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To: Campus Presidents and Deans

CC: Provosts  
Chief Student Affairs Officers  
Chief Enrollment Managers  
Chancellor’s Cabinet  
University Provost’s Cabinet

From: José Luis Cruz, Ph.D.  
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Subject: **Call to Action: CUNY’s Academic Pivot to Summer 2020 (and Beyond)**

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**The Road Traveled**

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It is the case that the last several weeks have been physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging. Yet our University stands tall. We are poised for action, and together we continue to advance what is perhaps the noblest mission among our nation’s institutions of higher education — a mission that seeks to better serve the historically underserved, those whom through their talent, energy and drive make our city, the City of New York, the greatest city in the world. A note of gratitude to you and each member of the campus communities you lead, for continuing to fuel this most formidable engine of opportunity.

The agile conversion of more than 40,000 **Spring 2020** courses into distance learning and the adjustment of the institutional efforts of over 40,000 faculty and staff to remote working modalities demonstrates our dedication and determination to those who have entrusted their educational journeys and professional careers to the world’s greatest urban university. But it has also laid bare the difficulty of sustaining academic excellence against the backdrop of a global pandemic of historic proportions.

## Summer 2020 and Beyond

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As you know, after careful consideration and consultation, The City University of New York's **Summer 2020** course offerings will be exclusively conducted via distance education format. Any exceptions will require approval by a College's president or dean and be subject to the social distancing provisions of the New York State on Pause Executive Order that may be in effect at the time. This decision is consistent with [NYSED Guidance](#) published on **April 2, 2020**, which waives the requirement that specific courses and programs be registered for delivery via distance education. We appreciate the feedback we received from the University Faculty Senate and other academic leaders on this. For staff, current guidance regarding remote work will remain in effect consistent with the New York State on PAUSE executive order.

A decision regarding the teaching modalities for **Fall 2020** will be forthcoming, subject to alignment with Federal, New York State, and New York City plans, guidance from the relevant regulatory and accreditation bodies (including the U.S. Department of Education, NYSED and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education), and consultation with the University's stakeholders.

Please note that from a regulatory perspective, NYSED has indicated that "offering programs in the distance education format (i.e., 50% or more of the requirements can be completed through study delivered by distance education) beyond the **Summer 2020** term(s) will be subject to regular distance education approval requirements, including the submission of program registration applications to NYSED. The need to extend this flexibility beyond the **Summer 2020** term(s) will be determined depending upon the COVID-19 emergency time frame." As of this writing, the U.S. Department of Education and MSCHE are similarly advising institutions.

Notwithstanding the above, we must use the time available to us to prepare for a fully distance education **Fall 2020** or one that could start out with a mix of teaching modalities (as in the pre-COVID-19 era), but with perhaps a higher proportion of hybrid and online courses that may or may not need to be converted at some point during the term to fully online instruction if the virus resurges.

## The Pivot

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So, based on the above, as we pivot toward the future, we must engage and accelerate our efforts to better support faculty, staff, and students for the extended and expanded role that distance education and telecommuting can be expected to play in the **Summer 2020** and **Fall 2020** terms. Accelerating our efforts for distance education and telecommuting is key for what it means for the access, retention, progression, graduation, and post-graduation success of our students, and for what it means for the University's ability to provide a strong foundation to build and rebuild as it navigates new threats to its structures, policies, and practices.

Attention to this challenge is fundamental to the important roles and responsibilities of campus presidents and the University Chancellor, with presidents per University bylaws having the "affirmative responsibility of conserving and enhancing the educational standards and general academic excellence of the College under his/her jurisdiction" and the Chancellor being responsible for "oversee[ing] and hold[ing] accountable campus leadership, including by setting goals and academic and financial performance standards for each campus."

It is imperative that we continue to deliver on these responsibilities, as the future of our City and State depend in no small measure on CUNY's ability to advance its academic mission.

To this end, in the past several days, as circumstances have allowed us to pivot attention to the future, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) has discussed with key University and campus stakeholders the concept of a "University Playbook" for **Summer 2020** (and beyond) based on effective practices in distance education.

