NEW STRATEGIC PLAN WILL MOVE LEHMAN STEADILY AHEAD IN ENROLLMENT, PROGRAMS, FACILITIES, AND TECHNOLOGY

The following address on the “State of the College” was delivered by President Ricardo R. Fernández on September 15, 2010 at the annual convocation that marks the beginning of the new academic year.

I welcome this opportunity to speak to you about where we are and the programs and activities you can expect as we move forward.

Paradoxically, as historians tell us, a guide to the future can often be found in the past. Eighty years ago this month, our campus welcomed its first students into our first building, Gillet Hall. The year was 1931, and the nation was in the midst of the Great Depression. Unemployment doubled that year to sixteen percent, and fears were growing that the stock market crash of 1929 would have a long-term effect. Despite this very troubled economy, our predecessor institution, Hunter-in-the-Bronx, came on line with the first of four initial buildings. By 1934, the other three were completed.

Beginning in very tough times, this campus evolved into an institution of higher education that made a forceful impact on our borough and city. Over the course of more than three decades, Hunter-in-the-Bronx educated many thousands of women—and after World War II, men as well. Like our students of today, most were from immigrant and working-class families. They would go on to lead productive, rewarding lives and contribute significantly to the resurgence of New York’s economy.

Since the baton was passed in 1968 to Lehman College, two generations of dedicated faculty and staff have continued that legacy. Despite financial uncertainties and the vagaries of support for public higher education, our College has persevered and excelled. This past year, altogether 2,490 students received undergraduate and graduate degrees and diplomas that bear
the proud name Herbert H. Lehman College. All of them will contribute to their families, professions, and communities, and many will achieve success similar to today’s keynote speaker, Dr. Julius Williams, a distinguished Lehman alumnus who has made a profound and lasting impact on his field.

WORK OF STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL LED TO ACHIEVING THE VISION DOCUMENT

I know you have been following the news these past several months about the State’s fiscal situation, and are aware of the budget reductions sustained by the City University of New York, which total over $205 million since FY ’09. At Lehman, reductions and mandatory encumbrances as a hedge against future reductions later on this year amount to 3.75 percent of our annual budget. Nonetheless, we have planned carefully for our future and are prepared to move steadily ahead in accordance with our plan.

In September 2008, Professor Ira Bloom and the other members of the College’s Strategic Planning Council began a critical process to identify the key issues Lehman College will face over the next decade, and to propose strategies to address those issues.

Thanks to the Council’s work, and to the involvement of a broad spectrum of the campus community that provided input for that report, we now have the document entitled Achieving the Vision by Building on a Strong Foundation: Strategic Directions for Lehman College. This plan condenses the Council’s recommendations into four goals that will guide our planning, programs, and activities through the next decade:

- Excellence in Teaching, Research, and Learning
- Enhanced Student Success
- Greater Institutional and Financial Effectiveness
- A Commitment to Engagement and Community Service.

Senior administrators, working with the faculty and staff in their divisions, are developing the action plans and concrete steps that will need to be taken to realize the plan’s overall vision. Deadlines and responsibilities are being assigned, and budgets for personnel and technology are being estimated.

Funding, of course, is essential to the plan’s success, and it has been carefully considered. We will continue to wisely apportion our annual state operating support, advocate vigorously for priority capital improvements and expansion, strengthen our current funding from external sources, such as grants and gifts, and also develop new sources of support.

For example, every year several of our faculty members win significant awards and grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and many other agencies. Institutionally, we support and recognize these achievements, and are working in various ways, such as strengthening grant-writing skills, to produce even more successful applications. We are already beginning to see results. In total, 157 proposals were submitted this past academic year, the second-highest recorded number of proposals submitted for the College. We anticipate a slow and steady growth in research funding, resulting in somewhere between $3 and $4 million a year in grants in this category.

We are continuing to enhance the infrastructure for a successful development program by expanding the network of alumni and friends of the College and engaging faculty and staff on corporate and alumni fund-raising programs. In one year, we have realized a major increase in the donor participation rate in the Annual Fund (from 0.5 percent to 3 percent of alumni). We fully expect this upward trend to continue as we continue to build our alumni program and secure philanthropic support to keep us on track to raise the $8 million still needed to meet our goal of $40 million in the CUNY comprehensive campaign by 2014.

PROGRAMS WILL EXPAND IN BOTH ENROLLMENT AND FACILITIES; NEW ONES WILL BE DEVELOPED ON-CAMPUS AND ONLINE

If you look around, the Lehman College of the future is, in fact, already taking shape in our physical facilities, our growing numbers of faculty and students, our virtual courses, and in many other areas.

