Dear College Community,

I share with you my report for the month of November. I started the month inspired by our students and a cadre of New York City’s most influential women from all walks of life at CUNY’s 15th Annual Women’s Leadership Conference. The Conference, an outgrowth of the 2005 CUNY Women’s Leadership Initiative, was created to enhance opportunities for students who have demonstrated a facility for leadership. The conference theme was "Leading with Values & Culture" and the CEO and President of the New York Botanical Garden delivered the keynote. I had the honor of co-facilitating a panel of NYC Council Members Carlina Rivera (District 2), Adrienne Adams (District 28), Helen Rosenthal (District 6) and Alicka Ampy-Samuel (District 41) with Anastasiya Rodchyn, a KCC Education Studies major. Alongside VP Dorestant, I attended a breakfast sponsored by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce for Brooklyn’s Higher Education Leaders. Under the leadership of its new president, Randy Peers, the chamber is committed to working closely with colleges in Brooklyn to advance economic development in the borough. The college’s Division of Workforce Development, Continuing Education and Strategic Partnerships is already working with the Chamber on a number of initiatives.

In November, I welcomed Richard White, CUNY Vice Chancellor for Risk, Audit and Compliance; Andrea Shapiro Davis, Interim Vice Chancellor for University Advancement; and Gaby Celiba, the new commanding officer of the 61st Precinct. We have a productive working relationship with our local precinct as they work with our Department of Public Safety to ensure the security of our campus and the safety of all members of our college community.

This month, the Diversity Week Symposium included a host of speakers and presentations. I wish to extend a special thank you to Kevicha Echols and Juan Morales-Flores for their leadership in organizing the symposium. Faculty also got to present their research/scholarship at the Faculty Forum. As I served my country in jury duty, we were still able to celebrate our veteran students and employees at our 2nd Annual Veterans’ Luncheon. As we approached Thanksgiving Day, my senior staff and I were happy to serve students a hearty Thanksgiving meal and give a special thank you to our Office Staff, Public Safety, Building and Grounds, and Laborers at our Season of Thanks Breakfast and dinner for our night shift employees. Earlier in the month, I braved the cold in the Bronx and I know many others braved the cold in other parts of the city to cheer on the runners in the New York City Marathon. Among the over 50,000 runners, were three KCC employees, first time runner Karen St. Hilaire (President’s Office), and marathon repeaters Lauren Ferguson (Office of Student Life) and Paul Garza (Office Services). In November, the college also kicked off its own marathon of activities for KCC Spirit Week with Domino, Jenga, Connect Four, Volleyball and Scrabble competitions.
This past month, I sat riveted at the Theater Arts students’ production of Marisol and I enjoyed a spirited double header of the women’s and men’s basketball teams who played Bronx Community College. I am always in awe of student athletes. The ability to commit to playing on a team and all that it entails along with full-time study is to be commended. Moreover, what they do once they get playing is awe-inspiring. I hope in the coming year, we can improve our attendance at student functions. I know that for our student athletes and those who have accomplished great things academically, as well as our theater arts, fashion design and other students who have skills to showcase, besides taking center stage winning and receiving awards, there is no better feeling than seeing and hearing supporters hooting and hollering for them.

In November, we celebrated employees with 45 to 10 years of service. We also welcomed Pittershawn Palmer to KCC. Ms. Palmer serves as the Communication Publications and Editorial Manager will assume some of John Aaron’s responsibility as well as provide support to AVP Todmann. Ms. Palmer is the founder and CEO of Creative Ankh Designs and has over 18 years of experience as a writer and a graphic and website designer. She holds a BA in English and a MS in Journalism from Iona College. She is on track to receive her MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College in June 2020.

As fulfilling as some of November was, this last week has been the most difficult in my career in higher education. Vile anti-Semitic propaganda was anonymously faxed to several offices on campus, which is the antithesis of our values as an institution. News of an alleged assault on a student, is news that you never want to hear. Public Safety and the NYPD responded swiftly to both matters and I provided updates to the campus. VP Rios will continue to provide updates to the campus regarding increased security measures. Please know that the safety of all members of our community and the security of the campus is our outmost priority.

As you know, improving the campus climate so that it can be one that reflects our college values, remains one of my top priorities as well. Earlier in the month, I addressed the College Council in response to the issue of a former adjunct who was recently identified as a white supremacist. I shared that in that moment, I was most concerned that those who work and learn here are respected and valued. To this end, after finalizing a time that would work best for most of the committee, I convened the first meeting of the Campus Climate Advisory Committee. This committee will serve to provide me with feedback regarding issues as they occur. They will also help develop and identify ways in which we can begin to break down walls and build community at the college.

From where I stand, I see long standing issues that have resulted in deep divisions in our community. While I cannot change the past, I need you to know that we are taking the necessary steps to bring closure to outstanding matters, address issues as they occur, and work to strengthen the community within our community college. These issues were not created overnight, and they will not be resolved overnight. Nor can I do this work alone,
this is work that we all must be involved in. The Campus Climate Advisory Committee, while a good effort, by itself will not be enough to improve the climate on campus. Only our individual efforts will make the most meaningful impact. I constantly reflect on how I treat others as well. In the Administrative Building there is a sign posted in VP Cohen’s window that serves as a reminder for me to T.H.I.N.K. before I speak with and engage with others. Is it True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, and Kind? We should be mindful that what we say and do and how we treat each other makes an indelible impact on the campus climate. As we close out another semester, year and decade, let us resolve to do this work together. The future of our college and our ability to help students to meet their goals is at stake.

While we are approaching the end of the semester, we are also preparing for the start of a new one. Enrollment for the winter and spring semesters is underway. VP Rivera will be sending an enrollment update next week.

Under VP Fox’s leadership, the second annual Faculty and Staff Satisfaction Survey is now available for you to tell us what you think. This is one way we identify issues and work to resolve them. Results from last year’s survey revealed most dissatisfaction with internal campus communication, the advisement process, the website, communications and marketing, weekend evening student services; physical conditions of the classrooms, academic preparation of students, student motivation, support for travel to conferences and tenure and promotion processes. There is more work to do, but I am sure you can all see some improvement in these areas that has been made over the past year. Your input is important. Please take some time to complete the survey.

Thanksgiving Day is behind us, and Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa await us. I approach this holiday season grateful for the opportunity to serve the college, thankful for all the work you do, and hopeful that the best is yet to come for the college, our students and all of us.

Many thanks,

Claudia V. Schrader
President