



Free City College Oversight Committee Meeting Minutes **DRAFT**



Members: Hong Mei Pang (Co-Chair), Alan Wong (Co-Chair), Win-Mon Kyi, Heather Brandt, Patrick West, Calvin Quock, Sherrice Dorsey, Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins, Alisa Messer, Jill Yee, Conny Ford, Malinalli Villalobos

Date and Time: Friday, December 6, 2024, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
In-Person Location: City College (Main Campus) - Multi-Use Building, Rm 330
50 Frida Kahlo Way, San Francisco, CA. 94112

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

- A. Meeting called to order at 10 AM.
- B. Members Present: Hong Mei Pang (Co-Chair), Alan Wong (Co-Chair), Patrick West, Calvin Quock, Sherrice Dorsey, Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins, Alisa Messer, Jill Yee, Malinalli Villalobos
- C. Member(s) Absent: Win-Mon Kyi
- D. Members Heather Brandt and Conny Ford joined remotely under just cause in accordance with AB 2449. Member Ford husband was present in the room. Member Brandt did not have anyone present in the room.
- E. Welcomed new member Sherrice Dorsey-Smith to Seat 9.

II. Adoption of the Agenda

- A. Agenda adopted with the change of order; moved the 23-24 Free City Annual Report before Public Comment to allow time for it to be completely presented.
- B. Member Villalobos motioned.
Member Messer seconded.

III. Adoption of August 30, 2024, Agenda

- A. Agenda adopted.
- B. Member Villalobos motioned.
Member Messer seconded.

IV. Review and Approval of June 2024 Minutes

- A. Minutes approved.
- B. Member Villalobos motioned.
Member Messer seconded.

V. Review and Approval of August 2024 Minutes

- A. Minutes approved.
- B. Member Villalobos motioned.
Member Messer seconded.

VI. 23-24 Free City Annual Report

- A. Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins introduced Kelley Karandjeff and Micheline Pontious, Senior Research Analyst with City College, to present the report:
 - The report is rooted in the work of your collective efforts to create an equity-focused work plan for Free

City for the period of 2023-2026. This is the first year reporting out on the work of that plan.

- We looked at participant data with a focus on eligible students. This allowed us to have a much more purposeful and clear understanding of how students are engaging with the program when we're really looking at only those who are eligible and not any credit student who's at the college.
- Student perspectives is a new addition to the reporting process and is included in the annual report.
- There was an external campaign launched in partnership with Acer marketing. There was an internal campaign to make sure that all eligible students, particularly those who didn't apply for the benefits and skipped that part of the application process, were contacted and encouraged to access the program.
- The application process was improved, and the requirements were clarified once they were deemed eligible.
- Quite a bit of effort to eliminate outstanding debt for students who were enrolled Fall 2017-Fall 2022. There were other efforts to address students' financial stability through Free City and beyond. Particularly to encourage students to complete the FAFSA.
- Saw a slight uptick in participation from prior years. What you see when you look at it through the lens of which students are eligible. 92% of eligible students are taking advantage of the program, and that is a strong participation rate. Participation remains steady by term.
- Roughly two-thirds are receiving a tuition waiver from the college, through the program. Roughly, one quarter received a free city cash grant.
- Continuing students are most likely to take advantage of the program when the data is sliced by enrollment status. New students and returning students seem to be taking advantage of the program at lower rates. Returning is defined as a student who's been away for two primary terms (Fall and Spring).
- Reminded everyone that Free City is not designed as an equity program. It's open to anyone, regardless of demographic.
- When we cross race and ethnicity with enrollment status, we really start to see where there are some gaps emerging in in terms of student's use of the program. Specifically, new and returning students who identify as Black or African American and Latin/a, and a significant gap for Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander students who are returning and or new. This is a new way of looking at participation. We don't have trend data yet. It does give us some clues in terms of which student groups to consider prioritizing and outreach around the program. We'll be able to start to see if anything shifts given new efforts from the program in terms of marketing and outreach.
- Data is stable from year to year in terms of Free City student's submissions of FAFSA, receipt of CCPG and receipt of Pell grants. There are persistent opportunities for both students and for the college in terms of increasing students, completion of financial aid applications and making sure that they're accessing all available aid to make college attainable. We know that tuition alone is not enough.
- Students emphasized that Free City is a draw to the college because they were able to receive free tuition for their college education. Really amplified the value proposition of Free City to potentially encourage more San Francisco residents to enroll. Career shift, upskilling, free transfer preparation or free job training.
- The feedback on the updates to the application process was overall appreciated. They (students) like the streamlined application and the clear information. Interestingly, a number of students said they felt like it was almost too good to be true. They felt like they had to go through so many hoops when they were enrolling in the college, that when they got to this application, and it was so simple it was almost like, am I missing something? They suggested that perhaps to slow folks down, utilize video clips or testimonials on the application page or just explicitly saying, this is simple for a reason.
- Asked about the repayment requirement and received some mixed feedback. In some cases, students said it incentivized them to stay enrolled and helped them think more strategically about the number and type of courses they were taking. At the same time, students talked about the kind of stress it can cause when they have extenuating circumstances that may make it challenging for them to complete a

class. They suggested a more proactive outreach by the college to make sure that students and faculty are aware of this repayment requirement and the potential ramifications for students who can't repay the tuition costs.

