

March 24, 2023

Colleagues:

As the calendar turns to spring and the weather begins to warm, I write with updates as to recent activities. I want to begin by wishing the Muslim members of our community “Ramadan Kareem” as they enter the holiest month of their year, and I wish all a joyful time with family and friends. Holidays and celebrations are always a time for reflection and appreciation: I hope to do some of each and encourage all to join in such restorative activities.

Much has happened since I last communicated, and I have positive news to report on our budget situation. Last Tuesday, CFO Serrano and I met with representatives from the Chancellery and from the Institute for State and Local Government, where we received many accolades for the work that we have done, collectively, to address our budget shortfall. Executive Vice Chancellor Batista applauded the approach that we employed, especially our focus on improving collections—and a special shout-out here must be made to the teams in our Bursar and Financial Aid offices, who worked so hard to clearly communicate information to our students about deadlines, emergency grants, micro-loans, and other tools—which has allowed us to be better positioned budgetarily than most thought possible. Kudos, all!

As I communicated to the College Council and Faculty Senate (and the CSI Foundation Board) last week, we submitted our revised FY 2023 financial plan last Friday. Although we have not yet heard if that plan has been accepted and approved, I am confident that it will be, and look forward to sharing that (or any other) news when I receive it. Along those lines, we did learn late this week that the University has relaxed some of its Vacancy Review Board protocols and is leaving many (though not all) hiring decisions in the hands of the campuses, assuming certain criteria are met. Given our continued precarious budgetary state (our revised plan still has a projected deficit in excess of \$6M) we must remain prudent and cautious in our hiring, but the increased flexibility of the revised CUNY protocols is an important step, notwithstanding.

This week, members of our administration and I also had a meeting with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to discuss ways in which we might improve access to and egress from our Willowbrook site. There is seeming interest on the part of both parties to do so, but there are also considerable financial, logistical, and political hurdles to clear. Conversations will continue in coming weeks and months, as we ascertain the viability of increased service amid fluctuating

ridership. I can make no promises other than continued transparency about these negotiations.

The week also saw the resumption of my monthly “Pizza with the President” luncheons, where VP Hodge and I hosted some of our international students to discuss how we can better serve that community and meet their needs and their interests. Not surprisingly, this group had some of the same desires as others: maintain a vibrant, inclusive, “user-friendly” campus that allows for predictability of processes; good customer service; and a positive overall experience. These themes also formed the basis of conversations that I had with the co-PIs of the campus BRESI RELAY team, and with the leadership of CSI-Hillel who shared their work, respectively, on improving campus climate. It is wonderful to hear and see so much work in this space, but we must also remember that there is more that must be done. As CSI is committed to embracing diversity, centering equity, and practicing inclusion, we must not tolerate any form of hate, which includes but is not limited to anti-Semitic occurrences. If you witness any form of hate (i.e., the removal of flags, flyers promoting conversations and programs focused on difficult topics, etc.) please report these incidents to the Office of Public Safety immediately. One of my top priorities is our safety and security. As such, we have and will continue to increase the presence of Public Safety throughout our large campus, but we need your assistance to ensure that we remain inclusive and provide a safe space for all. So, if you see something, please say something.

Thanking you for your attention and support, and wishing you well until next time,



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