

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
FALL PLENARY, ALFRED, NY
OCTOBER 12, 2010

Two issues, the legislative budget process and Strategic Planning, dominated our attention this past year, especially during the past six months. As Chancellor Zimpher explained the relationship between the two inseparable elements, *The Power of SUNY*, the Chancellor was SUNY's "roadmap" to the future, while the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act – PHEEIA – was its "driver's license."

So, that means that we are now driving without a license.

1. PHEEIA, the New York budget process SUNY and the University Senate

We now know what occurred during the late spring and early summer as the New York budget process slowly and agonizingly moved to completion. Sen. Dennis Stachowski (D., Buffalo) held up the state budget for as long as he could, seeking enactment of PHEEIA, which had been introduced by the Governor in December. The holdout became increasingly untenable when faced with the obdurate opposition in the Assembly. The stalemate ended, with a whimper, not a bang, a brokered deal that "promised" an agreement in principle. In reality SUNY was left with a \$210 million reduction in its operating budget, without either an across-the-board tuition increase – even the inadequately modest 2% first proposed by the Board of Trustees – or any of the three core elements of PHEEIA.

What now? Assigning responsibility for this state of affairs is useless; there is more than enough blame to go around. The reality we face is that our fundamentally broken system of funding – or underfunding to be more precise – public higher education survives for yet another budget season. Even with a new Governor in place, the projected \$8 billion deficit suggests that chronically underfunded SUNY and CUNY will likely remain so in the near term, if for no other reason than the fact that I have heard of NO viable alternatives to either the current, legislature-driven funding process or PHEEIA.

What will all this for the system this year? We have been forced to do more – tens of thousands more students in 2010 than in 2008 – with less, a \$643 million total reduction in state support for operations over the same period. The effects began to appear last year with New Paltz's decision to close its Nursing program and continued this fall with the Chancellor's August letter to campus Presidents authorizing (but not calling for) the creation and submission of retrenchment plans, if absolutely necessary. Earlier this month, rumors of programs closing became reality at UAlbany, when President George

Philip announced the suspension of admitting new students into five academic programs, from the baccalaureate through the doctoral levels, with attendant and future reductions in staff, both professional and teaching.

In all probability this will not be the end of such news. Each case, whether formal retrenchment or program and office consolidation, poses obvious problems for faculty and staff governance bodies. To what extent should we become involved in any of the on-campus planning processes? Where can the lines be drawn reasonably?

While the answers will be campus-specific, dependent upon current leadership, campus planning processes, and campus governance traditions, there are obvious limits to any participation: faculty and staff governance bodies cannot become party to specific decisions that result in the elimination of programs, faculty or staff. Based on my experience at Brockport in the early 1980s, where more than two dozen administrative staff and 52 faculty (37 of whom had achieved tenure) were retrenched, governance participation appropriately ended with the definition of criteria for the decisions that were then made by administrators.

Beyond retrenchment and program reductions, other plans have been announced to meet the budgetary constraints under which we now operate. For example, System Administration has enacted a forced furlough of all MC staff and proposed a System-wide freshmen enrollment cap that would limit incoming first-year classes to their 2009 levels. With some exceptions, campuses could not keep any additional tuition revenue generated beyond that number. The policy seeks to maintain the quality of the first-year experience across the System, by limiting, for example, the growing number of triples in freshmen residence halls and the growing number of adjunct faculty needed to teach first year students.

Despite this, the immediate future offers several promising possibilities. Since the Legislature demonstrated NO appetite for comprehensive reform last year, we should expect little, but I do believe the arguments over PHEEIA (as well as those of Buffalo 20/20 the previous session) have created a greater understanding of the depth of the fiscal problems confronting public higher education in New York State.

To make our case for reform more effectively, we will need allies, specifically our CUNY counterparts and the unions, both of which have vested interests in finding greater resources with which New York's public universities could pursue their varied educational missions effectively. For that reason, the Senate will continue our collaborative discussions with UUP and CUNY leadership, as evidenced in "Research That Matters: An Exposition of Graduate Research in SUNY and CUNY," the joint CUNY-SUNY

poster exhibition that has been scheduled for March 8 in the Legislative Office Building. Regarding the unions, I have met – and will continue to do so – with Phil Smith, the President of UUP to maintain open lines of communication and to identify issues about which we have a broad area of agreement. I will note here that the Union has supported major modifications in the state purchasing procedures as they apply to SUNY, one element in PHEEIA, and in recent statements indicated possible agreement regarding a rational tuition policy. In short, we all know that the current situation is untenable.

Finally, while many may have doubted whether SUNY could ever be THE engine of economic growth in the State, there are few who question the importance of higher education, especially public higher education, in providing the human capital that is the essential seedbed for sustainable economic growth in a post-industrial culture. That is one of the primary rationales for the Strategic Plan’s focus on the broader society, rather than the internal institutional dynamics.

2. Strategic Planning Implementation.

A word about what has been accomplished during this past year.

