



# Free City College Oversight Committee Meeting Minutes



**Members:** Eileen Mariano (Co-Chair), Alan Wong (Co-Chair), Win-Mon Kyi, Heather Brandt, Patrick West, Calvin Quock, Maria Su, Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins, Alisa Messer, Christopher Brodie, Jill Yee, Conny Ford, Malinali Villalobos

**Date and Time:** Friday, January 26, 2024, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
**In-Person Location:** City College (Main Campus) - Multi-Use Building (MUB),  
Rm 140 50 Frida Kahlo Way, San Francisco, CA. 94112

## I. Call to Order and Roll Call

- A. Meeting called to order at 10:03 AM.
- B. Members Present: Eileen Mariano (Co-Chair), Alan Wong (Co-Chair), Win-Mon Kyi, Heather Brandt, Calvin Quock, Maria Su, Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins, Alisa Messer, Conny Ford, Malinali Villalobos, Patrick West, Jill Yee
- C. Member(s) Absent: Christopher Brodie

## II. Adoption of the Agenda

- A. Agenda adopted.
- B. Member Cooper Wilkins motioned.  
Member Ford seconded.

## III. General Public Comments

- A. Public comment: S. Robinson
  - Doesn't make sense that enrollment is down, especially since City College is free now. Most undocumented people are still not eligible for the program, would like to fix that. Currently working to get the state law amended to include more people in my Labor Studies class. Plans to come back next quarter with a resolution with the hope that someone will sponsor and support this effort.
  - No one knows it is free (Free City program) and part of the reason is the name. The name "Free City" doesn't resonate with people. Consider exploring the pros and cons of renaming, suggested "The Diane Feinstein Fellowship or Scholarship". Marketing and naming are two different things. Raise awareness, expand the pool, City College is great, and get more people in the door.

## IV. Review and Approval of April 2023 Minutes

- A. Minutes approved.
- B. Member Cooper Wilkins motioned.  
Member Wong seconded.
- C. Member Comments
  - Member Messer asked how and if agenda items can be flagged for follow-up (Section 8, A. third bullet). Chair Mariano asked that we bring it to Future Agenda Items for our next meeting.

## V. Equity Subcommittee

- A. Update provided by Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins and Kelley Karandjeff.
  - Kelley shared that the committee's work has been organized into four areas of activity that relate sometimes to multiple goals:

- Free City Awareness: Increase Free City use both through external outreach and in reach in the college.
- Free City Processes: Ensure the process for accessing the Free City benefits is as student-centered and user-friendly as possible.
- Free City Program Design: Ease students' financial burden.
- What is Student Financial Stability: Number of goals and strategies the group identified that relate to supporting students' financial stability that may not be in the specific scope of the Free City program. For example, basic needs supports.
- Member Cooper Wilkins highlighted one of the goals, the Free City College application. A small working group reviewed the application and created much clarity that Free City is free tuition and clarified the language of some of the incorrectly answered questions such as residency status. The next goal is to look at the website for similar opportunities and make it clear for students.
- Continue to engage areas of the college such as Admissions and Records and Financial Aid in the process.
- This set of equity goals was purposefully aligned with the college's equity goals.
- Organizing the goals and strategy in this way allowed us to quickly identify the quick wins and what may come in years two or three. It will also serve as the structure for the annual reporting.
- Focus groups will be held this spring to explore with students, both those who are accessing Free City and those that are not; on how the process is working for them, how to raise awareness, what other financial barriers are impacting their college experience, progress, and success.

#### B. Member Comments

- Member Brandt asked who serves on the Equity Work Group. Member Cooper Wilkins shared that it's open to anyone on the Oversight Committee who wants to be involved. Currently, Jill, Alisa, and Mallinalli are a part of the work group. This is separate from participatory government.
- Member Brandt shared that she is glad about the related goals in terms of removing students' financial burdens and barriers and how that can potentially increase the use of Free City.
- Member Ford loved the point about details, it's not just rhetoric or talk. It's very important to get our documentation and structures in place so students have better and easier access to the program.
- Member Messer shared this may be the first time where committee members and folks at the college are interacting, and sharing goals and experiences in ways that we can capture. We heard that the language that had been in the application was straight out of the MOU, may not be the most student-accessible language. This potentially may have a large impact on our undocumented students, AB 540, and other students who should have access to Free City. Being able to find ways to address these small things, that are huge, has been great.
- Member Yee asked if at the next subcommittee meeting, will we be able to track the changes of the application. Member Cooper Wilkins replied yes, and we will also bring that back to the committee. They'll be able to see screenshots of what it looks like. Member Yee responded the application is so key. It's essentially the gatekeeper to who benefits from the program and who is barred.
- Member West asked how the FAFSA completion is connected to participation in Free City. Member Cooper Wilkins shared it's currently not required for a student to complete the FAFSA. As we talked about students' financial aid stability efforts, we see FAFSA as a way for students to understand what their total eligibility for financial aid could be. They are not required to accept but use it as a strategy in helping students secure as much aid as possible. Member West asked because SFUSD has a goal of %100 of graduating seniors complete the FAFSA. If there's no connection, maybe when we have those meetings with SFUSD students, we'll help them complete it, but they have this other option.
- Member Yee asked for clarification on whether students are supposed to first apply for FAFSA to benefit from Free City (the answer is No). Read Article 5 – 5.3 in the MOU. Now interprets that as the burden is on the college to make a good faith effort for students to exhaust other financial aid and resources.

