

Rutgers-Newark Update 2020-21 to The Rutgers University Senate from Nancy Cantor, Chancellor February 19, 2021

In providing today's campus update, I want to focus on the ways in which the institutional story of Rutgers-Newark is – perhaps sadly in the sense of its urgent relevance – so right for the taxing time in which we live. A time that calls all of us to contribute not just to “getting back to normal,” but instead to building a new, more just, more inclusive, more fully productive and safe normal. Our story is as a place where three threads inextricably intertwine to capture our identity: we are a place committed to being a pathway to social mobility and racial equity; a place that produces innovative publicly-engaged scholarship addressing the pressing challenges of our time – systemic racism, educational and economic inequality, environmental injustice, to name a few that press on our community; and we are an anchor institution in and of Newark, collaborating across sectors and disciplines to make a difference, right here, right now on those very challenges. In this regard, harkening back to President Holloway's three value propositions, we are a place where diversity and the *beloved community* is, as he called for, intentional, not the product of happenstance; where that diversity is woven through and a clear advantage for the *excellence* of the scholarship and curriculum we produce and the collaborative work we do in and with our broad community partners to focus with *strategic clarity* on creating a new, more inclusive, more equitable, and more livable landscape of opportunity.

In other words, our institutional story interweaves, in the service of opportunity, excellence and impact, three strands of university life that often operate in siloes. We intentionally bring to the table talent that might historically have been sidelined, engage the full participation of that diverse talent pool – students, faculty, and staff – in addressing the knottiest dilemmas of our time, and move seamlessly between our anchor institution and the community in which we sit and with whom we partner. For example, when we established and organized one of our crown jewels – the [Honors Living Learning Community](#) (HLLC) with students and faculty from every school and college at Rutgers-Newark – we structured it around local citizenship in a global world. Not only is the curriculum at HLLC tied intentionally to the lived experiences of its highly diverse student body, but the faculty and staff who teach at HLLC are consistently innovative public scholars and virtually every course engages both the students and faculty deeply with our Newark community partners.

Let me briefly touch on two examples of how *lived experience*, *public scholarship*, and *community collaboration* intertwine seamlessly here in the service of excellence and impact.

In the HLLC course, [Environmental Justice in the Ironbound](#), Julie Winokur, from Talking Eyes Media (and a partner of Tim Raphael in the development of the multimedia digital story-telling platform, the [Newest Americans](#), teamed up with environmental activist Maria Lopez-Nunez from Newark's Ironbound Community Corporation. Together, they immersed our students in the realities, which resonated with many of their own experiences, of environmental toxicity in this frontline neighborhood. They in turn

not only produced audio interviews of residents, collected soil and water samples then tested in Rutgers labs for toxicity, but contributed to the travelling exhibition created by the Humanities Action Lab (a national and global network of public humanists located at Rutgers-Newark) on [Climates of Inequality](#).

Also emblematic of the breath of disciplines and community challenges that benefit from the diverse lived experience of our HLLC students and the innovative publicly-engaged scholarship of our faculty is the collaboration with the [Rutgers Advanced Institute for the Study of Entrepreneurship and Development](#), directed by RBS's Ted Baker. This is a hub for prosocial entrepreneurship solutions to urban challenges, including a new Urban Solutions Lab at HLLC. In addition to providing an innovation space in HLLC, the Urban Solutions Lab complements the pathway that Chris Agans and our [NJSTEP prison education program](#) has built from prison to post-secondary degrees – including for several of our star HLLC students. And, it also connects to Baker's RU-Flourishing program for formerly incarcerated entrepreneurs, engaging several of the program participants' fledgling ventures in the Urban Solutions Lab space.

Next, and returning now to the pandemic moment of racial reckoning we find ourselves in and the lessons from the last year, I want to reiterate how Rutgers-Newark as a beloved community has leaped into this moment with our many partners in Newark. This has involved very specific attention with community partners to studying the disparate impact of COVID on Black and Brown residents of Newark, as Dean Charles Menifield of SPAA and his partners at the Urban League of Essex County have done, as well direct technical assistance, as for example our students in the [Lives in Translation](#) Program have provided by serving as translators in the City's Contact Tracing Efforts, and [Keary Rosen and his 3D Design Studio have contributed by making PPE](#) when it was most scarce. It has also involved what might be seen as a broader effort at viewing our own scholarship and curriculum through a racial equity lens.

Faculty across the curriculum, with students across the generations, have taken a racial equity lens in and outside the classroom, from [Norma Riccucci's critical race theory framing](#) of her graduate course in public administration and [Lindsey McDougale's course on social justice](#) in non-profit management to the [community engaged paintings of Black Lives Matter murals](#) on the streets of Newark, organized by our artists at Express Newark with support of the Mayor's Office, and the virtual [jazz/poetry courses for high school students and college students](#) alike as part of the collaboration with NJPAC and our MFA Program in celebrating Newark's legacy.

Moreover, at the heart of the intentional racial reckoning of our time must be the kinds of dialogues we have amongst ourselves, and with our various communities, as our Chancellor's Commission on Diversity and Transformation has promoted in the wake of this fraught election year in cooperation with our [Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center](#) and our [P3 Collaboratory](#), and as the forthcoming *Dialogues in a Time of Fracture* that our Mellon Humanities Leadership Faculty Fellows, Domingo Morel, Jennifer Bernstein, and Jason Cortes are organizing will invoke. Most importantly, the nuances of our racialized landscape, made up as it is by so many intersectional social identities, must be deliberately unpacked, as for example, Belinda Edmonson from English, historian Kornel Chang, and anthropologist Sean Mitchell will

embark on in their Mellon funded [Sawyer Faculty Seminar](#) entitled “Natives and Nativists, Migrants and Immigrants in an American City,” focusing directly on Newark’s constantly changing cultural and demographic landscape.

