

## **Stated Meeting of the College**

### **Remarks by President Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D. Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, CUNY**

Thank you, Diana Kreymer, newly minted Interim Executive Chief of Staff, for your coordination of our Stated Meeting. Special thank you to my fellow presenters, Professor Ialongo, Brian Carter, Acting Provost Drago, SVP Rodríguez Chardavoyne, Interim Dean Mertens, and Dean Babette Audant.

I celebrate with gratitude the excellent work being done by our Middle States Steering Committee ably and generously chaired by Professor Nelson Núñez Rodríguez and Professor Kate Wolfe. The Semanarios these past weeks have featured significant achievements by many colleagues: a big bravo to our engineering programs, Professor Yoel Rodríguez, and our caring faculty, and quite considerable sharing of information; a big bravo to SVP Rodríguez-Chardavoyne and Chief Bernabe for the presence of FEMA responding to the community's aftermath to Ida, and pop up vaccination clinics on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Today is a day to give thanks for all that has come before and all that is yet to come.

On a personal level, I stand here today feeling so blessed by the support and care of so many of our students and the work that brings us together. As I consider the journey that brought me to the presidency of Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, I note that it has not been lonely. It has been a journey of the heart and intellect. Multiple areas have come together to assist and guide me in the work I embrace on behalf of so many who come to a public higher education institution just as I did decades ago looking for access and support in their journey to the American dream.

A little more than a year ago, the campus received me as its Interim President during the dark days of a raging and growing pandemic devastating humanity. At that time, I reflected on Pablo Neruda's Nobel laureate speech "Toward the Splendid City." Neruda spoke of life's journey and the times when he had been forced to cross borders, looking for refuge. This passage sometimes led him to wade in the dark waters of rivers or to cross the mountains and valleys of the Andes. Each time to be reminded that he was not alone; that there were others behind him to assist him; that there were signs pointing to the fact that others had crossed there before him. Neruda's words about the meaning of life and life's journeys have deep resonance for me, an immigrant who has had to cross multiple linguistic, educational, and cultural borders and whose trust in the kindness of others is seldom betrayed. As I look back on my journey as a young immigrant, who received so generously and was educated so thoughtfully by CUNY faculty, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, I am reassured that there is beauty in humanity, that I will never be alone. I can trust and take comfort in the fact that there are others who were here before me, some others who will stand behind me now, and so many others who will join hands with me as we move this venerable and significant institution to its next moment in history until we hand it over to the next generation.

Since I arrived, I have shared my life-long vision of what a community college should be — a place where the word community is central; a place where students are considered our most sacred trust and our finest asset; and where collaboration within and outside the confines of our immediate surroundings defines our actions. Community college students provide us with an opportunity to contribute to the betterment of our society and to feel that we will share in a future which will not be ours and where we may not go, but whose rich harvest will have been ensured by the seeds that we plant today. Eugenio María de Hostos Community College is our very own academic community of purpose, an institution where we can place our highest aspirations and a place where we cultivate lives for a better tomorrow.

As we look to our work together in years to come, I know that we will strive to create an environment rich with intellectual, educational, cultural, and civic-minded experiences. In this regard, we will be forever indebted to the generosity of MacKenzie Scott's gift of \$15 million to the College, an anchor, and enrichment of opportunities we offer our students. As diligent members of the Hostos family, our cultivation begins with engaging in careful curricular planning and reviewing to ensure that we are abreast of changing workforce trends and needs, and can be nimble enough to adjust and change in support of a stronger economy and a greener planet. We are also looking to create additional opportunities on campus for intellectual, social, and cultural development outside of what has been traditionally called "the classroom." It affirms the College's commitment to blending rigorous academic study with hands-on service learning.

To that end, we will come together to work with constituent groups this academic year and in the coming years to firm up a number of strategies, including but not limited to the following:

1. Putting intentionality at the forefront when it comes to students' onboarding, evaluation of prior learning for credit, and continued programming—from orientation to advisement.
2. Growing stackable workforce non-credit and credit certificates.
3. Establishing or strengthening community advisory boards that link programs to jobs, and increase career educational opportunities tied to employment.
4. Partnering with the Hostos Community Advisory Council (CAC) to build the academic year 2020-2021 five roundtables to create opportunities to benefit students, beginning implementation this Fall 2021 semester.
5. Creating support to encourage faculty and staff research and foster and increase a culture of grant writing at the College by means of the engagement of the Committee on Sponsored Programs and Grants (established March 2021).
6. Regularizing assessment, particularly academic program reviews and other means of assessing how effectively our degree programs and support services help students learn and achieve career and transfer success.
7. Mapping out all component elements that contribute to student transfer with special emphasis on frequent touchpoints and assessment of student's progress.
8. Use environmental scanning to assist us in determining what academic programs need more revisions and what programs need to be created to ensure that access is closely tied to career and transfer opportunities.

In his seminal study "Walden," Henry Thoreau explains that "students should not plan life, or study it merely...but earnestly live it from beginning to end" (56-57). These concepts, very

nineteenth century and so relevant in the twenty-first, translate into a philosophy of teaching that focuses on hands-on learning, beginning precisely where the student is, as Don Eugenio María de Hostos often affirmed, creating agents of change and well-being who are an integral part of the vitality and health of their respective communities. I believe that the definition of what a classroom is should include an understanding that learning happens in the cities themselves as we work on-site and with multiple partners in business, industry, and education on solving some of the workforce challenges facing our communities. Internships and service learning are pillars upon which we will create a community that cultivates learning, leaders, and lives.

The College is poised to continue to embrace the word community in a collaborative manner and to share in the work that must be done to ensure a brighter future for the South Bronx, New York State, the nation, and the world. This past year, we worked hard to reach out, to include, and to embrace as partners multiple constituencies in our society. This spirit of inclusion and collaboration defines who we are at Hostos.

As we look to the future and the challenges facing us, including the current budget crisis, I remain optimistic and confident in our ability to advocate for The City University of New York and to plan carefully in preparation for difficult budget years ahead. We at Hostos understand that it is more important than ever to make judicious decisions in support of our student's need to be educated. Responding to the imperative to be a partner in the revitalization of the economies of the communities we serve will also guide the steps we take. As we move forward together, I am grateful for the generosity of spirit and the talent of the Hostos family.

As I look to the next five years, I see the transformation of the College through the continued strength of viable academic programs, strong teaching, and learning leading to retention of students to graduation. This process will be supported by the full utilization of all common spaces, as classrooms to enhance the intellectual, educational and cultural opportunities. I also see new opportunities for the exploration of classrooms without walls, supported by technology and by the multiple learning venues provided by our partners in education, business, and industry in various locations in the areas served. I see an institution that takes pride in its role as a catalyst for change, and in the teaching and learning provided to students whose retention to graduation becomes a passionately embraced goal. I see above all, an institution where hope and optimism are embraced in every action. In his Nobel laureate speech, Pablo Neruda affirms: "All paths lead to the same goal; to convey to others what we are...but in this dance or in this song there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our conscience in the awareness of being human and of believing in a common destiny." I believe that our common destiny is that of a caring community of purpose, an academic community that partners with multiple stakeholders and works closely together in harmony and in concert, to ensure that Eugenio María de Hostos Community College will live to the promise made in our mission to embrace diversity and opportunity as the birthright of all.

Thank you for your support. I am deeply moved by our role in the South Bronx and New York, in particular, at this moment in time, and look to your continued support this academic year and in the future.

*Mil gracias y bendiciones.*