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Address to Board of Trustees
February Meeting
Thursday, February 3, 2005

Greetings, Chairman Tyree, Chancellor Watson, members of the Board, Officers of the District and all others present.

This was the most difficult address that I have had to write in my two years as Faculty Council President. It saddens and horrifies me that I must announce that the faculty of the City Colleges of Chicago have resoundingly supported a resolution of no-confidence in Chancellor Wayne Watson. The final count of the votes of the faculty who participated (only full-time faculty were asked to participate) is as follows: 360 voted no-confidence in the leadership of the chancellor; five voted against the no-confidence vote, and fourteen abstained.

Why the no-confidence vote? Frustration, anger, disbelief in the face of the most recent actions perhaps, but it should also come as no surprise. Indeed, I feel a bit like Cassandra, the Trojan woman who warned the Greek warrior, Agamemnon, about his imminent death. When I first came before this board, there were a number of issues and challenges about the leadership and governance that disturbed the faculty. The hope was, however, that with open communication and continued dialog, these issues would be resolved and the tensions lessened.

Such hasn't happened. The egregious treatment of the emeriti faculty and adjunct instructors is just one symbol of the larger issue of the systemic damage to the district under Chancellor Watson. The resolution outlines the general charges against Wayne Watson. What the resolution doesn't outline are the subtle corrosions within the system that undermine the education of the students enrolled in the City Colleges. And this is what is most problematic about his leadership: Chancellor Watson has consistently undermined the education of the students through what, at best, can be called misguided policies and procedures. Our students depend on his leadership. And he has failed them.

The assumption, for example, that anyone, including, in the vivid phrase of Jack Lombard, "the last warm body off the bus" can teach is absolutely contrary to best practices in education. Even if we have all the classes covered, there is no guarantee that the best instructor with the best preparation is in front of the classroom. Nor is

successful learning guaranteed because an individual has seemingly appropriate credentials (and who decides credentials?). For many of our students, the Chicago education system has failed them again and again by following similar procedures: that anyone who wants to teach, can teach and that quantity, not quality, rules, whether this is determined by a standardized tests or enrollment numbers. And yet instructors who are qualified and have won, in many instances, awards for their dedicated leadership and scholarship are passed over for the “last warm body off the bus.”

As I've suggested before in this forum, successful learning, which is what we all want, is not about the teachers, the administrators or the students, but takes place in the center of the delicate web, which connects these three groups together through mutual respect and communication. It cannot be easily built, but it can be quickly destroyed. The misguided actions of the chancellor are undermining our students' education. We can no longer support Chancellor Watson.

Respectfully submitted,

Polly Hoover
President of Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago