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COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT NO. 508
April 13, 2023

Faculty Council Report

CCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, March 13th, 2022

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

As you all know, today is the last time that I will address you as FC4 President. The past three years have grayed hair all over my body--especially my beard--but it has also grown me in unimaginable ways. From the day I began to this day, I have taken it as a great responsibility and a true honor to represent the concerted voice of faculty, and to advocate with and on behalf of our students and our communities.

I just want to take a few moments to reflect over this time. First, I'd like to acknowledge how magnificent my outfit is. Normally, I'd let this be an unspoken, but well understood truth; however, from my first board report on for the last three years, my attire has often been central to the messages that I've wished to convey. I began during the pandemic and I'm somewhat confident that I wore African attire for almost every zoom board meeting. African American male educators are very much unicorns, and we are often asked to become something other than ourselves to fit in, or to be accepted. So, for me, it was imperative that upon first entering this space, especially in the age of youtube, social media, and live streaming meetings, that it was clear that neither I nor do any of the people I represent need to be anything other than themselves. My students who come from a variety of places needed to know and see that. I don't have to manage my blackness, tone it down, or distance or divorce myself from it to be professional and effective. It doesn't require explanation nor apology and I offer neither. Representation matters. While we often say things like we don't recognize color, and that we are unbiased, somewhere within ourselves, we know that isn't entirely true. The late, great author, Toni Morrison, spoke about the "white gaze" by saying that, in her work, it was necessary that she assume the centrality of her race and that in it was the freedom to do the work that is now part of the American Canon. Like her, I have chose to lean into the centrality of all of my identities, and there I found the language to speak from the specificity of my point of view, and I think that recognizing our differences and bringing forward the lived experiences of people from whom we come and identify with help us to broaden our perspective, and consequently,

broaden our reach. So, I really appreciate the faculty of our seven colleges for standing with and behind me at every step and never making me feel neither othered nor tokenized. I hope that in standing in the totality of my race, that others are empowered to embody their difference. I also hope that I served as a strong advocate for the issues that plague other populations.

I have to tell you two very short stories that converge to make a statement about our institution.

I grew up in a relatively poor neighborhood in Milwaukee. I was bussed to elementary and middle school, but like many, I rode public transportation to high school. To get to the bus stop of choice, I had to walk uphill for several blocks, each one progressively rougher than the last. Invariably, on my way to school I would see families that had been evicted. It seemed that that was an early morning priority of the sheriffs. It was always the same. A family standing on the lawn, all of their belongings strewn out in front of them. They stood there in silence, staring off into the distance. There was no formal rule about it, but it was just known that while you could watch them as you approached, but once within earshot and direct sight of them, you assumed their silence and you looked straight ahead, averting eye contact. When I was young, I think I imagined that being put out was embarrassing enough, so they didn't need onlookers judging eyes to top it off, but now as think think back on it, it think that we didn't look at those people because if we our eyes meet theirs, even for just a second, we would see their humanity, and it would require us to do something. We didn't look because it wasn't their shame that we were avoiding, but our own. We walked by as people, for whatever reason, were being displaced, and we had no intention of doing anything about it.

Fast forward to this past Saturday. Somewhere mid-evening, many of my college friends began calling and texting me to tell me that our undergraduate alma mater was closing at the end of this semester. I received a youtube video of the president explaining the decision: low enrollments, declining funding, inability to serve at the level that it was known for. When I attend, the college was one of the largest private colleges in the state, and the Sisters of St. Francis who ran the college were nationally known for their progressive philosophy of education and were one of the first colleges in the nation to offer bachelors and masters degrees of arts in education, as they firmly believed that education was an art. Whenever I went back to Milwaukee, I made a point of stopping by the campus. I can say with confidence that many of my classmates did the same. It was a homecoming of sorts. We are bening evicted. We are standing on the lawn with all of our things strewn out in front of us. There is no place to go back to. Certainly, if we want further education, there are other universities we can attend, but they aren't home. Home is a place where people know you and are glad to see you return, no matter how long you've been gone. Home is

where people know you by many intimate names, home is where people care for you and want you to be well. Home is where no matter how beaten up you've been, the question of how it happened doesn't matter because the people there aren't investigators, they are healers.

Until now, I don't think that I've ever thought about Reinvention this way, but the consolidation of many of our programs amounted to being put out in the elements, before the sun rises, wearing nothing more than a housecoat and slippers, and with no one to come and take you home because no other home exists. Many of our faculty, staff, and students were displaced, and many left and never came back. This is why the work of FC4 is so valuable. What we do is home preservation. When we meet with each other, when our various committees meet, when we engage with our administrators, we are trying to save our home. We are trying to make sure that the people in our community have some place to go where people care and want to see them well and whole. I'm so very concerned that everyday we estrange ourselves a little further from each other and our mission to make and maintain our home due to national trends in education, state policies, and other external and sometimes internal forces that think of our spaces as houses but not homes. Places where people stop by to lay their heads for the night, but they don't live, transient, and move from us without emotion or memory. We've become halfway houses, homeless shelters, a place that will offer food, but is not a place to sit and have dinner. I remember when the current Malcom X college was built, the departments at Truman were asked if we wanted to remodel some of our office spaces, and one of our greatest fears was that we would lose our offices. The fear wasn't selfish, but we had seen the communal office space at Malcom X and we were afraid that if we remodeled we, too, would lose the doors from behind our students learned, laughed, confided, and cried. Things one does amongst family at home.

If we have any power, it is the power to connect with our students and help them grow through relationship building. While I have my concerns, I'm so very grateful to Dr. Potter who always shows up to build house with us. We don't always agree--and I'm not sure that that is the goal. The real value is the consistent showing up and committing to bring our varying perspectives informed by our expertise and experience, not to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to work our way toward what is the best decision for our students and our institution. Generally, I believe we have been able to move in the same direction. If nothing else, when we meeting, it is clear that we don't wish the other harm. I can recall a time when our administrators did not speak to us and very much wished us ill. Thank you chancellor for a similar spirit of "we're in this together" and whenever we've really needed you, you've made yourself authentically available to not only listen, but also to act.

Finally, to our board members, you are the one group in our institution who is most explicitly charged with our well-being. The fiduciary roles that you assumed when you accepted your appointments requires you to ask yourselves: have we silently walked by those who have been put out, counted out, marginalized, or demonized? Have we averted our eyes to ignore their humanity and to deafen the cries for help that may not come from their lips, but that their lives put on full display? I'm usually very good at pointing out how I believe we can do better, but I think that I've done enough of that over the last three years, and that you have expertise in your fields and are proven leaders who can pinpoint where we have been derelict in our work, where we are doing well and can improve, and what we should be proud of and highlight. The one thing that you can't do is be a bystander as our home deteriorates, and I don't believe that you have. I don't believe that you will. But I also imagine that the Trustees of my alma mater never saw this coming either. So it is our collective responsibility to diligently ensure that our students, faculty, staff and communities always never put and have a home at the City Colleges and that, in the darkest of nights, our porch light is always on.

If there are no questions or comments, this concludes my last report.

Submitted by Keith Sprewer on behalf of the faculty of the City College of Chicago