

Minutes of the One Hundred and Seventy-Third Meeting of the College Council
Formed on November 14, 2002

Date: Thursday, September 18th, 2025, 2:30pm – 3:25pm
Location: 1P-119 & Zoom Meeting

CC Members in Attendance

Zaghloul Ahmed, Neo Antoniades, Paul Archibald, John Arena, Comfort Asanbe, Banu Aslanertik, Warrick Bell, Alan Benimoff, Holly Block, Paolo Cappellari, Vandana Chaudhry, Andrew Colbeck, Brian Cortijo, Lorianne Crowder, David Curcio, Debbie DeSimone, Valkiria Duran-Narucki, Gene Fellner, Valerie Forrestal, Rosane Gertner, Kenneth Gold, Hernan Green, Patti Gross, Susan Holak, Eric Ivison, Shi Jin, Emma Johnson, Burnett Joiner, Wilma Jones, Patricia Kahn, Carlo Lancellotti, Catherine Lavender, Robert Lovering, Timothy Lynch, Lisa Manne, Tara Mastroilli, Dan McClosky, Halil Ege Ozen, Michael Paris, Ralf Peetz, Jonathan Peters, Greg Philips, Mark Aaron Polger, Sarah Pollack, Alex Scott, Carlos Serrano, Suzy Shepardson, Susan Smith-Peter, Sarolta Takács, Christina Tortora, John Verzani, Ashley Villalva, Robert Wallace, Simone Wegge, Siona Wilson, John Wing, Cindy Wong, Mark Zdziarski, Kelly Zyko.

CC Members Via Zoom

Clarisse Domingo, Nathalia Holtzman, Alfred Levine, Jackson Mushnick, Steven Milewski, Gabriella Rosales.

CC Members Absent:

Jason Bishop, Aris Efting, Ismael Garcia-Colón, Yumei Huo, Anatoly Kuklov, Philippe Marius, Angie Mekki, Vincent Mirabella, Catherine Paradiso, Michelle Pasaca, Angelina Raio, Madonna Shaker, Allen Tesdall, Gaolan Wu.

Guests In-Person

Cheryl Adolf, Hayley Augustine, Michael Batson, Fausto Canela, Jasmine Cardoza, Jessica Collura, Chrystal Deosaran, Veronica DiMeglio, Aleks Dudek, Jennifer Durando, Ali Elkomy, Emmanuel Esperance, Katrina Fama, Stephen Ferst, Ruta Gordon, Orit Gruber, Michelle Karpeles, Koby Kohulan, Anna Lambert, Jackie Lamberti, Michael Lederhandler, Carey Manifold, Aliza Martini, Susan Massara, Christine McEville, Laxmi Ramasubramanian, Terri Sangiorgio, Lisa Roe, Donna Scimeca, Amy Stempler, Dana Trimboli, Rosemary Vitale, Rhoda Wilson.

Guests via Zoom

Barbara Cohen, Jonathan Cope, Celeste Del Maestro, Danielle Dimitrov, Catherine Ferrera, Antonio Gallego, Linda John, Yolelda Ira, Jane Kisto, Benji Kuriakose, Lynne Lacomis, Tom Lauria, Mary Murphy, Ed Patri, David Pizzuto, Carly Racioppi, Christopher Santiago, Caterina Scarimbolo, Janine Scotto, Don Selby, Jessica Stein, Joyce Taylor, Brenda Valentin.

- I. **Approval of the proposed agenda** – approved.
- II. **Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting** – approved with no changes
- III. **Executive Committee Report** – Kenneth Gold

Good afternoon and welcome back. I hope your semester is off to a great start. The Executive Committee met with President Lynch, Interim Provost Holtzman, (whom we welcome to CSI), and Chief of Staff Collura on September 11th for its monthly consultation.

