

College Council Remarks November 18, 2021

As I announced a few weeks ago, I am retiring at the end of this semester. This is probably my 106th, and likely my last, College Council at the College of Staten Island, as the December's meeting is scheduled while I will be on annual leave.

I want to take this opportunity to tell you all how much I have enjoyed serving as your President, and previously as your Provost, over the past 13+ years, about a third of my academic career post-graduate school. I also want to say thank you to the many, many hard-working faculty and staff – CSI would not run without you!

As many of you know, this is actually my second retirement. I came to the College of Staten Island after having already retired from another institution and when I was appointed here, I was appointed with an underlying title of a tenured full professor. This afforded me some freedoms in decision making that not all Presidents have. Given my tenure, and retired status, I was able to make decisions that I believed were the right decisions and not necessarily the politically expedient

ones. With each decision I made, I considered the institution first and did what I thought was best for the College, for the students, and for the community. And while many of you didn't always agree with my decisions, I can honestly say that I followed my moral compass and never wavered in my commitment to do what I believed best for the future of CSI given the information available at the time.

When I announced my retirement to the campus, I listed many campus accomplishments during my tenure that I am proud of, but some, in my opinion, will continue to help move this College forward far into the future. If the campus continues to believe in the mission of this great institution and make every effort to build upon its solid foundation, everything is possible!

I am so proud of our Strategic Plan, "*Opportunity to Ascend.*" Our Strategic Plan is a powerful tool and map that will help guide the institution with every decision that is made. Our plan solidifies our mission to put students first and focuses on ensuring their success. Each priority builds upon priority number one, our students, and strengthens our resolve to ensure that each student gets a quality, affordable, well-rounded education to help them graduate and accomplish their dreams. We must never waiver in our commitment to our students. They must

always be the priority and every decision made must support that mission.

Building upon the Strategic Plan, our move to NCAA Division II, is another source of pride for me. Friday night, Bonnie and I went to one of the CSI Dolphin Basketball Games here on campus. As we entered the gym, we could hear and feel the excitement surrounding us, and as we watched the game we could see and feel the energy of the fans and the players on the court. It was a new energy, a great college competition with real spirit and pride – one that we haven't seen before. We had visitors staying in thirteen hotel rooms booked for the weekend in neighborhood hotels, a crowd of family and friends that traveled to cheer on the student athletes, students cheering on their classmates, and people having fun - albeit with masks and social distancing and limited capacity due to COVID restrictions. But the point is, we had school spirit, school pride, a fun college experience, while we were showing the crowd why the College of Staten Island is a campus that students will want to attend, and at the same time being good stewards for our community. Some of the friends and siblings of the visiting teams will eventually choose CSI as a *Destination Campus*.

Transitioning to NCAA Division II is a decision that will help make us a destination campus. For the first time, our baseball team has eight

athletes who are academically eligible to apply for Macaulay Honors College. Fifty-one student athletes reside in Dolphin Cove, 99 student athletes are enrolled who would not have been here without DII and we are generating approximately \$1.4M in tuition revenue, and an additional \$1M in fees, housing, and meal plans, most for use of the general college budget, and far exceeding the non-tax levy scholarships that it took for them to come. CSI is becoming a school of choice for scholar athletes; we are thereby attracting and increasing our population of fully academically prepared baccalaureate students. In addition, the transition has a great community impact, increases the number of baccalaureate residents in Dolphin Cove, and positively impacts student life. We need to embrace student life programs like this and support them and their potential to transform us as a destination of choice.

Another source of pride is the formation of the three schools, the School of Education, the School of Health Sciences, and the School of Business. In addition, we received the largest ever gift for a non-for-profit on the Island, \$7.5M cash gift for the naming of the Chazanoff School of Business, that subsequently generated \$1M more in an estate gift as part of the original gift (and not a new naming opportunity). These funds will really help the Chazanoff School become accredited and will make us an attractive choice for students seeking an education and future career in Business.

In addition, we opened up St. George to reach more students on the North Shore and provide an opportunity to Staten Island residents to access higher education classes and earn degrees.

During my tenure, there has also been an increase in Foundation and unrestricted funds. When I first started, the CSI Foundation was in a hole. Now, it has more than quadrupled its assets, going from near bankruptcy with \$4M in assets but an unrestricted fund that was \$-300,000 underwater to a foundation with \$22M in assets and a million and a half -dollar surplus in unrestricted funds. Of course, to be consistent with other senior campuses, an institution like ours needs over \$100 million, a number that did not seem possible nine years ago. Today, it is well within our sights within the next nine years.

Finally, the over \$250 million in major construction, critical maintenance, and renovations, that we fought for and have completed on this campus, as well as the future projects that we have already secured funding for, has helped and will continue to help build upon the foundation of this campus as we move into the future.

It is easy to forget but just a few years ago, loop road was undrivable, our buildings had no gutters, and work had not started on the front entrances to the academic buildings, power went out on an all too regular basis, and 2M was vacant. Today, renovations of 2M are continuing, four front entrances have been done and work will start on more, a new \$39M substation to bring power stability and to allow for future growth is nearing completion, and the sidewalks will all be redone, hopefully starting in the spring when the snow leaves.

Of course, we could pour another billion dollars into the campus and it would not fix everything. I know many of you remain frustrated that so much remains to be done. However, consider that we had to start somewhere, and like eating the proverbial elephant one small bite at a time, or the single step to start a journey of 1,000 miles, we had to get started. Our construction budget from CUNY has also quadrupled with improvements that are coming. Throughout my career, as a guiding principle, I have built and planned for sustainability and for the long term, something for future generations to enjoy.

We must continue to keep the pace and not stop the momentum of building and growing.

I want to end by saying how grateful I am for the opportunity to have been your leader, for all the support you have provided me over the years, and for all that you do to help make this College the best institution it can be. Continue to build upon this great institution, focus on our students and providing them an exceptional education, and this College will continue to evolve and succeed in its mission.

I wish you all much success and happiness in both your professional and educational journeys at the College of Staten Island. Beyond that, I wish you all the best wherever your path should lead you.

Again, thank you! Wishing you all have a very Happy and Healthy Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,

William J. Fritz
President