



## **Summary of Meeting • June 30, 2020**

*This meeting of the Senate was a special meeting called upon the petition of a sufficient number of Senators, pursuant to Article VII, section b, of the Senate's constitution. The Executive Committee having determined the existence of extraordinary circumstances, authorized the Senate to meet via Zoom.*

***Presentations from the President and Provost:*** Senate President Lerman introduced Joseph M. McShane, S.J., and Dennis C. Jacobs, summarizing concerns that members of the faculty had expressed with regard to Fordham's reopening plans and approach to systemic racism. Fr. McShane and Dr. Jacobs then addressed the Senate. They began by discussing the *Fordham Forward* plan with regard to reopening the University amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, commenting on the following matters:

- Fr. McShane noted that the University is at a point unlike any other in its history, with the pandemic intersecting the protests following the murders of George Floyd and other African-American citizens.
- He apologized for what may have seemed to be the University's slow pace. Fordham had to wait to publish its plans about reopening until after the state had issued its guidelines. This morning, the University published a detailed document, *Fordham Forward*, addressing key areas related to reopening, including screening, containment, social distancing, and what Fordham will do if another emergency arises. The plan is built around the premise that the University will be in session, on ground, for the fall.
- In every respect, Fordham has crafted plans more generous than New York State's minimum requirements; this is how the University hopes to alleviate the anxieties and fears with which members of our community have been wrestling.
- Dr. Jacobs reviewed the process by which Fordham has assembled our plan in conformity with all federal, state, and local requirements. He noted that the pandemic environment is very fluid; the course of the virus is unpredictable, and therefore *Fordham Forward* is a planning document designed to place the University in a state of readiness, not the final word on what exactly will happen.
- Fordham has adopted a four-phase approach to restarting campus operations and will move from phase to phase based on the state's requirements.
- First and foremost is concern for the health and wellbeing of all members of the Fordham community. Fordham will make accommodations for individuals who, because of their own circumstances or the circumstances of family members, require special attention. In addition, the *Fordham Forward* document outlines plans for mitigating the spread of the virus in every setting, including classrooms. The plan also includes arrangements for COVID-19 screening and diagnostic testing.

Fr. McShane and Dr. Jacobs responded to numerous questions from Senators and faculty guests. Decisions about arrangements for new faculty, as well as the mechanics of registration and the teaching of individual courses, will be made primarily at the school level. Asked whether he would commit to responding rapidly to requests for accommodations, Dr. Jacobs noted that Fordham has engaged a third-party occupational health consultant to review every application and that academic units, especially deans, will be in dialogue with faculty members about identifying appropriate accommodations. He committed to making sure that decisions are made rapidly.

Questions arose about how the University will ensure the safety of students living in residence halls, whether Fordham will provide access to campus to members of our neighboring communities, and how the University will deal with those who refuse to wear masks. Fr. McShane said that students will be asked to sign a covenant with regard to their behavior and that of others; space will be set aside on campus for students in quarantine and isolation; masks will be mandatory. He noted that there will be daily screening for all individuals who come to campus. He commented that the government's directive to restrict access to the campus is difficult for Fordham to square with our commitment to address racism and community relations. Dr. Jacobs described efforts that are being made to make our closed environments safer; he added that further details remain to be finalized with regard to testing and that the University has developed and is continuing to refine operational details with regard to each of the areas that the *Fordham Forward* plan covers.

Fr. McShane and Dr. Jacobs then turned to the topic of racism and antiracism, offering the following comments:

- Fr. McShane regretted the delay in the publication of the University's action plan about racism. He said that for the past five weeks, he has sought to listen and learn as much as possible from members of the Fordham community. He characterized the action plan as a first step, one that has to be worked on, expanded, and made more practical. Fr. McShane observed that the University's plan seeks to respond to the most difficult and persistent forms of racism, including what he called the racism of indifference; these dynamics have power because they are embedded in culture and society. Therefore, the University's response must embed conversations about race throughout the curriculum.
- Dr. Jacobs commented that the University must act against racism on three levels simultaneously. Members of the Fordham community must consider how racism has influenced us personally, in who we are, how we act, what we say, and how we live out our shared mission. At the same time, the University must interrogate and challenge forms of racism in our institution, and we must also ask how Fordham can be a force against racism and for justice in our community. Dr. Jacobs commented that the action plan seeks to work on all of these levels, and it is a start. The deans of the schools, colleges, and faculties join him in a commitment to work in important and decisive ways.

Vibrant discussion ensued. Asked about the absence of timelines in the action plan, Fr. McShane commented that timelines should be developed from the ground up rather than imposed from above. Dr. Jacobs added that the next step is to assign responsibility for each item in the plan to a unit, collection of units, or individual(s), tasking them with the development of detailed implementation plans, metrics, timelines, and budgets.

