

Rutgers University – Newark Update to Rutgers University Senate January 2022

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor
Rutgers University – Newark

Strategically Living into our Public Mission by Living into our Lived Experiences

In composing my Senate update remarks today, I am drawing upon the framework and priorities outlined in our 2014 [Rutgers-Newark strategic plan](#), a plan still very much alive in the work we do day in and day out to live into the full mission of a university as a public good. Throughout that plan (and across the many working groups that produced it), we returned time and again to the historical antecedents of the public mission of higher education – as we said:

“Now, even more so than then, we rely upon our colleges and universities to be engines of innovation and social mobility as well as educators of our democratic citizenry. We call upon them to think expansively and deeply about the pressing and increasingly interconnected challenges faced in every city, state, and nation; to prepare increasingly diverse generations of students for their roles in the workplaces of a “flat world” and in the many public squares that invigorate democratic dialogue; to partner beyond their gates to magnify societal impact and create two-way streets of access and opportunity.”

This set a framework of the public mission that interweaves themes of social mobility, high-impact scholarship, and democratically-engaged anchor institution work in, of, and with our Newark community, in ways that remind us how far the “local” can resonate. We emphasized in the 2014 plan not only strategic priorities in a general sense but modes of action – including strategic investments to specifically empower leadership, faculty, staff, students, and community partners to “build bridges and break down silos, find collaborators, and create a community of experts and stakeholders working together.” And we committed to monitor our success in ways “that capture inclusive definitions of quality for students, a range of dimensions of productivity and excellence for scholarship, and multi-faceted indicators of societal impact.”

As we have continued to live into this strategic plan and its [2017 update](#) as well as the more recent opportunity to revisit it under the auspice of Senior Vice President Anna Branch’s university-wide [diversity, equity, and inclusion plan](#), it is more apparent than ever that what energizes this work is a shared equity commitment that can only be instantiated when it draws upon the talents of everyone in our community (broadly defined to include students, faculty, staff, and community partners). This need to spread the work of our public mission broadly and deeply throughout our institution, our city, and our national partners is a critical lesson that we have taken away from our participation in several national networks and studies, from the work lead by colleagues at ACE/USC on [shared equity leadership](#) in which we served as one of the case study institutions to our leadership in both the national [Anchor Institutions Task Force](#) and the [Newark Anchor Collaborative](#) to the APLU national project [Powered By Publics: Scaling Student Success](#), involving 125 institutions among which we lead a cluster of institutions with

high Pell Eligible student populations. In all of these collaborative tables, the [Diversity Bonus](#) is clear as can be, whether it is from the merging of shared commitment across different parts of a higher education institution, from student affairs to academic affairs to staff operations, or the energy from cross-sector collaboration between and across higher ed, arts and culture organizations, corporations, and community-based non-profits, to the lessons learned about the lived experiences of students and institutions in different geographies with both distinct and shared obstacles and opportunities.

Interweaving of Social Mobility, High-Impact Scholarship, and Anchor Institution Resonance

Therefore, before diving in to examples of the ways in which we continue to work on the three constituent broad priorities of social mobility, high impact scholarship, and anchor institution engagement, I want to begin here with some examples of the interweaving of all three aspects of the public mission covered in our strategic vision. In each case, we enter the work from one or other of the three priorities, but we quickly see its relevance to all three, and the contribution of multiple constituencies to magnifying impact.

- [PantryRUN](#) – When our students in SGA and GSGA first worked with our student affairs leaders to mount a food pantry at Rutgers-Newark in Fall 2017, its focus was (and still is) to meet the needs of food insecurity on campus in a stable and convenient, stigma-free environment, also connecting students to other on-campus and community resources, from our campus CARE team to local agencies providing NJ SNAP assistance. The meteoric increase in the amount of food distributed – from just over 2 tons in its first year to nearly 37 tons at its peak in 2020 – is a testament to the need. Yet as this highly successful project has evolved, and with the support recently of a [Hunger-Free Campus](#) grant from the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, the pantry’s horizons have broadened to include food literacy curriculum, community-based collaborations working with the Urban Agriculture Cooperative of local growers, and sustainability projects linking food and climate justice, going from food waste producing methane to sustainable composting, intersecting with Rutgers’ climate goals.
- [Lives in Translation](#) – One of the most successful recommendations to come from our 2014 Strategic Plan was for strategic investment via a [Chancellor’s Seed Grant program](#) – for which we have just [announced a new competition](#). These grants seed diverse, multi-disciplinary and community-collaborative teams, and a very successful example of those early grants that has blossomed tremendously over the subsequent years is the Lives in Translation Program mounted by a team of faculty from Spanish and Portuguese Studies, African American and African Studies, English, Law-Newark, Arts, Culture, and Media. Not only did this project aim to build leadership in “teaching and research related to multilingualism and translation” (and indeed they are now starting a new Minor in Translation and Interpretation Studies and a certificate program in Translation/Interpretation that just won a National Endowment for the Humanities grant), but they also wanted to build upon “the global provenance of our students” that makes our campus so linguistically rich and positions it to facilitate communication across “borders of many kinds.” And in keeping with our commitment to live into the lived experiences of our diverse community, this

