

# President Schrader's CONVOCATION ADDRESS



September 6, 2019

Good morning,

Happy New “Academic” Year! I am really happy to see everyone. I hope that you are rested, rejuvenated and ready to make this a great year.

I know what you are all thinking, with the *Game of Thrones* series completed, what have I been up to? Well this summer, I spent a few days in Puerto Rico alongside our amazing CUNY students who were helping with rebuilding efforts on the island. I went whitewater rafting, and I stayed local, hanging out with friends.

Unfortunately, I haven't found a TV series that has grabbed my undivided attention, like *Game of Thrones* did.

But, I did rediscover a love for reading. So, for the past few months I worked my way through *A Marriage of Opposites*, *An American Marriage*, *Children of Blood and Bone*, *She Would be King*, and most recently, I started on a journey to re-read Toni Morrison's works. I just finished both the *Bluest Eye* and *Sula*.

Morrison has always been a favorite of mine. She was one of the first African American authors whose works I was introduced to in college and who inspired me. So much so that when news of her passing hit the press, one of my college buddies sent me a text offering his condolences, because he knew what an impact she had on me, a 17-year old who was in the midst of finding voice and coming into herself. I didn't know Toni Morrison personally, but her words were so personal to me. If you've read her novels, you know that her writing is thick and sweet like homemade syrup. Her words linger on, long after you've read them. For me, it was what she wrote in *Beloved*:

**Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all.** It is in this spirit that I think about our year ahead. **Our mission is or it ain't. A thin mission ain't a mission at all.**

We say in our mission statement that we are **dedicated to promoting student learning and development** as well as **strengthening and serving our**

## diverse community.

In preparing for today's convocation, I reflected back on the welcome address I made to the College almost a year ago. In that address, I shared with you the things that I value, and a blueprint for my priorities based from feedback I received during my interview process and during the first weeks of my appointment. These priorities continued to be shaped throughout the year by the feedback I received in my many meetings with faculty, staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders; data from our office of Institutional Research; data from the CUNY Performance Management Plan; feedback from the Faculty and Staff Survey; and my own observations.

For the past year, I have been laser focused on addressing these priorities:

- Enhancing the Campus Climate
- Stimulating Resource Development
- Increasing Enrollment
- Improving Communications and Marketing
- Ensuring Institutional Effectiveness
- Upgrading Facilities
- Building and strengthening partnerships *and*
- Strengthening Workforce Development

These eight priorities are necessary if we are to fulfill our mission. Today, I will provide a broad overview of highlights over the past year (much of which has been shared with you in my monthly reports) and discuss what is on the horizon for this new academic year and beyond. Members of the senior staff will do the same for their respective areas.

Last week, we—the senior staff, both my direct reports and ECP's in their areas, as well as a number of staff from their areas—participated in a two-day retreat, where we reflected on critical priorities as it pertains to the College and the University's Strategic Framework; the past year, the coming year and beyond. And I have to say, there is a lot going on. So much has been accomplished over the past year, but it didn't all start with me. I walked into Kingsborough to many initiatives underway; and there are still many more in progress. In the spring, we will pilot the reinstatement of the club/administrative hour in the class schedule. In addition to providing students with the opportunity to access resources and engage in co-curricular experiences, we hope this time that we carve into the schedule will provide faculty and staff opportunity to also engage in this work if we are to

strengthen the College. Colleagues, real, lasting, effective change takes time and your engagement. I ask for your patience, understanding, and feedback that will help us to further the work that must be done if we are to continue to be that beacon of opportunity for our students.

A central theme in my address last year and in a number of my subsequent monthly reports, was that of respect, diversity and civility. Last fall, while we had a newly updated mission and vision, I asked for a set of values to be developed that can guide how we work, and how we work with each other to accomplish our mission.

I am pleased that our KCC values were approved by College Council in the spring. But I have to tell you, I am not content with the thought of these values only showing up in a self-study or a Middle States report, or even on some page on our website. And even though the Division of Communications and Marketing will ensure that it is advertised around campus, it is critical that we continue to function in ways that are reflective of these values. You will see these posters around the campus. They serve as a reminder to us as well as signal to anyone who walks these halls that this is what we stand for. Thank you to the AVP Todmann and her team for designing them.

