April 26, 2018

Fellow Xavierites,

Recently, I hosted an open forum of students, administration, staff, and faculty to discuss concerns raised in the recent weeks and months. The forum was intended originally to discuss issues pertaining to sexual safety, violence prevention, general safety, and Title IX. In the course of the evening, other topics arose, and we shared important information and insights with each other about those topics as well.

In this letter, I review our discussion of Title IX issues and report on other items raised during the forum so as to inform all members of the community.

Over the past months, I have worked with the Provost and members of the university leadership to strengthen how we address issues of sexual safety and Title IX.

I, the Provost, and the entire administration take this issue seriously and hold ourselves to the highest standards for protecting the entire community. It is not only our responsibility but our commitment to create the just and humane society, starting here at Xavier.

A safe and affirming environment where all students can learn in a culture both encouraging and supporting is my commitment to you. Recently, I secured the services of independent consultants to review and make recommendations about our Title IX policies and processes. Based on their review, I repositioned and elevated the role of the Title IX Compliance Coordinator who will lead and manage Title IX, issues of safety, sexual violence prevention, response and reporting. This position will report henceforth directly to me.

I recognize more needs to be done. To encourage reporting of incidents, we have secured a third-party vendor to provide a Hotline and web portal for reporting incidents with the option to remain anonymous. The launch of this service is projected for completion in the next 30-45 days. These reports will be directed to our Internal Auditor, Mr. William Bostick, and Associate Vice President of Human Resources, Mr. Kevin Wolf.

Physical safety on campus has been a major concern of the Xavier community. The blue light emergency system is a major element of campus safety. That system has been tested, repaired as needed, and is maintained on a continuous schedule by XUPD. Chief Batiste, along with student volunteers, will conduct
a walking tour and testing of the system in the coming days and will continue to do periodic checks to confirm that status. Xavier will additionally expand Title IX, safety awareness, and sexual violence education through sessions offered to incoming freshmen at orientation and other learning opportunities for upper-class students throughout the year beginning in August 2018.

For safe transit between the library and residence halls during nighttime hours, a shuttle service departing the library every 30 minutes will be formally established with service between the library to KD, St. Mike’s, DePorres, and LLC from 8pm to Library closing by August 2018. We will also run an interim service during the upcoming exam weeks to accommodate increased need for library access during this time.

Information sharing is key to preventing incidents and safeguarding ourselves. The University will provide notification of emergency events on campus effective immediately utilizing current systems. Revised protocols and communication technology to improve the alert system will be implemented by August 2018. By August 2018, I will also institute a Safety Council consisting of students, faculty and staff. The Safety Council will work with the Title IX coordinator to hold us all accountable for a culture of safety and affirmation.

Residence hall access is also a critical part of keeping students safe. Xavier policy presently mandates ID checks in residence halls and sign in of guests by those students they are visiting. No entrance to residence halls will be allowed without a valid ID or, in the case of a guest, the signature of a resident. Please report if you see something that looks unsafe or non-compliant with this policy. We will also investigate benefits of a swipe system and determine what the best solution is for Xavier.

Lighting has been reviewed and upgraded. Earlier this year, staff met with Entergy to request improved lighting on Dixon. Entergy did make improvements. Our facilities staff is reviewing these improvements to see if they suffice. We are looking into other ways to improve lighting including adding lights to houses Xavier owns in the neighborhood.

There were a few requests for an expansion of transit services. We will study how we can expand transit services at Xavier. This is a longer term project and we will need some time to research options to provide transportation around campus and to off-campus locations where students need basic access.

A few other topics regarding areas of student concern that arose during our forum included increasing course offerings on the African Diaspora, sustaining our role as an HBCU, increasing numbers of black and other minority faculty, more course availability, and additional opportunities for graduate education.

I am happy to report that we have reviewed and updated faculty and staff recruitment practices to attract diverse pools of applicants aligned with our mission, and we have had some success during the past year. Yes, we are increasing offerings and curricular options focused on experiences of African Americans and other people of color. Thanks to our faculty, examples include our new MPH program in Health Equity and the undergraduate minor in Afro Latin American and Caribbean studies, both of which will begin in August.
Students expressed concern about aspects of the dorms, technology in the library, additional recycling, installation of water purification systems, and the need for additional parking. Students shared their desire to be more fully engaged in the hiring process and contributing to developing the vision for the future of Xavier.

In the coming months the campus will expand its efforts to grow as a green campus with eleven filtered water stations presently being installed to reduce the use of plastic bottles. Recent awareness activities for Earth Day have increased focus on our environment. We are assessing the other concerns and will provide additional feedback.

We received some additional individual comments that have been compiled and are under review by the leadership. I will be assigning staff to address these concerns and will monitor progress on collaborative ways to improve Xavier and benefit the entire community.

I thank you all, students, the Provost, members of the administration and staff, and faculty who attended the forum in great numbers and openly discussed topics of importance and proposed solutions.

Thank you for your commitment and strong voices. Together we will continue to live our mission and realize a just and humane society.

Sincerely,

Reynold Verret
President