

# Keeping the “EOF Promise”

The Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) has been a highly successful, taxpayer-supported financial aid program operating at New Jersey’s many colleges since 1968. Designed for students who are economically disadvantaged and academically underprepared, but who show strong evidence of ability and initiative, EOF has given thousands of young people advice, financial aid, and a realistic chance to achieve their dreams.

During the last few years, access to this innovative support system has become more difficult as rapidly increasing costs of higher education have outpaced all forms of federal, state, and local aid. EOF candidates have faced difficult choices. They have needed to locate more financial aid, take jobs to pay the higher costs, or borrow even more money. The scarcity of financial aid available and increasing need for loans can spell serious trouble after graduation. And the necessity of employment can compromise a student’s chances for success in the classroom. The bottom line: EOF drop-out rates have been rising.

Promising students were leaving New Jersey for less costly programs out of state—a serious problem threatening to undo all the benefits of a program that had been bringing greater diversity to the College and long-term rewards to the

needy communities of the state. TCNJ’s answer was the EOF Promise Award. Determined to restore a quality EOF Program, President Gitenstein, along with the EOF, financial aid, and development staffs, worked out a plan that promised to do so, beginning with new students entering in the 2004-2005 school year. It was not possible to do this for all EOF

students, but aggressive fundraising provided enough new money to assure the 92 first-year students that year could be guaranteed on-campus housing and tuition at no cost. In addition, the new students were urged not to take any job during their first year, to make sure their transition from high school to college went as well as possible. During the first two years of EOF standing, loans were eliminated from the EOF aid package.

The positive impact was immediate, according to James Boatwright, TCNJ’S EOF Program director. Only two of 92

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students dropped out in that first year; applications went up for the 2005-2006 academic year; and the percentage of EOF accepted students who elected to attend rose from 50 to 72 percent. Of course, the cost to the College had to rise the next year as a new class of freshmen enrolled.

For the College to ease the burden on older EOF students, fundraisers had to work even harder to appeal to individuals, foundations, and especially corporations to support the new EOF initiative. President Gitenstein was personally involved, persuading Kurt Landgraf, president and CEO of the Educational Testing Service in nearby Lawrence Township, to support a freshman student, paying all college expenses for four years, plus offering the opportunity for three ETS summer internships.

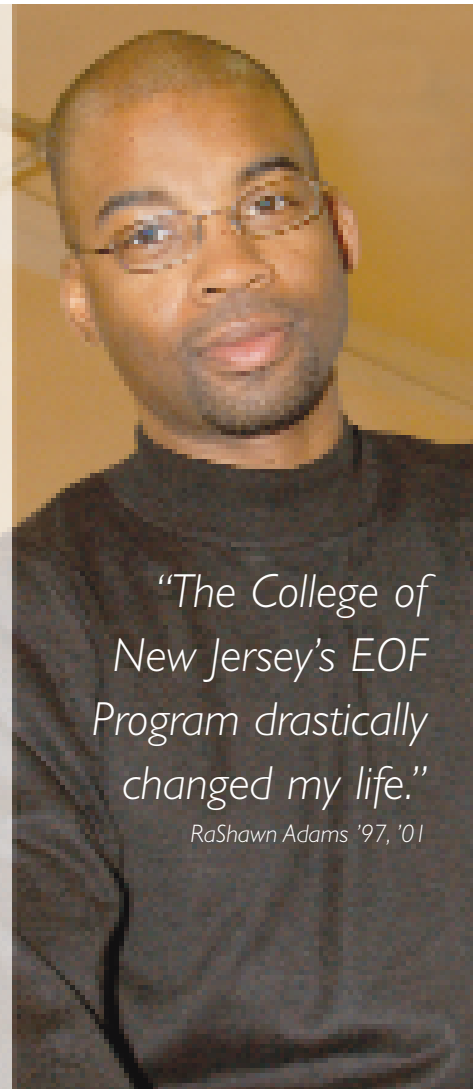
During the last 18 months, substantial gifts have come from many individuals, including Sidney Hofing, a member of TCNJ’s Foundation board, and **Stacy Holland** ’92, a TCNJ trustee and a one-time EOF student. Corporate and foundation donors have included Lockheed Martin, Wachovia Bank, Merrill Lynch, Janssen Pharmaceutica, Ford Motor Company, C.R. Bard, and the Lowell Johnson Foundation.

As a trustee, Mrs. Holland is a strong advocate of the EOF Program, especially the intensive advising and leadership training she and other students received as part of the experience. For her, the opportunities to explore extracurricular activities, to tutor younger students, and to branch out into leadership positions were a vital part of her educational development.

## A lasting impact

“The College of New Jersey’s EOF Program drastically changed my life,” said **RaShawn Adams** ’97, ’01, principal of the Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School in Trenton. “It allowed me to become the person I am, and I don’t know where I would be without the support I received.”

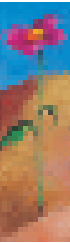
Adams was so impacted by his EOF experience that, following graduation from TCNJ, he established two funds in the names of his father, Robert Adams, and grandmother, Audry Morgan, that provide annual book awards of \$300 and \$200 to the most-improved and highest-achieving students in the College’s summer EOF Program. He has also served as an adjunct professor in TCNJ’s education administration program for the past nine years.



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*RaShawn Adams ’97, ’01*

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