

JUNE 4, 2020

FCCCC President's Address
CCC Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday May 7th, 2020

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

Writer, Toni Morrison said in an interview, "The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing." I would rather tell you about the very good work that FC4 has engaged in with our district administrators, the feeling of good will concerning shared governance, particularly in our work in establishing online work at the individual colleges, and I will appear as an addendum to my written report to the board; however, while it grieves me to do so, we must address this distraction.

In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is now a seminal work in African American literature and an American classic, W.E.B. Du Bois writes, "*Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. How does it feel to be a problem?*"

Certainly, being black has caused Blacks in American many problems. But Du Bois wasn't speaking about *having* problems. He broches the question of *being* a problem. He asks the largely unasked question: how does it feel to *be* a problem, unearthing the unquestioned presumption of the black body as criminal, violent, and inherently cancerous.

Like many of my colleagues, I am deeply disturbed by recent events. But as a Black American, I am unsurprised, and I am tired. In all of this, I have been encouraged when I have seen the diversity of the protests and the outrage voiced by many citizens, nationwide and in our city. Corporations and societal institutions alike have released statements addressing what we are witnessing. On Tuesday, Chancellor Salgado emailed a statement to our college communities, including our students. I like to read to you some statements from a few of our students in response to the Chancellor's email.

The Chancellor wrote: I know that many of you, like me, are angry and saddened by the acts of brutality we have seen repeatedly perpetrated against African-Americans and people of color across our country," and a student replied: "Why does something that

concerns Black people have to have another ethnicity to qualify it as worthy of attention? It seems strange to add a secondary group to an issue faced solely by Black people. No other ethnicity has the level of police brutality that Blacks face.”

The Chancellor wrote, “The emotions we feel at the losses of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, and so many others, are real and natural.” To which a student stated that this statement trivialized the circumstances of their deaths. “Say their names and call out the police brutality responsible for their deaths. When you do not call out the circumstances, you put others at risk for the same fate. Saying emotions are real is one thing. Saying reality is real is another.”

The Chancellor wrote: “Racism has no place at our colleges or in our communities.” a student replied: “If racism has no place at our college, why can’t the chancellor support a hashtag that suggests racism has no place in the world?”

Like these students, i have received numerous calls, texts, and emails from faculty and staff who were disappointed by this statement, specifically it’s inability to name the catalyst of this moment, Police Brutality against Black people fueled by anti-Black racism, and it inability to directly state its support of Black students, staff and faculty.

I wouldn’t doubt if there were some legal basis for this coded language; however, as a writer, I am keenly aware of the way in which we use language to say certain things and to not say others. I would like to read to you what a statement should have sounded like:

We are a welcoming college community that is committed to providing a safe and secure teaching and learning environment that supports the success of all of our students, including our Black students.

As announced, President Trump plans to militarize cities in which we have seen massive protest and in some cases violence.” While many details remain unclear about the impact of this announcement, please know that City Colleges of Chicago stands firmly with our Black students, faculty and staff who are a source of strength in our colleges and our communities. I would like to take this opportunity to remind our Black students of our continued support. We stand right

alongside them and are committed to helping them overcome this challenging period.

If anyone believes that this statement goes too far in its specificity in calling out our colleges' black constituency, note that everything that I just said was taken from three emails that the chancellor sent on Sept 11, 2017, and March 6th, 2018, and July 12, 2019. All I did was place "Black Student" where he wrote "DACA Student" or "Undocumented Student."

The Chancellor wrote in the email he sent in this past Tuesday: "Our colleges have always been welcoming spaces for critical conversations and we will continue to serve in that role" to which I respond: That is not enough.

This summer, some of our students will be returning to our physical colleges. Many of them are Black. They will traverse our city, navigating the challenges of transportation during potential protest and rioting, having to manage their blackness along the way. When they get to our college campuses--all wearing masks--I wonder how they will be met by security on our campuses, all of whom, to my knowledge, are police officers, either active or retired.

First, we must acknowledge and understand how deeply embedded racism is in police culture. We have literally been having this conversation in this country for centuries. Why? Because the very basis for policing is slave patrol. What do we expect of an organization whose genesis was capturing blacks attempting to emancipate themselves from state sanctioned systems of oppression, and then returning them to enslavement where, undoubtedly, their deaths would be hastened by unthinkable physical and emotional abuse by white slave owners. 400 hundred years later, the directive hasn't changed. Like many of our societal institutions, the criminal justice system has been instrumental in the oppression of Black people. Policing is the entry point to the criminal justice system, and for Blacks in America, it is much like passing through the doors of no return found on the coasts of West Africa. Africans were herded through these passageways never to see the freedom of their homelands again and loaded as cargo onto the hulls of slave ships headed to the Americas where they would be dehumanized, exploited as commodity, and slaughtered either by back-breaking labor or quite literally at the hands white people wielding racial superiority as the basis for this country's original sin. To this day, centuries later, the descendants of those Africans and others who look like them face sundry versions of systemic racialized oppression, torture, and terrorism enacted upon them by those called to protect and serve.