- Students who were receiving the cash grant really valued the support that the college was offering them, not only through free tuition, but for those extra dollars that were going into their pocket to support other educational costs.
- Reviewed the data from the Financial Challenges Beyond Tuition.
- Emphasized there was an interest in better support for working adults in the institution. If they're (CCSF) going to accommodate students who are working, services and courses need to be available evenings and weekends. A traditional schedule really doesn't work for many adults who are contending with other employment and caregiving responsibilities.
- It's clear that the Free City program is a key component of the college's affordability approach for students. There is a real need to continue to think about how to support students who are struggling with basic needs that go beyond the cost of tuition. Whether that be through ensuring that all students are taking advantage of all available aid or adding additional resources through the program for certain populations.

B. Member Comments

- Member Ford asked are we still pursuing the 600 students (to re-enroll), under eliminating outstanding debt? Kelley responded those students did re-enroll. That's what that means. So, of the 10,000 plus students who were reached about 600, have re-enrolled as of Fall.
- Member Brandt asked for clarification on whether the debts have been resolved (eliminated) for all the students who had an outstanding debt that fell within the date range for which we approved spending funds to cover their debt. Member Cooper Wilkins responded, yes, anyone that's included in this number. Their fees were already paid and their holds lifted from those outstanding debts. We are finding some students who are coming forward, that for whatever reason may not have initially been identified, every student's situation is different. You may also notice when we come and give the update that the numbers sometimes change slightly because we continue to address any students that may have not fallen into the original identification of students who were eligible.
- Member Messer asked if 71% of the annual headcount are all students or credit students. Kelley responded, it's credit students. 77% are eligible. 71% take advantage of the program.
- Member Ford asked how much is the cash grant. Kelley responded, it's \$46 per unit. It depends on the number of units you enroll in.
- Member Yee shared there were some concerns about fraudulent enrollment of students and asked, is there any way of tracking that in terms of students who are receiving Free City. Lisa responded we would need to double-check that with financial aid (office). Financial aid is a part of the process of resolving this. We could request to see if they could piece that out for us. Monica from City College added, three areas are identified monthly, admissions, enrollment and financial aid. Individuals are notified to come forward to verify their identity, and we also have other measures in place. If they don't verify their identity we send them to the State Chancellor's office.
- Member Brandt thanked Member Yee for posing the question but clarified that the issue of fraudulent students is a statewide one, not specifically a City College one.
- Member Messer added that Free City cash grant reimbursements occur later in the semester. It delays students access to cash for their books and other things they might need. But that's in part to sort of get beyond the last day to drop. We should run the numbers. I'm guessing it's negligible, if at all.
- Co-Chair Pang asked why the trends (enrollment status) are reflected in that way. Are there particular barriers or ways to motivate new and returning students? Member Cooper Wilkins responded we've been having discussions both here and in the Equity group about ways to incentivize Free City.

Incentives that would help in buying books or covering other basic needs. I appreciate now that we've had this opportunity to do some focus groups. We don't capture every single student but hearing more organically from students about what some of the reasons is helpful to know. Co-Chair Pang added if there are targeted ways that we can understand for these particular groups of students and if there's any mapping against other indicators for what would be ways to incentivize participation, would be helpful data.

- Member Messer shared we've had an anecdotal sense for years now that Free City was part of the reason that our financial aid numbers were low. This tells us that's not true. We might be losing financial aid applications in some way, and this is probably the worst year ever to try to figure out what's happening with financial aid. I think that's so important for us in this room because there has been this set of assumptions that Free City was somehow damaging or not necessarily helping financial aid along.
- Co-Chair Wong shared when he applied for FAFSA, it was like a multiple week affair with my mom and I trying to sort out all these documents and going back and forth and finally submitting it. It is a gargantuan effort for a lot of families, especially if you're the first one to go to college and there's no experience. The number of submitted FAFSA's are surprising to me how it is overall. Compared to other colleges, is the rate about the same, lower? Both Kelley and Micheline responded they haven't looked at that data. Micheline shared that they generally look at full income and not FAFSA completions. Co-Chair Wong added that's something I'd be curious about in the future. The other data point I'd be interested in is how many people apply using the Gi bill versus saving it for saving it for other institutions. Micheline added we do have a lot of veterans using it because we pay out a higher cost of living here. As far as who maybe is trying to save it, that's a little bit harder to tease out. We do know who is identified as veterans on the application, and are not using it, but it could be because they've already used it.
- Member Brandt shared we have a lot of Free City students that just do Free City because they already know that they're ineligible for financial aid either due to struggling in school and not having the GPA required, having taken too many units, or having already graduated, but still needing to complete requirements for CSU and UC. I don't think we have all the answers.
- Co-Chair Pang asked how do we leverage what we've learned and some of these insights, to make sure that this continues to be a program that is available for students to be able to access and to support all our diverse students and their needs.
- Member Brandt shared Free City becomes all the more important given what is transpiring. One of the things that I appreciate is that we're exploring race and ethnicity. But I think what's also missing for me is the incorporation of other outlined equity groups at the college, such as our foster youth, our LGBTQ students, our housing insecure, our justice impacted, and a group that is not yet a part of our equity population. I also just wanted to say, from the student side and perspective, holds sometimes get administered on accounts mid semester which doesn't afford the student the ability to drop a class that they need within a given semester which can impact them. I don't know what the solution is for that. I think the college would really benefit from trying to explore high-flex courses which can meet students where they're at.
- Member Messer shared this is a partnership with San Francisco. It's City College and San Francisco. I know I've brought this up often, but I think it makes students, and their families feel differently about living in San Francisco like in a good way. I think it benefits the college, but I also think it benefits the City, and that we shouldn't lose track of that as we figure out what the outreach looks like. It's such a profound benefit to students and to people who live in San Francisco. The other piece, as we continue to have conversations about the debt relief program that we had, whether the equity populations were more likely to need and or get those that debt relief. It feels like there's an opportunity to try to figure out how this is impacting the equity populations. Or is it?
- Member Ford shared folks in my neighborhood, the Fillmore where I live, know about Free City, but they have a hard time connecting that the job training is free, whether it's nursing, whether it's construction.

