

**REFLECTING ON  
JOHN JAY AT 50  
AND THE ROAD AHEAD  
STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS**

**President Jeremy Travis**

November 12, 2014



Dear Colleagues:

We have come together this afternoon to celebrate this College – our College – as we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. This celebration is well under way, beginning with the visit of Justice Sonia Sotomayor at our Convocation in September. Lil Jay is everywhere. Big Jay – the statue of John Jay – will arrive on December 8. Our students are energetically engaged in “acts of justice”. Some students are writing essays to reflect their personal perspectives on justice. We celebrated the installation of the Alexandre Dang Exhibit, an art exhibition that speaks to the issue of environmental justice. Today we are releasing a special brochure celebrating 50 years, and will soon publish another report on fifty years of research by John Jay faculty. We look forward to Alumni Weekend on April 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> which will bring together our far-flung family of graduates to celebrate John Jay. This is a year to remember!

The John Jay story is unique within the history of the City University of New York. In the early 1960s, a small group of individuals representing the University and the New York City Police Department came together, united by a bold vision: to create a liberal arts college with an emphasis on the study of criminal justice. The first students at this new College were all in-service police officers; the first classes were offered in the Police Academy; but the vision has always been larger than policing and larger than criminal justice. The vision, which remains our guiding star today, was to create an institution dedicated to “educating for justice.”

The founding faculty affirmed this ambitious vision when they voted to discard the original name of our college – The College for Police Science – and instead named it after a New Yorker who played a critical role in our country’s struggle for independence, a man who devoted his life to the pursuit of justice, John Jay.

Today, a half century later, we recognize that we have inherited a unique and powerful institution, one that has made an enormous difference in the world. As the exhibit in the Haaren Hall Lobby so wonderfully illustrates, John Jay has been through struggles and challenges, including a threat to its very existence, but today the College we love is strong and our mission of educating for justice is more urgent than ever.

How should we assess the impact of John Jay over the past fifty years? I can only offer my thoughts on this matter, but know that each of you will have your own measure of John Jay’s influence. Let’s start with the simple fact that there are over 54,000 John Jay alumni in the world who will quickly acknowledge that this college played an integral role in their intellectual, moral, and professional development. We need only look at the recent City elections when we saw three John Jay alumni elected to positions of enormous responsibility – New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer, Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson and Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams. Many city agencies have so many John Jay alumni that they could open free-standing alumni chapters, and a number of agencies – including the Police Department, the Corrections Department, the Probation Department, the Fire Department, the Sheriff’s Office and the Office of Veterans Affairs-- have been headed by John Jay alumni.

But the contributions of the College extend far beyond the public service record of our alumni. Our faculty are leading the exploration of critically important issues, including false confessions, eyewitness evidence, child abuse, terrorism, racial profiling, gang violence, international human rights, sex work, deportation and immigration, Islam and western society, and police leadership to name a few. Other faculty are intellectual leaders in literature and the law, the ethics of punishment, bias and micro-aggressions, the art and music of the Caribbean and Latin America, the science of life-threatening diseases, the development of catalysts to convert biological feedstocks to usable fuel, and environmental pollution. In countless national associations of scholars, John Jay faculty exercise important leadership -- and in some we dominate the field.

Then let's count some recent recognition. With the John Matteson's Pulitzer Prize added to Mike Wallace's Pulitzer, we now count ourselves one of the handful of public universities with two Pulitzer Prize winners on its faculty. Then there is Cathy Spatz Widom's Sutherland Award from the American Society of Criminology, the recent announcement by Attorney General Holder that the Justice Department has selected David Kennedy's Center for a national initiative on race and policing, President Barack Obama's award to Anthony Carpi recognizing the excellence of PRISM, the undergraduate research program in the sciences, Michael Brownstein's appointment as a Visiting Scholar at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Alisse Waterston's election as President of the American Anthropological Association, and Nicole Elias's selection as a Distinguished Research Fellow with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. To put frosting on this very rich cake, consider that Sara MacDougall has been awarded the coveted Mellon Fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study and Belinda Rincon has received a grant from the Ford Foundation for her project War, Gender and State Formation: Latina War Stories from the Mexican Revolution to the War on Terror.

This is a breathtaking list, and only a partial list. The founders of John Jay must have known that creating an intellectual hub of activity on the issues of justice would have impact far beyond the four walls of the College. But I doubt they imagined that John Jay would become such a vibrant institution with a global reach.

