



September 27th, 2022

To: Faculty and Staff Arts and Sciences, Rutgers University - Camden

From: John Griffin Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Rutgers University – Camden

Re: Conversation with the Dean and New Beginings

All,

I wanted to reach out to all of you as I know many could not make my Conversation with the Dean event earlier this month. I know it is a very busy time as we begin this fall semester, especially as we emerge from the last two tumultuous years, overshadowed by a global pandemic that has changed much of what we do and our lives. Know that I appreciate all you have been through, individually, with your families and friends, and as part of our university, and I am honored to now be a part of this community.

I have been on campus since early summer and have learned a lot. First and foremost, I have heard about and seen your commitment to our students and each other. This is a special place. Our students are driven to succeed, for themselves, and for their families that depend on them in many ways. Many of our students work one, if not two jobs and have other commitments that can push education to a low point on their personal priority lists. But when they see your commitment to and engagement with them in their studies, they will do more and accomplish more than they ever thought possible. This only confirms my commitment to all of you to do my best to lead us forward.

So where do we start and where are we going? To answer the first part of this question, I can say we are already on the move. We began by restructuring some of our operations to improve efficiencies and support all of you in your work, teaching and scholarship. We are working on better lines of communications, clearer procedures, and transparency in managing our collective budgets. I met several times over the summer with the Chairs and Directors as we worked through enrollment issues and prepared for the coming year. I provided them with a detailed budget review and they will soon get an even more detailed view of their budgets, allowing them more agency in managing their programs and initiatives. A set of position requests originating in the departments for next fall has been submitted to the Provost and Chancellor, with four that are

part of cluster hiring initiatives now approved and moving forward. Six more positions are still being considered, with decisions to come in the next week or two.

Yes, we do have challenges in front of us. While graduate programs are growing, undergraduate enrollments are at historic lows, leading to budget shortfalls that have to be managed. The pandemic has also changed how students and their families think about education, its importance, and how we engage with them in and out of the classroom. Engagement and experiential learning are clearly at the core of our ethos here at Rutgers-Camden, with our undergraduates and throughout our graduate programs. So, how do we keep our commitment to this high level of interaction and engagement in a world that is increasingly filled with online interaction? Where does online or hybrid learning fit in what we offer our students at Rutgers-Camden and when is hands-on and in-person learning essential to gaining new knowledge in the classroom or creating knowledge through collaborative research and scholarship? These are a few of the big questions I hope to bring to all of you for discussion and to develop a vision and plan for us all to move forward.

There is more, always more, to work through together. But, I believe that if we all work to move our academic and research programs forward with a focus on our students and their success, to steal a phrase from a favorite movie...”they will come”. They will want to be a part of our community and see the value in engaging with us at Rutgers University – Camden!

In addition to what I hope is seen as my true excitement and optimism, I did share some of the nuts and bolts of what we do at the Conversation with the Dean event, as well as some resources. We now have a detailed [Academic Calendar for Arts and Sciences](#), and resources for Chairs and Directors have been re-organized into one place through the development of an [Operations Manual](#). We will be working throughout the year to continue to improve these resources and develop others! I also want to let you know that I have reserved 8:00-10:00am every Wednesday to be available for a conversation with anyone who has something to talk with me about. Whether an hour or just a few minutes, I want to listen, learn, so I can help us all move forward. If you want to make an appointment, please email Andrea Ohrenich in my office. Or just take a shot and come by my office. If I am not meeting with someone else, I will invite you to sit and talk!

As I mentioned above, this is a critical moment in time for higher education and for us in Arts and Sciences. Many are questioning our value and that of our programs, and either not pursuing a college education or going elsewhere. We need to tell our story and develop our path forward. We need to develop a vision and plan for how we will strengthen the foundations of our university and help move us all forward. In this regard, I will be forming an advisory Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Please see the attached document that I asked Chrissy Beswick to put together for us as our starting point for details and how to nominate yourself or a colleague for this important work. I want you to know that everyone will have the opportunity to engage in this process. I will provide regular updates and seek input along the way, through the SPC, the Chairs and Directors, the FASC Senate, and through several all-faculty and staff meetings.

Finally, we need to get our message about who we are and what we do out there, in front of those who are thinking about coming here for their educations, as well as those who seek to engage

with us in support of our community and in our many research and scholarly pursuits. We need to speak with one voice about how we engage with our students and provide them with experiential learning opportunities that light their passions and encourage a life of learning, service and success! So, we will be working on our own communications plan to share with the Chancellor and other university leaders, as well as engaging our alumni and those who want to support our students and your work. This is our time to stand up and be recognized as Rutgers University – CAMDEN!

Lastly, please join me on Wednesday morning at the [Chancellor's Fall Address](#).

I look forward to meeting those of you I have not yet had the chance to meet and to the many conversations and the great work we will get to do with and for each other and our students over the coming months and years!