I would like to see that a little bit more emphasized.

- Member Messer challenged the committee to envision a world in which, sometime next year San Francisco announced that not only did Free City continue, but it was extending its benefits for undocumented students in San Francisco. I think a lot of people in this room probably care about that idea, and it's kind of profound to think about what that would look like.
- Co-Chair Wong shared it's really important for San Francisco to be standing up and being bold and supporting our students. The Free City College program is really an opportunity for us to do that, and to ensure that we continue college access and affordability for our entire community. I'm very curious on how the new mayor stands on this. He did state that he would support protecting the funding for Free City college. I am looking forward to being able to advocate for that as he comes into office. We need to not only protect the Free City College program, but to expand it to support our basic needs for students, for food, housing and transit and other things. There is a huge worry amongst our students. I think it was 60% (of students) worrying about their basic needs.

C. Public Comments

- Alisa: We need more support in Free City because we are talking about the students taking great classes. When we start from learning English, we need to repeat 3 years from high school. We don't have scholarships. We don't have many support. Really is necessary for this kind of students, because we have a lot of students, Latinos, but we don't have the same opportunity.
- Nico M.: I think when talking about equity, the numbers and the testimonials of students who have trouble paying for their basic needs while going to city college, even outside of tuition, is extremely challenging. I think that is super important, like strengthening the cash support, and the direct support. Undocumented students as well as like international students. I appreciate the mention of the repayment requirement, because this is what I hear from students. I think we're past the point of need to continue examining it. I think interest should not exist; it should never have existed. It's just a roadblock for students. We shouldn't be assuming it's because oh, poor planning on their card, or that they don't really care about it. I think it's just a completely different thing for students to be able to continue to be told Oh, yeah, you're going to have to repay it back, but don't worry, we try to cancel it every couple of years. I appreciate seeing these considerations.
- Student (did not catch name): As my colleague said, the purpose here is to expand and not restrict. As many people here said in light of the new administration that is coming a big stress to you guys how important it is. But I'm going to spell it out, the new Education Department of the United States may eliminate FAFSA. So, this is when Free City is going to show how much San Francisco cares about its future without FAFSA. Possibly, Free City will be more important than ever, and it needs to be expanded, not restricted. I just wanted to stress that.

VII. General Public Comments

- A. No public comment.

VIII. Unfinished Business

- A. FCCOC Informational Guide and Resources for Committee Members.
 - The Committee Secretary announced they have guides for members who did not attend the last meeting and requested members to share with them any contact information (emails, phone numbers) that may have changed.
- B. Member Comments
 - Member Messer asked where we were with the audit. The Committee Secretary shared the audit was issued mid-November and will invite the external auditors to present at our next meeting.
- C. No Public Comment.

IX. Future Agenda Items

- A. The audit was requested to be included in the following meeting and a Free City College budget update will also be included in the February 2025 meeting agenda.
- B. Member Comments
 - Member Cooper Wilkins added Free City College general update.
 - Member Messer added indicators of fraudulent students, not during the meeting but as an information request. The Committee Secretary responded that members could email them informational requests. Member Messer also added the benefits of Free City coming through our Equity subcommittee.
- C. No Public Comment.

X. Adjournment

- A. Co-Chair Pang shared it's likely my last meeting with the committee. It's just been wonderful learning and engaging with all of you. Thank you for all your work and your leadership. Does not know who's stepping in for her.
- B. Please respond to the calendar (meeting) invites moving forward or email the Committee Secretary if you're unable to attend a meeting or if you need accommodations. It would be helpful for the purpose of knowing whether quorum is attained.
- C. The meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.