- amazing program, drawing on a database of 450+ students who speak 48 different languages, trains these students as interns with the faculty in our Law Clinics, translating and interpreting for clients, and with community organizations throughout Newark, including, recently, helping with contact tracing in the pandemic.
- [*Crafting Democratic Futures: Situating Colleges and Universities in Community-Based Reparations Solutions*](#) -- Building on the strength of our public historians and their deep connections to the network of Newark community-based activism organizations, we are participating as one of nine partners nationwide brought together by the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan (and supported by the Mellon Foundation) to interrogate what community-based reparations solutions could look like in a moment of racial reckoning when the sequelae of our history of slavery, redlining, and segregation could not be clearer in the ever-widening racial gaps in wealth, public health, environmental justice, and public safety, access to education, employment, and social mobility. Lead by faculty co-PIs, historian Mark Krasovic, urban education faculty and HLLC Dean Tim Eatman, and Executive Vice Chancellor and sociologist Sherri-Ann Butterfield, and engaging community fellows, Ryan Haygood, CEO of New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and Richard Cammarieri, Director of the Newark Community Development Network, this project is a perfect example of the interweaving of the themes of social mobility, high-impact scholarship and anchor institution engagement, as a team of 10 graduate student and HLLC student researchers, many of whom bring substantial lived experience to this table, go back in history to draw the lines to today's Newark landscape, while community fellows lead dialogues across this diverse global city, and our faculty and students from the Design Consortium at Express Newark and librarians in our digital humanities archive at Dana Library create a visual and digital platform to engage, express, and ponder solutions that both fit the times now and reflect the long arm of history. Once again, this expansive project demonstrates the power of a diverse, locally-embedded team to resonate beyond its boundaries, as it shares its work on local solutions in a national network, participating in national conferences, including those organized by our Price Institute on [Decolonizing Public Humanities](#), and in [local and state campaigns relating to reparations legislation](#).

Taking a Deep Dive on Social Mobility, Productivity, and Impact

I hope these three examples show the benefit of investments we have made in projects and programs and infrastructure that explicitly, jointly interweave and build on the diversity of our community, the impact of our curriculum and scholarship, and the richness of our anchor collaborations in Newark. In fact, we have just announced a call for nominations for [Chancellor's Impact Awards](#) to recognize the range of contributions of our faculty, students, and staff. Now, I want to take a bit of a deep dive (although again pointing to only a few of our many examples), into the strategic priorities and investments focused within each broad priority, starting with our persistent attention to how we enrich and support the diversity of our students, faculty, and staff, in ways that build pathways to social mobility and productivity and impact.

As we noted in the 2014 strategic plan, Rutgers-Newark has a strong history of commitment to diversity, tallied in the many national rankings we top, for example labelled

recently by the [WSJ/Times Higher Education](#) report as “highest among schools in the Northeast for the diversity of its students and faculty” and “second in the country for diversity.” We also pay close attention to drawing our staff from the rich and diverse talent pool in our region, a commitment that we have substantially expanded since 2017 as part of the city-wide HIRE local project for all the anchor institutions in Newark through which we joined with RBHS in setting a target for 220 hires of Newarkers collectively by 2020 and actually hired 581.