### **I. Looking Back on our Recent History**

Before turning to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, I would like to speak briefly about our recent history. As you know well, John Jay has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. We are now a senior college in CUNY. To accommodate the enormous demand for an education in criminal justice and forensic science, we and our community college partners created the CUNY Justice Academy. Now, students who do not meet the entrance standards at John Jay can start their education at one of CUNY's six community colleges. Upon successful completion of their associate degrees, these students can move seamlessly to John Jay where they can finish their baccalaureate education.

We should be very proud of this accomplishment. The size of the Justice Academy alone is cause for celebration. This year the Justice Academy counts nearly 9,000 students -- enough to constitute a medium-size college. More importantly, the students in the

Justice Academy are doing well. They do better and complete their degrees more quickly than their counterparts at the community college. And when they arrive at John Jay – which they are doing now in great numbers -- they also do better and complete their degrees more quickly than other transfer students. The CUNY Justice Academy illustrates the great promise of the integrated university, with lessons for public universities everywhere: motivated students can start at a community college, transfer to a senior college, and experience academic success. I believe we have created a program of national importance.

The second enormous change at John Jay has been the development of liberal arts majors. Over the last several years, 10 new majors have been created, bringing exciting new academic programs to our campus. There are currently close to 1,400 students who have declared majors in those subjects, and we can reasonably expect that number to increase significantly in the years to come. We should also note that nearly 20% percent of the Justice Academy students declare a major other than a traditional criminal justice major when they arrive at John Jay. This is a tribute to the educational model we have created: we encourage open intellectual exploration. The final step in this transition to the top tier at CUNY was our admission, two years ago, into the Macaulay Honors College. We have now welcomed two classes of spectacular students who have been attracted by our mission of educating for justice. As you might know, there was some doubt that John Jay could compete at this level for the very best students; we have proven those skeptics wrong.

The third phase of our academic revitalization – the development of a new General Education Program -- has also been a resounding success. Working patiently and constructively, a group of faculty, in collaboration with our academic leadership, has totally overhauled our approach to General Education, following the accepted best practices and linking these new courses in creative ways to our justice mission. We now have 136 Gen Ed courses with almost 25,000 registrations. At the same time, we implemented profound reforms in the First Year Experience so that, this year, 100 percent of incoming students participated in the First Year Seminar.

These academic reforms represent a breathtaking, fundamental transformation of our College. John Jay is now recognized as a leader in educational innovation at CUNY. We are indebted to many faculty and staff for this accomplishment, but we are most deeply indebted to the academic leader who has fearlessly led this journey toward excellence, our Provost Jane Bowers.

The next chapter of the transformation is also well underway. In last year's State of the College address, I highlighted the College's investment in a new entrepreneurial team to oversee development of new masters programs, the launch of John Jay Online, the revival of an Office of Professional Studies, and the creation of an Office of International Programs. Today, I will not provide a detailed update on these initiatives, except to say they are doing splendidly under the impressive leadership of Associate Provost Anne Lopes and her team. We have developed one new masters program, with two others in the immediate pipeline and a number of others planned. Our first masters program developed explicitly for online delivery – a Masters in Security Management – exceeded

its enrollment target in its first semester by nearly 200%. Our first online certificate program – in Terrorism Studies – also markedly exceeded its target enrollment. Another online certificate program in U.S. Homeland Security launches this fall and two more such programs are under development. Over 1,000 people registered in our first MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), a course on Literature and Law of American Slavery developed by our Distinguished Professor, John Matteson.

Finally, we are developing a plan for recruitment of international students this year and expect to see that dimension of life at John Jay increase substantially in the years to come. A year ago I stated that these initiatives represent the future of John Jay. We have made remarkable progress in a short time.

## **II. Facing the Challenge of Promoting Student Success**

As we celebrate our successes and plan our future, I hope we will focus laser-like on our core mission, supporting student success. I would like to share my thoughts on how we are doing in meeting this obligation, starting with some data about our students.

### **A. Retention and Graduation Rates**

Let's look first at our students' preparation for college-level work. Over the past five years, we have seen some improvement in the profile of our incoming students. The average SAT and CAA (College Academic Average) for entering freshmen have increased. But both fall far below the average for senior colleges.<sup>[1]</sup> In fact, on both measures, John Jay ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of CUNY's 8 senior colleges.

