

FCCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting: Thursday, August 6th, 2020

Chairperson Massey, Board of Trustees, Chancellor Salgado, Provost Potter, Officers of the District, faculty, staff and all others streaming: Good afternoon.

Like everyone who is working from home, our FC4 members have been working overtime this summer. Our members are all volunteering their time and showing up while off contract to uphold the faculty's end of the bargain of ensure the wellbeing of our institutions. By our next meeting, some of our current membership will change, so I want to publicly thank every member who has participated over this very strange and difficult summer. We have been able to do some really good work on behalf of students and faculty.

Over the past month, FC4 has continued the conversations about transitioning online coursework to the colleges. As I have reported over the last two months, the work is important both for the health of our colleges, but also as a model for how shared governance should look. The steering committee has been selected and will have its first meeting soon. Thank you, Meghan Chandler, for leading this work in such an inclusive, egoless, and thoughtful manner. We would all do well to adopt this posture toward our work. Similarly, the work with the developmental education committee led by Provost Potter, was also a shining example of shared governance in a fundamental aspect of our institution. The depth and breadth of our exploration into developmental education in the City colleges and the inclusion manner in which the work was carried out and final recommendations made is a model that should be highlighted nationally in conversations of developmental education reform. What we have done could be used as an alternative to the one-size-fits all legislative reforms we are seeing across the country. I hope that we use our innovate approaches to difficult questions to situate ourselves as national leaders in educational reform.

In response to Chancellor Salgado's call to engage in an anti-racism agenda within the City Colleges, we have created a new standing committee: The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. This committee will convene for the first time this fall to articulate it's mission and begin the work to make sure that these lenses are applied to all of the work we do. It's one thing to say that we will explore these issues and continue critical conversations around race, gender, sexuality, differing ability, and varying types of otherness, but often these actions are ephemeral and serve as performance rather than real, ongoing discourse and actionable goals. This committee is charged with continuing this type of thinking and making it one of the pillars of our practice in all areas. And in spaces in which the work doesn't get done because we don't have the tools to conceptualize how diversity, equity, and inclusion interface with our work, we intend to bring the language that we can inhabit to more fully discuss the interconnectedness of these critical values and our everyday work. We stand at the ready and look forward to joining Chancellor Salgado in this agenda.

Earlier this summer, it was announced that for the fall semester as much coursework as possible would be remote. I want to highlight how the decisions about what classes would function in each modality came about. Essentially, these were very sensitive conversations in which faculty in conjunction with our Vice presidents were able to marry their concerns for the safety of our students with faculty expertise to create college-specific plans that faculty were

comfortable with. This is a sort of privilege afforded to faculty because, in most cases, we situate the success or failure of students at the nexus of the faculty/student relationship. This relationship makes the value of the work of faculty easily recognized and, in this instance, esteemed. In this way, the considerate treatment we received was owed to us by virtue of our role in the educational process.

But this leads us to ask, what is owed to those who participate in the educational process but aren't in the classroom? Some have often used the metaphor of the theater to describe the workings of higher education. They label faculty as the actors, and professional and clerical employees as the stage crew, running things behind the scene, but playing an equally important role. I'd argue that our professional and clerical staff are actually the first actors our students see, and they make appearances throughout the performance that is a student's college career. They are both actor and stage crew. This duality of roles--both on and off stage--suggests that they too are owed, so it is disappointing how the regard afforded faculty has not been given to our professional and clerical co-laborers.

I want to be clear that FC4's purview is primarily the fundamental areas including curriculum, methods of instruction, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. We have labor unions to address labor related issues. What I am discussing live at the crux of relationship between our labor practices and student life.

While the individual college reopening plans suggest some amount of care was taken into the thinking about how to reopen as safely as possible, they neglect the reality that 1) we were never closed. All of the critical functions of our institutions have continued from the safety of home, and 2) reopening suggests that we are at a place in the lifespan of this pandemic in which we could or should offer services face-to-face, even in a limited capacity.

There are two popular arguments for reopening related to students that were present in Chancellor Salgado's report: First, that students are requesting in-person services; and second, that we limit access to certain student populations by not doing so.