We began with some informational items (St. George remains unrented and partially subsidized by CUNY) and conveyed some communication challenges regarding the recent IT inventory. President Lynch shared that while CSI had accounted for 97% of its computers, the highest rate in CUNY, the College still had 600 missing devices. We suggested taking a closer look at the provenance of the missing items.

We spoke about onboarding new faculty and staff. We were pleased with the full day event last month for faculty. Always in favor of more feel good moments, we suggested sending out a welcome letter and urged that next year the College renew the practice of taking new faculty to Denino's and Ralphs. We also noted the importance of some collective onboarding for new staff members every few months and for having up to date office name plates. In response to the latter request, the President described efforts to secure capital funds for a signage project for both inside and outside buildings.

We spent some time discussing last May's commencement. Committee members shared their discomfort with having a recorded speech of the valedictorian when she was present on stage, their surprise that there were funds to rent a jumbotron screen but not chairs for individual departmental ceremonies. Given the unsuitability and inaccessibility of at least one indoor location that was used, we think that an additional investment in chairs and labor while retaining as many feasible indoor locations as possible was in the college's best interest. The president remained steadfast about his decision, which he shared was made to protect the college and speakers. He also noted that steps such as vetting the speeches was longstanding practice, as was the expectation that remarks should be consistent with what was proposed in the application to be valedictorian. We alerted the President that many members of the campus community remain dissatisfied as well, and we've carved out some time on the agenda for those concerns to be raised after he reports to the body.

We spoke about a most unfortunate occurrence, the inability to spend and thus loss of \$150,000 awarded to the Social Work Department for a Simulation Lab. We focused on learning from this failure and the Provost expressed a willingness to do so, including a review of the extensive report prepared by former Social Work Chairperson Barbra Teater.

We reviewed plans for several open administrative positions: The director of communications search closed last week, searches for a VP of Student of Affairs, a Dean of Education and Social Work, and an Assistant Provost for Student success are planned. We are not immediately looking for a new person for facilities management, Planning and Administration. The XC urged that the former position be reconstituted at the VP level and that the College hires a provost this academic year.

Last week the College, and especially our colleagues in the Chazanoff School of Business, was rocked by the news of Dr. Soon Ae Chun's untimely death. At this time, I would like us to have a moment of silence for her and other current or former employees who have passed away in recent months. Feel free to add a name as I look in your direction.

Elections: The secretary of the Executive Committee of the College Council, Wilma Jones, cast a ballot for each of the following members who were elected to serve on the College Council's Executive Committee:

- Vice Chair – Jonathan Peters, Department of Accounting and finance - (one-year term, completing the two-year term of Barbara Teater)
- At-Large Member - Comfort Asanbe, Department of Psychology (two-year term)

IV. President's Report – Timothy Lynch

President Lynch welcomed everyone back to campus this Fall semester. He began his report with budget and enrollment updates. To date, enrollment stood at approximately 11,450 students, the highest since Fall 2021 and a three percent increase over last year. The college was experiencing a strong increase in opportunity programs such as ASAP (double numbers since 2020) and Verrazano Honors which received record number of applications, fulfilling our mission of access and excellence. A new recruitment effort now includes a virtual campus tour to enhance outreach. He gave special thanks to everyone at the Office of Admissions and Recruitment and also thanked everyone else for their efforts around retention. Regarding the college's budget, the college aimed to increase classroom capacity for Fall by one student per section across 2,000+ courses but achieved only a 0.75 increase. This shortfall might have an impact on the final budget as they expected the FY25 deficit to end up between \$2 and \$2.5 million, well below the target for the year. The College is being cautious, prudent, and intentional regarding expenditures and staffing given Federal uncertainty especially around potential legislation like President Trump's proposed "big beautiful" bill, that could shift funding away from higher education.