Second, we must have further training for all individuals in our college communities, particularly our security officers. While training is good, training is only as good as the individual being trained. Without policies for accountability, it has no teeth. Training should be the basis for a framework to hold individuals accountable.

In The Chancellor's emails concerning ICE he referenced know your right's trainings for undocumented students. Will we have "Know Your Rights" trainings for Black members of our community and others who choose to lift their voices in protest?

I have had multiple conversations with the Chancellor and I know that he has a heart for our students and our city. I'm saddened that his message to us didn't reflect that. What are we going to do? What real actions are we going to take? While heart-to-heart conversations are all well and good, they don't hold racist outliers accountable. Policies do that. Without clear and specific details about our values, how we will live them out, and how we will deal with those who don't choose to live out our values, the Chancellor's statements are little more than thoughts and prayers and an #alllivesmatters hashtag.

We look forward to further communication from the Chancellor on how we will make sure that our Black students, faculty and staff feel welcome, comfortable, and valued at our colleges.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,
Keith Sprewer on behalf of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago

Addendum:

Statements concerning the Chancellors June 2nd, special announcement:

Students:

- Why does something that concerns Black people have to have another ethnicity to qualify it as worthy of attention? In other words, when CCC posted announcements about supporting undocumented students against ICE, CCC did not say "we support undocumented and Black students." Similarly, it seems strange to add a secondary group to an issue faced solely by Black people. No other ethnicity has the level of police brutality that Blacks face.
- Saying the names of three Black people killed while trivializing the circumstances of their death. Say their names and call out the police brutality responsible for their deaths. When you do not call out the circumstances, you put others at risk for the same fate. Saying emotions are real is one thing. Saying reality is real is another.
- Diversity is not only based on ethnicity. Why not bring up other demographics, especially in light of Pride month? Also, why not list Middle Eastern and Atlantic Islanders?
- If racism has no place at our college, why can't the chancellor support a hashtag that suggests racism has no place in the world?
- Seeing each other in our full humanity means humanizing not trivializing the Black experience.
- It seems flawed to assume the college and our communities have a culture of mutual respect and understanding. I have experienced racism both on campus and in my community. This still feels like trivializing the Black experience.
- To be told we can better ourselves and our communities through education seems to trivialize the presence of systemic barriers that threaten Black lives each day.
- Saying that violence and destruction are unacceptable implies that CCC property is more valuable than Black lives. Additionally, Chicagoans getting back to work is prioritized over Black lives. In other words, capital is seen as more than Black lives.
- How can safety and health be a top priority if CCC refuses to acknowledge the top health risk to Black people?

Faculty and Staff:

- The statement felt so detached and devoid of any real acknowledgement of the Black communities

- Purposefully using the term “African-Americans” just doesn’t sit right with me for some reason.
- I don’t feel supported.
- Not to name it [police brutality], to brush over it. It’s further violence.
- I’m curious about the use [of African-American] in this context as Black Lives Matters is so commonly used right now--It felt tone deaf to not amplify the message.
- I don’t know if he gets it and doesn’t want to risk his position or if he’s truly ignorant [of the issue].
- It doesn’t say Black Lives Matter and seems to imply that diversity will save us.

The following are issues that FC4 is currently addressing:

Plans for returning to college campuses in the fall:

Faculty would like to know sooner than later what the various modality will be for the fall so they can plan accordingly. Dr. Potter said that this was a conversation happening with the VP’s and we would have a more solid answer soon. As of today’s board meeting, we have not gotten a solid answer yet.

Dr. Potter assured us that decisions on which courses will be offered in which modalities would local decisions, which was encouraging.

Online coursework:

We have been able to engage Dr. Potter and Megan Chandler in an initial conversation about the large and complex task of establishing ownership of online coursework at the individual colleges. The greatest concern of faculty, as it is with many large decisions, is that faculty are often brought into the decision making process at its later stages and we lose a very crucial voice that could aid in the formulation of any plan. The same is often true for our local administration. When appropriate, we would like for these two stakeholders groups to have the opportunity to serve in an advisory role much earlier.

It was good for us to briefly begin to imagine what colleges owning online coursework could look like and exemplifies how shared governance should operate.

Our main desire is a committee composed of faculty, VP of academic affairs, district officers, and online learning leadership to collaboratively create a structure for district to provide

guidance to and high-level oversight of the respective colleges while supporting the colleges in overseeing, evaluating, and managing their own coursework, as required by our accreditor.

Other issues related to that conversation were:

- District supporting the disciplines to engage in conversations about pedagogy, universal design, and standards.
- Ensuring that decisions about online course offerings be local decisions informed by substantive conversations between department chairs and the office of academic affairs.
- The need for online test proctoring software.
- Academic freedom concerning the ability to alter master course shells and choose books.
- Involving the disciplines in review/creation of master shells and assessments.

We look forward to continuing this conversation next month and being active thought partners throughout this process.