

President Chris Reber Remarks

Hudson County Community College Town Hall Meeting

Monday, July 2, 2018

Good morning, and thanks so much for being here!

I want to thank Jennifer Oakley and Nick Chiaravalloti for arranging this meeting today. I also want to give a big thanks to Jennifer Oakley and Marcella Williams for arranging many upcoming meetings with Trustees, faculty, staff, students and community members. I'll be conducting a listening tour throughout the campus and community in the coming weeks and months, and I'm very much looking forward to getting to know all of you! And thanks so much to many of you who have sent me notes and background information. It has been enormously helpful!

Allow me to begin by offering special thanks to Board of Trustees Chair Bill Netchert and all of our talented, devoted and kind Trustees for entrusting me with the honor and privilege of serving as Hudson County Community College's new President. I am exceedingly grateful for the Trustees' trust, guidance, advocacy and support and look forward to a continued great working relationship of the President, the Trustees, and all of our colleagues.

In preparation for joining you, I've been reading about the great work that all of you do.

- For example, your Middle States Self-Study that is well underway;
- Your many exceptional academic programs that are distinctive regionally and even nationally, including Culinary Arts, Nursing and Allied Health, English as a Second Language, STEM, and others;
- The growing number of disciplinary accreditations that are testaments to your commitment to academic quality and continuous improvement. I offer special congratulations to our Nursing and Allied Health faculty for recently obtaining ACEN accreditation and JRCERT reaccreditation!
- Your exemplary achievements with respect to ensuring opportunities for social mobility for our students.
- Your strong commitment to – and leadership for – diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of its forms. Your inspirational cultural arts programs, including the Foundation Art Collection throughout the campus, the Dineen Hull Gallery, stimulating lectures, and a myriad of other cultural events. Kudos to Michelle Vitale and her colleagues in the Department of Cultural Affairs and others who contribute to this outstanding work!
- Your phenomenal facilities, including the Gabert Library of the Year, Culinary Conference Center, North Hudson Campus, your impressive new STEM Building, and the exciting new campus at Secaucus that presents so many collaborative pathways opportunities. Special thanks to Ilya Ashmyan and his colleagues for their great work – albeit quite challenging – with our facilities.
- Your commitment to – and continuous improvement around – student success, student credential completion, and pathways from K-12 dual enrollment programs through transfer opportunities to four-year and graduate programs throughout the region, nation and the world.

- Your partnerships across the metropolitan region and beyond, including collaborations with government, business, industry, health care, human services, education and more.

And I could go on and on! This is a great institution – an inspirational institution – and I’m honored and thrilled to be joining you as your president! I thank all of you, the Trustees, and other members of the HCCC community for your trust and support. I’ll work very hard to maintain and build upon that trust with all of you!

During my career, I have experienced a good number of leadership transitions, and I appreciate how important and impactful this is for everyone, particularly following a 25-year presidency! I therefore thought it might be helpful to comment briefly on my philosophy of leadership.

As I discussed with some of you during my interviews, I aspire to be what some refer to as a servant leader. I want to support your efforts and your successes in every way that I can.

I believe in transparency and inclusion.

I believe in shared governance and the importance of respect and trust among all of our constituencies in order to ensure the very best outcomes and climate for our students, employees, and the community.

I believe in a campus culture that values everyone’s ideas and celebrates the contributions of each member of our community.

I believe that every person matters and everyone’s perspectives should be encouraged and valued.

I believe in integrity in everything we do, everything we advocate, and everything we stand for.

I believe that student centeredness is at the heart of what we all do: our students’ success is our success, and we are partners with our students on their educational journeys.

This is our central common value and goal: ensuring student success and life-changing opportunities for our students, their families and our community.

We have so many strengths to build upon thanks to the strong leadership of Dr. Gabert, the Trustees, the faculty and staff, the County and State, our partners and donors, and to the exceedingly good work of others on the campus and in the community over more than the past quarter century. Building on the exemplary accomplishments of this College community in support of students, the region and beyond, I believe that together we can move to the next level of stellar outcomes for our students and the region.

In the short term, we also have many challenges, primarily attributable to a decline in public resources relative to HCCC’s phenomenal growth – both quantitative and qualitative growth; increased challenges associated with the recruitment and retention of our students; challenges and opportunities associated with building an increasingly cohesive, trusting and caring college community that lives and breathes a commitment to shared governance and mutual respect among all of our constituencies; and a need to seek continually expanding partnerships and investment in the College in order to manage our destiny and ensure continuous improvement around student access, achievement and success.

We will be open in discussing these challenges, and, working together and considering good ideas throughout the campus, we will address them while maintaining our commitment to meeting the needs of our students, our community and other constituents.

HCCC has been a forward-thinking, entrepreneurial institution and has experienced by far the largest community college enrollment growth in the state over the last 25 years. The College's credit-hour enrollment has increased by a staggering 216% compared to the statewide average of just 39%, and only one other community college's growth rate is even close to Hudson's over this time period. But while enrollment has grown, public resources have not been able to keep pace with that growth.

Let me emphasize that we are exceedingly grateful for strong support at the county and state levels – and a shared commitment of those in the public sector – to this College and its life-changing mission. But the public funding trend is very clear, and the direction we must follow to help HCCC thrive and manage its own destiny is equally clear.

To begin, we must work very hard to maintain and grow the trust of our community, including our elected leaders at all levels and the public at large. As your President, I will become fully immersed in the community, and I will seek opportunities to provide leadership and support for what the Aspen Institute calls “collective impact” – addressing high-priority community and regional needs in partnership with K-12 and other postsecondary institutions, business, industry, human services, health care, government, and other sectors.

