

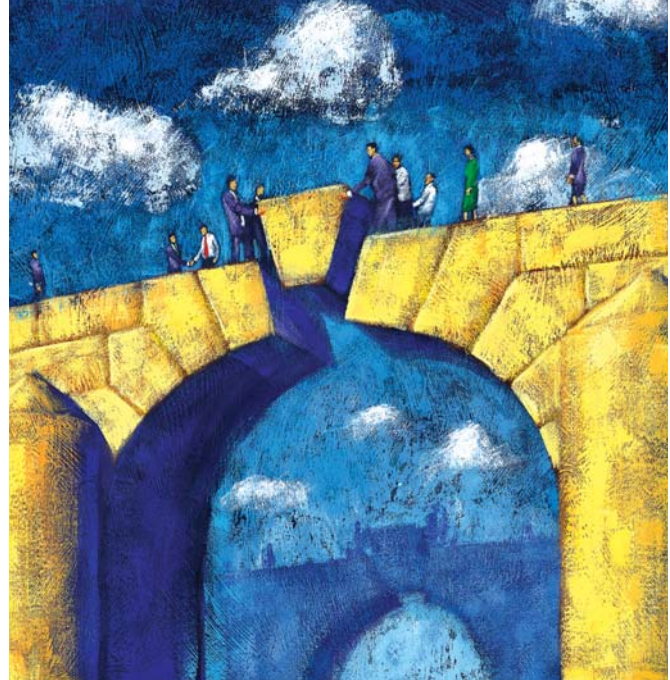
CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

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For many years, I have been a strong advocate of the notion that economic development must be an explicit mission element of the university as a complement to instruction, research and public service. The perspective and experience gained since leaving the presidency have reinforced my views. The corporate environment has grown fiercely competitive, the sources of competition far more widespread, the sophistication and capacity of global competitors ever increasing. Clearly, the need for a more powerful business-technology-higher education linkage in our country is paramount.

Business survival drives the need for increased efficiency and effectiveness, but business dominance comes only from innovation that sets one apart from competitors. Business creates de facto boundaries that transcend national boundaries. The computer and the Internet make information available at increasing rates of access and with increasing transparency. Competitive advantage is often fleeting. To say that the world economy is changing rapidly is a monumental understatement. China has become a manufacturing powerhouse. India has developed extraordinary capacity in technology. Much of their success and that of other rapidly growing economies rests upon the foundation of strong universities, the growth of which also diminishes the flow of students into American universities.

We emphasize economic development at NJIT because this is the arena where our graduates and professionals must ultimately make an impact. We are wise to surround the campus with the culture of practice so that study remains connected to the professional world. Our graduates are strategic contributors to economic growth. Many will be immersed in economic development activity that helps to maintain our standard of living. They help the nation compete through the development of new products, processes and businesses. In addition, NJIT, through its varied and extensive assets, activities such as research and development leading to intellectual property, the synergies of Science Park — including our business incubators — and partnerships with industry and government, has demonstrated a capacity to contribute to economic expansion. Outside of the formal classroom, perhaps, but very much connected to it.



The imperative to innovate and understand global economic dynamics lies at the heart of the contribution a university education can make. What we as a nation may have lost in traditional manufacturing, for example, we must make up in developing new products and processes. Innovation must create new businesses and employment, even as competition may erode employment in some areas and challenge businesses that were once globally dominant. That is the nature of the economic dynamics in which higher education must play a key role. Linking economic development to a broader variety of academic activity gives a greater dimension to university education.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected in communications, trade, competition and aspiration, the business community finds itself more and more influenced by factors that were on the back burner just a generation ago: the need to understand and respect the lessons of history and cultural diversity, and the imperatives generated by economic circumstances changing more rapidly than anyone would have imagined. For the university, there is an increasing and strategic overlay with business. Somehow, in curricula already crammed with subject matter that is broader, deeper and more sophisticated than a decade ago, educators are challenged to practice and teach about the integration and interconnectedness of factors in a complex world. Thus there are strong forces of economics and communications shaping the work of the professionals we prepare. We are challenged to teach in the context of real-world systems of product and process realization and market economics. That is the world our graduates will experience, and schools such as NJIT are distinctive in drawing students that are focused on professional studies.

I am delighted that NJIT is taking a leadership role in building an alliance that embraces the Innovation Cluster concept along with strong advocacy of the World Class University system in New Jersey. This involves building upon strategic synergies. Strengthening the relationship of the Innovation Cluster concept, successful in other regions of the nation, and intimately connecting the Innovation Zone to university classroom and laboratory experiences can only have positive results for New Jersey and the nation. ■