Several faculty members got a chance to hear Dr. Edythe Abdullah field questions in an open forum back in November. Others had the pleasure of greeting her at the reception on April 13. Soon, everyone will get an opportunity to meet the President in person, as she plans on interacting with the ECC community in a variety of ways over the next several months.

While Dr. Abdullah brings a clear sense of purpose to her new position, one of her first priorities is to learn more about faculty, students and staff. In addition to meeting regularly with the SGA and sitting in on college governance sessions, Dr. Abdullah plans to hold “conversational meetings” with faculty in each division and quarterly meetings with the faculty as a whole. She will also make a habit of walking the campus as part of her regular routine, in order to find out more about what we do, hear our concerns, and share ideas.

In the President’s view, all employees play a key role in shaping and “impacting the institutional environment.” She noted that while individual members of the college may play different roles, it is important for everyone to remain focused on building a “culture of mutual respect, innovation, and love for students.” “Faculty,” she observed, “play a central role in terms of student success and how we can enhance it.”

President Abdullah, who describes herself as “warm and caring, but results oriented,” places a strong emphasis on listening and wants to get a thorough understanding of the institution before implementing any significant change. However, she undoubtedly brings a clear vision, one that is unmistakably student centered. Improving retention and graduation rates will be a focal point of her presidency, and to achieve this, she will emphasize the need to help students make “a smooth transition into the college environment.”

For Abdullah, an essential part of this transition involves enhancing students’ academic and social preparation for college, thereby lessening their need for remediation. With faculty input and cooperation, she hopes to create partnerships with high schools, faith-based organizations and other community groups.

Part of her concrete vision also entails helping potential students develop what she calls an “expect college attitude” and a career-oriented direction. “It is important that students make the connection,” she suggested, “and see why it is important to learn reading and math skills as they relate to being a nurse or an engineer.”

While she wants to reduce students’ need for developmental courses upon entry, the President remains unequivocal in her commitment to open admissions and ECC’s longstanding mission of serving the non-traditional college student. “I’m not interested in turning ECC into Rutgers or any other four year college,” she noted. Clearly, she plans to build upon ECC’s success, but hopes to inspire a renewed sense of challenge and commitment, especially when it comes to learning outcomes.

Another key strategy for enhancing student success centers on educational technology. “If I had my druthers,” Abdullah reflected, “every class would be in a smart classroom,” wherein all faculty could take advantage of multimedia technology, incorporate PowerPoint presentations, and use document cameras (ELMOs). She
There were some trains that he was told me the reason for the note. We exchanged pleasantries and he more manageable for him. After the house by himself was a bit much to the point where maintaining the Jon’s medical condition had gotten him up to move. It seemed that his brother’s family were packing.

When I got to Jon’s house, he and I time away from home, so it lifted my heart to see that he was back recently and had to spend some time away from home, so it lifted my heart to see that he was back.

no longer interested in and that would not be making the move with him; he was now modeling in a larger scale, a change that many model rails make as they get older. And while the larger trains were going with him, his older, smaller trains – the same size I model – were not making the trip. Did I want them before they went in the dumpster – or to look a gift train in the mouth, I accepted. (Hey, what better way to “Renew, Reuse, Recycle”?)

So that’s how it came to be that a week later I was sitting in my basement/launder room/art studio/train room looking at the equivalent of twenty copy-paper boxes full of engines, cars, buildings, track, vehicles, scenery materials and tools. Some 40 to 50 years old, others brand new. Many in their original boxes, never opened. A lot were trains I always dreamed of having (Jon and I had similar tastes regarding trains.). It took about a month to go through everything and catalog what was there. There were no particularly valuable pieces, just boxes of old trains. One night, when I was done cataloging, I sat downstairs and looked at the boxes around me. I was in the middle of expanding my train layout so nothing would be up and running for a year or so. Even then, I knew that once the layout expansion was finished I would find myself in a place I never thought I’d be: with more trains than I knew what to do with. (The whole “Whoever-dies-with-the-most-trains-wins” idea never appealed to me.) Then it came to me. The answer to my dilemma was on my key ring.

That October, our minister had given out key rings related to a sermon on contentment. One side had a quote from Rev. Adam Hamilton’s book Enough: Discovering Joy through Simplicity and Generosity. It basically said to be grateful for what you have, remember that you don’t need most of what you want, and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity. It was the generosity that got my mental gears turning. I went back to the lists and mentally rearranged everything into what I would like (the “simplicity” list) and what I could live without (the “generosity” list). Then the “Generosity” list took off!