Over the same time period, the retention rate for first year students has increased from 74.9% to 77.9%. But we are still far below the senior college average of 83.5%; once again, we rank 7<sup>th</sup> of CUNY's 8 senior colleges. Another important metric is the rate of credit accumulation for full-time first-time freshmen. In the 2012-13 Academic Year plus summer, our first year students accumulated 24.1 credits on average. This represents a significant increase from previous years, but is far below the senior college average of 26.1 credits. On this measure, John Jay is ranked last among the senior colleges.

These are sobering statistics. But I hasten to point out a more encouraging reality. For the past five years, the four-year graduation rate for John Jay students has been at -- or close to -- the senior college average. We have ranked as high as second place, and never lower than fifth among our peer institutions. The six-year graduation rate for John Jay students was 43.4% for the class entering in 2007, which placed us in the middle of the pack.

We can view these data from a number of different perspectives. Most important, we should celebrate the reality that John Jay students consistently outperform expectations. As you may know, John Jay students, more than most CUNY students,

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<sup>[1]</sup> The SAT for freshmen entering in 2013 was 963, up from 942 in 2009, but far below the senior college average of 1,096. The average high school grade point average in 2013 was 83.5, up from 81.2 in 2009, but below the senior college average of 86.3.

shoulder the obligations of working, care for family members, travel a great distance to come to school, and struggle with significant health challenges. Given these obstacles, we should consider their success at John Jay a tribute to their motivation and energy. I also view this as an affirmation of the quality of support they receive on our campus. Here's an important news announcement that underscores this point: once again, last year, John Jay was ranked first in 11 out of 12 categories of student satisfaction— ranging from Campus Climate to Campus Support Services. We provide a first rate environment for our students and they know it ...and I want to thank you for making that difference in their lives.

I ask that you consider another perspective on these numbers. I find the fact that less than a quarter of our students graduate in four years deeply troubling. Let's look at this reality against a larger national backdrop. The research literature tells us that a college degree is strongly correlated with economic success and upward mobility. We know that our students are overwhelmingly drawn from poor, working class and immigrant families. Nearly 60% of those who apply for financial aid come from families designated "low income", meaning the family income is less than 200% of the poverty level. Over half of our students who file for financial aid list their family income as less than \$30,000. Nearly half are among the first generation in their families to attend college. Our students represent the best hope for our city because, although they come from difficult economic circumstances, they are smart, motivated, and eager to succeed.

The tradition of the City University of New York is to provide college education for all the children of New York – not just because an educated population is essential to our democracy, but also because an education provides an opportunity to move up and out of poverty. In an era when we are concerned about growing income inequality and embedded poverty, I believe we need to double down on public higher education as a vehicle for advancing social mobility and promoting opportunity. Seen against this backdrop, a four-year graduation rate of 19% -- and a six-year rate well below 50% -- is very troubling.

As we celebrate our first 50 years, I take this as one of our most important challenges: what can we do to improve the likelihood that our students will complete their college degrees? There are many national examples and some here at CUNY, of public institutions that have embraced this challenge and seen results. The question is whether we have the will to follow those examples? Even if we have the will, are we sufficiently flexible and innovative to meet this challenge? Can we reallocate resources to provide the advisement and academic support services that will help John Jay students succeed on their academic journey? Are we able to offer the courses our students need in the winter and summer sessions where we have seen our enrollment decline, not increase in recent years? Can we offer the right online courses so our students with obligations to work and family can study at home? Can we find ways to award prior learning credits so that students with experience can be recognized for that experience? Can we reach out to John Jay students in their place of employment? Can we offer sufficient weekend and evening classes? Do our current academic structures, financial incentives, and administrative systems adequately support this goal?

To break through on the stubborn realities of low graduation rates, we will have to create a community-wide commitment to do what it takes to help our students succeed. We will need to embrace the goal of “Finish in Four.” We have now created for every entering student a roadmap for a four-year graduation rate. We will have to mobilize our resources to align with that goal. If we can make progress on this metric, we will have demonstrated, once again, that John Jay is at the forefront of educational innovation.

In the coming months, we will launch a campus conversation about this topic. I hope this will lead to the creation of a pilot project that would show that significant improvement is possible. For now, let me pose this challenge: Can we imagine that we could successfully design and implement a program here at John Jay that would double the four-year graduation rate? Dare we dream so boldly? I think this is possible, but know it will take a sustained effort calling on the best in all of us. I have no doubt that our students are capable of this success. For me, the question is whether we can focus our resources to help support them in their journey toward successful completion of their degree.

