



Office of the President

September 17, 2021

To the Manhattan College Community:

It has been so good these past several weeks to move out of Google rooms and experience the energy and excitement of our return to campus. Many thanks to all who worked so hard and so well to prepare our campus and welcome our students back for the beginning of the new year.

As we complete our third week of the semester, I'd like to provide some brief updates on matters that I know are of concern to all, and to brief the community on some of the important work that is being done to help us emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever.

Campus Return: Our One Manhattan team continues to help us navigate daily campus life, ever vigilant as we learn more and more about COVID-19 and its evolving variants. Thanks to their hard work and to the cooperation of our community, we have made significant strides in our vaccination compliance efforts and I can now report the following: 99.6% of our employees are in compliance (2 employees are in the on-boarding process), which includes 2.7% of employees with an approved exemption; and 96.6% of students are in compliance (we are still reconciling numbers from the add/drop period), which includes 4.3% of students with an approved exemption.

While we are a highly vaccinated campus and have been able to resume many of the activities that we had to curtail last year, we must continue to be vigilant — as we have been over the past year and a half — about the health and safety of our community. As you know, in addition to the vaccination requirement, we are also requiring that masks be worn indoors. And, as of this week, we are also subject to and working to be compliant with [New York City Emergency Executive Order 225](#), which imposes further restrictions for unvaccinated colleagues and students. For more information on these restrictions and on all current protocols, please visit the [One Manhattan webpage](#).

On enrollment and our FY2022 budget: We continue to assess the usual plusses and minuses in revenue as we work to firm up our actual numbers after a summer of continuing recruitment and management of the usual “melt” With the continuing threat of the virus in the mix, the situation is even more volatile than usual. As of Monday, we had 758 active deposits for freshmen and 110 from transfers. (Budget goals presented in June were 750 and 125 respectively.) On a positive note, our projection for housing occupancy has risen to 1319 (from 1200 in June). However, preliminary retention numbers for continuing undergraduate students are lower than normal (down 69 students from the budgeted number). Graduate projections are also trending less than budget (down 80 credits), mostly due to student demand for entirely on-line options.

On the expense side, we continue to work to balance our financial realities with our need for sufficient staffing to assure the quality of our operations. So, while we will continue to hold many positions open, we are selectively approving searches in areas of special need. We are also continuing to hold as a top priority the timely restoration of salaries and retirement contributions. We will need to await final census numbers to determine exactly how much we will be able to do in the current year, but we are committed to making substantial progress on this goal. I know how much of a burden and what a sacrifice these reductions have entailed, and assure you that we are doing all we can to find the funds to restore these cuts.

We continue to restrict our capital expenditures to health and safety projects; however, we unfortunately have several emerging issues in facilities that demand immediate attention, most notably issues with steam leaks (in Alumni Hall and in the underground network of pipes; e.g., the area near the statue of De La Salle). As you know, we also sustained damage in the wake of Hurricanes Henri and Ida, mostly in the first-level offices in Miguel, Memorial, and De La Salle Halls, but also affecting Draddy gymnasium and in Horan and Overlook. Our Facilities teams have done excellent work responding to these historic storms and restoring these spaces, even as they have been hampered by availability of materials. While we expect insurance to cover most of our costs here, the work has still been a strain (on top of so many other strains) for our people.

The work ahead: As we have worked with such resilience through the past eighteen months, we have learned important lessons about what we need to do to move forward and recommit to rebuilding and sustaining our work as a community. Pressured by revenue declines, created mostly by the loss of room and board income, we have engaged in significant cost-cutting this past year. We know, however, that our future depends not on such reductions but on finding ways to grow. Over the summer, the senior leadership team worked to identify key areas in which we see opportunity to draw on these lessons, improving operations and structures to assure that we are as effective, efficient, and accountable as possible in all aspects of our organization—especially in activities that have the potential to restore, diversify, and increase revenue.

This work has issued in the creation of several focused working groups (Self-Managed Teams) to address specific areas in which creative change is needed for us to recover from the pandemic, adapt to new challenges, and continue to thrive in pursuit of our mission. In each area, the relevant team is charged with working across divisions to analyze current barriers to success, recommend improvements, and set goals and measures going forward. The teams will draw widely on the expertise of the community as they work, informed by a college-wide and cross-functional mindset, to re-envision crucial aspects of our operations. In this first-round, teams are working in the following areas, identified over the summer as among our most important immediate priorities for moving forward:

— **Building external partnerships and improving structures to strengthen and diversify student recruitment, including transfer students.** As the demographics and educational trajectories of prospective students change, we need to make sure that we are as accessible and attractive an option for an increasingly diverse range of students. The group is focusing on partnerships with community colleges, streamlining application and acceptance policies across the board, and having as “transfer friendly” an environment as we can. Other important aspects of this work: building on our successes to date in being an excellent choice for military veterans; leveraging our D1 athletic programs; and better tapping our relationships with the International Association of Lasallian Universities.

