The 2011-12 academic year at Lehman College starts out with good news: U.S. News and World Report has released the college rankings for 2012, and, once again, Lehman is ranked both in Tier 1 and as one of the Top 50 Public Schools among regional universities in the Northeast. My thanks to all our faculty, staff, students, and alumni for their hard work in achieving this recognition for two years in a row.

As we seek to build on this momentum, the months ahead promise to be an extremely busy and productive time, with major initiatives either launching or coming to fruition. Beyond our campus, we hear, and are heeding, the calls for higher education to develop programs that will spur growth and to graduate students who will keep our country competitive.

In their new book That Used to Be Us, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman and his coauthor argue that the world is no longer simply “connected,” but “hyperconnected,” and that the future will belong to those nations that can educate, imagine, and invent. Lehman can be proud of the tools we give our students for exploring and expanding their connectedness — tools that prepare them to assume roles as leaders in a global community.

Recently as well, an article in The Times reported that the master’s is becoming the degree of entry in a growing number of professional fields. Many of our students have been encouraged to continue their education beyond the baccalaureate, and now this would appear to be wise advice for success in the job market as well. This year, we have hired a pre-professional adviser with a background in law and medicine, as part of our effort to strengthen advising and support in key professional areas.

Understanding the world our students will enter has major implications for the responsibilities we bear as educators. All of us — and all of our students — must adapt to new ways of teaching and learning and even to entirely new fields. Look at some of the new professions that have emerged over the last decade: robot programmers and game designers ... remote sensing specialists ... health informatics specialists ... forensic nurses. All these fields have one thing in common: higher education.

I have every confidence that Lehman College will rise to the new challenges facing our world, both individually and institutionally. More than that, I believe our College will be — and in
At the same time, we are advancing new programs through the pipeline: an MFA program in fiction and poetry, a combined BA/MA program in history, a new track in theatre education, a new concentration in entrepreneurship, and a new multimedia studies program. We can look forward to proposals for a combined BA/MA program in biology, a new BBA specialization in hospitality management, and an expansion of our international affiliations with a dual-degree business program with Universidad Acción Pro-Educación y Cultura in the Dominican Republic.

A Drive to Expand Professional Accreditations

In our drive for greater excellence, we plan to seek professional accreditation in all areas where that accreditation is available. Many programs, including chemistry, counseling, education, nursing, social work, and speech-language pathology, have long been professionally accredited.

In fact, our education programs were the first in CUNY to receive accreditation from NCATE, the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education. That was back in 2002. In 2008, our school counseling program became the first within CUNY to receive accreditation from CACREP, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.

The Educational Leadership Program is the newest addition to our list of accredited programs, and we plan to seek still more accreditations in business, public health, and foreign language education.

A Further Upward Trend in Retention and Graduation Rates

In the area of student success, we have made equally great strides. One year since establishing the Strategic Plan, the upward trend has continued in SAT scores for regularly admitted, first-time freshmen, in our rates of student retention, and in our graduation rates.

We also expect the series of recommendations that flowed from last year’s Foundations of Excellence Transfer Student Project to be...
gin bearing fruit. For instance, this year a Transfer Council will be established to coordinate the areas of the College that work with our transfer students.

The design is also in place for the “one stop” location that was recommended to assist these students. The next step is to secure the funds needed for construction and furnishing of space on the first floor of Shuster Hall. In the meantime, a new virtual transfer center is providing comprehensive information to guide students through the admission process and help them make a seamless transition to studying at Lehman.

This semester, preliminary registration figures indicate that enrollment remains stable, with just over 12,000 matriculated students, including slightly more transfer students and graduate students. Our goal is to increase that figure slightly for next year.

Many factors contribute to an institution’s retention and graduation rates. We need to understand not only how well students are succeeding, but also how highly they regard their experience here. Lehman currently exceeds the CUNY average for student satisfaction with academic support services, administrative services, student services, and access to computer technology. In some of those areas, Lehman actually has the top score among all the senior colleges.

We are committed to maintaining this high level of satisfaction and to offering the courses and support services needed to further improve the rates of progression through graduation — even in a difficult budgetary environment.

A Program to Build or Upgrade Campus Facilities
The condition of classrooms and other campus facilities also plays a role in student satisfaction. At Lehman, there are several visible signs of our program to expand and upgrade our learning environment.