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### **B. Post-graduation Success**

The second aspect of student success that I would like to address today concerns life after John Jay. As our new mission statement states so clearly, we are committed to a “liberal arts curriculum that equips students to pursue advanced study and meaningful, rewarding careers in the public, private, and non-profit sector.”

We have made remarkable progress in meeting this goal. We can now boast about the number of students accepted at law schools, medical schools, doctoral programs and other graduate schools. We now have students winning prestigious fellowships – Marshall, Fulbright, New York Urban Fellows, Jeanette K. Watson. We have created two offices that are recognized throughout the university and beyond as “best in class” – the Office of Fellowship and Scholarship Opportunities headed by Vielka Holness and the Center for Career & Professional Development headed by Will Simpkins. The Pre Law Institute, headed up by Vielka, has doubled the law school acceptance rate for John Jay students, and last year \$9.5 million in merit scholarships were awarded to our graduates headed for law schools. As we continue to build a nationally-recognized science program, and embark on the creation of a Pre-health Program, our students will increasingly be accepted at medical schools, doctoral programs in science, and graduate programs in public health.

The Career Center has also been a stellar success. Our career services currently rank number one in student satisfaction among CUNY senior colleges. Student and alumni attendance at Job & Internship fairs has more than doubled since 2010, while employer registrations have increased by more than 50%. The Career Center works with almost 5,000 employers who posted over 1,500 jobs and over 1,200 internships last academic

year. The Center provided about 5,400 individual student career counseling sessions in the same period. We also have developed linkages with scores of government agencies that provide invaluable work experience to our students, sometimes leading to concrete job offers. Mindy Bockstein, our Executive Director of External Affairs, has been working with those agencies to create explicit linkages between the College and our alumni who work there, thereby building more opportunities for our students.

John Jay stands out in another way. With impressive leadership and creativity by our faculty, we have created a number of high quality fellowships that are closely linked with our academic programs. Just in the last few years, we have created the Vera Fellowship in justice reform, the Pinkerton Fellowship in youth justice, the KMPG fellowship in forensic accounting, the Charina Fellowship in forensic science, the Tow Fellowship in justice advocacy, the Art and Justice Fellowship, and most recently the Siegel Fellowship in Strategic and Non-Profit Communication. All of these have been developed by our faculty. All have been funded with private money raised by our development office and the John Jay College Foundation.

Now is the time to catalogue our successful experiences and learn from our strong connections with the world of practice. We are now ready to more explicitly develop a suite of partnerships that link our academic programs, our fellowships and internships, and our many partnerships to develop a comprehensive suite of pipelines between John Jay and the world of work. As a first step in this direction, I will soon name a Task Force charged with cataloguing our many linkages with various employment sectors. Later in the year, we will bring together faculty and staff who work on these issues for a retreat to brainstorm ideas for a more strategic and robust set of relationships between the world of work and our college. Our goal will be to offer each incoming student a clear picture of the pathway to career and graduate school opportunities. This will provide an incentive to complete the baccalaureate degree, but more importantly will create robust linkages between our faculty, our staff, and our colleagues in practice so that opportunities outside the classroom become integral part of the educational experience at John Jay.

### **III. Creating the Modern John Jay**

It is very exciting to watch our community engage in the creation of the next five-year Strategic Plan – called *John Jay 2020*. As you may know, the Ad Hoc Committee for the Strategic Plan has nominated ten goals for possible inclusion in the plan. The topics under discussion are very exciting – learning for post-graduate success, promoting global citizenship, enhancing access through scholarships, expanding the reach of faculty research, creating schools within the college, elevating John Jay Online, strengthening our profile as a Hispanic-serving Institution, creating a strong residential life program, designing a pre-health program, and expanding our program of faculty support. I look forward to a robust campus conversation over the next several months as we finalize our next Strategic Plan.