- Phase 1 of our new science building will open in 2012, and we expect that it will be followed by the next two phases later in the decade.

- Our new $16 million Multimedia Center, dedicated last spring, is the most advanced academic facility of its kind in the region. It ushers in a new era: the training of tomorrow’s journalists … the first course in film scoring of any public institution on the East Coast … the first major in multimedia journalism within the University … and the creation of non-commercially based productions that focus on important issues and values.

- Faculty are in the process of developing other new programs, like combined B.A.-M.A. programs in various fields: English, history, and biology, and a Master of Fine Arts in writing. Departments also are working on new majors like media studies and theatre education. New concentrations will emerge in business, such as entrepreneurship, and, later on, following what other CUNY campuses are exploring, a multidisciplinary, graduate program in biotechnology.

We also are looking beyond the immediate campus for locations that will allow for the expansion of programs. We are close to purchasing a property on Villa Avenue, just west of the Grand Concourse, on which our proposed new School of Health Sciences, Human Services, and Nursing (which will house a new Center for Nursing Education and Research) will rise. This school will provide a vitally needed resource for the borough’s healthcare and social service sector, which is one of the most vibrant and dynamic segments of the Bronx economy, with double-digit job growth since 2001. Graduates of this new School will provide a pool of well-prepared, culturally sensitive professionals who can help address existing health disparities and inequities in the delivery of these vital services to our communities.

This academic year, we will complete the renaming process of our present divisions to become schools, such as the School of Education and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. In consultation with faculty, we also will begin to develop plans to establish a School of Arts and Sciences and a School of Business. Much more information about these initiatives will be shared with the campus community as discussions take place over the next few months.

Just four years ago, in Fall 2006, Lehman’s enrollment stood at
anywhere. The next step is to develop an entire program that can be offered online, and we expect to see some results by next fall.

In the months ahead, transfer students, who constitute the majority of our new undergraduates, will occupy a significant portion of our attention. The Division of Undergraduate Studies, along with a College-wide Task Force, is leading a major self-study to determine how we can better facilitate the student transfer process from other colleges to Lehman. In a few weeks, Lehman will begin its collaboration with Hostos and Bronx Community Colleges on the Foundations of Excellence Transfer Student Project. The information we acquire from the campus self-study and through interactions with colleagues from the two community colleges will lead to a better understanding of our transfer students, better coordination with the feeder institutions, and ultimately, positive effects on student success. The self-study will be completed this fall, and the planning stage will be completed in the spring.

This initiative represents the first step toward creating a comprehensive Sophomore Success Program, as well as a Transfer Center—a one-stop location to guide students through the process of admissions, financial aid, advising, and registration. Both measures are designed to further reduce second-year attrition rates and improve the College’s graduation rate.

Our students and faculty exist not only on our campus but “virtually” as well. Back in the spring of 1997, a forward-looking member of the geography program began our very first online course, which he conducted entirely by email! From that pioneering start, Lehman now has the largest number of online courses in CUNY: 269 altogether this fall. That represents about thirteen percent of all of the class sections we offer. Our students can learn anytime, anywhere. The next step is to develop an entire program that can be offered online, and we expect to see some results by next fall.

SURVEYS SHOW HIGH DEGREE OF SATISFACTION AMONG BOTH STUDENTS AND FACULTY

But numbers tell only part of the story. What about the quality of life at Lehman? Two recent surveys are very helpful in that regard. A survey by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, titled “Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education”—COACHE, for short—was conducted last fall among Lehman’s tenure-track faculty. In key areas relating to tenure, teaching and research, and the climate, culture, and collegiality of the campus, faculty ratings put us in the top 25 percent of all comparable colleges across the country that were part of the survey.

In the 2010 Student Experience Survey administered by CUNY last spring, Lehman compares very favorably, across the board, with other CUNY colleges. In virtually all areas—from student satisfaction with faculty to satisfaction with their overall experience—Lehman is at the same level as our peers, or higher. This is especially true in student services. Right down the line, from counseling to career services, satisfaction with this area remains among the highest for any senior college in the University, continuing a record we have enjoyed for the last ten years.

Still, there is much more we can do, and will do.

One goal is to expand the number of students who take part in campus life. More than 100 students, for example, have completed the program offered by the Herbert H. Lehman Center for Student Leadership Development, which involves 450 hours of service both on campus and in the community. For two years in a row, their service, plus that of many other Lehman students, has earned Lehman a place on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This is the highest recognition an institution of higher learning can receive from the Federal Government for its commitment to volunteering, community service, and civic engagement. We are encouraging even more students to join programs like these. The skills students develop in them will be useful in both their personal and professional lives.