- Last fall, the student cafeteria was reconfigured and upgraded, with new lighting, wall covering, tables, and chairs.
- This fall, we are breaking ground on a new $6 million Child Care Center that we expect to be completed next spring. This modular building will house six classrooms, a multipurpose room, terraces designed to grow greenery, an atrium with an open stairway, skylights offering a natural ventilation system, and, on the outside, a new playground. It will double the capacity of our present center and provide a critical resource for our students with young children.
- Additional progress is taking place through technology. The new systems becoming available through CUNYfirst — and scheduled to be implemented at Lehman this year — will make it easier for students to register, pay their bills, and see their records.
- In our classrooms, more students and faculty will have access to systems that enhance instruction through the use of technology. By the end of this year, the Division of Information Technology will have upgraded 178 classrooms — about 75 percent of our inventory.
- Development this year of a mobile College website, complementing the app developed last year for the iPhone, will make it easier for students, and all of us, to access important information wherever and whenever we need it.
- The Library, as well, is designing a self-guided tour of its collections and resources that students can use on their cellphones.
- On the horizon, we can see a newly completed science building. This new building will be an environmentally sustainable and technologically advanced center for teaching, learning, and research. The structure and the programs it will house will be one of the jewels of a rejuvenated, forward-looking borough. Construction is on schedule and set to be completed next spring, with an opening next fall.

We also are continuing to plan for a new College Center that would become a “center of gravity” for student organizations and campus activities. Our current direction is to look at the feasibility of a combined student housing and student union project.

A Tight Budget Year, but Fundraising is on the Rise
What about our goal of greater institutional effectiveness, specifically in terms of our budget?

Fund-raising efforts provide a vital source of added revenue for the College. Last year, contributions to Lehman from alumni and friends, corporations, and foundations reached $4.6 million and were used for student scholarships and essential College needs.

Over the last three years, our rate of alumni participation has more than quadrupled, rising from .05 percent to 3.5 percent, the average rate for CUNY colleges. About 2,100 alumni are now actively involved as donors. This year, we expect to raise at least $4.8 million and increase the number of gifts from alumni.

With the recent tuition increase of $300, students are continuing to contribute more to their education. For those whose aid does not fully cover the costs of tuition, and whose continued matriculation may be at risk, the University is setting aside need-based funds to help out.

It’s true, of course, that none of us like to pay more for anything. But with the new Multimedia Center — the best facility of its kind in CUNY — and with the new science building coming on line, in addition to our excellent faculty and the other new programs and resources I’ve mentioned, a great deal of positive value continues to be added to our students’ educational experience.

As we look ahead, the College has good reason to be optimistic. The agreement CUNY has reached with New York State points to a more stable budget environment and what we hope will be an end to the sacrifices of the past few years.
A Commitment to the Community in Many Different Areas

The fourth goal of the Strategic Plan calls for a renewed commitment to our community.

In this regard, Lehman was an early pioneer in CUNY and remains one of the nation’s leaders in this new “hyper-connected” era.

- For instance, our School of Education alone, including its three nationally recognized centers and institutes, has relationships with more than 200 public schools and has generated more than $26 million in local, State, and Federal funding since 2008.

- Lehman Center for the Performing Arts defies the state of the economy and continues to attract record crowds with its variety of cultural performances, from orchestras and dance companies to legends of the salsa world.

- With more city schools forced to reduce their budget for art instruction, the Lehman College Art Gallery remains a lifeline of creativity and expression for more than 2,200 students in twenty-four schools, who regularly visit the Gallery or take part in its programs.

- The School of Continuing and Professional Studies is collaborating with employers and labor unions to offer to the community industry-recognized training and certification in growing and emerging sectors of the economy. New programs are focused on healthcare, sustainability, and entrepreneurship.

- The School works closely with the Bronx Small Business Development Center. Since moving to Lehman in January 2000, up through August of this year, the Center has helped to create or save 2,542 jobs in our borough and made an economic impact of more than $84 million.

- The health of the Bronx remains one of our top concerns. Today, our borough has the highest rates of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, hypertension, and asthma, and a seriously underserved community in need of quality health care. Once launched, our new School of Health Sciences, Human Services, and Nursing will help promote improved health outcomes for our fellow residents.

- Last year, with the launch of Lehman’s Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies, the College took a leadership role in these important fields that are tied into both the work of Herbert H. Lehman and the early days of the United Nations, which held some of its first meetings on this campus.

Lehman College’s remarkable record of achievement and our vision for the future is in keeping with the proud history of this campus, which will conclude its eightieth anniversary at the end of 2011. If you haven’t seen it yet, there’s a wonderful website — you can link to it from our home page — that describes our history and celebrates eight decades of excellence on this campus.

For me personally, as president of this great institution, my twenty-second year coincides with the period when Lehman College, I believe, will find its greatest hour within its reach. Our ability to stay true to our mission, and to the liberal arts as our core, while still adapting to the needs of the community we serve, has put Lehman in the lead in shaping areas now vital to our city, state, and country.

As I look out at the audience, I see many familiar faces and many new ones among both our faculty and students. This year, we are very pleased to welcome a new dean, twenty-three new full-time faculty members, and seventeen new full-time staff members to Lehman College, and of course many hundreds of new students. I know you will find Lehman to be a place of extraordinary energy, commitment, and inspiration. And I hope, like me, you will soon count yourself fortunate to have chosen our campus as your academic home.

Ricardo R. Fernández, President
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