Following the lead of this institutional history and the strategic plan’s emphasis on creating social mobility, and drawing on the richness of the diverse talent pool right here in Newark and the Greater Newark region, we have made a number of major institutional investments to keep expanding our reach. For example, when we think about building social mobility and inter-generational opportunity for and with the families of Newark, we point to the growing impact of the following signature programs: our [RUN to the TOP last-in full tuition and fee financial aid program](#) for lower income Newark residents and community college transfers which has supported nearly 5,000 students since 2016; and our truly revolutionary [Honors Living Learning Community](#) – a centerpiece of the 2014 recommendations – with 50% of the 480 students since 2015 coming from Newark, 71% Pell eligible, 47% first generation, and 80% students of color. HLLC now has a spectacular new residential and academic building that invites public participation, houses a social justice minor with core courses taught by teams that include faculty across campus, staff from many campus units, and local community partners. They collaborate with local artists across the street in Express Newark on [BLM murals](#), foster entrepreneurship via the Urban Solutions Lab run by RBS’ George F. Farris Chair, Ted Baker and supported by our anchor partners at Prudential and PSEG, and celebrate its diverse student body to live into their lived experiences, as when formerly-incarcerated HLLC [NJSTEP](#) students lead the way in understanding what the pathway from re-entry to true social mobility can look like.

And pathways are critical not only to establishing social mobility opportunities generally, but to empowering the mentors that can create social capital networks for success for our next generation talent pool. We see this in the programs fostered with the K-12 schools in Newark and Greater Newark by our [Center for Precollege Programs](#) and the dual enrollment for Newark high school students in our courses as part of the [Newark City of Learning Collaborative](#), and through our new program, [RUN Rising](#), supported by an OSHE grant to recruit back to campus Newarkers who have some credits from us but no degree. We see it in the pairing of a diverse set of students to STEM mentors through Professor [Ashaki Rouff’s new Claire Booth Luce grant](#); in Professor Courtney Swindell’s [innovative approach to broadening the appeal of subjects like organic chemistry](#) through gaming, and in Professor [Nicole Richardson’s “Everyday Data” course](#), part of an Apple-sponsored pipeline program with a data science minor, teaching assistantships and summer internships in companies to inspire students from all majors to bring their talents to the task of democratizing the technology and “big data” ecosystem. And, relatedly, a key investment from the 2014 plan in our graduate students and faculty is the work of our [P3 Collaboratory](#), with mentoring and programming around [inclusive pedagogy through the national partner ACUE](#) and Chancellor’s P3 Fellows like English Professor Patricia Akhimie, who also extends her work in mentoring new generation diverse scholars as part of a [Mellon grant to produce more pre-modern race scholars](#). The presence and voice of our very diverse staff is also critically interwoven throughout these investments, and especially important in this

regard is the strength of the social capital network that followed from the recommendation of the 2014 working group on “staffing for the new mission,” to create a [Rutgers-Newark Staff Council](#), which has been up and running and making its contributions across campus since then.

Connecting Scholarship and Curriculum to Lived Experiences and Anchor Engagement

In a nod to another kind of pathway encouraged by the work of our 2014 strategic plan working group on the [New Professoriate](#), it has been very reassuring to see attention being increasingly paid to the vital link between high impact scholarship on critical societal issues and the benefits that such work provides both for creating a curriculum that draws in the lived experiences of diverse students, faculty, staff, and community partners, and for enriching the solutions considered around the tables of our Newark anchor institution collaborations.

The strength of the connections between high-impact scholarship and curriculum and the lived experiences of our students and faculty across our schools and colleges are so clearly seen in a variety of work on the long trail and multi-dimensional geography of racism and segregation. We can go from conferences on [Dismantling Eugenics](#), convened by Price Chair Jack Tchen and an impressive array of thought leaders, activists, poets, scholars, and artists to the curriculum in his Fall 2021 class on “De-Eugenizing Anglo American Political Culture.” Or, look at the connections that fellow historian Mayte Green-Mercado draws for her students between *Race, Ethnicity, & Religion in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean* and the short-term study abroad program, “[Mediterranean Displacements: Refugees, Exile, and Migration from Antiquity to the Present](#),” that she and her colleagues in history run with support from a State Department grant. At the heart of this global program is the connection that participating faculty draw between the family ties of our students to this region and their intense interest in questions of migration, immigration, and belonging, documented in the digital platform on the [Newest Americans](#), created by Arts, Culture, and Media Professor Tim Raphael and Talking Eyes Media.

Moreover, what I find so compelling about this pathway between scholarship, curriculum, and lived experiences, is how many examples one can find across disciplines well outside of those in the humanities and arts where one might expect to see such work. For example, when Yla Eason, professor of marketing at RBS teaches an HLLC course on marketing and society, she draws on her professional practice experience as the creative marketing mastermind behind [Mattel’s Sun-Man and other multicultural toys](#), which she invented when her 3-year old son said he couldn’t be a superhero because he was Black. Similarly, when political scientist James Jones teaches a course on racism and American government, he too draws on direct experience analyzing the [paucity of congressional interns of color](#). Literally, across the full range of Rutgers-Newark scholarship and curriculum, we increasingly see the demonstrated value of bringing diverse lived experiences to the table, as the 2014 strategic plan working group on [Leveraging our Diversity](#) predicted.

