



OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

September 8, 2020

Dear LACCD Colleagues:

As Chancellor for the Los Angeles Community College District, it is my honor and pleasure to welcome each of you on behalf of our Board of Trustees to the official start of our 2020-2021 Academic Year. It is certainly a start like no other that I have ever experienced in my 35 years in higher education. As we approach seven months of navigating the coronavirus pandemic, we have done some amazing work together to keep our people safe and to deliver on our mission to serve our communities through education.

Your health and safety remain a top priority for the District, as we remain almost entirely remote in teaching, in providing services, and in operating our District and colleges. This public health emergency has impacted every aspect of our lives and, now, we find ourselves communicating, delivering services and teaching remotely and safely. In the next few weeks, I will be communicating our plans for the Winter session and the Spring 2021 semester.

It is my sincere hope that you and your families are safe and healthy during this pandemic period. Each of us must do our part to stay safe, and to remain extra vigilant to contain and prevent the community spread of this virus.

I also want to keep you informed on a few key areas:

COVID-19 and Our District

In conjunction with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH), we have crafted policies and protocols that will allow for the safest return to campus when the time and circumstances allow. Our District remains in the County's Stage 2 response of the declared public health emergency and is not yet authorized for Stage 3, which includes more on-campus activities. To date, we have received over 130 self-reported positive COVID-19 cases since mid-March, with the single fatality of our beloved colleague.

This summer, we did allow some very limited return to on-campus instruction for courses from last spring that needed to be completed in support of California's essential workforce. We have continued this fall semester with a few of these courses occurring now in-person with heavy supervision, safety protocols and support.

With Spring and Summer successfully completed in remote platforms, we are now better prepared to tackle this new academic year with remote learning, virtual labs, online counseling and financial aid services and much more – yes, all done remotely. We also have the protocols and supplies in place to do limited in-person education. My sincere thanks to the District's Emergency Operations Center and to the Incident Command teams at your colleges for getting us to this place.

It is uncertain when this will end. Health, safety and science will dictate when we can return to in-person instruction. Until then, follow our [safety guidance](#) posted online and watch for our new Stay Safe messages on social media.

LACCD 2020-21 Budget

At last week's September 2 Board of Trustees' meeting, the Board conducted a Public Hearing on the [District Budget](#), and voted to approve the budget for the 2020-21 academic year. This year's District budget demonstrates continued support for our faculty, staff and students and the vital programs that our District's nine colleges provide.

The State Legislature and the Governor adopted an approach that protects our vital programs through "deferrals" to buy time for our economy to improve, and defers funding moving forward. We applaud the Governor and the Legislature for reaching an agreement that protects critical programs for our most vulnerable student populations. We also join this Administration and Legislative leadership in calling upon Congress to provide much-needed financial support and flexibility to institutions of higher education to help ease our budget uncertainties, to navigate our institutions and to mitigate the impact of this global pandemic.

For the short-term, we are financially stable with strong reserves. We will closely monitor our expenses throughout the year that will better position us for the uncertainties of next year and beyond.

Enrollments

Community college enrollments are down, with colleges across the country reporting drops of 5% to 30% in enrollment. In addition, in a recent survey of California Community Colleges, 85% reported lower enrollment in Fall 2020 compared to Fall 2019 by an average of 12%. Enrollments at neighboring LACCD colleges that started their Fall Semester 2020 classes at different dates are currently reporting drops from 0.2 to 13 percent.

We won't have the final numbers for Fall 2020 enrollment until later in the semester. However, as of yesterday, we were down in headcount by 7%, in enrollments by 10% and in section count by 9%. This is after growing enrollments by just under 1% last academic year and growing by 10% in enrollments this summer.

Given the uncertain impact of the pandemic and the slumping economy, it's not surprising. In response, our colleges are bolstering late-start classes for students, and our District is engaged with social media targeted marketing. We will redouble our efforts in dual enrollment with local high schools and bolster adult/noncredit education and continue to reach out to the underserved student populations.

For Fall 2020, we have another strong cohort of students who have joined the L.A. College Promise program for the academic year. Some 5,000+ students are the newest cohort to complete a virtual summer bridge program and will be our fourth cohort to attend first-time, full-time with tuition-free education, wrap-around support services and counseling, priority registration and free Chromebooks.

We have extended the enrollment in our signature [L.A. College Promise](#) program to September 15. The Promise program gives students a clear path to completing their educational goals within two years, whether it's gaining skills for work through a short-term career education certificate or transferring to a four-year institution for a bachelor's degree.

With guaranteed admission, priority registration, flexible schedules, technology and support systems, students can begin and achieve their dreams right here at LACCD.

Racial Equality and Social Justice

The national cry for social justice, racial equality and criminal justice reform is sweeping the nation. If indeed we are an organization founded on educational excellence, opportunity and access, and if indeed we are dedicated to the principles of equity, justice and community, then our District must lead by example. Leading by example means making structural and permanent changes to root out the ill effects of racism and bias from our classrooms and our workplace.

We must be deliberate and purposeful in educating about anti-racism. We must fully acknowledge that racial equality and social justice manifests in how we build our schools and colleges, to what we teach in our classrooms, from the way our streets and colleges are policed to equitable access to healthcare and jobs.

The [Framework for Racial Equity and Social Justice](#) document speaks to the values of our organization and directs specific action steps and commitments that will allow our colleges and District to actively build anti-racist organizational capacity and resilience, and move forward towards a more socially and racially-just academic community. The Action Steps will complement the specific activities and programs at the nine colleges, where this work has already begun. Through these Action Steps, we have the real opportunity to “Move the Needle on Diversity, Racial Equity and Inclusion” and to better understand why it matters. It matters because a lack of consensus or inconsistent leadership on issues of diversity, racial equity and inclusion impacts the performance of underprepared and under-resourced students. Without major improvements in our diversity, racial equity and inclusion efforts at LACCD, we run the real risk of further bifurcation and passive perpetuation of inequality and educational disparity.

Always Focus on Students

The COVID-19 health emergency has exacerbated inequities and shined a bright light on health, educational and economic disparities, especially for the most vulnerable student populations, who were already under-resourced before the pandemic.

We will continue to remain vigilant in our ongoing advocacy efforts to support the rights of all students, including African American, Asian Pacific Islander, Latina/o, DACA, undocumented, Native/indigenous, international, re-entry, veterans, LGBTQIA+, low-income, and other vulnerable student populations who need our support more than ever during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Student basic needs, such as food security, housing, employment, mental health, access to the internet and technology tools, and emergency aid, have become more prevalent and disproportionately impact underserved students and communities. Record numbers of students have, or will receive, Chromebooks, Microsoft Surface Go machines and other types of emergency aid and food gift cards to help bridge these gaps. Our recent District partnerships with Los Angeles Room and Board and Shower of Hope organizations are providing much-needed housing to our homeless college students.

In Closing

So, now more than ever, we need to stay focused on improving student services, student success and the overall student experience. Our comparative and competitive advantage must be excellent service and excellent teaching.

I hope that in June 2021 we will once again have students walking across the graduation stage to celebrate their achievements, but for now, we will continue to deliver our programs and services remotely and safely.

Thank you all for your dedication to our students. We will get through this together, and we'll be stronger and more unified as a result. Resilience and resolve must prevail here.

LACCD Proud. You are the best of us!

With my deepest admiration and respect, I wish you a fantastic and resilient 2020-2021 Academic Year.



Francisco C. Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Chancellor
Los Angeles Community College District