LEHMEN WILL EXPAND ITS COMMITMENT TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CAMPUS

What else lies ahead?

As a long-term goal, we plan to create a Teaching and Commons area in the Old Gym Building. It will feature flexible classroom and learning space, areas for group and quiet study, a technology support and training area, and a lounge and cafe.

A Weekend College, now in the development stage, will open up new blocks of time in which students, with their busy lives, will be better able to take classes and complete their degrees.

Building on our people and programs, we will expand our commitment to the larger community beyond our campus, inviting more visitors to join our intellectual dialogues and cultural events, and reaching out to them with our diverse resources in business, education, and the arts. Let me give you four brief, remarkable success stories:

■ The Bronx Small Business Development Center is supporting local businesses and providing vital economic development for our borough. In the last four years, from June 2006 through June 2010, the Center counseled 2,412 clients, created or saved 612 jobs, and helped local businesses secure more than $35.5 million in financing.

■ The Bronx Institute, with major support from the Federal GEAR-UP program as well as corporate grants, is serving 8500 middle and high-school students in the Bronx, supporting them in their academic achievement and preparing them to enter—and succeed—in college.

■ The High School of American Studies only began on our campus in 2002, with its first freshman class. Yet, for the past three years, U.S. News and World Report has listed it as one of the nation’s top 100 high schools. It currently ranks #19. Lehman staff and faculty members from our History Department and others are invested in this excellent public school, which serves close to 400 students, half...
of them from the Bronx, even though it is a competitive, city-wide specialized school.

- The Performing Arts Center (PAC) is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary with a full schedule of acclaimed artists, representing genres from contemporary to classical. Despite the economic restraints facing New Yorkers, audiences at the PAC have continued to grow, with more and more families becoming part of the Center’s returning guests. It is estimated that some 400,000 persons attend events at the PAC every year.

INTERNATIONAL AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES WILL CONTINUE TO GAIN MOMENTUM

We also must look beyond the Bronx in fulfillment of our mission. Over the past two decades, we have established strong affiliations with literally dozens of city and regional organizations and agencies, and with notable institutions of higher education around the country and on several continents.

Lehman’s excellent online programs and other technological resources have positioned us to take a leadership role in assisting our students to become active, engaged citizens by helping them to harness the power of technology to bring constructive change to their communities.

Our significant online presence and distance-learning capabilities have likewise expanded our geography. This year, the Division of Adult and Continuing Education is partnering with the Hispanic Information Telecommunications Network to deliver a live, distance videoconferencing course to locations around New York State. As members of HETS, the Hispanic Educational Telecommunications System, we have previously delivered live lectures from our campus to classrooms in the Caribbean. The staff of Information Technology Services, under the direction of VP Ronald Bergmann, is at work on an IT strategic plan for the College. You will hear and read more about this next spring.

This year, the CUNY Trustees approved establishment of the Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Lehman College—the first such center in CUNY. My hope is that we can further connect through the Institute with the work of the United Nations. As many of you know, our campus was part of that organization’s early history, and throughout the past four decades Lehman has endeavored to hold events that expand our involvement in international affairs.

In the months and years ahead, our sustainability efforts also will have a greater impact, as we work to substantially lower Lehman’s carbon footprint by thirty percent within ten years. When it opens, the new science building will incorporate many important “green” features, but we are bringing that kind of forward-looking technology to the rest of the campus as well. These measures will be better not only for our health and the future of the planet but also for the College’s budget. To mention a few of the measures we can anticipate:

- Next year, in 2011, you’ll enjoy a farmer’s market on campus, making it easier to buy fresh, locally grown produce, and you’ll also see more bicycles in use by maintenance staff. Already, we’ve purchased an electric vehicle to replace a gas vehicle used for hauling.
- By 2012, you’ll notice more bicycle racks on campus, to encourage greater use of this human-powered method of transportation, and solar thermal panels on the APEX will heat the water in the building’s pool, sinks, and showers.
- By 2017, the College’s heating, cooling, and power plant will use 20 percent less energy.

As this new academic year begins, and as we implement Achieving the Vision, we will continue to plan and act—not according to this moment’s crisis—but focused on the faces in our classrooms, on their futures, and on the world we wish to shape, opening our students’ minds to new ideas, and their lives to new directions.

Let us therefore reaffirm the pledge articulated in our Values Statement and remain “committed to providing the highest quality education in a caring and supportive environment ... where respect, integrity, inquiry, creativity, and diversity contribute to individual achievement and the transformation of lives and communities.” That is the true spirit of Lehman College as we begin the journey to our golden anniversary in 2018.

Ricardo R. Fernández, President
Herbert H. Lehman College
The City University of New York

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