In fact, drawing the local-global resonance of our lived experiences, connecting Newark to the world and the world to Newark, is one of the fundamental ways we have increasingly leveraged our diversity following the 2014 plan, especially through investments in an [Office of Global Initiatives and Experiential Learning](#) that mounts a two-part course – part in our classrooms and communities at home and part in national and international sites, partnering with

public and nonprofit organizations addressing local community needs that can then be seen across the map. In one cornerstone example, [We Share Solar](#) suitcases are constructed in Newark high school STEM labs and then deployed by teams of our undergraduate and graduate students in rural communities with low resourced educational and medical facilities to maximize the impact of sustainable living. As described by Professor Clayton Walton who leads this program, so far, “the program has deployed 32 We Share Solar suitcases, completed 7 school revitalization efforts and executed 5 community gardening restoration projects impacting over 40,000 people in Tanzania, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and India.”

In a similar vein, the New Professoriate working group also emphasized the role that diverse scholars and students and staff could increasingly play in producing publicly-engaged scholarship to inform our participation in collaborative work right here in Newark as a major anchor institution. And we have seen this body of applied work grow by leaps and bounds since that 2014 plan, from the utility that the Newark Public Safety Collaborative – a group encompassing criminal justice scholars, law enforcement, community street teams, social service professionals – finds in the data from the [Risk Terrain Modeling of professors Caplan, Kennedy, and Santana](#), to the in-depth analyses by urban education experts from the Cornwall Center on successful national school reform programs that then translate into pilots for [Freedom Schools](#), parent-engagement programs, and more in Newark schools and state-wide coalitions fostered by Henry Rutgers Professor Elise Boddie and the [Inclusion Project on school desegregation](#), or training programs for students and community members on “no-blame problem-solving” in a partnership between our public administration experts in [SPAA and the non-profit Citizens Campaign](#). And once again, there’s no shortage of examples of the utility of publicly-engaged scholarship to our anchor institution collaborations literally across the board – from RBS Prudential Chair Jeff Robinson’s NSF funded research on inclusive entrepreneurship that then informs the work with Newark businesses by Professor Lyneir Richardson and Robinson at [CUEED](#) to Professor [Kevin Lyon’s pathbreaking analyses of local supply chains](#) that then feeds the work of the Newark Anchor Collaborative in our BUY local initiative and Distinguished Professor [David Troutt’s pathbreaking reports on affordable housing](#) that translate directly into recommendations from the Mayor’s Equitable Growth Advisory Commission on which both Troutt and Lyons serve. Henry Rutgers Professor Salamishah Tillet and Professor Nick Kline’s vision for Express Newark is at the forefront of the socially engaged art movement, putting the voices of Newark artists front and center, while connecting with other anchors like Audible, in the [Newark Artists Collaboration](#). Similarly, Professor Rigoberto Gonzalez has our MFA Program in Creative Writing in the spotlight with collaborators from NJPAC in a Mellon-funded jazz/poetry program, [City Verses](#), leveraging the talent of recent MFA graduates like Simeon Marsalis and recent American Academy of Poets [“Poet of the Day” Dimitri Reyes](#) to reveal the intricate intertwining of the two art forms to Newark high schoolers.

Most important in all of these examples – and there are many more – is the two-way street being traversed between our engaged scholars and students and staff and the many community-based groups, corporations, schools, museums and art centers, public agencies, and citizens. They all come together to build evidence-based, democratically-voiced, equitable solutions to change the long arm of history and reap the fulsome talents of Newarkers and beyond. As our [Truth Racial Healing and Transformation Center](#), organized as part of the ACU national network, promises, dialogue and racial healing is a collective enterprise, if true

transformation is to take place – and transformation is what our 2014 strategic plan asked of Rutgers-Newark as we fully live into our public mission by living in to our diverse lived experiences. Which brings me back to where I started. The work cited here today – and truly it is only a glimpse of the investments made following our 2014 plan – is important in no small measure precisely because it opens the gates of Rutgers-Newark even further and more deeply into our world, our city, and beyond, making our curriculum, and scholarship, and anchor engagements matter to the public to whom we are indebted.