Senate Committee on Campus Life and Facilities
Special meeting

Meeting Date: March 17, 2010
Present: Patricia Kolb, Ray Flook, Janette Tilley (chair), Michaelle Garcon, Claudia Amoama, and guests Derek Wheeler, V.P. Administration and Finance; Domenick Laperuta, Director of Public Safety; Fausto Ramirez, Assistant Director of Public Safety

This was a special meeting with representatives from Public Safety to discuss the emergency school closure notification systems and procedures.

The committee was informed that the CUNY Alert system is state-wide emergency notification system which, on the date of the first snow storm (Wednesday, February 10), was overloaded (the problem resided in its inability to handle "multi-dialers"—members of the community who had registered more than one contact phone number or e-mail). Representatives from Public Safety were unable to access the system throughout the morning. The decision to close the campus that day was made later than other campuses because no significant accumulation of snow had fallen on campus in the early hours of the morning (4-5am) and only the week prior to this storm, another predicted storm had failed to materialize. Not wanting to make hasty judgment meant that the college would remain open in the morning. Significant snow began to accumulate by 7:30 and a new decision to close the college was made, but could not be communicated via CUNY Alert. It is not clear why the banner on the college website was not modified until 9:15am. The decision was communicated to the IT department before 8:00am, but the website was not immediately modified.

The State has done some work to improve the CUNY Alert system and on the second snow storm (Friday, February 26) the system worked as indented. Some changes to the way in which the notification system is used have been outlined by the State, including restriction to life-threatening situations and campus closure. The system will no longer be used to notify the community that the campus has re-opened.

In the opinion of representatives from Public Safety, the CUNY Alert system is an effective notification tool that can be relied on for true emergencies. They underscore the need for everyone to enroll in order for it to function as intended.

The campus-wide emergency phones and stands have the ability to be controlled centrally in order to send emergency messages to the campus or to specific buildings or areas. This ability has not been activated owing to lack of funds but remains an item in the college's budgeting plans for the future.