I will develop relationships that build trust and enable me to be a tireless champion and advocate for the College, including its contributions to an increasingly educated citizenry, community workforce and economic development, quality of life, and bringing visibility to the College's needs. I will seek increasing opportunities to consider and develop partnerships that lead to win-win relationships – partnerships that can deliver outcomes far greater than the sum of their parts.

At the same time, it is clear that going forward we cannot rely upon increased government funding to continue and expand our upward trajectory as a high-performing, student- and community-focused institution. But we have some ability to control two things that can lead to sustained growth in the College's financial health. The first is continued growth in our enrollment, and this remains a strength for HCCC. I understand that our fall enrollment is looking very strong, with an expected enrollment increase, and I congratulate Lisa Dougherty, Paula Pando and everyone for this progress. Enrollment is the outcome of everyone's efforts, so kudos to all!

I will lead and support efforts to continue to develop, grow and refine a culture that utilizes strategic enrollment management principles to reach recruitment and retention targets.

Our goals must be guided and informed by data, and they should be challenging, but achievable, ensuring a continuing trend of enrollment growth that will generate increasing levels of revenue for the College going forward. But fundamentally, we must also grow private and grant investment in HCCC so that over time the proportion of our budget funded by other entities in the private, corporate, foundation and granting agency sectors increases. I will therefore seek every opportunity to provide leadership and support for systematically growing what I call the “fourth leg on our financial stool.”

I look forward to working closely with the HCCC Foundation; Nick Chiaravalloti, the Foundation Board of Directors, and the Advancement staff; Eric Friedman and the deans, faculty and staff; the All-College

Council; Chief Financial Officer Veronica Zeichner; Jennifer Christopher, Roger Jones and the Public Relations staff; and the entire College community to raise funding over time that can provide the margin of excellence for our College to continue to grow in its life-changing mission.

That mission is focused on ensuring that every student succeeds, that we serve a growing and increasingly diverse population of students, and that the College is a full and robust partner with all parts of our community, region, state and nation. It is a noble cause that is worthy of significant investment by donors, foundations, corporations, and granting agencies.

So in the short, intermediate and long term, we can and must continue to excel and grow.

I believe that future growth should be a shared value and focus in all of our efforts.

- Growth in the development of programs that address priority needs of our students and region, and that we can deliver with excellence.
- Growth in our partnerships with other institutions to provide programming that is distinctive; that supports educational, economic and workforce development; quality of life; and that provides educational and career ladders of credentials and opportunities for our students.
- Growth in our efforts to ensure the success of every student.
- Growth in the diversity of our College community, particularly with respect to the faculty and staff with whom we work and whom we serve, so that our faculty and staff diversity more closely aligns with our inspirational student diversity.
- Growth in our outreach in the region and in the quality of our services to support students and the community.
- Growth in our engagement with high school students, and in our efforts to develop and expand dual enrollment pathways.
- Growth in our engagement with nontraditional students, including programs and services at other locations, and online program offerings.
- Growth in what we do on campus – including course offerings and programming, student clubs and organizations, cultural programs and events, and community activities and meetings held in our facilities.
- Growth in our Continuing Education and Workforce Development initiatives, including distinctive and specialized training.
- Growth in our involvement in the K-12 community, and with other postsecondary educational partners.
- Growth in program accreditation and other initiatives to reach increasingly higher standards of excellence inside and outside of the classroom.
- And, in support of all of these initiatives, growth in our fund-raising and friend-raising efforts in order to support our collective vision and goals.

Essential in these efforts will be the use of meaningful data and research to inform the choices that we make, and a culture of ongoing assessment to ensure quality and continuous improvement in everything that we do.

Equally important, we must invest to the fullest extent possible in the professional development of

our faculty and staff. We are a people enterprise. Our talented faculty and staff are by far our greatest institutional asset, and over 70% of our budget is dedicated to faculty and staff salaries and benefits. It is vitally important that we support and invest in this asset – the people who educate and support our students. That’s all of you! So I will support professional development opportunities in every possible way going forward.

I look forward to working closely with Vivyen Ray and her staff, and with our faculty and staff leaders and their colleagues, including All-College Council Chair Denise Rossilli; Support Staff Federation President Dorothea Graham-King; Adjunct Faculty Federation President Shoshana Goldstein; Academic Administrators Association President Jose Lowe; and Professional Association President Michael Ferlise.

Together we can do more than any of us might believe possible! I pledge to do everything that I can as your President to support our collective efforts to continue to grow and excel as an institution that is committed to serving our students, community, region and beyond.

As we approach our 50th anniversary as a community of learners, there is much for which to be thankful, much to celebrate, and much more to do!

Please never hesitate to share with me your thoughts, your ideas, your concerns, and to let me know how I can be helpful. Feel free to stop in to see me at the office, drop me a note, give me a call, or schedule time to talk. I’d like to communicate and interact with all of you – the entire College community – on a regular basis through meetings, e-mail and other forms of communication, at events, celebrations, and in the everyday life and activities of the College.

Very importantly, this includes students! I enjoy almost all parts of my job, but there is nothing that I enjoy more than opportunities to meet and interact with students. One of the many things I look forward to in this regard is offering “Pizza with the President” sessions periodically and throughout the College in order to meet, get to know and learn from our talented and inspirational students.

So thanks again – each and every one of you! I’m honored to have the opportunity to work side by side with all of you, to celebrate our successes and work through our challenges together, and to be your tireless advocate.

Sincerely,

Christopher M. Reber