The balance of these conversations with the members of the Council of Academic Affairs, Council of Student Affairs, Council of Enrollment Management, and Committee on Academic Technology, faculty, and students highlighted the fact that because we have limited to meet the challenges ahead of us, we would benefit most from a University-wide call for campuses to scale-up effective practices already in place and an articulation of how the University would help scale-out these effective practices and provide support in areas where it is better positioned than individual campuses to do so.

Therefore, the idea of a Playbook morphed into this "call to action" memorandum. While there are many and varied "calls" presented herein, when boiled down to their essence, we find each one of them to simply be a call to doubledown on our mission, expand our impact, and increase our reach.

Granted, there are myriad other considerations that the University must address as we work toward meeting the strategic and operational challenges ahead. These considerations will in due order be tended to via separate University-wide organizational and planning efforts. Nevertheless, we feel confident that the calls presented herein are timely and will do much to help establish the foundation upon which we will build our new place within the landscape of higher education.

### **Summer 2020 Course Offerings & Learning Outcomes**

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It is hard to overstate the importance of engaging and mobilizing our campus communities in the development and implementation of a systematic audit of our **Summer 2020** course offerings. By thoughtfully doing so we can ensure that each of our campuses is well positioned to deliver a high-quality experience to faculty, students, and staff in keeping with our values of equity and excellence. To accomplish this our entire community must create the conditions that allow learning outcomes to be met.

As we all know, our summer sessions play an important role in ensuring student success and institutional sustainability. Many of our students rely on summer sessions to appropriately pace their coursework as they balance learning, working, and living. Summer sessions help our students meet satisfactory academic progress, maintain academic momentum toward timely degree completion, meet regulatory requirements associated with financial aid and scholarship awards, strengthen their ability to successfully transition into higher-level courses, complete the requirements for their degree, move out of probation, and return back after stopping-out, among other student benefits. Enrollment in our summer sessions also represent an important revenue stream that helps support our annual efforts to advance our mission and make progress on our institutional goals.

The reality is that **Summer 2020** will be a summer like no other. It will be our first all-distance education academic term and it will unfold along with the continued disruption COVID-19 has brought into our lives. These factors necessitate that we be particularly mindful about how we curate our course offerings, utilize

qualitative and quantitative data to inform our decisions, and leverage both institutional as well as University-wide resources as we aspire to deliver the best summer experience ever, for all involved.

With these factors in consideration, we present the following calls to action to each of our College leaders as you pivot your attention to **Summer 2020** and beyond. For some this guidance will serve as a gentle reminder of things to prioritize in your work, for others, it will simply serve as encouragement to continue the excellent efforts you are already carrying out in the specified areas below.

**First, Colleges shall review and ensure that the number and length of summer sessions are well aligned with effective distance education practices and that assessment processes are in place to measure the corresponding learning outcomes.**

As of this writing, CUNY's colleges and schools have published approximately 9,500 sections of 6,200 different courses and identified approximately 3,500 faculty members to teach the approximately 39,000 students who have registered to date. As many have pointed out, most of these course offerings and faculty assignments were completed before a decision was made to move all **Summer 2020** offerings to distance education and the approval of a CR/NC flexible grading policy.

And so, it is not unreasonable that Colleges revisit the assumptions behind the current course offerings and embrace a "sense and respond" mentality to adjusting the offerings based on the needs of our students, the communities they represent, the corresponding learning outcomes, and the College's fiscal health (e.g., by carefully considering section sizes and fill rates).

This includes rescheduling to longer summer sessions those courses that cannot reasonably be delivered via distance education in short summer sessions and to later summer sessions those which may require some form of in-person instruction (e.g., scientific labs, performance spaces) as conditions on the ground could perhaps allow those to be scheduled as we approach the fall term.

Furthermore, Colleges should not only think about how they can help their students through their own course offerings, but also consider how to leverage the University's e-permit program to full effect — especially Pathways courses that lend themselves to online delivery, are fully transferable, and appeal to students within and outside of CUNY.