This academic year, I also plan to convene a small *ad hoc* climate committee which will serve as an advisory body to me to discuss climate-related issues that may arise, and explore ways in which we can come together and enhance campus life to reflect both our values and the College we know and love. Our differences should not divide us, they should be a way to bring us together.

Speaking about love... I have been at a few institutions, but I have never been at an institution where students and alumni profess such great love for the faculty and staff. As such was the case this past spring, I was inspired by a student who participated in one of my meet and greets with student groups. At the tail end of a discussion about their experiences with acceptance and diversity at KCC, she said that to her, Kingsborough was “one love”. And it was like a thousand light bulbs lit up over my head, and I could hear angels that sounded like Bob Marley singing in my head. By now, you probably realize how much I enjoy music. So, I decided that it would be a great campus life/school spirit activity to make a music video. I present to you KCC One Love, directed by JoAnne Meyers, produced by Tonya Collins, and starring KCC staff, students and faculty.

Thank you to all those who participated. I plan to make this an annual activity and will solicit recommendations from the college for the next song. In

the interim, if you have suggestions, please send them to AVP Todmann.

I hope that over the past year you have been able to see and experience the improvement in communications that so many of you indicated was a source of concern and dissatisfaction. I initiated monthly reports to the campus, and senior staff have sent salient updates from their areas as well. Although we had to meet the mandates of the Office for Civil Rights and make immediate improvements to the website, we continue to move ahead in procuring a new website. What exists now is a marked improvement from what was there last year, and when it's all said and done, our future website, will be even better. Thank you to all those who helped to upgrade the website and thank you to all who serve on the website committee for your efforts to improve this critical area. AVP Todmann will report on additional and significant strides that have been made in the area of marketing as it pertains to improving our brand, increasing visibility, and attracting students. I am grateful for the Division's work in promoting activities on campus, securing the College a monthly news column, responding to requests from offices, and most and best of all, giving me an excuse to shop for a whole new wardrobe of clothes in our College colors.

Enrollment continues to be an important priority. And I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to Dr. Johanna Rivera, our interim VP for Enrollment Management, who will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval next month. Dr. Rivera has hit the ground running alongside the staff in her area (and other areas) who have been working diligently over the past few months, weeks and as we speak—to recruit, advise, enroll, orient, call, email, follow up with, test, counsel, and welcome our new and continuing students. It has not been easy. Over the past year, there has been a transition in leadership, transition to a new application system, a transition to a new framework for registration and advisement, and increased attention on enrollment. It's been a lot, and I can't say that having a new president, and new expectations and ideas for how things should be done has not made this work any easier. I know that there are some staff members currently advising students, but I will like all staff from the following offices in Enrollment Management, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs-- (Admissions, Registrar, Testing, Financial Aid, Advisement, ASAP, College Discovery, Freshman Services, Transfer Services, New Start) to please stand and be acknowledged as I say "thank you" for all you have done over the past year, and for offering your ideas, being receptive to new ideas, and your excellent service to students.

Reports from the University from the past few weeks show enrollment challenges across the community college sector but reflects our significant

improvement over where we were last year at this time; but our continuing student enrollment is behind where we were last year. I am at the point where when I review the enrollment report, I feel like I am watching presidential election results. Some days it's too close to call; we are either going to be slightly below, match or slightly exceed our enrollment from last year. But, we will not meet our established targets which were set last year and which were very aggressive. We are in AHD mode—All Hands on Deck—and we have three more days of registration activity. If yesterday's turnout at the New Student Orientation was a sign, then we have nothing to worry about. We had easily over 1,000 students in attendance. Both the PAC and the MAC playhouse were filled to capacity with new students. Thank you to VP Cohen, Dean Mitra, Cindy Lui and Damali Dublin, and all who made yesterday possible.

Even though the semester has not officially begun, we are already in planning mode for next year. VP Rivera will provide you with a more comprehensive report on our current enrollment, and plans for the coming year.

I am excited that Dr. Rivera is on board and will take leadership of this very critical priority, but she is not the poster child/poster woman for Enrollment Management. This work is not only highly collaborative (Student Affairs and Academic Affairs are key partners) but we all have a role in Enrollment Management.

