To: Provosts
From: Selma Botman
Date: December 14, 2005
Re: Campaign for Success

At our recent Academic Affairs retreat I issued a call for renewed emphasis on student success throughout the University. As the data from OIRA confirmed, CUNY loses far too many students on the way to a degree, and it is time for us to take another look at how this University views its student body and to formulate some new, outcomes-based approaches to those areas in which our efforts fall short. As a first step toward a University-wide response, I would like you to submit by February 15 an initial planning report for such a campaign on your campus that works from the premise that each of our students deserves our best efforts to help them achieve academic success.

COMMUNICATING A CULTURE OF SUCCESS
What messages do students receive from your College and the University? To what extent does each of these messages convey an expectation of success? How often do students receive these messages and from whom? Every contact with a student represents an opportunity for your College and this University to communicate a clear sense that we are interested in and committed to each student’s academic success. How can we ensure that students hear that unambiguous message repeatedly throughout each semester? This is by no means an expensive proposition, but rather a change in culture to employ fully CUNY’s talented and committed faculty and staff in an all-out Campaign for Success to help our students achieve the best possible academic outcomes.

PRACTICING A CULTURE OF SUCCESS
An institution’s commitment to student success must be embodied in a variety of practices. To cite some examples of what CUNY is already doing, in a typical semester we have more than 40,000 students enrolled in Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday classes. We also have more than 6,000 requests for permit course registration each academic year. Even more immediately, it already appears that by and large we will fill all the seats that CUNY will have available during the pilot winter session this year. However, the 2004 Student Experience Survey Results provide a couple of important wake-up calls: 37% of all CUNY students responded that they could not register for a
course they needed because “space was not available” and 40% reported that they “took fewer courses than originally planned.”

How then can each division of your campus convey its intention that every student should succeed? Are students inadvertently discouraged through awkward registration procedures? Do all students receive timely, effective counseling? Are there scheduling problems that impede the availability of classes? Are students encouraged to seek help and treated with respect whenever they do? Are faculty readily available for student advising and consultation out of the classroom? It is time for us to take a frank look at questions like these and to wrestle with the ways in which we fall short.

PUBLICIZING ISLANDS OF SUCCESS
Of course, many of you will discover that there are some outstanding instances on your campuses of the commitment to student success, but how widely known are they? If you are surprised when you encounter them, you should wonder just how many other folks on your campus are aware of these model efforts. In fact, the entire University might benefit from these best practices. It is time for us to publicize what works and to figure out how to make these efforts exportable. How would you do that? What kinds of intra- and cross-campus collaborations would be most effective for spreading the word about what works?

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES
CUNY faculty and staff are well known for their deep commitment to urban higher education and their innovative approaches in the classroom and in student affairs. However, our Campaign for Success must be steadily focused on outcomes. How will we measure the impact of what we are proposing to do? When can we reasonably expect to see progress towards our goals of improving retention and graduation rates? How do we use data to guide our decision-making? Where, specifically, do we want to end up? These are complex and subtle questions that will require thoughtful, collegial approaches and collaboratively structured efforts. After all, none of us has a monopoly on effective ideas, and all of us benefit from broadly based planning.

SUPPORT FROM THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
During my first year at CUNY I set in motion a variety of assessments of the academic status quo, including studies of the University’s efforts in retention and developmental education, both of which have contributed usefully to my understanding of the challenges now facing the University. The byproduct of all of this work, which has involved many members of my staff as well as faculty and staff from your institutions, is a deep commitment to employing my Office’s expertise and energies in supporting your campuses’ work on this Campaign.

You will have access to members of my staff to assist you in crafting your proposals, to answer your questions as they arise, and to help you develop the most strategic projects possible. In addition to your own Office of Institutional Research, you will also have
access to the considerable expertise of the University's OIRA and its rich data resources. While you are best situated to understand the challenges facing your campuses, we in the Office of Academic Affairs will provide as much help as we can and will work to secure the necessary resources for achieving your goals, from targeting areas for faculty development funding to including our Campaign for Success in new grant applications. While there are certainly financial limitations that might affect some of your new initiatives, there are many other changes on your campuses that require rethinking and refashioning campus culture rather than significant new funds.