Along with a slide presentation, President Lynch mentioned several significant investments inside and outside campus facilities:

- Library upgrades: Last year the entrance doors were replaced for accessibility, and this past summer the third floor received a major rehabilitation.
- A meditation garden was recently installed outside Dolphin Cove, a nice space for students to relax and calm down from the frenetic pace of studies.
- Water filtration systems: To date, two-thirds of campus drinking fountains have been replaced with filtered water bottle fountains over recent summers, thanks to continued funding by Student Government.
- A Maker Space in Bldg 4N will soon be completed, and a ribbon cutting ceremony has been scheduled for October 14, 2025, funded by NYC Council.
- Hardscaping projects to increase accessibility around campus continue; projects completed around buildings 1A and 2A this summer.
- A Wayfinding Station which offers interactive signage has been installed near the 1P bus stop to help visitors navigate the campus. It is also mobile-friendly.
- Live performances returned to the Center for the Arts, starting with *Fiddler on the Roof*, which had a successful four-night run, drawing close to 1,500 attendees. Three shows sold out.
- Summer Camp at CSI was also revived, drawing over 200 campers who participated in athletics and recreational activities. Plans are underway to expand into arts and academics next year.
- A Tech Innovation Hub will be opening soon at Lighthouse Point in a renovated facility. It is designed for a wider community audience, beyond our traditional students.

President Lynch gave a special welcome to 18 new tenure-track faculty and several new directors who joined CSI as of June 1, 2025, a reflection, he noted, that was a commitment to growth despite financial challenges. He acknowledged the presence of two new cabinet members: Dr. Ruta Gordon, Interim VP for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management and Dr. Nathalia Holtzman, Interim Provost & SVP for

Academic Affairs. He ended by expressing deep pride in the fact that CSI was gaining recognition for its academic and cultural contributions, especially in the areas of faculty grants and community engagement.

Q&A

A question was raised about the pre-recording of a student's speech at commencement, which was unexpectedly shown on a stadium-size monitor. The speaker described the decision to pre-record as one that was unprecedented at the College of Staten Island and felt by some to resemble censorship or distrust, especially given the speaker's identity as a 47-year-old Palestinian American. The speaker wondered if the decision to pre-record was made in light of the Valedictorian's identity. President Lynch stated that he had already responded to the speaker's questions before on the evening of Commencement Day, but he was happy to repeat his response which has remained the same. He first confirmed that the decision to pre-record the speech was made long before knowing the student's identity and shortly after the 2024 commencement. President Lynch disagreed with the characterization of censorship. He emphasized that the decision was not directed towards the valedictorian or the salutatorian, who was not present, but that this was an effort to keep things moving in a timely manner, keep things moving in an appropriate manner, and to keep folks on task. He stated that it was his decision alone, and he remained steadfast in standing by this decision.

Another question was raised by a speaker, identified as representing the Fight to Win Caucus, who expressed outrage over what they viewed as censorship and repression at the 2025 College of Staten Island commencement. The speaker linked the pre-recording of the valedictorian's speech (by a Palestinian American student) to broader issues of academic censorship, especially in light of global events like the war in Gaza. They cited: firings of adjuncts at Brooklyn College, congressional hearings on antisemitism, police crackdowns on campus protests, and fear and suppression of free speech in higher education. The speaker criticized the heavy police presence and the arrest of a parent who intervened during a student walkout. They called for an end to the militarization of campus events and urged the administration not to engage in further censorship. President Lynch defended the administration's decision to pre-record the speech, citing "time, place, and manner" guidelines. He denied censorship, stating that commencement was not the appropriate venue for political expression.

Another speaker suggested encouraging future student speakers to focus on **unifying themes** rather than polarizing topics. President Lynch reiterated that the valedictorian's speech was compelling and not censored and emphasized the importance of maintaining decorum at official events.

Another speaker criticized the handling of the Commencement ceremony, stating that while the time, place, and manner of the event were appropriate, allowing a particular speech to be pre-recorded disrespected the student's family and friends who came to hear her speak. The speaker noted he had yet to see any Commencement ceremony handled in such a way and urged a change in practice, agreeing with the first speaker that using First Amendment restrictions on time, place, and manner was not a reasonable approach.