A faculty guest commented that the University's action plan is troubling because it contains little acknowledgement of the deep pain and trauma that students of color have experienced and shared. The least the University can do is communicate to students that we have not only fallen short, but we have failed, and that we have heard their pain. Fr. McShane said he agreed: the University must take this step. Another faculty guest asked about the intersection between structural racism and the University's response to the pandemic, commenting that some of the approaches that Fordham is taking to move to hybrid learning may further inscribe racial and economic inequalities. Dr. Jacobs agreed that it is challenging to determine how to proceed in an ethical way. It is essential to build learning communities that are responsible and sensitive to the needs of all groups of students. He added that additional financial aid resources are being made available. Another faculty guest insisted that the University must focus on the economics of racism. Fr. McShane observed that Fordham was founded to break through narrow circles of wealth and must continue to be daring in that regard.

### ***Fordham Reopening Plans***

Senate President Lerman introduced Senator Sen, who presented a resolution with regard to reopening that

members of the Executive Committee had drafted. Senator Keller seconded the resolution. Senators offered suggestions; these included emphasizing the need for the University to take every available measure to ensure that students, faculty, and staff have a safe environment in which to learn, teach, and work. Several Senators observed that faculty have not had the chance to express their views about the *Fordham Forward* reopening plan.

At the urging of several Senators, Senate President Lerman proposed that a straw poll be taken of the Senators and guests in attendance. The question was: “In light of what you know of the University’s reopening plans as of this date, are you comfortable with returning to teach and work on campus in fall 2020?” 91 individuals responded to the straw poll. 9 said yes, 71 said no, and 11 said they were uncertain.

Following conversation about the Executive Committee’s proposal, the Senate adopted the following resolution (23–0–0):

**Fordham’s faculty is willing and eager to sustain the University’s core missions of teaching, research, service, and community engagement as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. In order to fulfill our responsibilities, faculty must have, on an urgent and ongoing basis, detailed information about the University’s reopening plans. More effective and more regular communication about matters related to reopening is particularly necessary at a moment when time is of the essence and trust between the faculty and administration is of paramount importance.**

**The Senate, therefore, while acknowledging that faculty members have different points of view about the wisdom of returning to campus under present circumstances:**

- (1) Calls on the Administration to make the health of students, faculty, and staff, and their households, the highest priority in all aspects of COVID-19 decision-making, and expects the Administration to do everything within its power to ensure that Fordham’s campuses comprise a safe environment by the time that students and faculty return to campus, both as a moral imperative and to ensure that the greatest number of community members feel safe returning;**
- (2) Urges the University, particularly the Provost, to create streamlined decision-making processes that will allow timely responses to changed circumstances and that decentralizes decision-making to the greatest extent possible;**
- (3) Calls upon the Provost to host a weekly open forum for faculty at least until the start of the fall semester;**
- (4) Requests that the President of the Faculty Senate be included among the members of the Reopening Fordham steering committee, and that the Senate President be invited to all meetings of the Cabinet and other University leadership bodies where reopening plans are on the agenda;**
- (5) Asks the President of the University to provide an explicit timetable for consulting with faculty and sharing information about the segmentation of course sections, flexible workload and classroom policies, and parameters for flexible hybrid teaching; urges the President to make available all reopening plans and operational details immediately as they are confirmed; and asks that faculty requests, including those for accommodations, be responded to in a clear, consistent, and expedited manner; and**
- (6) Delegates to the members of the Executive Committee the responsibility of collecting faculty feedback on the contents of the Fordham Forward plan and sharing that feedback with**

## **relevant members of the Administration.**

### ***Racism and Antiracism***

Senate President Lerman introduced Rafael A. Zapata, Chief Diversity Officer, Special Assistant to the President for Diversity, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. She summarized initiatives that students, alumni/ae, and faculty have undertaken in recent weeks to call for change in Fordham's racial climate. He described the process that led to the publication of the University's action plan on racism, characterizing it as a first step and noting that a greater challenge lies in its implementation.

Discussion followed. Asked how the University is seeking to support students of color, Mr. Zapata commented that he has advised Fr. McShane that Fordham must do three things: take immediate steps to encourage healing within the community, conduct outreach to all quarters of the campus, and enact a longer-term plan. He said that the student leaders who initiated the recent petition and social media campaigns have asked to meet with members of the administration, and he hopes that conversation will be about their demands as well as their experiences. In response to a Senator's question about the gates that surround Rose Hill, Mr. Zapata observed that the gates around the Rose Hill campus may pose a particular challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic, since it is incumbent upon the University to welcome the community and not to impinge upon it through, for instance, congestion at the Fordham Road entrance to campus. Especially in this time, Fordham needs to show that we care about the residents of the neighborhoods where we are situated, being intentional to ensure that our reopening plans and communications convey our concern for our neighbors' needs and well-being as much as that of members of the Fordham community. Mr. Zapata also acknowledged the progress the University has made, including the recruitment of a more diverse faculty. This past year, for instance, 17 of 27 faculty members hired in Arts and Sciences are scholars of color.