When I take a look around the University, I see the very strategic development of new programs that meet both workforce needs in the next 5-10 years, and that attract students. We can have the most incredible staff, attractive website, marketing plans, and outreach efforts but, if we do not take a bold step into the future with new degree programs that can attract students, we will continue to lose students to other institutions. Those are the facts. I read an article earlier this week that discussed the ever-shrinking high school enrollment. Colleagues, if the pool of students is getting smaller, we need to go big in our efforts to attract and retain as many students as we can.

It's also a fact that poor customer service, unkempt facilities, negative experiences in the classroom, emails that never get responded to, or offices that never answer their phones can turn students off, and set them on their way to another campus. So, I want us to continue to be vigilant in providing the kind of service that we know students can only get at KCC.

True story: On Wednesday at the Council of Presidents meeting, we had a

presentation by and lunch with Cathy Davidson, Founding Director of the Futures Initiative, and Distinguished Professor in English and Digital Humanities and Data Analysis and Visualization at the Graduate Center. She is the author of *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for the World in Flux*. I'm telling you her credentials to say that she is a big deal. I've heard of her but I'm sure, to her I was just another face at the table. At lunch, the Chancellor suggests that we go around the room and introduce ourselves. It's clear from the introductions, and some of the banter that various presidents know her and she knows them, and has been to their campuses. And then here I go, Good morning, Claudia Schrader, Kingsborough Community College. She clutches her chest and says "Your students!, Your students! Love that college!". I smile knowingly. Because I hear this all the time, from alumni, students, people who used to work here, and people who have family members who went here.

*Quick side story: I went to the West Indian American Day Parade on Monday. I was at Grand Army Plaza trying to make my way to the museum for the luncheon. They wouldn't let me through on Eastern Parkway, and the police officers proceeded to tell me to walk up Flatbush Avenue to Empire Boulevard. So I walked with my friend, what seems like 10 miles—another police zone. My friend says, "Use your credentials tell them you are the president of Kingsborough" I said, "I don't think those credentials qualify, it's not like I'm the governor." So then my friend says, "You never know; they might have gone to KCC." The next police officer I saw I explained to him that I walked all this way, and I'm expected at the luncheon and I'm the president of KCC. He said, "Really; my girlfriend goes to KCC. She loves it there."*

But back to the first story. After lunch, I go up to Dr. Davidson to ask for a picture with her, and to tell her that, yes, our students really do love the College. She said they are incredible and she said she always ask students if they had to change anything about their college, anything, what would it be? She says the Kingsborough students always say things like, "the bagels." So, I say all of this to say; This is a special place. With special people. Who do special things. I know I don't need to tell you this. I just want us to get as many students that are out there in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and in yonder places to experience what we have, the KCC advantage.

To maintain this advantage, it is necessary for us to review and enhance the way we do business. Not all our students are able to come to campus during regular work hours. To be truly student centered, we have to reach students and to meet students where they are. This might mean having extended hours during the week, or adding hours on the weekend especially during the registration period. It

may mean cross-training staff so that instead of students walking to and from office to office, they get to speak to one person who has the answers.

Colleagues, we all have a role in enrollment. Including me. I was reminded of that a few weeks ago. It was a day when we had a healthy group of students waiting to register, while we were waiting for CUNYFirst to work. It was down for hours. Our incredible staff gave students updates and invited students to wait (as it was expected to start working soon), or come back the next day and have priority registration. Many students stayed. Our staff saw to it that they got snacks to eat, and someone even logged into their Netflix account so students could be entertained while they waited. I walked over with VP Cohen to say hello to the students, and thank them for their patience. As I was getting ready to leave, one student said to me, “I read an article you wrote and then I read up about you. That’s why I decided to come here. I thought how cool was it to have a president who was from the Caribbean.”

**Everything we say and don’t say; Everything we do and don’t do makes a difference in whether a new student decides to come here, or a continuing student decides to return.** Every student we “don’t attract” or that we “lose” makes a difference.

