As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, it is an appropriate time to reflect upon those things for which we are most thankful. In this vein, I want to thank the faculty and staff for their hard work and dedication in ensuring that our students continue to have the opportunity to receive an affordable and high-quality education here at the College Staten Island.

In these times of profound economic instability, we recognize that students are experiencing a greater need for financial assistance, and we remain committed to providing the maximum financial support available to them. More than 14,000 students matriculated at the College of Staten Island during the 2010-2011 academic year. Of this total, over 9,000 students, approximately 60%, received nearly $49 million in need-based financial aid, which included Federal Title IV grants, Direct Loans, TAP, and other New York State-funded grants. Approximately $29 million in grant aid was paid to more than 6,500 undergraduate students, which represented 44% of all undergraduates. Over the last two academic years, the number of PELL Grant recipients at the College increased by 39%, and the total amount of PELL funds disbursed increased by a staggering 75%. Additionally, the College has supplemented this funding by awarding more than $240,000 in CSI student scholarships. The College remains vigilant to the financial needs of students and judiciously deploys its resources to maintain an efficient and responsive financial aid infrastructure.

In this same spirit, CUNY has long advocated for a rational tuition policy in order to mitigate the unpredictability of tuition cost spikes. Last June, a new bill was enacted by the New York State Legislature that authorized the implementation of a rational tuition plan, which would allow an annual increase in tuition of up to $300 over the next five years. The bill also included a “maintenance of effort” commitment from the State that its financial support will not be reduced from prior-year levels except in cases of financial emergency. The legislation further provided that revenue from the tuition increase will flow to the University and could not be used to close the State’s budget gap, as had been done in past years.

The rational tuition plan will allow students and parents to more adequately plan and prepare for their college expenses. The additional revenue, which will now stay within the CUNY system, will be utilized to support academic priorities and student services including more full-time faculty and critical infrastructure initiatives. Furthermore, the rational tuition plan will allow multiyear planning by the University and the College of Staten Island in order to strategically invest in the future of these institutions.

Our efforts demonstrate that we are deeply committed to providing access to, and persistence in, affordable, high-quality education for our students, and that we are equally dedicated to supporting and advancing our students’ academic excellence and success.
Last month, I reported that CSI was the recipient of a tremendous honor in being recognized as one of the top “Military Friendly Schools” in the nation by *G.I. Jobs* magazine. As part of CSI’s ongoing commitment to the support of our veterans, November marks “Veterans Appreciation” month at CSI. The Division of Student Affairs sent an email to all faculty, staff, and students providing a full calendar of the month’s events.

I am pleased to announce that Chancellor Goldstein has appointed me to chair a special University-wide committee to further enhance the needs of the approximately 3,000 veteran students enrolled at CUNY and the more than 600 CUNY veteran faculty and staff. This appointment is truly a reflection of the tremendous work of the staff of CSI’s Veterans Educational Transition Services, the Registrar’s Office, the Student Veteran Center, and the Division of Student Affairs, who are jointly dedicated in supporting the needs of our student veterans through a wide array of specialized services.

On November 1, one of the dedicated staff members from the Office of Veterans Educational Transition Services, David Colon, was honored by the Chancellor at the “2011 CUNY Thank You for Serving Reception,” for his military service during Operation Enduring Freedom and his service at CSI. These are just a few examples of the national and local recognition that the College and its faculty and staff are receiving for their outstanding commitment to student success and achievement.

I am also pleased to report that, at the 2011 CUNY Financial Management Conference held this week, CSI’s Center for Student Accessibility won the College’s first-ever CUNY Productivity Award for its successful implementation of a Communications Access Real-Time Translation Program, or CART system. The CART system allows the translation of a faculty member’s classroom lecture into text, which can then be immediately accessed on a laptop computer by students with hearing impairments. The Productivity Award recognizes CSI’s success in providing better services to our students in a more efficient manner. I want to thank Christopher Cruz Cullari, Director of the Center for Student Accessibility, and the divisions of Student Affairs and Technology Systems for their leadership with this important initiative.

The Governor recently issued a proclamation designating November 14 through 18 as International Education Week in the State of New York to raise awareness of the benefits and value of international education. International education is a fundamental component of our new Mission Statement and Strategic Directions, reflecting the value that CSI places on diversity and academic excellence.

I am currently serving as Chair of a University-wide working group created by the CUNY Council of Presidents’ Ad Hoc Committee on International Education. The working group has been charged with looking at ways to improve the marketing, recruitment, admission, and retention of international students at CUNY and CSI, and a draft of the group’s initial report and recommendations was recently presented to the Ad Hoc Committee. I will keep the College community updated on this important work as it progresses.

My involvement with the working group emanated from CSI’s demonstrated commitment to international education. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 135 CSI students studied abroad,
which represented a 64% increase over the previous year. Additionally, 139 visiting international students were enrolled at CSI from 12 countries, and 108 international students were enrolled in our English Language Institute.

Just this past month, representatives from the offices of Recruitment and Admissions and Financial Aid participated in the two-day “2011 College Fair” in Trinidad and Tobago. This opportunity arose from initial discussions with the United States Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago regarding potential higher education partnerships. On October 24, eight education leaders from Thai Nguyen University of Technology visited CSI, as part of our ongoing efforts to establish relationships with higher education institutions in Vietnam. This delegation, led by the University Rector, met with CSI faculty and staff to discuss potential collaborations between our two institutions for research, English language training, and the development of articulation programs in Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Telecommunications, Accounting, and Business Administration.

I want to thank the Division of Academic Affairs, the Office of Enrollment Management, and the Center for International Service for continuing to advance the internationalization of academic life at the College.

As I previously reported, a CUNY-wide committee has been working on evaluating proposals from renowned architectural firms for designing the College’s Interdisciplinary High-Performance Computing Center building. I am pleased to advise that we recently received notification from the CUNY Office of Facilities Planning, Construction, and Management that an architectural firm has been chosen for the project subject to finalization of an engagement agreement. Once this occurs, a formal announcement will be made concerning the winning design firm.

I am very pleased to announce that our annual Celestial Ball will be held on Saturday, December 3, at the Richmond County Country Club. This year, we will be honoring three very distinguished individuals: Denis Hughes, President of the New York State AFL-CIO and Honorary Alumnus; Mrs. Rose Volpe, Community Leader and long-time friend of the College; and Dr. Mary O’Donnell, Chair of the Department of Nursing. Last year’s Celestial Ball netted more than $630,000 for student scholarships and College support, which represented a 20% increase from the previous year, and received a special award from CUNY for outstanding gala success among all CUNY institutions. I encourage everyone to attend this year’s Celestial Ball as we look to continue our success in raising funds in support of our students.

In closing, let me wish all of you a safe and happy holiday. Thank you.