Chair Gold brought the Q&A to a close by suggesting the creation of a Task Force to look at other options. Solutions will be presented to President Lynch to consider for future ceremonies. He asked for volunteers to contact him.

President Lynch expressed that he appreciated the questions and comments from members in the room.

V. Professional Staff Congress (PSC) Report – Jonathan Cope

Below is a summary of the PSC CUNY report from Jonathan Cope, the new Chair of the PSC CUNY chapter at CSI. The full report is attached.

1. Contract Implementation: Several provisions from the newly ratified PSC Collective Bargaining Agreement have been implemented. If you have questions or believe you're not receiving entitled benefits, please contact: Alyson Bardsley (Grievance Counselor); Jonathan Cope (Chapter Chair); and PSC Contract Enforcement Office.

2. Proposed Health Plan Changes: NYC is proposing a new health plan—NYC Employees PPO—to replace the current Emblem/GHI and Anthem/Blue Cross plan. Key details: No premiums; Same co-pays; Expanded provider network (including mental health and out-of-state care); Administered by Emblem and United Healthcare, and Proposed start: **January 1, 2026**. PSC is monitoring the situation closely and has concerns about the rapid timeline and lack of long-term details. More info and a place to submit questions are available here: PSC Health Care Developments.

3. Academic Freedom: PSC is advocating for four adjuncts at Brooklyn College who were dismissed without explanation, likely due to their activism around Palestine. This raises serious concerns about academic freedom. Sign the petition for reinstatement: Reinstatement of the Fired Four. If called into an investigatory meeting, invoke your Weingarten Rights and Contact Ashley Dawson (CSI Academic Freedom Committee Chair) with concerns.

4. Community Action: Please join the New Yorkers Against ICE Rally on September 25, 2025, at 6pm at Foley Square. PSC members will meet by the benches at the north end of Thomas Paine Park.

5. Next PSC CUNY Chapter Meeting will take place on September 21, 2025, at 2:30pm. Guest speakers include Prof. Cathay Savage-Dunn (Queens College): PSC Defend Research Working Group and Liz Stevenson (PSC Action Fund): PSC's work in NYC electoral politics.

In solidarity,
Jonathan Cope

VI. **Report from the Administration** – No report

VII. **Reports of the committees of the College Council**

a. **Committee on Organization** – Warrick Bell

Warrick Bell, Chair of the Committee on Organizations, gave an update on vacant seats on the College Council and Faculty Senate committees unfilled for the start of the Fall semester. The report (slide presentation) is attached.

b. By-Laws Committee – Kenneth Gold

The Chair of the By-Laws Committee, Kenneth Gold, reported that the Board of Trustees passed the proposed changes to our bylaws at its May 2025 meeting.

A suggestion from a member of the body asked that the By-Laws committee consider representing other groups of staff who work at CSI and not just the interest of members of the PSC and administration.

c. Administrative Review and Evaluation Committee – No report

d. Institutional Planning Committee – No report

e. Budget Committee – Kenneth Gold

The Chair of the Budget Committee, Kenneth Gold, reported that the committee met last week and reviewed the year end budget of FY 25 and the projections for FY 26, both of which looked good relative to prior expectations and pending any drastic future cuts of federal allocations to NY State.

f. Facilities Committee – No report

VIII. Student Government Report – Ashley Villalva

The new President of Student Government, Ashley Villalva, reported on the following recent and upcoming initiatives:

I. Recent Initiatives & Updates (Passed/Completed)

1. NYC Student Union – CUNY-Wide Survey (9/16)

Student Government participated in a CUNY-wide survey aimed at gathering information on student needs regarding higher education and student success. This initiative will inform future policy and advocacy efforts. Awaiting survey results, expected in October.