For me, the overarching opportunity facing us is to create the modern John Jay College. We have exciting opportunities ahead, but we will not be able to reach those stars until we make significant changes in our business model. This may sound

extreme, but let me explain. As you know well, we have been through difficult financial times over the past few years. The reason for this is quite simple, actually: our revenue has not kept pace with our expenses. More precisely, our enrollment, which is the primary source of revenue for John Jay, has slipped below projections. The shortfalls have not been great, but even a small loss of students translates into a large loss of revenue. To put it most simply: an additional 100 students (counted as Full Time Equivalents) means an additional \$500,000 in net revenue. We have relied on the CUNY Compact to cover our budget shortfalls, but our shortages have also required us to cut vacant positions, delay hiring of needed faculty and staff, and reduce our operating expenses. I recognize that this has been very difficult for the entire College and undermines our ability to build a truly great College. I have promised that we will create a multi-year budget that aligns revenue with expenses, using realistic enrollment projections. That analysis will be presented to the Budget and Planning Committee in February. But this much is clear now: it will be a bare-bones budget.

We are sailing in uncertain financial waters these days. The CUNY Compact is about to expire. It seems likely that we will be required to absorb collective bargaining increases in our next budget. In terms of our external environment, we know that the numbers of baccalaureate-ready students graduating from New York City high schools is dropping. At the same time, the other CUNY colleges are becoming more competitive. Here in the New York market, private and proprietary colleges are aggressively competing for our students. Our pricing model does not allow us to compete head to head for those students, so we have to raise private money for that purpose. So there are dark clouds on our horizon.

More fundamentally, the entire public higher education sector is undergoing significant disruptions. Technological innovations, particularly the rapid growth of online educational programs and institutions, are turning our market upside down. Public financing for higher education is dropping, students are being required to carry more and more of the burden, and student debt is rising to troubling levels. It seems that every week there is another book on the market documenting the weaknesses of the American model of higher education. Sometimes I fear that we go about our day to day work at John Jay in splendid isolation from these profound challenges to the entire public higher education sector.

But as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I have little doubt that John Jay is up to the challenge of making the changes necessary to thrive in this environment. One thing is clear to me: we need to rally around the college, just as others did a generation ago. We need to be much more nimble. We cannot afford inertia. We need to double our efforts to build on-line programs. We need to launch a program to recruit national and international students. We need to bring adult learners into our educational community. We need to expand winter and summer programs, as well as evening and weekend programs. In designing a strategy to meet these goals, we will need the active involvement of all sectors of our community, particularly the faculty. Here's my message to the faculty: this is a time when your College needs your creativity, commitment and cooperation.

At the same time, we should take a fresh look at the ways that we work together as a community. Now, as we approach our next half century, we should be willing to revise our charter of governance. Our current charter has served us well, but a healthy organization should be willing to ask whether its constitution can be improved. My hope is that we can cast a wide net, looking at governance plans throughout CUNY and at universities far beyond our walls, to stimulate a campus conversation about how best to do the important work of the college. A related effort, signaled by the Strategic Plan Committee, is to ask whether John Jay should be structured differently – in divisions, or schools -- as is commonplace at most other academic institutions of our size. At the same time, we should undertake a third activity that will improve our efficiency and effectiveness. I think we should create an inventory of all standing committees at the College to ask whether they can be trimmed down, structured differently, or perhaps eliminated. Our time is our most precious resource and we spend a lot of it serving on committees. I sense that most of you would be grateful if we could find ways to work more efficiently, spend our time more productively, make better sense of our service obligations to the College, and simply make life easier.

In the coming weeks, I will be meeting with various stakeholders to talk about the best way to carry out these fundamental re-examinations of our governance structure, the organization of academic departments, and our committee commitments. As we start the next chapter of the life of John Jay, the college will be well-served if we modernize these processes.

When we meet five years from now to reflect on our new Strategic Plan, *John Jay 2020*, I know that we will have witnessed yet another chapter in the evolution of a remarkable institution. I hope we will be able to point to significant improvements in the critical measures of student success – higher graduation rates, stronger connections between John Jay and the world of practice, and even greater success in helping our students find their way to graduate and professional schools. I hope that we will have significantly expanded our reach to find new John Jay students in places where they are now beyond our reach – among adult learners, among those New Yorkers who can only go to college online, among new student populations around the world, among international students who come here to study, among professionals and practitioners who do not now call John Jay their home. I hope that our college will have met the challenges facing our entire industry by harnessing the power of technology. I hope that we will have modernized our governance and deliberative processes so we can respond nimbly and effectively to a rapidly changing world.

We know these goals are within reach. Granted, we have our work cut out for us because achieving these goals will require more of us. But we also know that John Jay has always risen to the challenges of the day. And we expect nothing less now. Much hangs in the balance. Our history reminds us that this institution is a force for good in the world. We know that prior generations have realized the promise of John Jay. Now it is our turn.

Thank you.