- Low enrollment affects the availability of resources.
- A reduction in resources means that we have to take a critical look at how resources are being used.
- It means that we have to prioritize, and in many cases, amend how resources are expended and allocated
- And I don’t just mean financial resources; physical resources like space might be reassigned to serve a different purpose, areas may need be reorganized and sometimes even human resources, like staff, might have to be reassigned to align with a priority or meet a critical need. Last year, I told you that I know change is difficult, and that I needed you to know that no one is trying to purposely make your life difficult. But there will be times where difficult decisions have to and will be made.

Enrollment is inextricably linked to the financial health of the College. We continue to be mindful of how we use resources, and how we can better use resources to address critical needs. This year, we continue to explore ways in which we can attract more resources (financial and other) to the College, through auxiliary activities, external funding opportunities, grants and strategic partnerships. This past year, we received \$800,000 in funding for KCC FLEX, our adult learner initiative, and in June, as you all know, we were fortunate to receive a

\$1,000,000 gift for student scholarships—KCC’s largest gift ever—from Len Riggio, CEO of Barnes and Noble, and our recent commencement speaker. And yesterday, I got an email indicating that the Urban Farm was awarded \$36,000 in grant funding to support the Bring It Home Program. *Let me ask you a question. Do you know what it means when your right palm is itching? Well, my palm has been itching, I see money in our future.*

Faculty, your palms should be itching, too. I want you to know that we heard you. This fall we will launch a conference travel award program for faculty to support some portion of conference costs. We cannot fund everything or everybody, or cover all costs, but we must start somewhere, and this is a start. Stay tuned for more information.

As you all know, after 35 years of outstanding service to the College, Dr. Elizabeth Basile has decided to explore other opportunities. I have asked my Chief of Staff Tasheka Sutton-Young to assume oversight of the area until such time as a national search is conducted. If you know Liz, you know she is super organized, and she has left us a comprehensive report of the past academic year and all our successes, and a plan for the coming year which will be shared by Tasheka.

Since coming to KCC, Liz was that virtual string around my finger never hesitating to remind me of the importance of Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships. As the only community college in Brooklyn, we are poised to play a major role in helping to provide training and credentialing to the larger Brooklyn workforce, creating pathways to degree programs and matriculation, and forging partnerships that can increase experiential learning, and employment opportunities for our students. I am pleased to introduce you to Dr. Simone Rodriguez Dorestant, our new interim VP for Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships (pending board approval), who will be leading these efforts. She too has hit the ground running with her staff. I thank them for holding down the fort over these past months. Dr. Dorestant will provide you with more information about what is on the horizon for Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships.

As you know, over the past year I have met with a number of elected officials and will continue to do so to advocate for our needs, especially as it pertains to our facilities in general, and the Marina, Library and PAC, and forging new partnerships that will help us expand our footprint throughout the borough and beyond.

Colleagues, it’s 2019, and I am thinking in the future, like 2025, when we

are due for our next Middle States visit. This coming semester, we will begin some preliminary work looking at the standards to identify areas where there may be gaps in evidence. In addition, also under the leadership of VP Rick Fox, we will move full speed ahead with the development of our 2025 Strategic Plan. VP Fox will provide a more comprehensive report on the past academic year as well as plans for the coming year. Institutional Effectiveness—a robust assessment framework that uses results of data to drive improvements in institutional and student outcomes—is critical to not only our accreditation efforts, but the success of our institution and students. I know we need to do a better job of ensuring that data is consistently shared, and that the results are used to make improvements or validate successes.

This past year, we conducted a number of assessments in administrative areas (which will be shared with you). I am also pleased to report that we are currently in the process of searching for a Director of Academic Assessment who will work closely with faculty to enhance academic assessment.

This past spring, faculty had an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience at KCC by taking the Collaborate On Academic Careers on Higher Education (COACHE) Survey. We improved our response from 40% (2015) to 47% (2019). And 68.9% of faculty agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I would again choose this institution.” While I wish the response rate would have been higher, the results give me some insight to the work we need to do to improve the faculty experience. To do this, Provost Russell, VP Fox and Dean Leaker will be working closely with Scott Cally (our recently elected Public Service Commission Chapter Chair) and Michael Sokolow (Secretary of College Council) to ensure that what happens next is a faculty driven process, and that we have a framework in place for how we understand and use this data to drive improvements. In the fall, as you recall, in order to get a better sense of satisfaction for the College community, we launched a faculty and staff survey. Some of the results regarding areas of low satisfaction were shared at convocation like internal campus communication, KCC website and communications and marketing are being addressed; as well as the advisement, tenure and promotion processes.

