even more explicit about a global reach for the College:

“Ocean County College will be the boldest, most creative, most innovative student-centered college in America and, by pioneering community college education internationally, will be a new prototype for global education.” (Ocean County College, p. 9)

Figure 5 below summarizes the jump shifts between the traditional and transformed missions. Throughout its work on revising the mission and vision and the shaping of strategies for their achievement, the Guiding Coalition held monthly town hall meetings to communicate progress and to receive comment from all campus constituencies. These meetings were open and, through the dialogue that occurred at them, the Coalition received excellent input, which it incorporated into its work. At the end of this phase of the planning, the campus was informed about and supportive of the planning process.

Figure 5 - Ocean County College Transforms Its Mission

Traditional Mission	<i>Transformed Mission</i>
Meet the learning and human development needs of the citizens of Ocean County	<i>Meet the learning and human development needs of citizens of Ocean County and beyond</i>
Provide learning offerings at the associate degree level and non-credit continuing education	<i>In addition to reinventing traditional offerings, broker for delivery on the Ocean campus degree-credit learning at bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral levels in a wide range of disciplines</i>
Provide primarily face-to-face learning, augmented by online offerings	<i>Provide a full range of face-to-face, hybrid, and online learning options, reaching a global audience</i>
Manage the College’s finances within the revenues available from Ocean County residents	<i>Achieve financial strength: augment in-County revenues with substantial net revenues from out-of-County sources</i>

Empower Action

Once the vision and strategies were completed, a constellation of sub-coalitions, one for each of the strategies, was formed to define expedition maps/project plans for the execution of each strategy. The chair of each sub-coalition was tasked to work with College staff with experience in project management to create and execute an expedition map/action plan for their strategy. These maps/plans were reviewed, critiqued, and approved by the Guiding Coalition; quarterly progress reviews were held by the Guiding Coalition for the first year of implementation. At that point, it was concluded the process involved too much repetitive reporting and needed to be simplified.

The solution was to move to a less detailed report, focusing on those sub-strategies where significant new developments had occurred. The expedition maps presented in this chapter are preferable to the highly detailed project tools used by OCC, and we believe that, had they been

available, this step in the process would have gone more smoothly. Nevertheless, the tracking process was essential to keeping execution on course and on time.

The Guiding Coalition leadership provided regular progress reports to the President's Leadership Team, the Board of Trustees, and to all Ocean County College stakeholders. In late 2015, Strategy Leaders were identified for each of the Strategies to ensure the on-time completion of supporting projects. While some disappointment was observed due to the narrowing of responsibility, this allowed for more ownership of projects and a better connection between identified champions. The Guiding Coalition took on an extended role in keeping the institution accountable for progress on reaching its stated goals.

There was initial confusion as the implementation of strategies shifted from those involved in the planning process to the Strategy Leaders and identified champions. However, the role of the Guiding Coalition became clearer and more focused with each passing year. The Guiding Coalition became more in-tune with the Vision of the college and asked tough questions regarding the progress of the eight strategies. Strategy Leaders were obliged to stay on task and meet deadlines, knowing that their progress updates would be shared with both the Guiding Coalition and the Board of Trustees (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Responsibilities, Coalitions, Groups and, Teams



Quick Wins, Continuing Wins

Much transformational work has been completed since 2015. President Jon Larson and his capable leadership team have stuck with the key tenets of the eight strategies for transforming Ocean County College. This work has taken place in three areas—new academic programs, new academic partnerships, process improvement and human resource and leadership development, and creation of best practice customer relations management function (HUB).

New Academic Programs. When new academic leadership was installed in 2016, the President asked a committee of academic deans, academic administrators, and faculty representing all academic units to generate ideas for new programs and, with consultant assistance, use the Business Model Canvas tool to identify the most viable program ideas for implementation.

The team first brainstormed ideas for new programs, which resulted in 40 leads. Using a series of criteria, e.g., the need for one program for in-depth examination in each of the major academic divisions, the team was able to winnow the proposals from 40 to 5 for in-depth examination using the Business Model Canvas tool. The tool produced a highly informative analysis of the viability of each program and enabled a side-by-side comparison of each. The program selected, the AS in Computer Science, Cyber Security Option, was launched and has been a great success.

