October 2020 CIC Remarks

[SLIDE 1] Thank you Beth and good morning everyone. It is a pleasure to be with you and I look forward to our discussion here, and also in the breakout session later.

[SLIDE 2] This past January I was invited to speak on a panel at the CIC's President's Meeting on this same topic, and so you might think that this will be a repeat of what I said there. But as all of you know, things have changed dramatically since January.

[SLIDE 3] For higher ed, and philanthropy, and indeed the planet, things have changed first because of the pandemic. What we might have hoped to be a half-semester blip, has turned into a full-calendar-year-slog involving pivots to remote learning, social distancing, testing and tracing, and discounts and refunds.

[SLIDE 4]: And, for higher ed, and philanthropy, and indeed the planet, things have changed, second, because of the renewed attention to issues of equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. I hardly need to be the one to tell you how these changes have affected you and your institutions. But I will share a bit about how this has impacted philanthropy's support for higher ed. Let me be clear however that this is based more on anecdotes than data since, to the best of my knowledge, we do not have comprehensive data on the changes that have been made throughout the philanthropic sector. I will look, in turn, at some implications related to COVID and then for the focus on equity and inclusion.

[SLIDE 5]: I will briefly comment on 4 COVID related items that are affecting the way private foundations are carrying out their work in the midst of the pandemic. They are: Enhanced attention to remote infrastructure, content, and training; Deeper worries about institutional long-term stability; Greater consumer price consciousness and even skepticism; and Increased attention to student mental health demands.

[SLIDE 6]: Let's begin with the first, that concerns the pivot to digital learning.

[SLIDE 7]: My comments here emerge from the ongoing discussions and work of a funder collaborative that includes a number of higher ed funders. Not surprisingly, that group has been looking at the challenges that are emerging around remote learning and how philanthropy can help address those. The group has been wrestling with some data that was collected by Digital Promise Global and Tyton Partners (and an article discussing some of this data was published by Inside Higher Ed on October 6 as well). And the results are not surprising.

[SLIDE 8]: The data shows a significant increase in student dissatisfaction with courses from before to after COVID though -– encouragingly -- almost 60% still were are least still somewhat satisfied.

[SLIDE 9]: Interestingly, students were largely satisfied with the instructors prep and the course content -- though more than 40% were still dissatisfied with what they learned overall.

[SLIDE 10]: When we drill down a bit more into the causes of dissatisfaction, students highlighted their sense of inclusion in the class, their decreased ability to engage other students, and the challenges of staying interested in the course.

[SLIDE 11]: However, research funded by this funder group showed that certain practices correlated with student satisfaction including assignments that ask students to express what they have learned, breaking up course content into shorter chunks, breakout groups, frequent quizzes and so on.

[SLIDE 12]: Here you can see that the percentage of students that were at least somewhat satisfied with courses correlates quite strongly with the number of these practices that faculty deployed.

[SLIDE 13]: On the faculty side, faculty were most challenged by how to keep students engaged, how to provide student support, and how to translate their pedagogical practices to a remote environment.

[SLIDE 14]: Not surprisingly faculty could see that their plans for the spring did not work well and intended, at the time of this survey to adjust accordingly. So while half reported teaching in roughly the same way in the second half of the spring term, well more than half intended to “adopt digital tools to supplement the student experience in the fall.”

[SLIDE 15]: This has sent institutions and faculty scrambling for resources, some of which already existed, but were not well known, and some that did not exist. One such resource that has emerged from funding through Gates and others, and is hosted by the non-profit entity EdSurge, provides faculty with something like the digital equivalent of “exam copies” of resources, allowing them to review alternatives and options before committing to one resource.

[SLIDE 16]: Members of this group are also supporting the Every Learner Everywhere platform which provides valuable resources for faculty including

[SLIDE 17]: this “Faculty Playbook” that provides practical, hands-on, free advice and best practices for digital instruction. So these are some of the things that higher ed philanthropy is doing in an attempt to be responsive to needs in the sector. There is a lot more to say that but let me pivot quickly to the second item which is:

[SLIDE 18]: Deeper worries about institutional long-term stability. Even before COVID a number of small private institutions were facing significant financial challenges. And those challenges have only increased, with some institutions facing 9 figure budget deficits for the 2020-21 academic year. As a result, at least some funders are beginning to scrutinize the financial health of institutions in greater detail, and refraining from providing funding for projects or activities that presume the long term survival of these institutions.

[SLIDE 19]: Financial health scores as reported by entities like the Hechinger Report, Forbes, Edmit, and the Department of Eds Financial Responsibility Scores now figure into the deliberations about grant awards some foundations. So if your institution is not aware of these resources, it is good to become acquainted with them, and to address them and the scores in discussing project ideas with funders.

[SLIDE 20]: We can cover the third and fourth items pretty quickly, the third being increased consciousness and even skepticism concerning college costs when instruction is remote and the experience provided is seen to be suboptimal.

[SLIDE 21]: This cost consciousness has led to increasing calls for refunds or discounts. Foundations cannot easily play a direct and major role in solving this problem, but many have taken non-trivial steps to offset some of these losses by converting project grants to unrestricted organizational support grants, releasing restrictions on endowment funds, or providing (sometimes significant) direct cash support during these shortfalls, such as the $62M that Lilly recently announced for Indiana institutions.

