

**Minutes**  
**SUNY Downstate Medical Center**  
**Council Meeting**  
**October 4, 2012**  
**SUNY Downstate Medical Center**

**Council Members Present**

Rev. Dr. Paul Smith

*Chair*

Dr. Phillip Abramowitz

Dr. Randall Bloomfield

Douglas Pfeil

Dr. Constance Shames

Dr. Monica Sweeney

Ms. MaryAnne Yancey

**Council Members Absent**

Peter Bellacosa, Esq.

Onyedikachukwu Momah

**Downstate Administration in attendance**

President Dr. John F. Williams

Astra Bain-Dowell

Alan Dzija

Dorothy Fyfe

Michael Harrell

Dr. Ian Taylor

Ellen Watson

**Approval of Minutes**

The meeting was called to order, with Rev. Dr. Paul Smith presiding as Council Chair. Minutes from the April 18, 2012 meeting were approved. Council was informed that Member Peter Bellacosa, Esq., who has served on the Council for 16 years, had written the Governor of his intention to step down from Council membership.

**Meeting Discussion**

Downstate's newly appointed president, Dr. John F. Williams, and members of his new administration were introduced to Council members. Council members, in turn, introduced themselves to Dr. Williams, including Douglas Pfeil, an MD/PhD student who is the newly-elected voting student representative.

Dr. Paul Smith, who has been serving as Council chair since the spring, introduced Dr. Williams and advised the Council that on behalf of the Council, he had met several times over the summer with SUNY Board of Trustee Chairman Carl McCall and Dr. Williams.

Rev. Dr. Smith introduced Dr. Williams as an experienced senior administrator and healthcare leader who, as chief executive officer, had led successful restructuring and turnaround efforts at The George Washington University Medical Center's teaching hospital. Reverend Dr. Smith urged members to give Dr. Williams their full support, and to work with Dr. Williams as closely as possible. "This Council can be of great assistance to Dr. Williams as we go forward," he said.

President Williams briefed Council members on his background, explaining that he had grown up in Crown Heights, and it was his prior knowledge of Downstate, as well as its reputation for excellence, its diverse student body and faculty, and its record for educating health professionals who stayed to practice in Brooklyn and the surrounding communities that convinced him to take on the restructuring challenge. The process, Dr. Williams said, will not be easy, but he promised to examine all options as he works to ensure Downstate's survivability and to preserve Downstate's education, research, and patient care missions. Change, he said, will be possible, but the first task is to ensure the institution's fiscal viability.

Council members asked Dr. Williams a number of questions, ranging from how do we ensure that Downstate maintains its distinct niche, to how does an organization such as Downstate implement change and culture transformation? Dr. Sweeney shared a recent experience at Johns Hopkins, noting that in addition to its reputation for excellence, patients are drawn to Hopkins because of its patient-centric focus, which has been enhanced through customer service training from the Disney Corporation. Every single person there, she said, makes one feel that the patient comes first. Doug Pfeil noted that there were many rumors circulating through the student ranks, and that students were hungry for information. Several Council members asked to be kept informed as plans developed, and touched on the need for transparency.

Dr. Williams advised that he will be meeting with elected officials, hospital heads, and leaders throughout Brooklyn, as well as hosting Town Halls and other meeting venues with students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders within the institution. He is also developing a strategic plan that he plans to release shortly. "We are a billion dollar organization, and part of one of the largest, most prestigious and complex state universities in the country. We need to take the steps necessary to ensure that we succeed."