

CCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting  
Thursday October 1st, 2020

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

I hope that since our last meeting in August, everyone has been able to find time to rest, recharge and ready themselves for the journey we are on. What we do doesn't stop; the weight of it doesn't ease, and it is a charge we cannot abandon, especially in times like these. Eight months have passed since Covid-19 grabbed the world, twisted our arms behind our backs, and made us call it uncle. What I have seen unfold over these eight months from City Colleges of Chicago faculty, administrators, staff, and students has been profound courage in the face of profound despair. From somewhere, we found will to continue with great determination and grace. I suspect that drive stems from our love for our institutions, those whom we serve, and each other. Over the last two months many good things have continued.

The beginning of the semester has brought a renewed commitment to much of FC4's committee work. I'd like to speak about some of this work.

Our SGA committee has reached out to open lines of communication between SGA and FC4 we look forward to the opportunity to directly listen to SGA leadership, promote their activities, and amplify their voices and be allies where we can. Trustee Thomas, we look forward to working with you and District-wide SGA leadership soon. Please feel free to reach out.

The committee charged with creating the infrastructure to building online course that will be owned by the individual colleges has made great strides and is now at the point of organizing committees at each college to begin conceptualizing the work and oversight mechanisms, and even greater, to think through how distance learning, via courses and services, can augment and support the good work that we already doing. This work, as I have said before, has been collaborative from its inception, and we are excited to bring more voices to the conversation soon.

Committee H is a committee whose goal is to address the unique needs of and serve individuals at various stages of their involvement with our carceral system, whether that be while they are detained or as they reenter society. This committee will soon resume meetings to consider the ways in which we can have an impact on our communities through our work in this space. Over the past few years, the efforts of this committee have been met with kind indifference and, in some cases, active deterrence. It is our hope that the tide has turned and we will be able to rely on our administrative partners to help us serve all of the citizens in our community, including those who have been impacted and often victimized by our criminal justice system. This is especially crucial in these covidian times.

In our last FC4 meeting, we received updates on the progress of CCC's prior learning assessment work. We have been asked to collaborate to review these issues. As we have a standing committee dedicated to PLA, we are ready to engage in this work and appreciate the invitation to do so.

During the meeting, we also had the opportunity to discuss the Learning Agenda, a committee that has lapsed over the last few years. We have found that there are many projects that have either been completed, are currently being undertaken, or are waiting to begin. Along with district leadership, we agree that while the charge and work of the committee needs to be retooled, the goal of conducting actionable research, socializing the findings and collaboratively considering the uses of the data is valuable, and, in the spirit of shared governance, we will revisit the role and reach of the committee.

As we have all witnessed, this past week has been a dark one in the history of our country, bookended on one side by two of Breonna Taylor's murderers walking away uncharged, and the third being charged with endangering the lives of Taylor's neighbors but not the for unjustifiably ending hers, and on the other end, our current president's inability to denounce white supremacist and even calling on them to "stand by." In the midst of this, the City College of Chicago community received two email's for Chancellor Salgado. I'd like to take a moment to address them from a faculty perspective.

The first email we received on September 24<sup>th</sup>. The Chancellor began by writing: "Watching Louisville officials justify Breonna Taylor's death was heartbreaking. ... Breonna's life matters, Black Lives Matter. Her death is representative of many that have lost their lives without justice being served." As I did with the Chancellor's letter following the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd, I would like to read some of the reactions I have read from faculty:

"It might seem insignificant to some, but the chancellor wrote both Breonna Taylor's name and that Black Lives Matter today. I needed that to be unapologetically articulated by district leadership. It's something."

"for the first time we have a specific unambiguous reaction to what's going on!"

"That email took me by surprise! And then, I was grateful he sent it. The reality must be acknowledged."

"I was happily surprised for its timeliness & directness!"

"Has someone thanked him?"

Chancellor Salgado, thank you for your display of empathetic leadership. It was a short message, but multiple faculty members have remarked on the sincerity they felt from it. It's a small gesture, but for those of us who are reminded daily of how dispensable some people in our society believe us to be, this message is further affirmation of what we know about ourselves: we

matter; our lives matter. It also serves as a simple but powerful means to say: you matter here. Again, thank you.

The second email, which we received yesterday, Wednesday, Sept 30<sup>th</sup>, could very well be seen as a promise to act on the compassion displayed in the former message. Introducing the pending Anti-Racism Advisory Committee that Chairman Massey, Vice-Chair Swanson, and Chancellor Salgado are launching, the letter began:

“Anti-Blackness and exclusion were present at the founding of higher education in our country and have created an elite system that values, rewards, and supports students in a manner that perpetuates inequality. As one of the most diverse institutions of higher education in our city and state, we must grapple with this reality in the context of how we serve and advocate for our students.”

The intent behind these words is clear and true, but I’m not sure if the gravity of them is fully known. I imagine in mentioning the anti-black racism present in the founding of institutions of higher learning in our country, The chancellor was speaking of the funding of many of our country’s great Colleges and universities with money garnered by the buying and selling--the exploitation--of black bodies. The very construction of some of these schools was dependent on the labor of enslaved people. But this is a distant truth that allows those of us in community colleges to think fondly of our general missions to serve those who didn’t have access then, and for a variety of reasons may not have access today, to four-year institutions. However, a closer look at the beginnings of community colleges paints a different story.