[SLIDE 22]: Finally, COVID has brought in its wake increased mental health challenges for students, and mental health costs for institutions. As a result, some foundations are making available additional resources to support these needs.

[SLIDE 23]: As mentioned at the beginning the second major shock wave that has struck the sector has led to a greater focus on equity and inclusion, and antiracism efforts. Indeed we at AVDF saw far and away the largest increase in funding requests in this area in the latest cycle. These developments have led to greater interest in efforts to support under-represented students, curriculum revision, providing training for students, faculty, and staff, and supporting various consciousness raising efforts about these matters--- There has been much effort devoted to DEI, and much of that work has been significantly expanded over the summer and fall.

[SLIDE 24]: Over a number of years, AVDF has invested significantly in work related to DEI for students including:

- Pre-matriculation academic and non-academic programming
- First or multi-year cohort programs

- Peer or faculty mentoring programs
- Undergraduate research opportunities, in both STEM and humanities
- Paid internships or support for otherwise unpaid internships, and
- Research on teaching practices or campus climate that boost retention

However, there has been a significant increase in funding requests directly related to anti-racism efforts that consist of more direct interventions aimed at providing remedies for racist beliefs, behaviors, or dispositions.

[SLIDE 25]: Many institutions have been spending considerable time and effort in this space and have been requesting philanthropic support to capitalize these interventions. And foundations have been responding with significant financial investments. However, I would urge all of you to urge your leadership team and staff to spend some time becoming acquainted with the literature in this space and to avoid practices and interventions that lack a strong evidence base.

[SLIDE 26]: While more research needs to be done, there is strong evidence that certain types of interventions do not work, and indeed that some of the most commonly utilized interventions actually make things worse. I would commend the research of Frank Dobbin at Harvard on this topic for example. But in any case it is worth noting that foundations are increasingly relying on evidence of effectiveness in making decisions about what to fund in this space.

[SLIDE 27]: While we are on the topic of evidence-based practices -- let me throw in a brief plug for a great resource that CIC provides: The Digest of Recent Research. This resource takes some of the most important empirical research that has been done on various campus interventions and curates it for those who are not ed research specialists. AVDF has just approved a grant to continue this work and to take the information provided here and make it accessible in an even more user friendly format. In addition to requests of this sort we are also seeing heightened interest and activity concerning efforts to promote civil discourse on campus.

[SLIDE 28]: As tensions related to inequity in our nation have become more intense the capacity for respectful dialogue across lines of difference seems to be diminishing at least in some quarters. Some foundations and activists look at this dynamic through the lens of free speech (such as organizations like FIRE or the ACLU or even the current White House). Others, however, are approaching the topic through the lens of civil discourse, seeking to help students internalize skills that help them to listen, provide constructive feedback, and engage in storytelling that enhances understanding and empathy.

[SLIDE 29]: A few colleges and universities have been supporting such work directly and a number of non-profits are facilitating work along these lines, often funded by

private foundations. This includes the work of organizations like The Greater Good Science Center at Berkeley which has recently produced the very helpful Bridging Differences Playbook.

[SLIDE 30]: It also includes organizations like: Bridge USA, Braver Angels, Civic Saturday, Ben Franklin Circles, The Neighborhood Project, The Hidden Common Ground Initiative, some of which are working with campuses to create opportunities for students to internalize skills of civil discourse, and to practice those skills in ways that help undermine cancel and call out culture.

[SLIDE 31] At AVDF we have been supporting an initiative called Bridging the Gap which provides an intensive J-term or May term experience for students from campuses that are more progressive and campuses that are more conservative. The early results from a pilot at Oberlin and Spring Arbor University, a conservative evangelical institution, have been quite encouraging, and the program will be expanding to 4 additional campus pairs in 2021.

[SLIDE 32]: For us, the goal of supporting work of this sort on campuses is to promote the aims of liberal learning that lie at the very core of CIC institutions: teaching students how to think critically, express and articulate their views clearly and thoughtfully, and to engage respectfully with others across lines of difference. This not only creates campus environments that allow for more effective learning, but also that environments that can shape stewards of democracy for the next generation, and help form graduates who are able to meet the complex demands of our global economy. Let me take this opportunity to encourage this body of leaders to consider coming together to create conditions on your campuses that allow students to internalize these critical and increasingly rare skills.

Finally, I want to take a moment to formally announce a partnership that was just approved by our Board this past weekend. We are very pleased to be joining the Teagle Foundation -- whose team is on the call today -- in a 5-year, nearly $6M initiative that is aimed at creating transfer pathways for community college graduates to four-year private colleges. Work is already underway in a number of states to create these transfer pathways and our joint goal is to complete transfer pathway agreements for colleges in 20 states over the next five years. More information about this initiative will be available on our website soon. But you don't have to wait. You can visit the Teagle website today to learn more about how to participate in this program. And we hope you will do just that. Happy to answer further questions in the breakout session, or in the QandA for our session here.