**Second, Colleges shall, in addition to considering quantitative indicators, systematically gather and analyze qualitative data on the expected performance of their students and the likelihood of higher than average course failures that could ultimately be registered by No Credit (NC) grades.**

This is important because in curating the **Summer 2020** course offerings we must recognize that our traditional quantitative metrics that helped produce enrollment projections will not be as helpful as in the past.

For example, the number of students who have withdrawn from courses at this time lags the number from last year, most likely because of our decision to postpone the deadline for course withdrawals in light of our COVID-19 academic continuity response.

We expect qualitative information will help paint a more complete picture of course needs and demands for the summer session and that these projections should be factored into the summer course offerings.

**Third, Colleges shall develop strategies to optimize continuing education courses, summer intensives, and pre-matriculation programs, among other important course offerings that extend beyond the undergraduate and graduate portfolio.**

This is important because for the University, through its constituent colleges, to help shape the future of the City of New York, we must be very intentional about how we use the summer to serve displaced workers, incoming freshmen, student parents, and unemployed youth, among many other distinct student populations. Because in an era of upskilling and reskilling, we recognize that a college education must respond both to the labor demands and the unique circumstances of students pursuing a degree.

Understanding that each of our colleges is approaching the above issues as well as they can but that there are always areas in which the central office can and should provide support, I am pleased to inform you that OAA, in collaboration with other units across the University and collaborators from our various University-wide offices, is positioned to support campus efforts as follows.

1. **Enrollment Data and Analytics:** Together in partnership with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (and other units), OAA will provide individual campuses with data and insights related to the student experience, gaps in course availability, enrollment and recruitment strategies in an effort to help make up for lost ground due to the ongoing crisis.
2. **Marketing of Summer 2020 Courses:** OAA is exploring new incentive models to increase enrollment levels and revenue through a reconceptualized summer marketing campaign that will aim to promote continuous enrollment for current students, reenrollment for those who have either stopped out or graduated, and new enrollment for undergraduates and graduates from non-CUNY institutions.
3. **Market Research for Continuing Education Programs:** OAA will engage with our ACE Council on this front and provide the analytical information needed to optimize our summer offerings. For example, a quick analysis of unemployment data suggests approximately 20-25 occupational areas in the tech, business, healthcare, public affairs/policy, communications, public health, and teacher education sectors where existing programs/courses can be enhanced to help dislocated workers and recent grads.
4. **Long-Term Value Proposition and Enrollment Management Strategies:** OAA will work with campuses and other units across the University, including the Office of Advancement, Communications, K-16, OIRA/DOE-CUNY Steering Committee, and Workforce Development to better articulate the value of CUNY's online programs in the marketplace.

#### **Certification for Effective Online Teaching: Online Teaching Essentials**

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As mentioned earlier, CUNY colleges have identified approximately 3,500 instructors to teach in the **Summer 2020** term — about a third of them have taught a fully-online course prior to **Spring 2020** and 93% are currently teaching in Spring 2020. This accounts for approximately 65% of the sections currently contemplated for the term.

While we expect our **Summer 2020** offerings to pivot in response to the conditions and considerations previously discussed, the reality remains that we have a formidable challenge ahead of us: ensuring that our instructors have the experience and/or training required to effectively manage their online courses,

help their students meet the corresponding learning outcomes, and contribute to institutional efforts to assess the effectiveness of our online offerings.

While our Colleges have done a magnificent job of creating curated online self-service and faculty-led training modules as evidenced by [the guidance made available by our campuses](#) and the [resources offered CUNY-wide](#) to help transition our Spring 2020 courses to distance education, conversations with the members of the Council of Academic Affairs, Council of Student Affairs, Council of Enrollment Management, Committee on Academic Technology, campus presidents, and faculty and student leaders point the need for a more systematic, structured and urgent approach to faculty professional development leading up to the summer and fall terms.