And, as we think about that ever-evolving demographic landscape, labelled by demographer Bill Frey as America’s *Diversity Explosion*, Rutgers-Newark is strongly committed to doing our part in changing the face of our disciplines, our professions, our graduates, and our workplaces. And our approach to this commitment again exemplifies how we see cultivating the talent of our diverse next generation as a collaborative enterprise, as for example Alec Gates is doing with tremendous success in leading the [STEM GSSLAMP consortium](#), which has increased the production of URM graduates in STEM across the participating institutions by 4-fold since the program began.

Inherent in this work is the engagement of not only cutting-edge scholars as mentors but the building of a community-based talent pipeline. Let me illustrate this with one of our very exciting areas of work, led by data scientist Lucille Booker in collaboration with Executive Vice Chancellor Sherri-Ann Butterfield and SASN Dean Jacquie Mattis, supported by a broad-based initiative with Apple, entitled: “[RU-N Codes: Toward the Socially Just Use of Algorithms and Data](#).” Their aim is to diversify the next generation technology workforce and bridge the digital divide locally and beyond. As such, they launched a data science minor that prepares our highly diverse student body across many disciplines to become data science practitioners and highly skilled data science partners, placing many of them already in jobs at major corporations, and focusing their attention on the legal and ethical implications of the technology they use. Moreover, in keeping with our anchor institution commitments, the initiative, aided by contributions from Rutgers’ Division of Continuing Studies, and in partnership with several school districts in Greater Newark, works to develop and prepare current high school and middle school teachers to teach Swift and IOS App Development, while at the same time embedding their curriculum in a racial equity framework of cultural competence. In fact, a full two weeks of cultural competency lectures in the curriculum for these teachers were taught by Dean Mattis (on [positive psychology](#) in urban spaces) and Executive Vice Chancellor Butterfield (on [Black Lives Matter](#)). Moreover, in keeping with our anchor institution approach, this expansive pipeline initiative intersects seamlessly with the work on [algorithmic justice and data science applications of other faculty](#) across Rutgers-Newark, including data science professor Pat Shafto and co-dean David Lopez in Law, as well as Jaideep Vaidya in RBS, who is busy [developing safe COVID-19 tracing](#) Apps for the City of Newark. As I keep saying, it all fits together as a synergistic package of excellence.

Having energized and intentionally incentivized this interweaving of a diverse next generation talent pool, an interdisciplinary array of public scholars, and a strong and expansive bench of community collaborators, I would argue that Rutgers-Newark is well positioned to make a real difference in helping to build a new normal, post-pandemic. For example, Ryan Haygood, the CEO and President of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice laid out an arresting set of statistics about our state of NJ in his [argument for the urgent need for reparative action](#) and we have faculty and their students and community collaborators working in precisely these arenas of racialized inequity.

For example, Haygood pointed to the startling wealth gap in NJ, with the median net worth of NJ's white families at \$309,000, while the net worth of Black families is at \$5,900 and Latinx families is only \$7,020. Accordingly, the public scholarship of our faculty is directly aimed at closing this gap. Consider, for example, the work of [David Troutt and his colleagues at CLiME](#), analyzing housing affordability and housing displacement risks for Newark residents, or the mapping that [Kevin Lyons and his colleagues at the RBS' Public-Private Partnership Program](#) do, connecting large anchor institutions, including Rutgers, with local women and minority-owned businesses for procurement contracts, or the groundbreaking [Angel Fund for Black and Latinx Tech Entrepreneurs](#) that Lyneir Richardson and Jeff Robinson at CUEED have created, building on the pioneering work of our beloved recently passed colleague, Jerome Williams, on the [discriminatory basis upon which banks and other lenders invest their capital](#).

Of course, closing the wealth gap involves an array of intersecting structural obstacles, from access to education and jobs to affordable housing and clean, safe, healthy neighborhoods, all concatenating to produce the landscape of disparities and durable inequality we see in Newark, and that holds back the talent pool we so believe in from succeeding. And once again, our public scholars, and their students and community partners, are right in the center of both studying these disparities and proposing reparative solutions. Take, for example, the work that Elise Boddie, newly named as Rutgers-Newark Director of the [Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice](#), does as part of [The Inclusion Project](#) to reverse the extraordinarily entrenched segregation by race and class of NJ's public schools. Or consider how the [Newark Public Safety Collaborative](#) – a broad-based set of community partners organized by our public scholars in the School of Criminal Justice -- draws on the risk terrain modeling of Joel Caplan and Les Kennedy to focus the attention of law enforcement and neighborhood residents collectively on places where crime occurs rather than on people as criminals. And speaking of neighborhoods and public well-being, consider the impact that Earth and Environmental Scientist Ashaki Rouff and her students in geochemistry have had in countering food deserts in our city by [detoxifying community gardens](#).

All of these collaborative initiatives in turn lay the ground work for a comprehensive analysis that we are now undertaking, led by historian Mark Krasovic and HLLC Dean Tim Eatman in deep collaboration with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and the Newark Community Development Network, as part of a national network organized by Earl Lewis at the University of Michigan to [study community solutions to reparations](#). And this then brings me full circle to the intertwined identity of Rutgers-Newark, where social mobility, public scholarship, and anchor institution collaboration come together to define our diversity, our excellence, and our strategic impact, all in one bundle.