Welcome to spring semester! Queens College operates year-round now; enrollment in Winter Session increased by 14 percent over 2019. It is rewarding to now see Spring classes and activities resume in full swing, still 99 percent online. I encourage everyone to keep up to date on what's happening by visiting the college calendar. In addition, we have scheduled two town halls this week, tomorrow, Wednesday, February 3, at noon, and Thursday, February 4, at 6 pm, regarding Queens College's safety plan focusing on how we are operating the campus (for registration details, see QC mailer sent yesterday to faculty, staff, and students). While most members of the college community will not be coming to the campus, we are maintaining the required public health and safety protocols. We are planning an important event in March to recognize the essential workers who have diligently helped ensure that our beautiful campus remains safe and sound and that renovation and modernizing projects continue unabated.

There have been exciting developments since my last edition of Frankly Speaking. In an inspiring gesture at a time of great need, the Queens College Foundation allocated $2.75 million to support scholarships, the Knights Table Food Pantry, and tech internships. Funding from other sources brings this one-time, supplemental infusion to $3 million. Most of the foundation's emergency support is earmarked for Retention Incentive Supporting Excellence (RISE), a new scholarship program for undergraduates facing economic hardships because of the pandemic. RISE scholarships will be issued for spring, summer, and fall of 2021, in compliance with CUNY financial aid policies. Athletics scholarship commitments will be supported. We are deeply grateful to our alumni for stepping up once again on behalf of our students.

Meanwhile, the CUNY Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Incubator, launched in 2019 with a $500,000 grant from the New York City Council and run by QC's Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding (CERRU), received another $450,000 in funding from City Council Speaker Corey Johnson. The incubator develops programmatic training to help CUNY staff and faculty build skills in bias recognition, mediation, and cross-cultural communications, while promoting dialogue among diverse groups on individual campuses. Adapting to the pandemic, CERRU led virtual workshops in the summer and fall at four pilot locations—Baruch College, Queensborough Community College, York College, and of course Queens College, where CERRU was founded in 2009. The new funding will enable CERRU to extend the incubator to four additional
The strategic planning process is moving forward, with each of the working groups meeting regularly and preparing their reports for review by the steering committee. I am very much encouraged by the high level of participation of the college community. The information gained from last fall’s town halls has been extremely helpful. To see notes from those meetings, and a video about the process under way, click here. A new round of town halls will take place in May, and I look forward to continued input from the college community.

We are always looking for new ways to promote the extraordinary research of faculty and staff. The Office of Communications and Marketing has created an exciting new video series, Big Ideas, that showcases the projects of faculty from different disciplines. Big Ideas debuts on February 11 with a look at the work of Lenwood Gibson (ECP). To see what the series is all about, watch the trailer.

I’m proud of the way the college faculty, staff and students addressed important topics last month through a variety of remote events. Here are a few examples: On Wednesday, January 13, Political Science faculty held a virtual roundtable, How Healthy is American Democracy, prompted by the deadly January 6 riot and its aftermath. It was a great event, well-attended and most timely.

The next day, I joined NYC Deputy Mayor J. Phillip Thompson, James Vacca (Urban Studies), Senior Advisor to the Mayor’s Democracy NYC Initiative and General Counsel Laura Wood, and Civic Engagement Commission Chair and Executive Director Sarah Sayeed in a virtual roundtable on New York City’s ranked-choice voting system. The roundtable was livestreamed on the college’s Facebook page. (Ranked choice is making its city debut with the Queens County 24th City Council District Special Election, taking place today, February 2. Voters in the 24th district are choosing a replacement for QC alumnus Rory Lancman, who left his seat in November to join the administration of Governor Andrew Cuomo as special counsel for ratepayer protection, a newly created position. For voting information, click here.)