THE BEDROCK CONCERNS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This Campaign is not about doing more with less; it is about recommitting this University to the bedrock concerns of higher education: the cultivation and transmittal of knowledge through teaching, the promotion of scholarship and research that enriches the classroom as well as the discipline, and the thoughtful preparation of our students for fulfilling, perhaps life-changing careers that are open to the college educated. After all, CUNY's mission is centered on providing successive generations of New York City students an education and, through it, the intellectual resources for living informed, productive lives. However, this requires our best efforts in teaching, retaining, and graduating the students that come to us each year.

As you look over the attached guidelines for preparing your campus' Campaign for Success, keep in mind that you should be focusing on developing a deep institutional commitment to student success that brings to bear the efforts of not only faculty, staff, and administrators on your campuses but also CUNY's Central Office. My call for this Campaign for Success seeks to mobilize the entire University in an all-out effort to change business as usual, to bolster the University's academic mission, and to advance the educational aspirations of our students, our most precious resource. I look forward to working with you as you complete your proposals. The results should be truly exciting.

cc: Chancellor Matthew Goldstein
    Presidents
Guidelines for Developing Your Campus’ Campaign for Success

As your campus begins the process of developing its own Campaign for Success, keep in mind that this effort is necessarily long-term, and it will require broadly based discussion and collaboration among faculty, staff, and students at your institution. Many of your ideas will emphasize changes in culture that are not, in themselves, necessarily expensive, but that will demand a degree of campus consensus in order to make them work. Others will involve reassessing allocations of resources (such as your CUE or academic support budgets) or even finding additional financial support, both of which require careful planning and considerable energy. All of your ideas should be carefully focused on specific outcomes that enhance your College’s efforts in teaching students more effectively, retaining them in greater numbers, and helping more of them to earn a degree. You may find it helpful to refer to the recent reports of the Task Forces on Reading and Writing, ESL, Math, and Retention as you develop your ideas.

A FEBRUARY 2006 PLANNING REPORT
By February 15, 2006, your campus should submit to the Office of Academic Affairs a first-stage planning report that identifies barriers to student success on your campus, existing institutional strengths, possible new projects, and suggestions for Central Office action. A committee of CUNY chief academic officers and OAA staff will review these submissions, synthesize the results, and develop a list of priorities to guide further development of the Campaign. Later this spring, OAA will issue a request for a full-blown proposal for your campus’ Campaign for Success.

CONTENTS OF THE REPORT
Your report should provide responses in the following areas:

1. Significant barriers to student success on your campus

These may be broadly conceived or quite specific. They might highlight specific courses with high levels of failure or poor performance, or they might focus on institutional problems, such as confusing registration procedures, course availability, or ineffective student services. Please focus on specific barriers to success that are susceptible to incremental change through systematic efforts by your institution.

2. Institutional strengths that could be further developed

These might include existing academic support efforts or innovative and effective strategies for serving students’ needs. They may be suitable for expansion on your campus or dissemination throughout the University. The efficacy of the programs and initiatives identified here should be complemented with relevant data that demonstrate their validity.
3. New projects

These projects should either address the barriers you have identified or propose the further development of your institutional strengths. Each brief project description should include specific and measurable desired outcomes.

4. Suggestions for Central Office action

These might be focused on areas in which you believe the Central Office impedes student success through its regulations, rules, or policies. You might also need specific kinds of help or support that only the Central Office can provide. Be sure to supply a brief rationale for each suggestion.

Your report should be limited to no more than 3000 words. Do not attempt to present overly detailed responses at this stage. These campus reports will help us develop a more carefully structured approach to the University-wide Campaign for Success and will inform our subsequent request later this spring for more detailed plans from your campus.

As you develop your report, please pay close attention to:

1. Developmental education and ESL
2. First-year students and transfers
3. Gateway and other courses in which there are low pass rates
4. Retention and graduation rates, as well as possible contributing factors
5. Student services and counseling

You should consult the relevant data for each of these areas and use it to structure both your campus discussions and your planning.

If you have any questions about these guidelines or want to discuss any aspect of the Campaign for Success, contact my office. An OAA staff member will be assigned to your campus to help you prepare your responses. Please submit your completed proposal to: Office of Executive Vice Chancellor Selma Botman, Office of Academic Affairs, 535 East 80th Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10021.