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FCCCC President's Address
CCC Board of Trustee's Meeting
Thursday, September 8, 2005

Good morning! Chairman Tyree, Chancellor Watson, members of the Board, Officers of the District, faculty, staff and all others present.

This past May I attended a wedding here. It was my first visit to the South Shore Cultural Center and I remember saying to my wife, "I have to come back here." As it is, we're here today enjoying this marvelous space and our very own Culinary Institute. I also want to add that the breakfast was delicious.

Generally it's a challenge for me to prepare these monthly presentations. Every Board meeting creates its own unique vibe and, since I speak last, the night before I struggle anticipating what the vibe will be the following day, never quite sure what part or parts of my speech are going to become irrelevant.

Having said this, though, last night was not as difficult as I had thought it would be. In all honesty and sincerity, speaking before you pales in comparison to what our fellow citizens have gone through in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It boggles the mind and, with the risk of sounding cliché, this catastrophe has hopefully put things in the proverbial "perspective."

Today I would like to discuss just two issues: the admittance of displaced college students from Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana to the City Colleges and the encroaching commodification of our educational system.

First, I would like to acknowledge Chancellor Watson for his national leadership in the wake of the devastation. When he and Vice Chancellor Lewis told me last week of the plan, at that moment I felt a great sense of pride in the City Colleges. Sure, there were going to be logistical and systematic questions on how to pull it off but, the point is, we were the first to make this gesture and we are pulling it off. It has resonated across this country. Every day another university system or private college announces that it, too, is following our lead and is accommodating displaced students.

Last night I spoke with the first displaced student to enroll at Daley College: Mr. Luke Thomas who, as a freshman, had just begun his first semester at Xavier University in New Orleans. It's his first time in the City Colleges yet he feels very welcomed and he wants me to let you know that he is very appreciative, especially for "not having to pay tuition this semester."

The other issue deals with the "commodification" of education, that is, the application of the business model "The Client is Always Right." In this model, if the client is not satisfied with the product or service, he can complain to the department manager. If the department manager's answer is unsatisfactory to the client, he can then take the complaint to the store manager. If he still is not pleased with the answer, there's always the regional manager. And so on it goes. Applying this model to an educational system, if the student is not satisfied with his grade (the product) or the teacher (the service) he sees the department chair. If not satisfied, his complaint moves up to the Dean and then to the Vice President, etc...

The concern that has been expressed to me by my colleagues is this: a group of students can come together, complain, and the end result is the dismissal of faculty. Now, there may be other mitigating factors at play but the *perception* nonetheless exists and we would all do well by dispelling the notion that the only factor was the students' complaints.

The Chancellor has gone on record that he wants to "raise the standards" in this increasingly flattened world. Studies indicate that the majority of students respond well to the challenge because they recognize that the diploma, the end product, is worth much more than the paper it's printed on. However, we run the risk of greatly devaluing that product when the "client-is-always-right" model is operating because it presumes that by purchasing a product, i.e., paying tuition, satisfaction must be 100% guaranteed.

I'm going to end there but I would like to encourage you to read a couple of excellent articles: "The 'Cooling Out' Function in Higher Education" (1960) and "The 'Cooling Out' Function Revisited" (1980), both by the sociologist Burton Clark. His articles tie in very well to the direction that the CCC is going in terms of Project Align, the reorganization of the pre-college math and English courses and, perhaps, the nursing situation. I would be glad to provide you with copies as I think that these articles will help frame the debate in our on-going yearlong conversation and I will be referring to the 'Cooling Out' effect often.

And, finally, a brief reminder to the Trustees that you are invited to attend one of our Faculty Council meetings during the year. Our first meeting this academic year is Wednesday, September 21, at Malcolm X College at 3PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Lakin
President, FCCCC