



College Council Remarks
November 19, 2020

Good afternoon.

To follow up on the plan I mentioned last month during College Council to further diversification, inclusion, and belonging at CSI, we submitted a meaningful and sustainable draft of the plan to IPC on November 3. We will be meeting tomorrow to discuss further.

But we are starting to move forward on some items this semester including:

- Student Affairs' Antiracism Committee will be hosting the first of a "What is?" series to educate the campus community on current issues. The first in the series is "What is White Privilege" with Prof. Jean Halley, which is scheduled for December 7, 2020;
- The Committee reviewing COACHE and Rankin Survey results has completed its review and it will be holding a town hall on December 4, 2020;
- I consulted with the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer of FDNY who is willing to work with our team to help us move our plan forward to promote inclusivity, diversity, and equality.

We will be starting the 21-day equity challenge, modeled after the 21-Day Challenge© (*21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge is the registered copyright of America & Moore, LLC., 2014*) developed and trademarked by [Dr. Eddie Moore Jr. of America & Moore](#), at the beginning of the Spring 2020 semester, followed by other meaningful programming such as:

- monthly diversity and inclusion conversations;
- discussions with Chairs and Deans, followed by discussions with each department to review the current makeup of each department and to encourage diversification of the workforce to be more representative of the student body.

Again, if anyone is interested in submitting material to be used in the challenge, please send them to me or Jessica for inclusion.

I will turn to the budget, as the State of New York released a Mid-Year financial plan update two weeks ago. Like I mentioned last month, state revenue shortfall increased to about \$15B, equivalent to 15% of State Revenue collections. Accordingly, there is no change in the State holding onto 20% of State agency allocations, inclusive of student financial aid, contingent on the Federal Government's response due to recent election results. It is unfortunate that our hard work to reduce the historical structural deficit, and one that I have written this body about many times, has been cut in half and would have been eliminated had it not been for this pandemic.

CUNY has been working with campuses on a plan for use of \$132M from the Institutional and the Minority Serving Institutions portion of the University's CARES Act allocations now that \$118M in Student Emergency Grants has been significantly disbursed. Late last week, CUNY provided additional guidance to assist with the development of campus strategies for use of these funding streams.

As a result of our collective hard work and feedback through the various committees since early this summer, we are well positioned to submit a comprehensive plan for reimbursement of expenses.

Some examples of line items to be submitted include costs of providing technology hardware to students, faculty, and staff, reimbursements of fees to students (i.e., dormitory, parking, and Student Activity Fees), purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), signage, and health screening equipment.

With the most recent guidance, we are finalizing our plan, which will be submitted to CUNY for review and approval. Thereafter, reimbursement of expenses will occur on a quarterly basis for the current year following completion of reimbursement for FY 2020 expenses.

Everyone received an email from the Chancellor on November 4, discussing a shortfall of millions to CUNY's FY 2021 budget, resulting in furloughs for members of the ECP. There is no mincing words, these are hard times – emotionally, financially, and politically, and we at CUNY and the College of Staten Island have a long road ahead of us.

There is a lot of uncertainty about the future and everyone is anxious, frustrated, and concerned. Some are even angry. On top of the pandemic was the historic and contentious election, further adding to the stress of the campus. We have been – and are continuing to be – challenged and tested at every level, leaving us feeling unsure of where we will end up when the dust begins to settle. So, we must find a way forward, together.

I believe the best way to position ourselves for the future is to focus on what brought us here in the first place – our students. We need to be guided by our Strategic Plan, which lays out everything we need to focus on to put us in a position of strength. If we follow our Strategic Plan, which has broad acceptance by our community, our politicians, and our Board, we will be central to educating our students for providing broad access to the highest quality education and of taking students from tough backgrounds and making them successful.

Student Success

First and foremost, we must focus on our number one strategic priority, student success. We must do what it takes to continue to connect with our students and give them the best possible chances to succeed and fulfill their educational aspirations – especially during these challenging times.

If you had an opportunity to watch our [2020 Virtual Commencement Ceremony](#), you saw and heard first hand, through our [Valedictorian, Stephany Luciano, and Salutatorian, Tiffany Hall-Clarke](#), why this priority is number one.

Stephany overcame a battle with multiple sclerosis and graduated top of her class, with the mindset to “focus not on life’s obstacles but how we persevere.”

Tiffany, a first-generation American, entered college as a 17-year-old single mother, and is now preparing for entrance to medical school. Tiffany spoke about how we must not let others define who we are and advised “when things get difficult, we all need to come together despite anything that divides us.”

If you have not watched the ceremony yet, please do so. It is truly moving and uplifting.

It is a reminder, that each and every one of us is here for the benefit of our students and we must ensure that our students always feel supported throughout their educational journey, from start to finish.

We must focus on retention, advisement, mentoring, support services, reducing achievement gaps, removing barriers, and increasing graduation rates. Our goal is to help our students achieve their goals. Their success is our success.

Borough Stewardship

CSI has so much to offer and we must continue to show how invaluable we are to Staten Island. We are the only public-serving institution of higher education in the Borough and we have award-winning faculty who provide a first-rate education to our students from Staten Island and beyond. As a large institution, we offer employment opportunities to Staten Islanders and others in the surrounding areas. In fact, we are the number 2 employer on the Island behind only SIUH.

We must continue to shape how we see ourselves as “a part of the community,” take pride in who we are, where we work, and what we are here to do.

We have been an integral part of Staten Island since 1956 and we will continue to be so for many years, as long as we continue to help identify and meet community needs. Our educational partnerships, such as our Tech Incubator, the P-TECH program, 30,000 Degrees, and Small Business Development Center are invaluable to our community and make us indispensable, as we have so much to offer.

Destination Campus

We must highlight and rally behind what makes CSI “a campus students will want to attend.”

School spirit is something we really need to focus on. If we have a true sense of pride in our institution, it will carry over to our students. School spirit will help give students a true sense of belonging to a community that can help motivate them and improve their performance.

Overall, improving school spirit will make everyone feel more invested and help foster a happy and more welcoming environment.

Importantly, we have a lot to be proud of – award-winning faculty like Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Tyehimba Jess and Pulitzer finalist and Kingsley Tufts Award recipient Patricia Smith; physicist Li Ge, who was recognized by the National Science Foundation with a prestigious CAREER award; Vadim Oganessian, who was recently elected as an American Physical Society (APS) Fellow; and multimedia artist Valerie Tevere of Media Culture, who was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

We have incredible students like our 2020 Valedictorian and Salutatorian, and our current Student Government President Maxwell Velikodny, who is so involved in helping to make changes for the betterment of the student body in order to help them succeed.

We have continued national recognition for value and academic excellence, such as being named to *U.S. News & World Report* 2021 Best Colleges list for Regional Universities North, gaining recognition for our Undergraduate Engineering program; and GradReports Best Colleges List ranked CSI's Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work programs each as 20th in the nation. GradReports has also named CSI's Undergraduate Nursing program to its Top 25 Undergraduate Nursing Schools 2020 list.

Scholarship-Driven Education

We must focus on scholarship and research that helps educate our students. Our students should be involved and incorporated into scholarship and research at all levels to strengthen our academic programs, enrich our students' educations, and increase the value of their degrees.

The Undergraduate Research Conference continues to be one of the best and most impressive events we hold at the College and it is invaluable to our students. These are the types of events that we should continue to build upon, grow, and invest in.

Resource Management

Through these tough times, we must position ourselves in a way to make the most of our limited resources and to earn the most amount of resources we can as a College. We must be very deliberate regarding how and where to invest funds and align our resource allocations.

Right now, we must focus on online education and how we can best support our students in a remote learning environment. In addition, we must determine what classes and programs we can continue to offer as online programs beyond the pandemic.

We must continue to make assessments and move our valued staff to priority areas as the situation may warrant, to reduce the effects of the budget impact. Since the beginning of the

pandemic, we have moved people from various offices to help provide staffing support where needed.

Global Engagement

We must have a diverse general education that has a global focus. In addition, as we prepare for a new administration in the White House, we should be prepared to welcome new international students and encourage meaningful exchanges and communications among members of the campus community with varied international knowledge and experiences.

As we use our Strategic Plan as our roadmap to success, we must continue to be true to our core values. Our Mission states in part, “We embrace the strength of our diversity, foster civic-mindedness, and nurture responsible citizens for our city, state, country, and the world.”

We must strive to ensure that all who come to CSI feel welcomed, included, and valued. We will increase the diversity of our workforce by placing the final hiring decisions in the hands of Deans for faculty, and administrators for full-time staff.

Consistent with our values, we will facilitate serious conversations about difficult subjects and we will grow by learning from each other and each other’s experiences.

I care deeply about this College, and all of our students, faculty, and staff. I believe we are a great institution filled with great and extraordinary people, and no matter the challenges ahead, we will continue to be a great institution. But as in all cases, there are always areas in which each and every one of us can do better and be better, and I believe we will get there.

We have a tough road ahead of us, but we will get through it as we have gotten through difficult times in the past. We must stay the course and follow the plan. I promise to do my best to lead us through these challenging times to the best of my ability. My hope is that you will help me by doing your part to help CSI and our students along the way.

I close with the value statement of our institution that speaks to an “[e]mphasis on campus pride and the cultivation of a welcoming and inclusive environment. We cultivate pride in our institution in everything that we do. We strive to ensure that all who come to campus feel welcomed and valued. We enjoy celebrating our successes. Together, we work to achieve greater recognition through advancement and the promotion of campus activities.”

William J. Fritz
President