And so, we are pleased to report that we have been in deep conversations with the School of Professional Studies to make their **Online Teaching Essentials** course available to a large number of faculty members. The idea is to start the 10-hour (asynchronous) certification courses in May and extend them through July on a rolling basis in accordance with the scheduled summer sessions and the establishment of discipline-specific communities of practice with small group facilitators. Significantly, the courses do not require any face-to-face or locked-in real-time online meetings. The first session will extend from **May 4 to May 24, 2020** and we are planning — with the support of our campuses — to build enough capacity to serve 500+ faculty members.

This three-week, asynchronous, instructor-facilitated workshop is designed to prepare CUNY faculty for teaching online and/or hybrid classes. The workshop models effective design and facilitation skills and addresses design issues, pedagogical approaches to teaching online and hybrid courses, as well as organization and management of an online class. It also provides an opportunity for faculty to become more familiar with the environment of the Blackboard LMS from both a student and instructor perspective.

As you can imagine, the magnitude of the challenge we face requires the coherence of our actions. And so, in addition to leveraging their deep wealth of experience, SPS will require the solidarity of participating campuses to ensure we can build the capacity required to drive this work to full effect. To this end, we have four big asks of our CUNY campuses:

**First, presidents shall inform the Executive Vice President and University Provost of their intent to leverage this training opportunity for their faculty and commitment to contribute to the overall goals of this ambitious initiative. Alternatively, presidents will submit their own plan to provide professional development to their campus faculty. Responses are due by April 20, 2020.** Once the University Provost receives the corresponding information from campus president, his office will circle back with a request for information that will provide OAA and SPS the granular information needed to optimally organize their work, schedule sections, establish disciplinary communities of practice, and engage with local campus leaders to build the support capacity necessary for success.

**Second, presidents shall provide OAA and SPS access to experienced faculty and staff who can help coordinate and implement this program.** Specifically, participating campuses will be asked to designate a point person for this initiative and allow SPS to enlist sister campus staff assistance for both sessions. To this end, we'd like your permission to allow CUNY SPS Office of Faculty Development and Instructional Technology (OFDIT) to reach out to faculty and staff who we know to be well positioned to help drive the bold objectives of this University effort. We would of course make sure that you are aware of who is being contacted, the role they'd be expected to play, and the associated campus commitment. In the event

that there are specific folks we'd like to enlist for the work, we'd also specifically ask for permission to tap into their time, talent and energy for this effort.

**Third, presidents shall mobilize their campus Blackboard teams to actively participate with CIS's Blackboard team and CUNY SPS OFDIT in the implementation of this initiative.** The early engagement of Blackboard administrators will better prepare them to work with their faculty during the summer session as well as going forward. CUNY SPS OFDIT will reach out soon to discuss this process. Finally, please know that CUNY SPS has already taken a first step in supporting the Colleges by sending all Blackboard administrators their self-paced [Blackboard Basics](#) course.

**Fourth, presidents shall mobilize their Centers of Teaching and Learning to participate in the implementation of this initiative.** Specifically, we ask that the CTLs at participating campuses either enroll as participants or help facilitate the Online Teaching Essentials course to strengthen their local community of practice. Again, CUNY SPS OFDIT will reach out to the CTLs soon to begin this process.

More information on the above requests for collaboration as well as the funding model that will cover the proposed activities and the stipends for participants will be forthcoming.

### **Certification of Effective Online Student Success Services**

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As we discussed our University's pivot to **Summer 2020** and beyond with the many stakeholders previously cited, a consistent theme that emerged was the need to be more intentional about how we approach providing student support services in distance education and remote work modalities. This in and of itself was not surprising, but the intensity with which this need was articulated and the many examples of why it was so important helped crystallize the urgency with which we must address it.

Consider, for example, the words of Sally Zieper who is pursuing a bachelor's degree at Brooklyn College and serving as a (remote) intern in the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, when asked: what should CUNY administration know about the student experience during the COVID-19 crisis?