— **Academic program development and expansion.** Among the tasks of this group are developing partnerships and articulation pathways for graduate and professional programs to pursue our mission of service, enhance the value proposition for undergraduate students seeking both bachelor's and master's degrees, and increase and diversify enrollment and revenue sources. Another area of focus is strategic alignment of marketing and communications plans with Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management in targeted areas.

— **Enhancing the on-campus student experience for residents and commuters.** Specifics of the charge include developing programming and building an environment to better attract and retain students in residence halls; rebuilding on-campus vibrancy and sense of community; ensuring all, residents and commuters, have a strong sense of belonging; ensuring that the entire range of student on-campus services are as attentive and responsive to student needs as possible; making progress, as finances allow, on facilities improvements.

— **Implementing the recommendations of the Diversity Council.** This involves two groups: one focused on students; the other on employees. Among both groups' priorities are increasing education and strengthening accountability around compliance with existing policies; as well as creation of new policies and procedures to reduce impact of discrimination, harassment, and micro-aggressions towards marginalized populations on campus. Also common to both groups is new programming designed to increase feelings of belonging and inclusion among, as well as retention of, all members of our community from marginalized groups. Both groups will study and make recommendations for achieving status as an Hispanic Serving and/or Minority Serving institution. Among the employee-focused group's chief areas of emphasis is the integration of goals identified by the Diversity Council's "Employee Recruitment and Retention Working Group," with divisional goals of Human Resources (e.g., in on-boarding and orientation programming), Academic Affairs (search committee training), and Mission (appropriately articulating and integrating the Lasallian Catholic core identity in the hiring and on-boarding process).

— **Rebuilding our financial capacity; increasing revenue.** Two groups are working here as well. The first is focusing on increased revenue generation through optimizing our financial aid strategies, modeling, and processes. The second will work to increase and diversify revenue from a range of sources, including grants, partnerships, summer programming, and expanded participation in targeted fundraising.

— **Optimizing the College Website.** While Marketing and Communication has an important role to play in several of the other working groups — aligning our marketing resources with targeted areas of growth — a separate group is working primarily on externally facing functions, including search engine optimization, with particular focus on recruitment in strategic areas (e.g., graduate and international) and partnership engagement.

— **Global Engagement.** The group is working to create an integrated, more centralized structure for our many programs, from Study Abroad, to international recruitment, to various opportunities within the Lasallian network. The goal is to increase engagement with both Lasallian and strategic global partners on multiple levels while providing a more seamless experience for students, faculty, and other constituents.

— **Shared Governance.** If we are to move forward effectively with the work I've just outlined, we will need to draw on the knowledge, expertise, wisdom, and good will of the entire community. This in turn requires that we have structures and practices that invite and encourage participation of all stakeholders in well-organized, well-understood, and transparently conducted processes. Assessments of our shared governance system have identified significant questions and concerns from all stakeholder groups, indicating that we have work to do in order to make sure that we have a common vision and understanding of the purpose and principles of shared governance across all constituencies; greater communication among shared governance structures and to those outside of shared governance; greater transparency in the College's planning processes; greater consistency of process among schools' policies and procedures from the student perspective; and better understanding of the roles of representatives and their function in governance structures, including the concept of interdependence of outcomes to all stakeholders for the long-term health of the institution. This group will be charged with helping us to achieve that shared understanding and those outcomes.

I believe that these plans accurately identify our most important priorities for the coming year. More important, I think that the approach we're taking — using small, agile cross-functional teams to break down a problem, create an effective solution, and move on to the next problem — is the way to go at a time when we're being challenged to think and work in new ways. We have a tremendous resource in our people and their dedication to our mission. The Self-Managed Team approach gives them the freedom they need to work creatively for the good of the whole.

I am very excited — and very hopeful — as we move forward with all of this work. United in our commitment to each other in service to our students and our society, we are more than up to the challenges we face. We have shown our resilience again and again over these past eighteen months, and I have great faith in our ability to continue to move forward, as a community, in the months and years ahead.

I will be present at the meeting of the Senate, Tuesday, September 21, to answer questions or provide additional information.

With prayers and best wishes to all as we begin again!

Sincerely,

Brennan O'Donnell
President

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