The Business Model Canvas tool has been used on a regular basis each year since 2016 and has produced several excellent, well-assessed ideas, including the AS in Business, Supply Chain Management; the AS in Digital Media; and the AS in Data Analytics, the latter in partnership with IBM and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Key segments of the Data Analytics program are also offered as mastery badges and certificates, providing important technological training opportunities in Ocean County, NJ. In addition to vetting promising new program ideas, the Business Model Canvas tool also provides those involved in program development a clearer idea of what it takes to develop and launch a promising program. Use of the Business Model Canvas tool has also had a significant impact on the culture of academic decision-making at the College. With the explication of the Model's criteria, administrators and faculty approach the process of program development with a much stronger orientation to the market and understanding of the cost and organization ramifications of new programs they are proposing.

New Academic Partnerships. President Larson and key members of his leadership team have worked hard since 2015 to develop a number of key partnerships, aimed at making the Ocean County College Campus a center for a broad array of academic programming at the associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree levels and to extend Ocean's reach globally. These partnerships include:

- ***Expansion of Open-Market Online Offerings.*** OCC has continued to expand its online offerings to the open market, starting with partners such as Pearson and evolving to other practices.
- ***Kean University.*** Kean University operates a substantial branch on the Ocean County Campus, using a major new facility designed in part for that purpose. Programs offered at the branch include a broad array of upper division and graduate programs in business, technology, and healthcare.
- ***New Jersey Institute of Technology.*** This emerging partnership holds significant long-term promise for the College and Ocean County. It also fits like a glove with NJIT's long-term aspirations. Programs include:

- ✓ IBM Program in Data Analytics,
- ✓ Applied Engineering Technology, a 2+2+2 program the involves Ocean County Vocational Technical School, OCC, and NJIT,
- ✓ Center for STEM Education, and
- ✓ New Jersey Innovation Institute for Healthcare.

The NJIT partnership extends to OCC's developing relationship with Egyptian Governmental, Private, and National Universities and American Affiliate Universities for three degree awards: the associate degree from OCC, the baccalaureate degree from the Egyptian universities, and the bachelor's degree (or bachelor's/master's degrees) from American Affiliate Universities.

- ***Egyptian Activities.*** The College commitment to online learning and innovation has helped it develop partnerships with Ahran Canadian University (Egypt), the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport (Egypt), IMI International (Morocco and Egypt), Ain Shams University (Egypt), El Alamein National University (Egypt), El Galala National University (Egypt), Helwan National University (Egypt), and Badr University in Cairo. There are ample expansion opportunities in the Middle East and Northern Africa regions, which are promising for OCC's future as a global player in higher education. Although progress has been slow, in the long term these partnerships could be transformational for Egypt and OCC. Some of the programs being pursued include:
 - ESL training for various governmental entities
 - Partnership with 14 Egyptian university campuses to offer associate degree programs in Egypt. Phase I of this initiative includes the following programs at four universities: Digital Web Marketing, Graphic Arts Design and Media, Forensic Accounting and Fraud Examination, Hotel Recreation/Tourism Management, and Mechatronics Engineering Management.
 - Potential to expand these programs to four years with partners such as Kean University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, New Jersey City University, William Paterson University, Southern New Hampshire University, University of Maryland Global, Florida International University, and Colorado State University.

The challenges OCC has encountered in developing these Egyptian partnerships—both here and abroad—have been significant and required dogged leadership persistence. They include the slow pace of decision-making abroad and risk aversion among U.S. Affiliates. Figure 7 depicts Ocean's Global Reach.



Figure 7 - Ocean County College Goes Global

Human Resource and Leadership Development. Important work in this area has proceeded over the five years of the 2015-20 strategic plan. These accomplishments include:

- Significant efforts to improve the campus climate for all employees including regular informal gatherings and town hall meetings.
- Establishment of a Leadership Institute for high potential Ocean employees; each cohort undertakes a major annual College transformation project as part of this training.
- Faculty development workshops for all classifications to provide them with the capacity to operate effectively in this era of transformation.

Process Improvement. Substantial work was undertaken in these important areas since the strategic plan was initiated. This work included:

- Significant process improvements to student recruitment and support services that have resulted in substantial increases in student success. Most of these improvements were completed by high performance, cross-functional teams.
- Improvements in enrollment management and substantial increases in online enrollments.
- Expansion of OCC's presence in Ocean County high schools, including bridge and dual enrollment programs.
- Addition of an Artificial Intelligence chatbot, "Reggie," to answer questions frequently asked by students.

- Delivery of concierge services to employers to connect them with the College and with Ocean students.