If you look around you, you will see other areas of dissatisfaction as per the fall 2019 survey, being addressed every day. New signage, refreshed areas, and a new conference center (U219 and 220). VP Rios and his team are to be commended for the work that they have done over the past year, and every day. Our campus is huge, complex, and can be challenging at times, and I am grateful to our custodial staff, buildings and grounds staff, technicians, and AVP Hussain

and his tech team for what they do to keep us running.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of our Public Safety team. I know, to most people, the campus is relatively calm, but I can't tell you how many emergencies our officers respond to. They are always prepared and professional, and I am grateful that they are a part of this community.

In the coming year, we will initiate efforts to move paper and time intensive HR processes into the 21st century by exploring and implementing the best kinds of technology to meet our needs. The Office of Human Resources will also be reinstating Orientation for new staff, which will be held twice a year, and they will be developing a calendar of professional development opportunities for staff. I have asked Mickie Driscoll to assemble a small planning committee to help in this effort.

Other areas like enhancing the instructional environment are being taken into consideration as we plan for the coming year, and the new changes and directions from the Central Office of Academic Affairs, as we engage in our own Academic Master Planning process.

To be honest, I don't even know where to start with the Division of Student Affairs and the Division of Academic Affairs. There is so much that has been done in the past year, and so much on the horizon for this coming year. You will hear more from them during their presentations, but let me say VP Cohen and Provost Russell and their teams are outstanding examples of how two areas can work together in the best interest of students. Most significantly, they worked together to develop a new framework for advisement.

I wanted to leave the best for last as I close out my convocation remarks and prepare to bring the VP's to the floor to provide their remarks to you.

For me the best of Kingsborough are the people who make up this vibrant academic community the faculty and staff.

First, I would like to acknowledge all the recipients of the employee of the month award September 2018 through June 2019. The recognition that you received is a high honor and a testament to your work when your peers both nominate and vote for you for this honor.

September 2018 – Cynthia Olvina  
October 2018 – Marianne Perrone



Esther Gabay	ENG	Lecturer
Patrick Hickey, Jr.	ENG	Lecturer
Khalid Islam	NUR	Sr. CLT
John Keller	ENG	Lecturer
Martin Litwack	MAT	Lecturer
David Mandelbaum	BUS	Lecturer
Dung Kim Nguyen	MAT	Lecturer
Jennifer Oliveri	ENG	Lecturer
Nancy Rouse	ART	CLT
Joanna Stein	ENG	Lecturer
Hong Tu (Eric) Yan	MAT	Lecturer

It now gives me great pleasure to acknowledge our faculty who have been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor and Professor:

TO THE RANK OF ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Michelle Billies  
Sarah Dillon  
Mark Eaton  
Amy Karp  
Jennifer Noe

TO THE RANK OF PROFESSOR

John Acosta  
Ryan McKinney  
Emily Schnee  
Samuel Taitt  
**Maureen Minielli (Posthumously)**

In closing, I want to thank my staff in the President’s Office. From the minute I walked in the door, they have made me feel at home. If it wasn’t for them Helen, Kathy, Ms. Sonia, Karen, Julie, Jennifer and Tasheka—I couldn’t do what I do.

I want to thank you for your attention this morning and now invite Provost Joanne Russell to the podium, who will be followed by Dean Mitra, VP Rivera, VP Rios (and members of his team) AVP Todmann, VP Dorestant, Chief of Staff/Interim VP for Institutional Advancement Sutton-Young, and VP Fox.

I have asked them to present on salient items, because if they were to report on everything they have accomplished and all the plans for the coming year, we would need eight convocations. To this end, all divisional reports and plans will be compiled into a single document and uploaded to the IR page in the next few weeks.

### **Senior Staff presentations: 2018-19 Highlights/ 2019-20 Horizons**

#### **Closing:**

As we embark on our 55th Academic Year, I leave you with another seminal quote from Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon: *"If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it."*

Colleagues, if we surrender to our mission, focus on our priorities, and embrace our values, and all that these things entails, we can ride it and take this College and our students to new heights.

I wish you all an amazing academic year.