March 25, 2021

To: William Fritz, President

cc: Michael Parrish, Provost; Sarolta Takács, Dean of HSS; Jessica Collura, Chief of Staff

From: Cynthia Chris, Professor and Chair, Department of Media Culture

Re: Council of Chairs meeting Concerning Governance Proposal, Opening Remarks

First, on behalf of the Council of Chairs, thanks to President Fritz for accepting the invitation to attend today’s meeting, and we welcome other guests present, the Provost, Deans, and Chief of Staff. This meeting originated with the Council of Chairs, rather than as a formal General Chairs or P&B, as an opportunity for a congenial and productive conversation about the President’s governance proposal, issued March 3 and introduced to P&B on March 4. We thought it critical to continue that dialogue.

Chairs have conferred among ourselves over these last 3 weeks, and my charge is to introduce some shared concerns in these opening remarks. I’m sure not everyone in the room will agree with everything I say, but I can affirm that we found a tremendous degree of agreement on points both procedural and substantive.

I’ll start with procedural concerns. Our initial concern stemmed from the sudden appearance of the proposal and a rushed timeline, at a time of almost unprecedented stress. We appreciate, Dr. Fritz, that you’ve withdrawn a plan to hold a referendum as soon as April, to allow for a more deliberative process.

**Accordingly, we advocate for a process of consultation that is inclusive of** **a full array of stakeholders,** among them HEOs and the standing by-laws committee.

Many of us are concerned that at P&B on March 4, Dr. Fritz, you declined to answer a question about whether the results of a referendum on the governance plan would factor into your decision about presenting the plan to CUNY for its approval. Nevertheless, **the governance plan approved in 2018 requires a majority vote at referendum to alter any of its provisions.** We may return to this question and ask you to address your commitment to established **democratic** procedures.

Surely there is no greater measure of the success of a plan for shared governance than **evidence** that the plan truly expresses the shared mission and values of an institution’s stakeholders, whether the form of shared governance is based on collaborative, consultative, or distributed decision making.

**We also hold that the rationale for a new governance proposal must be transparent.** Dr. Fritz, you have cited several reasons for seeking to replace the current governance plan.

1. First, CUNY Central’s dissatisfaction with the current governance. This came as a surprise to many of us, especially given how recently — 2018 — the CUNY Board of trustees approved CSI’s current governance plan. In the interest of **transparency**, we respectfully request a more detailed and evidence-based report on CUNY’s analysis of the plan.

2. Second, **incivility** has been cited as a motivating factor in offering a new governance plan. Many of us would tread lightly here, well aware that charges of incivility often arise from cultural differences or personal clashes which should not shape an institution’s future. **I affirm here that we share Dr. Fritz’s aim for an institutional culture built on respect, trust, collegiality, and accountability.** But these qualities cannot be legislated. Instead, they derive from open lines of communication, transparency, inclusion, and shared missions, exercised in opportunities like today’s meeting.

**Substantively,** the proposed plan calls for refining certain governance functions and enhancing accountability, but in places multiplies workloads and **weakens the accountability** of various bodies. We oppose the dissolution of departmental Appointments Committees. We question the elimination of dedicated committees

and instances in which **Committee authority** is diminished.

And it isn’t lost on many of us that on many proposed bodies, three small schools, which combined comprise less than 30% of the faculty, would have more votes than the two large divisions, which together comprise over 70% of the faculty.

Finally, we object to the dissolution of all bodies that allow for a **congregation of the chairs.** While there is significant support for creating Division/School P&B, we note that elsewhere, the proposal silos almost every other function into Division Schools. We maintain that bodies in which the chairs convene as a whole has been among the most **enlightening, responsive, and collegial,** ones in which we truly share and enact the College’s mission and values.

Thank you.