*"For many CUNY students, life pre-COVID-19 was already one of crisis. The issues of accessibility, housing and food insecurity, poverty wages, lack of health care, and unpaid care work that the COVID-19 crisis has made increasingly visible were immediate issues for students long before this pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare our precarity and vulnerability, with many of us already working and learning at capacity before the pandemic hit. Beyond this, anxiety and grief in the current moment takes a toll on students' ability to forge on with 'the new normal.' In a time of reflection, what's required is not only to address students' material and educational needs, but also to reimagine what our university community can be when we return to campus life. Reckoning with both the COVID-19 crisis and the broader crises of income inequality and poverty, how can we make our university and our city more equitable, accessible, and democratic for students, workers, and community members?"*

Sally's response reminds us that the University must pay as much attention to the support services our students needed before COVID-19 — which the pandemic have much exacerbated — as we now do to the optimization of our course offerings and the preparation of our faculty to teach effectively online. And, furthermore, that we would be well served to think long and hard about how we position the University to better support our campus communities once conditions allow campus and City life to resume.

**Therefore, in pursuing what we heard, the University calls on Colleges to develop and implement plans to better serve the career engagement, advising, mental health, and onboarding and orientation needs of our students as we close the Spring 2020 term and position ourselves for a Summer 2020 term in which support services may continue to be delivered by colleagues working remotely from home.**

Understanding the benefits of pursuing a University-wide approach to this work, OAA is pleased to inform you that we are prepared to provide targeted remote professional development for critical staff in the key student service areas listed above. We consider the following to be a set of first-wave offerings to ensure the success of our students in **Summer 2020**. CUNY OAA will work in dialogue with campuses to expand these efforts, which we recognize should be ongoing, as the University has an opportunity to build a strong infrastructure for providing broad student services in a range of modalities as we look to the future.

- 1. Professional Development Program in Remote Career Engagement Counseling:** OAA is working with the Career Development and Engagement Council and has identified key areas of focus for staff professional development including: development and management of virtual internships, creating effective remote counseling programs, activating peer mentoring networks, and working with faculty to support career development and exploration activities. We expect to launch a few technology tools and platforms that will assist in the efforts of scaling quality career engagement activities by **June 2020**. The next step will be to work with partners including National Association for Colleges and Employers, employer intermediaries, and private and non-profit workforce development entities to develop four to five program modules for these professional development areas of interest for staff who are in employer engagement, career counseling, internship placement, and partner roles. OAA has already pulled together a [Career Success Action Guide](#) to pool resources for all college staff who are working in career engagement areas. Finally, we are exploring the delivery of professional development content through partnering with college Adult and Continuing Education units within CUNY.
- 2. Professional Development Program in Remote Advising:** OAA will coordinate with our ASAP colleagues from the central office as well as our campus ASAP partners to develop a series of webinars on effective remote advising practices. Additionally, the University's Academic/Student Success Response Team will develop a webinar for advisors on more fully understanding the CR/NC option and any forthcoming policies related to grades. The webinars would be recorded so they could be viewed in an asynchronous manner afterwards and a series of informal Zoom follow-up discussions to provide space for cross-campus dialogue would follow.
- 3. Professional Development Program in Mental Health:** OAA will partner with several CUNY colleges offering exceptional models of professional development. Offerings will be aligned with Counseling Centers to present online trainings or single repeatable courses for administrative leaders, student services staff, and faculty focusing on areas such as: Grief and bereavement in the time of COVID-19; Self-care in the time of COVID-19; and Professional development for licensed mental health staff regarding best practices in tele-mental health, legal and ethical considerations of tele-mental health, and technical assistance across professional disciplines. The goal of this effort includes equipping staff and faculty with the tools they need to (1) anticipate and acknowledge the mental health implications of the COVID-19 crisis for students, colleagues, and themselves and (2) offer concrete supports to the CUNY community beyond what is currently

available. We expect these professional development opportunities to be available starting in **June 2020**.

4. **Professional Development Program in Virtual Recruitment:** OAA will coordinate with our admission/recruitment colleagues from the central office as well as our campus partners to develop a series of webinars on effective virtual recruitment practices. Additionally, the University's Enrollment Management Response Team will develop a webinar for staff on fully understanding the impact of changes to DOE High School Graduation requirements, implications for **Fall 2020** and beyond, and any forthcoming related policies. The webinars would be recorded so they could be viewed in an asynchronous manner afterwards and a series of informal virtual follow-up discussions to provide space for cross-campus dialogue would follow.

