July 14, 2021

Summer Virtual Town Hall: 
Reflecting on the Past Year and Getting Ready to Return to Campus

Dear Colleagues,

It was wonderful to see so many of you—more than 450 faculty and staff members—at yesterday’s Virtual Town Hall: Preparing for the Dress Rehearsal for the Future, our fourth such gathering since I joined Baruch as president on July 1, 2020. What a year it has been! Certainly, it was a bit of a rollercoaster ride, but all in all, we came out stronger as an institution by almost all objective measures. In my opening remarks, I named a few highlights of the remarkable accomplishments of our community:

• We made diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) a top priority. The Presidential Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion conducted more than 40 listening sessions to collect input from across the College; the team is working to analyze the data to make recommendations to me. We also recruited Elliot Dawes, JD, LLM, a well-known DEI leader to join us as Executive Chief Diversity Officer on August 2.

• We had a record enrollment increase—nearly 7 percent—over the past year; such growth is comparable to many other top-tier institutions in the country. Students vote with their feet—Baruch’s reputation and value proposition are shining through in a challenging time.

• We worked hard to maintain academic momentum for our students. Our six-year graduation rate went up: from a previous high of 69.9 percent, it now stands at 72.5 percent for undergraduates.

• We overcame a potentially disastrous budget crisis, going from 20 percent budget holdback, to a 5 percent budget cut.
We then closed the year with a positive budget balance thanks to the positive enrollment trend and the federal stimulus package.

- We completed three major facilities projects: Phase 1A of the Field Building at 17 Lex renovation, the Allen G. and Mary E. Aaronson Student Center, and yes, the Clivner=Filed Plaza on 25th Street—with an official opening slated for early October.
- We strengthened our ability to offer hybrid and online instruction. The Hybrid/Online Instruction Programming Working Group took key recommendations from the Task Force for the Future and laid important groundwork for our future. These advancements will allow us to build the infrastructure and support systems needed for Baruch to offer high-quality online education, even after the pandemic. Our target is to create at least 25 percent of instruction options and capacity online.

At the town hall, it was also my pleasure to welcome Linda Essig, who joined Baruch as provost and SVP for academic affairs on July 1, and to thank Myung-Soo Lee for his service as interim provost since January. I also introduced Nancy Aries, who will serve as interim dean for the Marxe School in the coming year.

**Baruch Forward: Safe Campus Reopening**
A main focus of the Virtual Town Hall was our upcoming return to campus. Beginning on Monday, August 2, our campus facilities will reopen and operate at roughly 50 percent of normal capacity. Faculty and students will be on campus for in-person and hybrid course instruction as the fall semester begins on Wednesday, August 25. Specifically, we are offering 32 percent of our courses fully in-person, 30 percent in hybrid modalities, and the rest online.

More than 50 questions were submitted in advance of the town hall, and many more were raised and discussed during the event. I invite you to watch the full event here, as the topics were wide-ranging and robust, although I will highlight a few important points here.

The Safe Campus Reopening Committee, broadly represented by colleagues across the College, looked at all aspects of Baruch operations and revised our comprehensive Safe Campus Reopening Plan to incorporate new CDC, New York State, New York City, and CUNY guidelines. Following CUNY’s review, the revised plan will be posted on the Baruch Forward website.
One significant update is that we will follow CDC guidelines for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals—a distinction that didn’t exist when the original plan was developed in Fall 2020. The protocols are:

- To enter campus, unvaccinated individuals will have to show a negative Covid-19 test result from within seven days. Vaccinated individuals are waived from the testing requirement.
- Mask wearing and social distancing are required for all indoor spaces, except for vaccinated individuals.
- The vaccination mandate for all CUNY students (subject to CDC final approval) stipulates that any student on campus will have to show either proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test result from within the last seven days. Unvaccinated students are not be able to register for in-person or hybrid classes.

Other topics discussed at the town hall included ventilation systems, cleaning protocols, and capacity requirements that are tailored to Baruch’s on-campus spaces and that meet CDC guidelines.

I want to thank Janet Rossbach, director of the Office of Alumni Relations and Volunteer Engagement, for her expert moderation skills during the event and to many of my Cabinet leaders for thoughtfully responding to questions based on the latest information available to us. It is critical to note that the situation is fluid and very much subject to change. For the most up-to-date policies and recommendations, please visit our Baruch Forward website often. In the coming weeks, Katharine Cobb, vice president for administration and finance, who also chairs the reopening committee, will also be sending updates to your Baruch email accounts.

**Thank You for Your Commitment**

As I did in the town hall, and in my May blog, I would like to close by offering you a mental framework of what you should expect and how we are going to approach our campus reopening as an institution. I would like you to think about the coming year as a “dress rehearsal for the future.”

The mixture of in-person, hybrid, and HyFlex instruction will be in our future. We should take advantage of these tools to facilitate experiential learning and other forms of curriculum innovation. The coming year provides us with an opportunity to find new, more effective ways to collaborate, serve our students, and support the mission of Baruch College. Doing so will require us to come together, experiment, improvise, and contribute our ideas. It is a dress rehearsal, and we will all need to be ready to jump in, innovate, and adapt.
I thank you again for the strong turnout at this and all of our virtual gatherings. As wonderful as it is to see so many people logged into Zoom, it will be even better to see you in person very soon.

Sincerely,

S. David Wu
President, Baruch College