Guttman Community College Commencement

June 19, 2017

Thomas Bailey Remarks

Thank you, President Evenbeck, and congratulations, Mr. Dervisevic. As someone who has been conducting research for more than 20 years on how community colleges can become more effective institutions for their students, it is extremely gratifying to be honored through this award by such a deeply committed founding president and by such an extraordinarily innovative and caring public college. My colleagues and I at the Community College Research Center have had many conversations with President Evenbeck and the faculty and staff at Guttman over the past several years, and we have witnessed the educators at Guttman working so thoughtfully and so passionately to shape the structure and ethos of this college, so it is very humbling to be recognized as a valued friend and supporter.

The Guttman faculty, administrators, and staff have drawn research findings and other evidence to craft an innovative, inclusive academic community that now serves as a national model. Now, over the years I have had many chances to congratulate the Guttman staff, and today is to celebrate the achievements of you, the graduates, but I hope that you can also take satisfaction in knowing that your experience here, your willingness to enroll in a new and different college, to work with your faculty and mentors to improve your own education, will benefit tens of thousands of other college students. Colleges all over the country are learning from your example, so we are beginning to see more and more adopting features that you and staff at Guttman have pioneered. Last year I was at a college in California a week after a group of faculty and administrators had returned from a visit to Guttman. They were eager to get started on using their Guttman lessons and said that they were particularly impressed with Guttman students. Just last week I was in New
Hampshire at a meeting of community college faculty, and one described a course in which students had a chance to explore their potential future careers. He said it was called Ethnographies of Work. “We stole the idea from Guttman,” he said. I hope that you realize how exceptional this college is; so when your friends and family ask where you went to college, you can say with pride—I went to Guttman.

As you continue your education, and I do hope that you do continue your education, the lessons you have learned from Guttman can serve you well. Guttman is a college where faculty, advisors, and staff work together to provide help and encouragement to their students, and now you have learned the value of that supporting community. You may not find the same type of community in other colleges or in workplaces, but you now have experienced the benefits of that support. Take those lessons that you have learned here and use them. Reach out to faculty, colleagues, mentors, fellow students, and friends. Create your own communities. Many of the faculty and staff and supervisors you will work with are also frustrated that they are given little chance by their colleges and employers to participate in supportive communities. Many will respond positively to your willingness to engage. Do not hesitate to do so.

So I am delighted and humbled to be here today at Guttman’s fourth Commencement and to celebrate with so many talented graduates, and to accept this medal, which I will cherish as much as any recognition I have received. This ceremony is testament to your hard work and success. Even under the best of circumstances, earning a college degree is a notable individual achievement that requires curiosity, intellectual development, the cultivation of skills and knowledge, interpersonal growth, and perseverance and commitment. You should be proud that you have reached this milestone. I applaud you for your accomplishments, and I wish you the best in your future endeavors.