Continued on Next Page
would also like to see faculty experiment with “hybrid” courses. At the same time, she is clear to point out that technology is only one part of the equation. “It’s not so much the technology by itself, but how we use it to reach students on a relationship level, and an academic level,” she added.

In the end, President Abdullah hopes faculty will be open to new ideas. Moreover, she would like them to “pilot, evaluate, and implement best practices” as they apply to the populations we serve and the culture of the institution. To support faculty in various initiatives, she emphasized the importance of development and support, including further education and recognition.

Clearly, Dr. Abdullah makes it her business to connect with and inspire every member of the college, whether through personal interaction or by emailing daily quotes she finds uplifting. This desire to motivate and connect with others can be traced back to two career choices she once contemplated: the ministry and law. As an educator, she has found a way to incorporate elements of both by “reaching people and changing their lives.”

This duality is also reflected in the words and wisdom of two of her most prominent influences, Maya Angelou and Abraham Lincoln. She admires the former for her “ability to overcome obstacles, and to become successful, articulate and spiritually well balanced” and the latter for his ability to preserve unity and persevere.

Edythe Abdullah has no small supply of innovative ideas, determination and spirit. Yet, recognizing the merits of ECC’s past and knowing that institutional change involves a step-by-step process, she will first lead by observing and carefully listening. When the time is right, however, she will set about building upon the legacy and tradition many have worked diligently to shape.

The Gift - Continued

First I contacted friends who are model railroaders (including both ECC Professor Alvin Williams and the husband of ECC Professor Gayle Gage) to see if there were items from the “generosity” list they were interested in. This led to six medium-sized boxes of trains being shipped out. Then one of the teens at our church announced that she was doing a Toys for Tots drive. So I went to the basement, found all the age appropriate cars and trucks and donated them to her drive. One of our friends was looking for some trains for her grandchildren; I gave her a brand new unopened train set. In the midst of all of this, I also found some custom painted trains that Jon and his brother had done many years ago growing up in Brooklyn. Knowing that these would have sentimental value, I boxed them up and sent them off to his new address. And, after registering with the NJ Division of Taxation, I sold some of the trains from the generosity list at a local train show in March. The day turned out to be a family event, with Kathy and the kids helping out. Even after giving 7% to the state, we had earned about $500 for the “send-the-kids-to-college” fund!

So now, when I go downstairs the gift does not seem as daunting. Many of the trains I didn’t want have been given to friends, donated to needy kids and used to support our college savings. There are still some items I could live without, and there will be other train shows for that. But it is the giving, not just to me, but particularly to others, that has made Jon’s gift so special.
Counselor’s Corner:
Where Counseling Comes In by   Luz M. Class, M.A., LPC, DCC

At times in a student’s college life, s/he will approach a faculty member and ask for guidance in educational matters, a discussion which may lead to personal disclosure.

Because we are a dedicated group of instructors, we listen to them. Such students might be feeling overwhelmed with academics and may be experiencing personal and life-changing challenges, such as pregnancy, coping with a parent’s illness, facing divorce, or a more compound problem, such as rape, domestic violence, substance abuse or mental illness; the list continues.

Students approach instructors because they feel comfortable sharing sensitive information with us; we have their confidence. But, these conversations aren’t always easy. When such a situation arises it is prudent for you to listen intently, and if you aren’t sure how to handle the situation, consider reaching out to one of the Faculty/Counselors (or other counselors) without disclosing the student’s name. Discuss the matter with the counselor and then ask the student if s/he authorizes you to refer him or her to a professional for help.

As counselors, we listen to them present their problems and if necessary, refer students to other resources within the college or community. Each of us has a specific set of skills and brings decades of experience and success to our work. We incorporate different strategies in our approach, but always focus on the student as a whole.

Faculty/Counselors and Teacher-Advisor/ Counselors are located in various departments: the Counseling Center, (Red Area), Educational Opportunity Fund (Green Area), and Special Programs (Yellow Area). In addition to intervening in personal/social matters, we provide academic and career advice, devise educational plans, advise new students for their first semester, and meet with students who are on probation, just to mention a few of the services we provide.

Counselors, whether they are social workers, licensed practitioners, clergy, career counselors, or disabilities or personal counselors, care about student success. Today we have a myriad of present and emerging concerns within the college; hence, it is crucial that we continue to work together to provide first-rate and wide-ranging services for our students.