As I did in the fall, I am reporting on the important issues that have taken the majority of my time since we last met. These are also the issues that I believe have been of greatest important to the system.

1. SUNY’s Strategic Planning Process

This is the undertaking that has involved a series of meetings, involving both the Traveling 200 and the Steering Committee. We have had four of the scheduled conversations to date: “Ensuring Economic Vitality and the Quality of Life” (HVCC, Oct. 21); “Education Pipeline” (Buffalo, Nov. 4); “Arts and Culture,” (FIT, Dec. 1) and “Diversity in the World.” (Delhi, Jan. 11). The next scheduled conversation will be on “Energy and Sustainability” at Stony Brook on Feb. 4, which will be followed by “Quality of Place” at Plattsburgh on Feb. 19 and “Health Affairs” on Feb. 25 at Upstate Medical University. Three additional conversations have been added, two in the NYC area during the first week in March, one focusing on “SUNY and the World” and the other on “Research and Innovation” at Stony Brook, and the last is a capstone as yet unscheduled for early March at the Nanocenter in Albany.

- The emerging unifying theme of the Strategic Plan is still the role of SUNY in the economic revitalization and enhanced quality of life for the citizens of New York.
- The steering committee of 18, including 6 faculty (2 governance leaders, 2 Distinguished, 2 at large) has met for an hour or two after each of the conversations.
- While we are only a bit more than half way through the conversations and have had no materials yet generated by the workgroups in support of a number of the themes and structural issues, we have begun to discuss in general terms what is emerging from the process.
- And in that regard, I urge you to pay close attention to the definitions of the strategic issues, since so many of them, including the unifying theme, are framed by the relationship between current social problems, equity, educational access, health and welfare, and the applicability of our research and innovation, and the University, with its human, material and intellectual resources to address them.

I urge you to learn more about and participate more actively in the emerging Strategic Plan by visiting the website [www.suny.edu/strategicPlan/](http://www.suny.edu/strategicPlan/) and contributing to the dialogues.

2. Shared Governance.

The Chancellor has appointed a Cabinet of 18 which has met twice and includes both Tina and me. We are now scheduling regular meetings for the remainder of the academic year, both for the Cabinet and one on one with the Chancellor. In addition, the Provost has extended himself to meet regularly with me, as have other members of the System Administration.
• One indication of the Chancellor’s willingness to work effectively with faculty leadership is that when a question was raised about shared governance at the last Cabinet meeting, she immediately suggested a small workgroup to address the issue systematically. She assigned the task to Tina Good and me to begin the process by drafting a charge.

• Despite the issues raised by the flawed process that resulted in the recent revision of general education, we have been assured that we will never again be asked to respond to a major initiative in such a short timeframe. That said, I must admit that I had not been briefed on what SUNY was asking in terms of flexibility, an “ask” that resulted in the Governor’s Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Bill.

• **Board of Trustees.** I am pleased to report that the Board is focused and working hard in the best interests of the University. I base my conclusion on the committee meetings, open Board meetings and Executive sessions I have attended. The range of activities undertaken by the University system is staggering, almost unimaginable without the seat on the Board. I am grateful to Joe, Carl and all who worked on our behalf to get us a seat at the table. Yet, I am also aware that it is not a gift without a price. I could imagine that there might be times when there could a conflict between my duties to this organization and my sworn duty as a member of the Board. It hasn’t happened yet, and I will work to make certain that it doesn’t, but it is possible.

• **FCCC.** I have included our working relationship with FCCC under “Shared Governance” because I believe we are working in concert to represent all faculty more effectively. And to do that, we need to make certain that when the organizations have either different interests or take different positions, as occurred with the revision of general education (see below); we do so collegially, with sensitivity and understanding of the other organization’s position.

3. **Budget.** It is obvious that the SUNY budget cuts last fall posed significant challenges to the system, especially to the state-operated campuses. The Governor’s budget is still being analyzed, but to some, the cut from the new base suffered by SUNY’s state operated campuses was less than it could have been. Perhaps, but the pain across the system is real, and it will impact both the range of programs we offer and the access to those programs for tens of thousands of students.

We will have an update on the budget from the new Chief Operating Officer for the University, Monica Rimai during this plenary. I also expect we will have an informed discussion of the impact, if adopted, of the Governor’s “Public Higher Education Empowerment Act.” For more on this issue see the attached documents.