Asked about student demands not addressed in the University's action plan, Mr. Zapata noted that Fordham will eventually need to give very clear answers to each proposal our students have made. He characterized the University's policy on demonstrations and protests as particularly untenable to our students. In areas where Fordham has committed to action, such as the creation of multicultural centers, it is essential to ensure that students, faculty, and administrators all agree not only on a general concept but on the particulars.

One Senator observed that student social media posts have named individual faculty members, who are concerned about not having a fair opportunity to respond. Mr. Zapata observed that he has been in touch with a number of colleagues who have been named, as well as with Human Resources and academic deans. He noted that it is essential that Fordham finds a way to address the students' concerns that is fair to all involved, and that work on this crucial task has already begun, led by HR and involving partner offices and campus leadership.

Senate President Lerman introduced Senator Jones, who presented a resolution with regard to racism and antiracism that members of the Executive Committee had drafted. Senator Hornbeck seconded the resolution.

Discussion about the resolution focused on provisions that some Senators worried would impinge upon academic freedom. It was also noted that the resolution did not call for the University to recruit a more diverse student body; in response, some Senators commented that it may not be possible, or ethically desirable, for the University to attract more students of color until the campus climate has meaningfully changed. Others observed that the University's action plan addressed the recruitment and retention of students of color.

Following conversation about the Executive Committee's proposal, the Senate adopted the following resolution (20-3-0):

**The Senate expresses gratitude to the students, alumni/ae, and other members of our community who have bravely shared their stories and concerns about racism at Fordham. As Senators, faculty members, and human beings, we are listening, and we are sorry that the faculty has not taken stronger and more effective action to date.**

**The Senate welcomes the publication of the University’s Action Plan, *Addressing Racism, Educating for Justice*. In the spirit of the “iterative process” the President of the University has initiated, the Senate believes that Fordham’s response to racism must speak not only to programs and policies but also to radical changes in an institutional culture that has permitted racist attitudes and behaviors to persist over a long period of time. Therefore, the Senate stands ready to work with students, the President, and other administrators to determine, as rapidly as possible, how best to enact this cultural change. We draw particular attention to policy proposals brought forward by student leaders not addressed in the University’s plan, including enhancements in Counseling and Psychological Services, revisions to the University’s disciplinary and demonstration policies, and reconsideration of Fordham’s ties to the NYPD and other organizations. In addition, the Senate requests that the University rapidly develop and publish timelines for implementation, as well as metrics and mechanisms for the ongoing and public assessment of the University’s progress toward the goals of the plan.**

**The University Statutes commit certain “fundamental areas” of the life of the University, including “curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process,” to the “primary responsibility” of the faculty (4.01-02). To hold ourselves accountable and do our part to enable Fordham to become an antiracist institution, the Senate therefore:**

- (1) Strongly recommends that all academic units should in academic year 2020-2021 revise their norms for reappointment, tenure, promotion, and merit so that these norms explicitly recognize and reward antiracist work and practices as a priority in teaching, research, and/or service; and commits to assessing progress as norms are revised annually;**
- (2) Urges, and pledges regularly to remind, all faculty members to deepen their learning about racism and antiracism beyond the annual training mandated in the University’s action plan by participating in such programs as the Racial Solidarity Network trainings offered by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Seminar on Inclusion, Diversity and Mission offered by Mission Integration and Planning, and other programs now being developed by deans;**
- (3) Calls urgently upon all of the schools, colleges, and faculties of the University to incorporate antiracist approaches into their academic programs, curricula, pedagogy, course design and delivery, events, and policies;**
- (4) Calls upon the University to undertake collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff a review of existing mechanisms for reporting bias incidents, with the goal of ensuring the fair hearing and resolution of complaints concerning racism and harassment;**
- (5) Mandates that the Committee on Student Experience and the Committee on Faculty Life make systemic racism a key agenda item for the 2020-2021 academic year, as well as that all other Senate committees consider and report back to the Senate by October 2020 how antiracist change at Fordham is relevant to their work and how they will undertake to bring about change; as well as pledges to set aside time during each Senate meeting this year to consider what has been done and remains to be done to advance an antiracist culture at Fordham; and**

**(6) Pledges our ongoing support and our commitment to advocate for all members of the Fordham community, including students, faculty, and staff, who have experienced and are experiencing racism, particularly anti-Black racism.**

*Announcements and New Business*

Senate President Lerman announced that the Academic Pursuits Fund, an element of the faculty's memorandum of agreement with the administration regarding salary and benefits, will take effect as of July 1. That is, although a mechanism for making reimbursements to faculty is still under development, expenses up to \$500 incurred as of July 1 will be eligible for reimbursement. Details are forthcoming.