The Time is Now: Forward!, the college’s annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was exceptionally moving. A robust audience tuned in from their homes on Sunday, January 17, to watch the impressive lineup of speakers and performers: Queens Borough President Donovan Richards, ACSM’s Director of Jazz Studies Antonio Hart, guest artist Alita Moses, and QC students Alisha Anderson and Kayra Theodore. An inspiring video titled “The Queens College Civil Rights Legacy” was presented, narrated by alumnus Richard F. Rothbard ’76. I had the honor of co-hosting the program with Student Association President Zaire Couloute. I don’t think I’ll ever forget the experience of hearing current students read excerpts of the compelling speech
King made to this campus nearly 55 years ago. I am grateful to have worked with Zaire and the other members of the planning committee chaired most ably by Jeffrey Rosenstock—Richard Alvarez, Julia Delpalacio, Nathanael Desulme, Annette Durrant, Deidre Flowers, Troy Hahn, Jay Hershenson, Jennifer Jarvis, Wayguard Wong, Jon Yanofsky, and Lillian Zepeda—to prepare a memorable salute to an authentic American hero whose work remains unfinished. Due to continuing widespread interest, The Time Is Now: Forward! will remain available throughout February, Black History Month. Everyone can access the program here.

Speaking of Black History Month, you can access a superb and full calendar of virtual events at Queens College celebrating Black history, culture and achievements while also addressing today’s struggle for racial equity. The calendar was prepared with the great help of the Office of the Provost, led by Betsy Hendrey, and assisted by Soribel Genao, Julia Delpalacio, and many other participating faculty, staff, and students. The details are available at www.qc.cuny.edu/BHM.

Since 2016, HSI-STEM Bridges Across Eastern Queens has been bringing together faculty from QC and Queensborough Community College in the effort to increase the number of Hispanic and low-income students graduating with STEM degrees. HSI-STEM Bridges’ annual winter workshop, conducted on Zoom on January 19-20, gave faculty from both institutions the chance to meet, discuss the past year, and share successful strategies.

It saddens me to report that the entire Queens community suffered a tremendous loss last week. Legendary journalistic photographer Corky Lee, a native of the borough, Queens College alumnus, and a friend of mine, passed away from complications of COVID-19. Corky chronicled the diversity and greatness of Asian culture and peoples. Among his best-known projects was the annual re-enactment of the transcontinental railroad ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah, by descendants of Chinese laborers present at the original 1869 event. Corky and his work will be covered in greater detail next week, in an article in QView. On a more cheerful note, I’d like to highlight two QC members of the administration who are taking on expanded responsibilities. Assistant Vice President Jennifer Jarvis is leading the Office of Student Affairs. She succeeds Adam Rockman, who left the college last month after more than 15 years of service, including over eight years as vice president of Student Affairs. Jennifer has been part of QC, remarkably, for a quarter century; among other achievements, she was the first woman to hold the position of executive director of the Student Union. She has a bachelor’s degree from Manhattanville College and an MSEd
from James Madison University. As a result of William Keller’s retirement in December, Assistant Vice President Joseph Loughren will manage the Office of Budget and Finance, and will serve as the college’s CFO. Many of you have met Joe at one of the Budget 101 discussions he and Bill Keller have been presenting since the fall. Joe came to QC in July 2019 from SUNY Stony Brook, where he last served as director of financial services for Facilities and Administration, and Information Technology. He earned a BS from St. Joseph's College, an MBA from Hofstra University, and is pursuing a PhD in College and University Leadership at Colorado State University.

I thank Jennifer and Joe, and all the staff and faculty on this campus, as we work together to face this year’s challenges. I am grateful to Bill Keller, who will continue to help Queens College and guide the further development of the tech incubator and related projects.

Finally, all of us are continuing to look to the federal, state and city governments and CUNY for guidance on the vaccination program under way. The university is providing two hours of paid time for full-time employees who have a COVID-19 appointment during their workday, and an additional two hours for a second dose that is required. Our Human Resources Office is available if you have any questions at our.payroll@qc.cuny.edu. I urge everyone, vaccinated or not, to continue wearing masks, washing hands frequently, and maintaining social distance.

In the meantime, I hope you have a productive semester and that you will check your emails for more information about the events and activities that enrich our community spirit and life during these challenging times. Stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,

Frank H. Wu