As a public agency, while we are careful to not act in paternalistic ways, we often have to balance the public's desire for personal autonomy and the greater good. Look at any public institution, us included, and there are very few things we do simply because the public requests it. So, our response to this is utilitarian in nature and is one we make all the time: student desire does not outweigh public safety. If we can ask people to wear masks and to physically distance as an effort to keep people safe--both measures that limit individual freedoms and curb personal desire--we can also ask people to stay home and where we can provide them with quality service virtually and safely. Adding to this, many of our students are and live in multigenerational homes with essential and frontline workers; many also take public transportation. With each person we bring into our buildings, we add layers of risk for our employees, students, and their families. While we say that the risk is minimal, risk is still risk; and if we know that we have the option to avoid it, we should. Telling students that they can come in if they'd like is giving the virus a standing invitation. In the absence of face-to-face appointments, students have been getting wonderful service in all areas virtually, and nothing

about our operations has fallen apart, so I am hard pressed to understand a rationale for the necessity to bring students, professionals, and clerical staff back now.

The second argument that we are limiting access to students who may be hindered by technology has an obvious response: if a student is unable navigate our systems virtually, how will they fair during a virtual semester? We are clear on the answer to that: they won't fair well. Instead of bringing employees back to our colleges, the solution is to improve the accessibility of our systems, empowering students rather than enabling them. The students who often are disadvantaged by technology are also often from demographic populations who have been most affected by covid: minorities, older adults, and low-income individuals. The only seeming rationale for bringing them to the physical colleges is to boost enrollment numbers in the final weeks before the beginning of the semester. If enrollment is the impetus, we can't ignore that, besides the nationwide drop in college enrollments, many of our enrollment issues don't stem from covid; they stem from poor choices that the City Colleges leadership made in the form of Reinvention despite faculty's best efforts to stop it. Own and rectify that before levying the consequences of choices made by individual-minded, capitalist leadership against the lives of our students and staff.

To this day, we continue to suffer from the vestiges of Reinvention because they aren't vestiges. Reinvention is still very much alive and well and, to date, we haven't seen any substantive changes suggesting that we have any intention on changing course. The largest problem of reinvention was its failure to recognize the interconnectedness of programs at the individual colleges. As we approach the fall semester, we have to be conscious of this as we make decisions about enrollment management in the form of course cancellations. FC4 has had what we believe was a very productive conversation about course cancellations and the importance of strategic thinking about programs and the college at large. Indiscriminate cancellation based on arbitrary numbers is not an option now and should never have been. Particularly at our colleges with critically low enrollment, canceling courses can lead to students leaving their home college and going to a different City College that has the courses they need. Once there, students often stay at the college that offers everything they desire. The alternative is--and we found this to be true during Reinvention--students didn't move to the City College that held their intended academic or career focus; they stopped attending the City Colleges all together, and many didn't show up in clearinghouse data as attending colleges outside of our system either. What may seem like a simple course cancellation could be the end of a student's academic pursuits and the decimation of our programs and possibly our colleges. We must focus on retention over enrollment right now. To this end, FC4 has discussed and are possession of a logic model to aid in conversations around strategic course scheduling in the event that a college doesn't already have a clear, logical and inclusive way to engage faculty in the course cancelation process. Provost Potter has expressed support for this type of collaboration to establish clear and transparent processes at the respective colleges that will best serve them and their goals.

To conclude, we should not place our efforts into investigating how to bring students and staff back to our colleges. While this may be expedient, expedience and safety in almost any line of work are at odds; similarly, expedience is often preferenced for its economic value. If anything,

we should investigate the questions of why we would be inclined to treat people like cogs in a machine and why, in the face of their cries for their health and ultimately their lives, we would continue to steep our staff and students in the ambient indifference to their voices that many of them experience daily, both at their places of employment and as they navigate the world.

In this time what we need is a working methodology for how we carry out our daily tasks and our mission that is humanizing, that recognizes the realities of this current moment, and that respects the work of our professional and clerical staff as an integral part of the educational process. Both our students and our staff have proven that they can manage things from home where they are safe. As the chancellor said during his report, our professionals and clerical staff take pride in their work. While that is true, it is disingenuous to couch that statement in a conversation about bring them back to campus when it isn't safe. Doing so suggests that they welcome the harm that may befall them, making them complicit in their own victimization and exploitation. Let's not conflate their pride in their work with decisions largely made in their absence and without their perspective.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

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Keith Sprewer, FCCCC President, Academic Year 2020-2021