Additional information regarding the above OAA supports will be communicated via the corresponding University-wide Councils. To ensure that we move into summer with the broadest base of fully trained staff in these critical areas, we ask that college leadership require key staff to participate in relevant offerings. Among information that will be forthcoming, we will include details on how participation will be recognized in the form of a badge, certificate, or college attestation.

## **The Road Ahead**

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As I reflect on the last several weeks and the road ahead, I can't help but be reminded of the words we used to describe CUNY's commitment to the people who we serve. In [\*Ever Upward: A Strategy for Momentum and Mobility at The City University of New York\*](#) — a document designed as much as a fiscal tool as it was an articulation of values — we acknowledged our part in what we envisioned as a shared imperative for shaping the future, as follows:

*New York State and City, along with CUNY, sit at a volatile crossroads — one that has resulted from the fateful convergence of social, political, economic, and environmental pressures that have destabilized what have been sustainable financial models thus far. Fortunately, there is a long-term solution for this ever-growing dilemma: The State, City and CUNY must endeavor to create a dynamic, educated, and skilled population, one with increased earning potential and correspondingly increased contribution to the City and State tax bases. To that end, CUNY proposes a partnership with the State and City, the private sector, and civic society to tackle these economic challenges, along with the environmental and social challenges of these tumultuous times... Most significantly, this partnership will coincide with expressed student demand for a new approach to higher education that better fuses the intellectual foundations acquired in school with the practical and portable skills gained through direct experience in growing fields, while remaining sensitive to individual student needs and hurdles to success.*

And so having recognized the volatility of the times we were living — if never realizing quite what the world at the time had in store for us — and having now lived bravely through what we hope will be the worst part of the COVID-19 pandemic that forever will color the way we view our place in the world, I am more than confident in our ability to do what it takes to turn the corner, pivot to the future, and continue to advance our University's mission and our plans to build a better, bigger, bolder and more accountable CUNY.

## The Deliverables

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In summary, and for your convenience, per the information presented above, Colleges shall engage in the following actions to better position themselves and our University for the **Summer 2020** term and beyond:

- 1. Optimizing our Summer 2020 course offering and learning outcomes**
  - a. Colleges shall review and ensure that the number and length of summer sessions are well aligned with effective distance education practices and that assessment processes are in place to measure the corresponding learning outcomes.
  - b. Colleges shall, in addition to considering quantitative indicators, systematically gather and analyze qualitative data on the expected performance of their students and the likelihood of higher than average course failures that could ultimately be registered by No Credit (NC) grades.
  - c. Colleges shall develop strategies to optimize continuing education courses, summer intensives, and pre-matriculation programs, among other important course offerings that extend beyond the undergraduate and graduate portfolio.
  
- 2. Certification of Effective Online Teaching: Online Teaching Essentials**
  - a. Presidents shall inform the Executive Vice President and University Provost of their intent to leverage this training opportunity for their faculty and commitment to contribute to the overall goals of this ambitious initiative. Alternatively, presidents will submit their own plan to provide professional development to their campus faculty. Responses are due by **April 20, 2020**.
  - b. Presidents shall provide OAA and SPS access to experienced faculty and staff who can help coordinate and implement this program.
  - c. Presidents shall mobilize campus Blackboard teams to actively participate with CUNY SPS OFDIT in the implementation of this initiative.
  - d. Presidents shall mobilize Centers of Teaching and Learning to participate in the implementation of this initiative.
  
- 3. Providing professional development for effective online student success services**
  - a. Colleges shall develop and implement plans to better serve the career engagement, advising, mental health, and onboarding and orientation needs of our students as we close the Spring 2020 term and position ourselves for a Summer 2020 term in which support services may continue to be delivered by colleagues working remotely from home.

The University's deliverables are described in prior sections.

I Look forward to the hard, important work ahead and wish you and yours the best, today and always.