- Chair Wong asked Member West if SFUSD is requiring everybody to do the FAFSA, does that also include undocumented students? If so, how does the district get around those concerns? Member West clarified that it's not a requirement, it's a goal. Each student is approached individually.
- Member Su shared that through negotiations the desire to have students come to the college was priority #1. Priority #2 was to figure out how to help students go through all these financial aid application processes. We've been living with this initiative for several years now and we've built out knowledge and experience on how to help students navigate the financial aid system, perhaps we can revisit FAFSA requirements or suggestions and help students move toward these other resources first.
- Member Messer shared that there's a particular group of students specifically mostly disadvantaged that need Free City the most.
- Member Ford shared that there was a great deal of angst from City officials that if we developed Free City people would take advantage of it, use it, and not complete it. We have proven as a commission that this is absolutely not the truth.
- Member Villalobos shared that this would be a barrier to have something mandatory to complete the FAFSA. Don't have it for the CCPG for that same reason. Shared a student's experience with the new FAFSA.
- Member Brandt asked does the institution collect data on why students are not filling out the FAFSA. This can help us determine how to support students. Also, share with students how income taxes are tied to completing the FAFSA. Expressed in being on the equity subcommittee. Member Cooper Wilkins responded that many of the things Member Brandt mentioned are covered in the FAFSA workshops and that's part of the awareness we need to broaden.
- Member Cooper Wilkins shared an interesting article on FAFSA completion that may give a broader perspective:  
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/improving-college-access-through-financial-aid-transparency-and-fafsa-simplification/#:~:text=Studies%20show%20that%20complications%20in,particularly%20for%20low%20income%20students>.

C. No Public Comment.

## VI. Outstanding Fees

A. Update provided by Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins.

- Thanked Rebecca Chavez, Bursar, and her team for shepherding the student debt relief program and shared the information they put together.
  - There were 11,497 payments made but an unduplicated head count means it impacted 10,660 students. Out of 10,660 students, 1,335 students are SF residents who didn't get Free City but were eligible.
  - When the payment is applied to the student's account, Admissions and Records (under the leadership of Assistant Dean, Monica Liu) goes in and removes the hold. An email is sent out and a text message (if cell number is on file). Likely, some of the earlier students may not receive the messages which is why the marketing campaign is going to focus on messaging to this specific population.
  - Rebecca Chavez recommended if we continue with the debt relief, we include Spring 2023 and Summer 2023 to finish up the Free City fiscal year. It would be cleaner and fall within the same audit.

B. Member Comments

- Member Su asked what is the timeline for the debt relief. Member Cooper Wilkins responded that it's Fall 2017 to Fall 2022.

- Chair Mariano shared it's wonderful to see the policy working. I bet the outreach will increase the number of students to register (who received debt relief).
  - Member Ford asked what is the process for us to say ok (to move forward with the recommendation). Chair Mariano is not sure if this is something the committee can approve of or if it requires additional approval but will follow up.
  - Member Brandt asked how does a student owe for multiple semesters. Monica Liu shared that sometimes a hold from the summer semester may not show up until later. Member Brandt asked how many students in each term are under Current Outstanding Fees. Member Cooper Wilkins shared the number of students for Spring 2023 – 1057, Summer – 230 and Fall 2023 – 1302.
  - Member Yee expressed what if the \$446,697 is not enough to cover the outstanding fees. Member Cooper Wilkins shared that what's remaining to be paid is a little over \$400,000.
  - Chair Wong asked do we make a recommendation to the Mayor's office as the Free City College Oversight Committee. Kia Wallace, Free City College Analyst, responded yes, it would have to go back to the Mayor's office especially if the debt is going to be more than what's left. Chair Mariano added we have work to do to figure out the process to make the change. Member Su added the Chancellor had weighed in as well.
  - Member Ford expressed let's do something concrete today to get moving. Chair Mariano responded the discussion is a good first step but doesn't feel comfortable taking a vote on an action item that is not on the agenda. Will add this to the next meeting's agenda.
  - Monica Liu shared that time is of the essence. Registration for Summer is the first week of April and the first week of May for Fall Registration. It would be great to do it before the start of registration.
  - Member Ford asked if it is possible to vote by email. Chair Mariano responded we cannot vote by email.
  - Member Brant asked if there could be a special meeting to kick-start the process. Chair Mariano will consider if that should be done.
  - Member Messer doesn't know if we need a vote because this seems like a logical next step to ask and suggest. Hopefully, it will not be the same budget process allocation. It's a change in the number and it could get done quickly in a way that impacts students. The last time we did this it took more than a year.
  - Member Yee asked Chair Mariano to share with the City that there is consensus about this.
  - Member Villalobos shared that there are so many drop class deadlines that they don't always coincide with the full refund deadline. Member Brandt shared that they are trying to streamline things regarding syllabus or courses so that they're consistent from class to class.
- C. Public Comment: S. Robinson
- Students may not know they have to drop a class. Suggested putting it in the syllabus.

