



February 2, 2024

Colleagues:

I hope that you are well. As the calendar turns to a new month, I write with updates as to recent activities that you may find of interest.

This week was an unusually busy one, with a wide range of activities marking the first full week of classes in the Spring 2024 term. Although there are still some last-minute adjustments, it appears that our final enrollment numbers will land somewhere (slightly) ahead of our projection (10,075) which is a major accomplishment and a testament to the individual and collective efforts that we have put into recruitment and retention. THANK YOU to all who worked to get us to this milestone, which represents the first time in several years that our Spring headcount has broken the ten thousand student threshold.

Tuesday saw a major event held in our Center for the Arts, which has been buzzing with activity and visits from local schools taking advantage of a variety of shows and performances. On that day, we welcomed nearly 100 persons who participated in our inaugural “[Combating Antisemitism Symposium](#)” generously funded by the Carol and Milton Petrie Foundation and supported by CUNY’s Office of Transformation and its anti-hate initiative. We heard presentations from individuals representing CUNY Central, Hillel International, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Wagner College’s Holocaust Center, and from among our own faculty (thank you, Professor Florette Cohen!). The symposium demonstrates our commitment to engaging in courageous conversations around difficult subjects and affirms our institutional commitment to fostering dialog and enhancing a campus environment that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive. It also prefaces a forthcoming symposium on “recognizing and responding to Islamophobia” (details forthcoming) and other anti-hate activities that will enhance these themes.

That day, I also participated in the term’s first Blood Drive at the Campus Center, where I was joined by more than 50 others from among our number who donated blood and plasma that

will go toward relieving an acute blood shortage in the area and which demonstrates our campus commitment to being “good neighbors” in the truest sense. Shortly after I met with the College Council Budget Committee to discuss our FY24 savings plan and the state of the current budget, where we discussed how our situation is improving to the point that we are not experiencing the kind of pain (including campus closures, program elimination, and faculty and staff furloughs) that is being seen elsewhere on the higher ed landscape. Although we still have work to do, we are well on the way to meeting our savings target (\$2.1M this FY) and addressing our anticipated FY24 deficit.

My week continued with our increasingly popular “[Spirit Day](#),” (follow us on social media for images: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#)) which will likely grow to involve additional morale-boosting events this term, and ended with what was undoubtedly the highlight of this young semester, a meeting with a participant in our Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program. At a campus event in December, I was approached by Mr. Ryan Ford, who requested a meeting with me and VP Hodge so that he could “share ideas about how participants in the MR program” could better integrate into campus life and how we as an institution could better promote the program and advocate for its students. Ryan came with a number of fantastic ideas about how those with cognitive, developmental, and/or intellectual disabilities could be an asset to our community and a testament to our legacy of place as stewards of the Willowbrook State School. We will certainly work to put his ideas into action, and I appreciate the self-advocacy that is a hallmark of the Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program.

As we enter Black History Month, I draw your attention to a number of events, on-campus and in the local community, that may be of interest, including the [CSI Library’s screening of \*Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin\*](#) on February 13, a book talk by author Maria Smilios on [The Black Angels: The Untold Story of the Nurses Who Helped Cure Tuberculosis](#) at the National Lighthouse Museum (February 11), [a conference addressing the remarkable story of Estavanico \(“Esteban the Moor”\)](#) on February 20, and a [community event hosted by SBDC and City Councilmember Kamillah Hanks](#) on campus on February 28. I certainly intend to participate in as many of these activities as my schedule allows, and to reflect on the meaning of the presentations, and on Black History Month as well.

Until next time,



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