While the “flexibility” in that bill will allow SUNY campuses to respond to external issues much more quickly, the central concern appears to be the proposed tuition policies, specifically differential tuition for both campuses and programs. While there is an oversight mechanism built into the proposal to ensure a degree of equity, numerous issues remain, such as the long-standing tradition of the state government of simply reducing state aid whenever tuition rates have been raised.
There is no guarantee that this pattern would not continue in the future, which would in fact further the process of privatization of public higher education in New York State, as the State divests itself of its financial responsibilities. More importantly, it would divert responsibility from the legislature and the Governor, where it now resides, to our campuses. The issue, as we academicians are fond of saying, is complicated. For that reason, I will be meeting with Phil Smith, the President of UUP, to make certain that we understand the issues posed by this rather complicated issue. For the UUP reaction to the bill, see www.uupinfo.org/communications/release10/100119.html.

4. **The SUNY Assessment Initiative.** Remember our resolution last year asking for relief from the endless rounds of assessment. Well………the long and short of it was the formation of a workgroup that met for a day-long session last summer to assess the SAI. This meeting resulted in a set of recommendations that fundamentally restated SUNY policy about the ongoing need for assessment, but, it concluded, that assessment was now being reinforced by Middle States and other accreditation organizations. Oversight is now being required periodically for each campus as it goes through its accreditation process, which releases SUNY System Administration from its former policing role.

If the workgroup’s recommendations are accepted by the Board of Trustees, who understand the need for some relief, campuses will no longer be reporting to System about assessment. Instead, the assessment responsibility will reside on each campus, with occasional spot-checks and on-going support for best practices from System Administration. The issue is under further discussion currently with the expectation that the Provost will present a resolution to revise the SUNY Assessment Initiative to the Board for its consideration at the March meeting.

5. **General Education.** I trust you are aware of the recent approval by the Board of Trustees of a resolution that revised the SUNY general education program. This resolution came to faculty governance very late (December 14 to be precise), without any indication that it had been drafted and was planned for Board consideration at the January meeting. After receiving it, I immediately called a phone conference of the Executive Committee, which decided that we should proceed to consider the proposed resolution carefully. With their approval, I distributed a copy of the resolution widely (all Senators, all CGLs, all members of UFS committees) requesting feedback by first week in January, in time for the Executive Committee to convene to discuss the issue at length.

We collated the responses from across the system, discussed the issue at length, and decided to support it, with specified understandings clearly stated. Our colleagues in the FCCC came to a different decision, choosing to not endorse the substance of the proposal because of its arrival at the end of the semester. We all agreed that the proposal had come to us at a very bad time in our annual schedule to consider carefully any major policy initiative. The FCCC took the position that it simply did not have sufficient time to evaluate the proposed revision. Attached to this document is our statement of support, as well as an FAQ sheet we subsequently created and distributed.

6. **Student Mobility.** The resolution that we considered and supported at the fall plenary was approved by the Board at its November meeting, with some excitement. It’s fair to say that members of the Board have felt that this has been an issue that needed focused
attention, which it received through the Joint Committee on Transfer and Articulation under the able co-chairs, Joe Hildreth and Tina Good.

The work of the Joint Committee resulted in a restatement of system policy, as well as a renewed commitment by the system to facilitate the transfer for all appropriate courses (those normally taken in the first two years) throughout the SUNY system. To this end, SUNY now has appeals processes in place on every campus to handle any disputed courses (whether the appeal is initiated by a campus or a student). In addition, System Administration is constructing a new website that will provide students and advisors throughout the system with much more accurate, up-to-date information, and it has mobilized the first of what will be a number of disciplinary groups that are designed to work out the topical outlines for courses normally offered in the first two years of the most popular majors.

The first such group has met and examined the two beginning accounting courses. Others will be organized soon. Some academic majors (history, for example, with a fairly standard curriculum across all our campuses) offer few problems, while others (such as Communication) pose innumerable issues. The working groups, composed of community college and baccalaureate campus faculty, will identify and propose solutions to the attendant student mobility issues. As we are asked for representative faculty for these disciplinary groups, I will need to contact you for recommendations.

**Summary:** With the appointment of Nancy Zimpher as Chancellor, SUNY began a new era, one in which a Chancellor who offered experience and nationally recognized academic leadership was given the support of the Board of Trustees to guide the nation’s largest comprehensive system of higher education. While there will certainly be differences of opinion between (and among) us, I am convinced that Chancellor Zimpher and her administration are committed to having faculty voices heard very early in decision-making processes. She, unlike several of her predecessors, needs no education regarding the importance of faculty contributions to solving the most difficult problems facing the university, which is critical since proposed changes in policies and procedures are moving at a quick pace just now. These decisions are being made in a building far from the classrooms, laboratories, studios, libraries, gyms, and myriad other spaces across our campuses where the real business of the university takes place each and every day.

Respectfully submitted
Kenneth P. O’Brien
President
January 20, 2010