Creation of Best Practice Customer Relations Management Function (HUB). Over the last four years, OCC has pulled its matriculation processes into one unit, the HUB, and transformed them so they operate in line with best customer relations management practices in the for-profit world. The broad outlines of this transformation are as follows:

- Basic enrollment processes initiated by phone or online requests for information are answered by an Ocean employee in no more than five minutes. This employee has the capacity and authority to address most issues raised by prospective and current students on the spot.
- The matriculation process was reduced from 12 to 5 steps, allowing a prospective student to complete full enrollment in one visit to campus. Non-essential steps eliminated included mandatory orientation, placement testing fees, and various registration holds for matters of low import. Also added was a multi-modal communications plan to nudge the student through matriculation.
- Creation of a pathways program for high school students to increase the number matriculating at OCC the year following high school graduation. The program is targeted to reach the 30 percent of Ocean County students who currently do not go to college.
- A lead follow-up system was implemented to measure the effectiveness of different types of advertising, greatly increasing marketing effectiveness and reducing cost.
- The financial aid process was streamlined to speed up awards.
- A plan was developed to increase enrollments in the Early College Program, which now includes 24 schools and over 1,300 students. The Program allows students in their junior and senior high school years to complete 30 college credits at OCC.
- The traditional admissions office was closed down and its functions were folded into the HUB, which focused completely on turning prospects into Ocean County College students.
- The impact of the transformation of the student matriculation functions on the recruitment of new students in Fall 2020 is clear. New student enrollments—3,457—were two percent greater than Fall 2019, in a year of significant overall declines in enrollments nationally.

Conclusion

The strategic initiatives at Ocean County College are a work in progress, but they have moved through the stages portrayed in Figure 8 below. In late 2015, the implementation responsibility shifted from the Guiding Coalition to identified Strategy Leaders. This allowed for focused responsibility of projects and redefined the role of the Guiding Coalition to that of a true accountability body. As the Guiding Coalition evolved, the constituencies represented on the Guiding Coalition were changed to comprise a membership better able to carry out the important role of the Guiding Coalition's charge to monitor and assess progress under the direction of the Strategic Leaders.

The good news is that President Jon Larson remains committed to the process and will continue Ocean's expedition, adding to some of the key elements in the original strategy and updating strategies to deal with the turbulent and challenging conditions projected for the 2020 to 2030 period and beyond.

Figure 8 - Stages of OCC's Strategic Initiatives



Figure 9 summarizes the Ocean County College Case Study, using the framework employed in all the case studies.



Figure 9 - Summary of Ocean County College Case Study

Key Factors	Actions Taken
<i>Sense of Urgency</i>	OCC President Jon Larson had the foresight in 2014 to see the looming disruptions for higher education and moved to address those challenges, which included a declining traditional college-age population in the campus service area, increased competition from area four-year institutions, and declining support from the State of New Jersey.
<i>Form a Guiding Coalition and a Constellation of Coalitions</i>	A broadly representative Guiding Coalition was formed in early 2014 to coordinate a highly participative strategic planning process that would produce a strategic plan for the College for 2015 to 2020. It created a constellation of strategy coalitions that engaged over 150 members of the College community to develop and execute the plan.
<i>Create and Communicate a Vision for Transformation</i>	The Guiding Coalition began its work on developing expeditionary strategy for the College by reviewing the existing Mission and Vision. It revised both statements to reflect an institution that was transforming to address the disruptive challenges before it. It defined eight strategies for the achievement of this vision.
<i>Empower Action</i>	Once the vision and strategies were defined, a constellation of sub-coalitions, one for each of the strategies, was formed to define expedition maps/project plans for the execution of each strategy.
<i>Quick Wins, Continuing Wins</i>	Much transformational work was completed between 2015 and 2020. This work has taken place in three areas—new academic programs, new academic partnerships, and process improvement and human resource and leadership development. Commitment to an updated set of strategies has been made.
<i>4 R's of Transformation</i>	Realign-College Mission and Vision to consider a turbulent and global world Redesign-Mix of programs to achieve this new vision Redefine-College service approach to offer and broker a full range of academic programs—from certificate to doctorate and to become global in reach Reengineer—Support services to better focus on student needs
<i>Culture Change</i>	Several Cultural Changes made these developments possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of online learning and development of digital skills • New Academic Role (Administrative Faculty) opened new possibilities • Expanding Mission and Vision beyond just serving Ocean County learners • International and Middle East focus; Partnership with a coalition of American Affiliate Universities and Egyptian Universities
<i>Learning from Ocean County College</i>	OCC was ahead of its peers in recognizing the coming revolution in higher education and has a big head start. It also has shown what it takes—absolute commitment and time—to transform.

Ocean County College.2015. “Strategies for Success 2015-2020,” Toms River, NJ.