Unlike almost every other strategic plan for a college or university or university-system, *The Power of SUNY* seeks to redefine the relationship between our university system and the most pressing contemporary socio-economic problems. The intersection of societal needs and university expertise is especially appropriate for a *public* university, or in our case, a multi-layered and varied-mission system of public higher education. It makes sense to remind both those within the university and those outside of our mutual interdependence, of the unique and essential range of educational services we provide to the citizens of this state. *The Power of SUNY*, under the Chancellor’s distinctive leadership, offers a promise of our continuing contributions to New York’s future, the benefits of which will both foster economic growth and enrich our community life by focusing on precisely those areas where knowledge can make a difference.

After the elements for the plan were defined through the planning process last year, we now begin the implementation phase, with six Innovation teams and seven Transformation teams, coordinated by a Steering Committee. The first six will address those social issues for which our knowledge offers distinctive benefit: SUNY and the Entrepreneurial Century, SUNY and the Seamless Education Pipeline, SUNY and a Healthier New York, SUNY and an Energy-Smart New York, SUNY and the Vibrant Community, and SUNY and the World. Each of these teams, working with an expert Research and Data Advisory Group is “charged with the solicitation, vetting, and recommendation of specific program proposals that will advance the initiatives as

described in *The Power of SUNY*.” The seven Transformation teams face inside the University, looking to address core infrastructure issues identified during the planning process, specifically Academic Excellence, Strategic Enrollment Management, Budget Task Force, Leadership Development, Innovative Instruction, Information Technology and Shared Governance. Again, the teams’ first task is to define specific, measureable outcomes that will mark our progress in addressing these issues.

So, 2010-11 promises to be another very busy year. The members of the Senate and governance bodies across SUNY have a special interest in “Shared Governance” team. Tina Good and I, the team’s co-chairs, look forward to working with representatives from the community colleges, the state-operated campuses, as well as System representatives and two campus Presidents. We believe that the attention given to governance in recent years by Middle States and other accreditation agencies gives the work greater visibility and importance.

For that reason, each organization, the UFS and the FCCC, will send delegations to the AAUP Shared Governance Conference that is scheduled to be held in Washington in November. Incidentally, one of the panels at the conference will focus on PHEEIA, as a governance issue, and the panel will include me, Sharon Cramer (former chair of our Governance Committee), Dennis Showers (current chair) and two representatives from CUNY, Sandi Cooper (the current Chair of their UFS) and Manfred Philip (the former CUNY Chair).

3. Other Items of Importance

- **Raises for System Administrators.** Without any comment on the value of the three upper level administrators whose compensation was significantly increased, it is obvious that the increases approved by the Board of Trustees infuriated many, both in the Legislature and across the System. While the outcome, the Chancellor eliminating all housing allowance including her own (\$90,000), was unexpected, the issue still appears to have weakened the chances for comprehensive budgetary reform. But, as I indicated above, there are still possibilities that we must pursue to further the understanding of what public higher education means to the State.
- **Student Mobility.** Much of the work begun last year is reaching fruition, as new institutional processes are fulfilling the decades-old promise of student mobility across SUNY. You may have heard of the disciplinary committees, with faculty from both the community colleges and the state operated campuses, identification of the four to six courses in each academic major that we expect each student to have completed by the end of their second year. In addition, these faculty groups have created course descriptors, with varying degrees of specificity that work to

make successful seamless transfer a reality. The success of these processes is due to the efforts of many different people from across the system, but none is more important in this final phase than Provost David Lavallee.

- **The Message from UAlbany.** No matter how justifiable it may be, adding my voice to the chorus of criticism already raised following the announcement of the closure of five academic programs at UAlbany earlier this month feels like "piling on." Yet, there are two concerns worth noting: based on Jean-François Brière's Open Letter, the news came as a surprise to him and his colleagues, and the fact that four of the five programs to be closed were languages adds an ironic note to the Strategic Plan's identification of "SUNY and the World" as one of its six Big Ideas.

Having lived through two retrenchments at the College at Brockport thirty years ago, I know how devastating such events are to a campus community, not to mention the damage done to individual careers. It took at least two decades for us to recover, two decades during which almost every major decision on the departmental level was made through the lens of how it would affect the department's position in the next crisis. Given the understandably dire realities that follow from these actions for a campus, a program and individual faculty and professional staff, I would hope campus administrative leadership would make certain to apprise the campus community of the range of actions it might have to take, before the specifics are announced, with the clear understanding that such actions are the absolute last resort for any administration.

- **Meetings.** Since the last plenary, we have held a number of meetings and presentations, including a gubernatorial press conference, our Summer Planning Conference with the Executive Committee, our Fall Planning Conference last month in Syracuse at which the annual working agenda for each UFS committee was adopted, and meetings with Tina Good, Sandi Cooper and Phil Smith are designed to keep each of informed of what the other's organization is concerned about and planning.

In closing, I once again appeal to all to remember what we do so extraordinarily well, in our classes, in our offices, in all those places on and off our campuses, in our research and in our commitments to the communities of which we are a part. No matter the budgetary shortfalls from public coffers – which probably will continue – we remain the teaching faculty and professional staff of the State University of New York.

Respectfully submitted,

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President