II. Upcoming Initiatives & Events

1. \$100,000 Special Proposal Funding Initiative

Open to the entire CSI community—students, faculty, and administration—to submit initiatives via CSI Connect SG Funding. Funds come from Student Activities Fees (SAF) and must benefit the broader campus community. Proposals should include detailed documentation, such as invoices, to ensure proper allocation and adherence to CUNY fiscal guidelines. For guidance or questions about proposal appropriateness, contact Mario D’Alessandro, Director of Student Life.

2. Continued Support for CSI Food Pantry

Funding secured for part-time staff to maintain pantry operations. This ensured ongoing support for students facing food insecurity.

3. In-House Student Government Elections

The nomination period for SG elections: 9/18 – 10/14. The elections have been scheduled for 10/23. Promotes student engagement and leadership opportunities on campus.

4. **Block Party – 9/25**

A block party was held on the 2nd floor in 1C Campus Center. Students circulated among different offices, learning about campus resources and services. The event was designed to welcome students back to campus, foster engagement, and support retention by creating a vibrant and connected campus experience.

5. **Halloween Bash – 10/24**

Organized by Student Government to encourage student participation and strengthen community ties. Students will be engaged through interactive activities and games, fostering connections among peers. Designed to enhance retention by creating a fun, inclusive environment that helps students feel connected to CSI.

6. **Fall Feast – 11/25**

A large-scale Student Government-led event celebrating community and student life. It would provide opportunities for students to network with peers, faculty, and staff while enjoying a festive meal. Retention-focused strategies would include highlighting student organizations, showcasing campus resources, and creating an inclusive space to strengthen students' sense of belonging.

III. Administrative & Operational Updates

1. **Meetings with Administration**

Student Government had a recent meeting with VP Dr. Gordon and AVP/CFO to discuss operational budget. Explored strategies to bridge the gap between students and administration. Collaboration would continue to strengthen relationships and enhance transparency.

Q&A

Chair Kenneth Gold asked of President Villalva to look forward to the end of her term and share an achievement, near and dear to her heart, that she would like to have accomplished. President Villalva responded by stating that bridging the gap between faculty and students was an initiative she would be proud to accomplish. She noted that this divide became especially apparent during the COVID pandemic. She had seen firsthand how disconnected students can feel from their professors, and many students have shared that they struggled to reach faculty or find solutions to the issues they are facing. As such, she has begun to work closely with the Vice President and Associate Vice President to create more opportunities for direct engagement.

IX. HEO Steering Committee – Suzy Shepardson

Welcome back for the Fall 2025 semester!

We held our first meeting of the year on Monday, September 15 and conducted our elections for co-chair. I am excited to share that I will be continuing in my role, and that I will be joined this year by Tara Mastroilli: Angelina Raio is taking a step back this year but is still serving as a member of the committee. I'd like to take a moment to thank Angelina, my Virgo sister, for her service and support.

While most of our members are continuing their terms, I'd like to welcome our brand-new member (Lorianne Crowder of the Psychology Department) and welcome back Michael Volpe of the Biology Department (who is rejoining us as an alternate).

We're working on plans for our regular meeting with President Lynch and his team, and we're also organizing a plan for continued outreach to HEOs to ensure that we are accurately representing and conveying their concerns.

That's the news, the weather is stunning, and we're here to help!

X. Auxiliary Services Corporation Report – Robert Wallace

Robert Wallace reported on the following items:

- Dining Services: Online orders can now be paid with credit cards and Apple Pay, addressing a major concern for students.
- New Food Truck: A new food truck from the Grace Foundation is now available on Wednesdays along Alumni Walk. Grace Foundation provides job skills and income for individuals on the autism spectrum.
- Housing: The occupancy of Dolphin Cove reached 89.8%, the highest since the pandemic.

XI. Old Business - None

XII. New Business

Meeting was adjourned at 4:25pm

Respectfully submitted by Wilma Jones
Secretary, Executive Committee of the College Council