Dear Members of the Campus Community:

Happy New Year. With the College now reopened, and with many staff members — along with students and faculty — back at work, I wanted to write to welcome you all to the new semester. I hope your time away was restorative.

I know that many of us have been deeply affected by the tragedy that marked the end of last term — the loss of Anique Ashraf ’17. I have spent most of the last two weeks not only ruminating on this unaccountable loss but also working with College and local officials to enhance the future safety of our campus. At the end of this letter I outline some of the steps we are taking to help ensure that an event like this does not recur.

In the coming term, we will also continue to work together on a number of other critical projects for our future. These include: developing our strategic plan and our new curriculum; advancing the work of equity and inclusion; and merging our offices of finance and administration. This letter is intended to bring you up to date on the status of those ongoing projects and to forecast what you can expect in the weeks ahead.

Strategic planning and Connections
Our strategic planning process is well underway thanks to the excellent work of the Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by Abby Van Slyck and Chad Jones, as well as our consultants, Keeling & Associates. It has also advanced because of your generous participation in the campus conversations this fall, and I want to thank all of you who took the time to share your views. The response was characteristic of the engagement that defines our community. Between September and November more than 300 faculty, staff, and students took part in individual and small group discussions and nearly 100 people attended the open forums organized by the planning committee. Over 1,800 individual comments were posted on the four idea walls that appeared in early November. And well over 2,200 people in the extended College community responded to our confidential online survey. Our consultants are now helping us parse and analyze all this data. The Strategic Planning Committee will be sharing both the data and their insights with you in the course of the coming semester as they work to identify the series of themes that will define the plan. An early draft should be ready to discuss by the end of the spring break.

As we shape a vision for the next five to 10 years for the College, we are building on what is distinctive about a Connecticut College education. Part of the work of strategic planning, then, involves refining the story that we tell about that education, and in the weeks ahead we will redouble our efforts in this area as well. The Connections
curriculum continues to be an inspiration for that work, built as it is on the distinctive approach to education first established in our centers for interdisciplinary scholarship. By extending the benefits of that approach to all students, Connections will make Connecticut College a leader in integrative education. It is an ambitious vision for the future, a new liberal arts for our interconnected world. The coming semester will be focused on the continued development of the seminars, pathways, and other interdisciplinary courses — as well as the advising — needed to support the first class to enter with this curriculum, the Class of 2020.

**Equity and Inclusion**

Last semester, we began a series of initiatives related to improving the campus climate and to nurturing an environment in which all people are empowered to thrive. As part of that work, we also relaunched a search for a new dean of institutional equity and inclusion. I am grateful for the hard work of the search committee, and for the input we received from all who participated in the open forums at the end of last semester. Unfortunately, although we brought some promising candidates to campus, we have not yet been able to identify the right person for this critical position. And so the committee and I have decided to extend the search through the spring semester. We all agree that it is in our best interest to spend the additional time to ensure the success of this search. I am grateful for the committee's continued commitment.

I want to thank David Canton for agreeing to stay on as interim dean while the search continues. He has done a wonderful job during the past semester, as evidenced by the work already completed. I also want to thank the History department for their forbearance as we borrow a valued colleague for one more semester. With the added strength of our new associate dean, B. Afeni McNeely Cobham, I am confident that we have the knowledge and support to advance our efforts in the coming term, even as we continue our search for a permanent dean.

In relation to our ongoing work on equity and inclusion, I want to mention that Dean Canton and I had a good meeting with some of our student leaders of color at the end of last term. We discussed a list of issues on which they were asking the College to take action. Some of these issues can be addressed in the immediate near term; others will require longer-term efforts. David and I will be sending a communication on our plans later this month, after students return to campus.

**Finance and Administration**

Last semester, with the dual retirements of Ulysses Hammond and Paul Maroni, I announced the decision to create a single position of vice president for finance and
administration. The search for that new position, though interrupted by the winter break, is proceeding well. It will resume in the next weeks and I expect that it will be completed in the very near future. I want to thank the search committee for their work throughout the fall semester. And I want to express special thanks to Mary Calarese, director of financial planning, and Amanda Mayfield, controller, for their excellent work during this period of transition. They have been indefatigable resources for the campus, and in the past semester, they and their teams have shown enormous dedication and skill in the stewarding of the College's resources. They will partner in carrying out the leadership of the finance office until a new vice president for finance and administration is named. I hope you will join me in thanking them for their service.

Safety and security

With the merging of the offices of Finance and Administration comes another change. Starting this month, the Office of Campus Safety will become part of the Dean of Students division, reporting to Dean of Students Victor Arcelus. Campus Safety has had a long-term close working relationship with Student Life staff and this change will enhance this partnership. This shift also affords Campus Safety the opportunity to build stronger relationships with the student body while continuing to advance the safety and security of the campus.

The tragic death of one of our own students last semester in a traffic accident has raised a different set of concerns about safety, especially in relation to Route 32, the State highway that bisects our campus. In the past two weeks, I have been working with the mayor of New London, Michael Passero ’79 M’89, and the superintendent of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Rear Admiral James Rendon, on a series of measures to address the safety issues related to this busy thoroughfare. We have written to the state commissioner of transportation and the governor asking for immediate assistance in improving crosswalk technologies, restoring lighting, and lowering speed limits in the school zones. The New London Police Department has committed to stepping up its efforts to monitor traffic in this area. In addition, I have asked Jim Norton, interim vice president for administration, and Victor Arcelus to co-chair a working group on pedestrian safety in order to consider a broader range of improvements and to develop a comprehensive plan for the future. In the interim, we continue to urge community members to use the cross-over bridge or to cross at the traffic lights on Route 32.

Finally, I want to let you know that the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life is at work on a memorial service to honor the life of Anique Ashraf. You will receive more information about this event, and about other projects discussed in this letter, in the
coming weeks. In the meantime, I wish you all the best for the start of a new year.

Yours,

Katherine Bergeron