Proposed as an experiment, In 1901, Dr. William Rainey Harper, the first president of the newly opened University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, principal of Joliet High School, took up the idea to offer the first two years of college to interested high school graduates. This was billed as an opportunity to expand the opportunity and dream of college to those who weren’t likely to leave their communities and who were not in need of the specialization that often occurs in the junior and senior years of undergraduate studies. The goal sounds nice, but the backdrop of all of this reveals much more. The population of the United States doubled between 1870 and 1900 and the industrial revolution had brought the rise of new industries and the growth of cities like Chicago. Industry demanded new skills and a semi-skilled workforce. Very much like today, the role of higher education was called into question and delegitimized by those seeking to place bodies into industry jobs.

President Harper, like other University presidents of the time, firmly believed that the primary function of the Universities was specialization, and that post-secondary education didn’t really begin until the Junior year. Had it not been for pushback from faculty, he would have gotten rid of the coursework that generally comprises the first two years of college altogether, establishing universities as the sole home to research and studies of the intellectual elite.

Joliet, a factory city at the time, was a perfect place to establish an additional two years of general studies to the high school curriculum for students who were not serious about research

and intellectualism (Brint & Karabel, 1989). And so, Joliet, the first community college in our country was born, conceived from the desire of wealthy white men to keep the growing immigrant and soon, due to the great migration, the Black population of Chicago out of the University of Chicago and into local factories as semi-skilled workers.

So the racism that we speak of in higher education is not solely the legacy of four-year institutions, it's baked into the DNA of who we are as a community colleges. While we, like Harper, tout ourselves as place where access can be gained, as bridges to where students want to go, the data suggests otherwise. In 2016, only 5 percent of students enrolled at competitive institutions transferred in from a two-year college. UChicago has a 7% acceptance rate, ranking it #1 in Illinois for lowest rate of acceptance, making it an extremely competitive school to get into with a very low chance of acceptance - even for applicants with the highest scores and grades. If the real goal of the Joliet Junior College was access, I wonder, over a century later, how many of their students are transferring to UChicago. I wonder how many UChicago students transfer in from the City Colleges. If we look to the other end of the spectrum from very competitive to less competitive institutions, the transfer rate was only 21 percent. What does this have to do with the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee? Everything.

Community Colleges have to reckon with our history of both providing access to some while diverting the majority of them from four-year colleges and universities. While I wholeheartedly believe in the trades and recognize that many career paths require specialized training other than a bachelor's degree, we have to be conscious of our history, not as conduits to access and upward mobility, but as barriers. With more and more student's beginning in community colleges, particularly people of color, and other vulnerable populations, If we don't contend this history, the state's push toward CTE growth, a societal lean toward anti-intellectualism, and the reality of what we do and how we think about upward mobility, real equity, in the form of equal educational opportunities for all, is not only a futile endeavor, the very idea is in danger. We have to look in the mirror and think about how we have been barriers--however it has manifested-- and how we plan to divest ourselves of those practices and the culture in which we are steeped which perpetuates this.

If we are really going to engage in this work, as the chancellor has stated, we have to explore our policies and practice. But I'd go even further and suggest that we have to turn the thing on its head. In this time when nothing makes sense, we have the opportunity to imagine something different. One way that we have done this has been with the work of the Dev. Ed committee. Instead of eliminating Dev. Ed, we have spent an entire year thinking how to bolster support for our students who desperately need it. While this is commendable, this work also begs us to be thoughtful about who we partner with. For example, CCC consultant and Senior CCRC research associate Davis Jenkins who was instrumental in the creation of our pathways, holds this view: "Students who first enter into remediation are less likely to complete and more likely to drop out... "If students are to ultimately drop out, it is better that they do so earlier – before the college has allocated substantial resources to them – than later" (Belfield et al. 2013). When we partner with individuals who believe the worst about our most vulnerable, what does that say about our commitment to them.

As leaders, we have to have prophetic vision for what we can be for our students and for our community. We can't just be responsive; we have to dream a world that could be, a world in which all of our students can, through their time with us, have a seat at the table. And not just a seat, but the ability to fully participate in a democratic society. It neither begins nor ends with healing circles and the like. It doesn't live in sensitivity trainings. It requires a real eye to equity, and justice, and inclusivity, and diversity in everything we do for everyone we serve. I'm just not sure that we are thinking big enough, that we've drawn the gathering circle wide enough for all of our student's dreams to live in. But we can, and this work is a start to build on what we do well and jettison what hasn't served us well. FC4 has heard about the composition of the pending committee and we fully support the work on the condition that we all recognize this work as ongoing. There will always be a need for this committee, as change is the only constant and evaluation and re-evaluation of our efforts and our policies will be necessary. We are requesting that representation not only from faculty from the individual colleges are present, but that there be space for a three FC4 member be included on this committee to insure communication to the greater faculty body. This will be a difficult and messy process, fraught with emotion, I'm sure. But it's worth it, and we look forward to partnering in this work. Thank you for creating this committee.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Sprewer on behalf of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago

Belfield, Clive, Peter Crosta, and Davis Jenkins. Can Community Colleges Afford to Improve Completion? Measuring the Costs and Efficiency Effects of College Reforms. CCRC Working Paper #55. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. 2013. Print.

Brint, Steven & Karabel, Jerome (1989). The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges & the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985. New York: Oxford University Press.