



Diversity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence

June 15, 2020

A Letter to Our Community

Please Join Me in Thanking Baruch's Essential Workers

Dear Colleagues,

More than three months ago, Baruch College took a series of unprecedented, historic actions to protect our community. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, within seven days and with the heroic efforts of faculty and students, thousands of classes moved to distance learning formats. Summer session classes continue to be offered online. Amid that shift, anxious administrators and staff learned that the College would be closed and their work would continue remotely. So we all hunkered down at home with our laptops, iPads, and myriad digital devices.

Yet the campus needed to be maintained and secured. Remote workers quickly understood how much support they would need: our office computers restarted when we lose remote access and our important mail delivered, for example. The entire community also recognized that maintenance work will spiral when the campus readies itself for reopening.

Reliance Upon Essential Workers

We all came to an important realization: how much we rely upon the College's essential employees, including Public Safety officers, Mailroom staff, custodial workers, stationary engineers, and maintenance workers. Most of us are balancing teleworking obligations with family responsibilities, worrying about COVID-19, trying to procure groceries, helping our children with online learning, and searching for stronger bandwidth for our Zoom calls, but Baruch's essential workers are managing all of those activities *as well as* getting to campus safely, working safely, and getting home safely.

In this letter, I want to publicly thank Baruch's essential employees. We acknowledge, respect, and appreciate the sacrifices you have made and are making.

Their Stories

To better understand their situation, I spoke with three of our colleagues, essential employees in managerial positions: Roseann Pilgrim, lieutenant, Office of Public Safety; Angel Camacho, senior stationary engineer; and Juan Gonzalez, Mailroom supervisor. I was moved by their courage, sacrifices, and uncomplaining resolve. As a testament to their leadership, all three asked that I include and acknowledge their staff.



ROSEANN PILGRIM

Lieutenant, Office of Public Safety

YEARS AT BARUCH: 20

COMMUTE: Public transit

WHAT KEEPS HER GOING: She plays the song "Wake Up Everybody" by Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes at least once a week. "It's the song my dad used to play every morning to get us out of bed. I get teary-eyed when I play it."

Roseann Pilgrim, who oversees four sergeants and 29 officers and campus security assistants, became a lieutenant in 2017. COVID-19 has altered her work responsibilities: Ms. Pilgrim monitors the distribution and inventory of PPE for the entire department; investigates reported cases of the virus in her department and coordinates a response with Director and Chief of Public Safety Robert Curry and the Office of Human Resources; and adjusts work schedules to ensure social distancing and protective measures and protocols are followed. She responds to email requests from the College community for building access and delegates to her staff requests for restarting computers for remote access.

Of the particular challenges amid social distancing, Pilgrim notes finding responsible ways for officers to "join" each other for lunches, change uniforms in their respective locker areas, and punch time clocks at the start and end of their shifts.

Her biggest challenge, though, has been finding the time to assist her two young children, five and nine years old, with their classwork and homework in the online learning environment. How does she manage the stress? She tries to do Zumba, yoga, hiking, and biking at least four days a week.

When asked what she would like to tell the Baruch community, Pilgrim says, "I am grateful for the opportunity to work and be part of a team that supports the various needs of the College community and those who are working remotely."



ANGEL CAMACHO

Senior Stationary Engineer

YEARS AT BARUCH: 3

COMMUTE: Driving

WHAT KEEPS HIM GOING: His personal motto: "Never Give Up! In goals and against obstacles in life."

Though the campus is closed, all BCTC server cooling units need to be checked to ensure that they are functioning properly. The Con Ed steam-reducing station, cooling towers, and all mechanical systems have to be monitored around the clock. Emergencies, such as leaks in pumps, need to be addressed. The College's swimming pool has to be maintained even though no one is using it. Baruch's Senior Stationary Engineer Angel Camacho is responsible for supervising the maintenance of these facilities.

Following two promotions since joining Baruch three years ago, Mr. Camacho supervises electricians, plumbers, oilers, engineers, maintenance workers and thermostat repair personnel. Since the campus closure, his shifts have changed. Like others in his department, he follows a two-man work schedule to minimize staff exposure. Though he normally would not be required to work these shifts, the department's current shortage of staff necessitates his presence. Pre-coronavirus, he worked ordinary day shifts.

Camacho considers himself fortunate, though, because he can drive to work and no members of his immediate family have been infected by COVID-19. His biggest challenge at work has been managing interactions with others, including contractors. On a personal note, he has not been able to visit with his daughter, whom he used to see every weekend, for fear of risking her and her mother's health. His co-workers are in similar situations, he says. How does Camacho stay positive and keep in good spirits? He reminds himself that "one day this, too, shall pass."



JUAN GONZALEZ

Mailroom Supervisor

YEARS AT BARUCH: 13

COMMUTE: Carpool

WHAT KEEPS HIM GOING: Each day, Juan asks himself, “How much longer can I do this?” His answer: “At least one more day.”

The hardest story to share is Juan Gonzalez’s.

Juan Gonzalez lost his 56-year-old father to COVID-19. He considers himself fortunate that he was able to visit his father in the hospital. Even more fortunate, that when he could not get his calls returned from funeral homes, a childhood friend who operates a funeral home contacted him and arranged a funeral for his father. During these times, having 10 family members attend the funeral was an unexpected blessing.

Mr. Gonzalez has a 12-year-old daughter who lives in Hazelton, Pennsylvania. He has been unable to visit her because of the pandemic. Especially hard was not seeing her on her birthday in April.

As Mailroom supervisor, Gonzalez has a different set of challenges. In the early days of the pandemic, when medical information was sparse and changing daily, he and his staff were processing incoming deliveries. They had questions, for example, Would these items infect them? How should they maintain social distance? Gonzalez was taking all of the necessary precautions himself, but were others being careful, like the Post Office, UPS, and FedEx delivery people they encountered? Even protocols for using campus bathrooms became complicated.

Once home from work, Gonzalez dealt with another new regime: stripping, showering, grocery shopping—an interminable cycle of “rinse and repeat” and continuous anxiety.

Gonzalez’s work is essential: In the beginning, his days were filled with preparing laptops and iPads to mail to students, staff, and faculty. Important documents, such as work visas and student visas, need to be accounted for. If getting the job done was important pre-COVID, the Mailroom’s operations have become even more important since.

Summer is approaching, but taking a vacation is not in Gonzalez's immediate plans. The reduced staff—three individuals doing the work of seven or eight people—needs his guidance. And this is a responsibility he takes very seriously. Gonzalez begins each work day by checking on his staff, asking them how they are doing and how their families are doing. He reminds them to take precautions: wear masks, wash their hands, and maintain social distance, both on and off the job. Gonzalez is concerned about their mental health and ability to continue working too. But he is proud of them. They, too, subscribe to his motto: Each day checked off the calendar is yet another day closer to the finish line.

"Staff and faculty calling into the Mailroom are uniformly surprised and grateful," he says.

Gratitude and Next Steps

Please join me in thanking Baruch's essential workers for their sacrifices and the risks they are taking to support the entire Baruch community, now in even more difficult circumstances and turbulent times.

My fellow members of the Presidential Advisory Council for Diversity and Inclusion and I will begin the task of holding listening sessions for all essential employees to better advise our incoming president, Dr. S. David Wu. This newsletter is part of that process.

Please feel free to send me *your* stories of Baruch's amazing essential workers.

Sincerely,

Mona Jha, Esq.

Chief Diversity Officer, Title IX Coordinator, and Section 504/ADA Coordinator

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