

FCCCC President's Address

CCC Board of Trustee's Meeting

Friday, December 7, 2012

Chairman Wolf, Chancellor Hyman, members of the board, officers of the district, faculty, staff, and all others present, good morning.

In 2010 when the Higher Learning Commission representatives interviewed Truman College's faculty council, the HLC representatives looked all of us right in the eye and asked, "What are you doing to nurture the life of the mind of Truman students?" Immediately a lively discussion ensued, a discussion which will remain confidential, but I can say Truman faculty came to love this phrase, completely embracing it as a light that guides us on our path and in our mission as educators.

This phrase--the life of the mind--was recently evoked in my reading of course materials for an Open Yale Course entitled "The Early Middle Ages, 284-1000", taught by Paul H. Freedman, Chester P. Trip Professor of History. In lecture 13 entitled "Monasticism" Freedman describes the life of the monks and states, "The closest thing to a monastery is a college." Of course, there are many obvious differences, but like the monastery, colleges and universities are devoted to the leisure, to read, to think, to engage in intellectual contemplation. Freedman does not use the term leisure in the modern sense, that is to say, the leisure to walk in the afternoon or play tennis on the weekend. No, Freedman means it in the sense of freedom--as a free person--to read, explore, and contemplate the great ideas of the past and present--the big ideas like truth, justice, honor, virtue, duty, logic, and art--the contemplation on the nature of meaning, the practice of the scientific method--the understanding of culture, and the activity of citizenship. By culture, I, of course, do not suggest what's happening on youtube, tv, or the consumer magazines obsessed on celebrity culture, and by citizenship I, of course, do not suggest solely the importance of casting of one's vote—though that is very, very important--or the liking of a cause on Facebook. No, I mean the deep understanding of people and culture and meaningful and active participation in civic life.

(off script with student examples)

- 1) Introduction of Literature 110--student project on Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem Sweeties"
- 2) Creative Writing 241—student comment on importance of voice and connection to the spirit, mind, and society.

These are just a few of the many examples of students at all of our colleges who have made invaluable discoveries about the physical world, the world's people and cultures, and most importantly themselves—their voice and its power in civic participation-- this fall semester. I know everyone in this room is proud of these students, and we should

also be proud these experiences have happened at City Colleges--that we have nurtured the life of the mind of our students.

In late October I attended the College Board conference held in Florida. During the keynote speech, the newly appointed president, David Coleman, spoke of education as a civil rights issue. On this point, I agree--and I would also add it is a civil rights issue for students of a certain economic class. That education is a civil rights issue requires all of us at City Colleges to protect our students' right to any degree or certificate program where the liberal arts, in both spirit and deed, permeate throughout. I know students want jobs and businesses need employees, but all of us at City Colleges must protect our students' civil right and access to rich contemplation on the big ideas--that is, we must maintain the integrity of the liberal arts and academic rigor for our students in the context of today's educational challenges and goals.

At the end of our last FC4 council meeting, the provost spoke briefly about starting discussions about taking academics, in the provost's words, "to the next level." There was brief talk of an honors program and a study abroad program, and FC4 is willing to continue this discussion as well as all the many discussions started this fall semester.

As a colleague said to me the other day, we need to "create a space of intellectual exploration," and I agree-- so that we can, in fact, provide the intellectual adventure I'm always telling students they are going to have.

Happy Holidays!

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Aguila, Assistant Professor
FC4 President