## VII. City College

- A. Update provided by Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins.
- This information is typically shared with the committee and the details were put together by Micheline Pontious, Research Analyst.
  - This information aligns with the news the Chancellor shared at Flex Day, where you can see we're experiencing an uptick in enrollment.
  - Suggested a future goal of incentivizing students who can take on more units so students can focus on their programs.
  - It would be useful to spell out the various types of aid students are awarded.
- B. Member Comments
- Member Messer shared it would be helpful if information could be pulled about the amount of unmet needs Free City College students have, the ones who go through the FAFSA program. Member Cooper Wilkins responded it can be explored in the Equity Subcommittee.

C. No Public Comment.

## VIII. Marketing

A. Update provided by Dr. Lisa Cooper Wilkins.

- Excited to be on this journey with our marketing firm (ASIR) who will be working with us over the next three years to help promote Free City.
- The first part of the campaign is being referred to as “Fresh Start” which is to let past students (who fall within the debt relief payment period) know that their debt has been paid and the hold has been lifted.
- Ensure we are aligning our work with the equity plan.
- Actual students participated in the campaign. The majority are Free City students.
- Lots of collaboration with the college’s Outreach Office, IT Office, and even our Institutional Research Office as we collect data.
- Should start to see different ads on social media as early as next week.

B. Member Comments

- Chair Wong asked if “Fresh Start” is our official tagline. Member Copper Wilkins responded yes; “Fresh Start” is not just for the debt relief students. Everyone deserves a fresh start.
- Member Villalobos expressed, if allowed, that we reaffirm in our messaging to students and potential students that City College is an accredited institution.
- Member Yee asked will the “Fresh Start” tagline be nuanced enough so that it doesn’t mislead students to think that the debt relief is blanket for everyone and it’s ongoing. Member Cooper Wilkins shared they will do as much as they can upfront. For example, an FAQ page.
- Member Cooper Wilkins shared that the annual budget is about \$175,000 per year for three years.
- Member Brandt asked will geofencing apply to each campus. Member Cooper Wilkins responded that we could decide where (which areas) ads are sent.
- Kelley Karandjeff suggested we amplify in the messaging the value proposition of coming to college. For example, complete your lower division requirements for transfer for free or boost your income through free job training.
- Member Brandt didn’t understand the connection of some of the images in the ad. Not sure how everyone is going to receive them.

C. No Public Comment

## IX. Unfinished Business

A. No unfinished business.

## X. Future Agenda Items

- 2023 Fees
- Member Messer asked to add to the agenda a discussion on what are the financial and non-financial benefits of Free City.
- Member Yee asked to add to the agenda ACCJC’s report about putting the college on warning to be sanctioned. This is relevant to this committee because Supervisor Mandelman cites the money the college is receiving for Free City. Would like to discuss the financial stability and sustainability of the college and would like to know what’s the Board’s (CCSF) response to the report and Supervisor Mandelman’s letter.
  - Member Brandt asked if this is the best place for this. Member Yee thinks it’s relevant because institutional stability and fiscal ability is integral to the recommendation our committee makes. Not to consider this relevant is irresponsible. Chair Mariano suggested we stay within our scope as the

committee overseeing the Free City College MOU, but there may be a way we can talk about how we can make sure the Free City College program is benefiting the college as much as possible. Chair Mariano and Chair Wong will discuss this further.

- Member Messer reminded the committee that the money we're in conversation about is money that was already allocated and we're asking to continue its use beyond when it was allocated. It's money that is there. This is not about coming back for more money.

C. No Public Comment.

## **XI. Adjournment**

- A. Member Villalobos motioned.  
Member Ford seconded.
- B. Meeting adjourned at 11:53 AM.