

As in reports past, what follows is a summary and rumination of the major topics I have dealt with over the past four months, rather than a chronological listing of meetings attended and work accomplished.

**1. Budget and Related Issues.** Unfortunately, I suspect that the news that most of you want to hear about – the budget for the next year or two – is still not available. As of this writing, we are all awaiting the decisions that will be made by the new Governor and his staff within the next week. The Chancellor and the Board of Trustees have decided to await the Governor's budget before taking a formal step. Hence, the Board cancelled two special meetings in the last month that had been scheduled to deal with the SUNY budget.

What we do know is what we have all heard in the press: there is a shortfall in the current year's budget of anywhere between \$100 million (Bureau of the Budget estimate) to well over \$300 million (the Comptroller's estimate). In addition, the projected shortfall for the next year's budget is in excess of \$10 billion, a number that rivals that of each of the past two years. This is approximately 7 to 8% of all state spending.

While the overall state outlook is thus grim, what this means for SUNY, much less individual campuses, is not yet known. We have a long way to go before we will have reliable figures that can be used for planning.

We will continue our efforts to make the case for SUNY funding with leaders and members of the legislature and their staffs. On March 8, the CUNY and SUNY University Faculty Senates are jointly sponsoring "Research That Matters: an Exposition of Graduate Research in CUNY and SUNY," which will be sited in the Legislative Office Building in Albany. This is but one event in what will be a more active presence in Albany during the budget deliberations. We are seeking to work more closely with our CUNY colleagues, both on this project and others.

After recent discussions with UUP leadership I am convinced that both the Union and the most senior members of the administration learned that there is little good that comes to the University when they are publicly at odds over budget and legislative goals. While agreement on all issues is not possible, civil discourse is, and both sides are, I believe, moving toward an increasingly common set of objectives.

Finally, under Senior Vice Chancellor Rimai SUNY has established a system-wide budget group, but one with no designated representation from the UFS. That will be corrected in the near future, thanks to quick positive response to a request. The Executive Committee and I are just beginning the process of identifying a faculty or professional staff member wise in the ways of budgeting.

**2. Program Deactivation.** We now know that three campuses – Morrisville, Geneseo, and of course, the University at Albany – have each announced plans to deactivate, suspend, or eliminate several programs. There are two issues that concern us as a governance body: 1. What does the elimination of a specific program mean for the education offered by SUNY, an issue that has and remains important to the Provost and his staff? and 2. To what extent is program elimination in a time of fiscal crisis, with attendant staff reductions, being employed as a means of achieving retrenchment through the back-door, without the protections provided by the UUP contract?

I have discussed these issues, especially the latter, with our Union leadership, with SUNY administration, and with our CUNY colleagues and will continue to do so, especially as we expect the number of programs scheduled for deactivation may well increase if the budget news does not improve significantly. Last month, before the break, we held a joint meeting of the Executive Committees of the CUNY and SUNY Executive Committees in New York City, graciously hosted by CUNY, out of which came a commitment for closer coordination and communication. For this meeting, you will have a CUNY statement on this issue, as well as one from your Executive Committee. Although we had hoped to issue a joint statement from the two Executive Committees, it is clear that our different labor contracts necessitate our use of different language, but to a common end: statements on the problem of using program elimination as a means to budget savings. In that regard, the Provost's Office has issued a new form, "Request to Deactivate and/or Discontinue a Program," which now, for the first time, indicates that the President or Chief Executive Officer's signature "affirms that the proposal has met campus administrative and governance procedures for consultation."

Last month, I was invited to speak to the Senate at UAlbany, where I presented the same message I have been delivering since the beginning of our current state fiscal crisis, which has become a SUNY funding crisis: existing governance bodies should be involved in drafting the criteria and process by which programs and offices will be evaluated, but they should not have representatives at the table when those processes and criteria are being implemented. That is the responsibility of administrators, not faculty and professional staff. This is my personal view, but it is one grounded in my experience at Brockport in 1981-82 where and when we lost approximately 10% of our teaching and professional staff, including 37 faculty with continuing appointment. I am deeply aware of the cost that such devastation wreaks for a campus community, and the decades it can take before faculty and staff begin working without looking for the specter of retrenchment over their shoulders.

**3. SUNY's Strategic Planning Process.** As many of you know, the implementation phase of the strategic planning process has begun, with thirteen teams organized to produce the metrics by which the System's progress in meeting its goals will be measured. The Chancellor has spoken before of "big, hairy, audacious ideas," and among the most audacious I would number the notion that we can identify specific metrics that mark our progress in each of these thirteen areas. While that task for the six Innovation teams, those directed toward internal operations, is daunting, it is possible, since we are able to define the goals and then control the processes by which we seek to achieve them. But, the Innovation teams, those focused on advancing New York State's progress on large social issues – energy usage, health, education pipeline to name but three – face a much more difficult task, since so much of the progress on these critical issues depend upon the actions of many others. Audacious indeed, but an audacity in the tradition of the University of Wisconsin, one worthy of a great public university that is putting its knowledge and energy to addressing the most pressing social issues of the day.

Among the Transformation teams is one on Shared Governance that I co-chair with Prof. Tina Good, the President of FCCC. After our first meeting in October, we were able to send a team of ten to the AAUP conference on Shared Governance that was held in Washington, D.C. in November. We will have a panel at this plenary meeting, at which time a number of the attendees, including Presidents Sandi Cooper (CUNY UFS) and Tina Good (FCCC), will focus on one or two of the major ideas they took from the conference. As for me, the conference re-enforced the complex issues raised by effective shared governance, dependent as it is upon campus traditions, leadership and the issues under discussion. That said, I found my own commitment to governance processes deepened by a recognition that each college or university campus (or system) forms a community of professionals

who share, to a large extent, values and traditions central to the creation and dissemination of knowledge and sensibilities. But, that very sense of community can be all too easily shattered by internally or externally applied pressures, fiscal crises, differences, even personalities.

We met again in January, organizing our work for the remainder of the winter and spring. By mid-April, we will have identified a number of metrics by which effective shared governance can be measured.

**4. General Education and Student Mobility.** The Joint Committee on Transfer and Articulation, so ably led by its co-chairs Joe Hildreth and Tina Good, has now been disbanded and the a new Student Mobility Advisory Committee, with representation from both community colleges and baccalaureate institutions, is being formed to continue to work. .

In addition to the appeals processes that were put into place last year to handle any disputed courses (whether the appeal is initiated by a campus or a student), we have seen the transfer website, which will aid students and advisors immeasurably in the transfer process, and through the work of many faculty, we have identified four to six (in some cases more) courses, each with short subject descriptors, in each of the academic majors that students are expected to have completed by the end of their sophomore year. These courses, much like those identified as fulfilling the general education categories, are guaranteed transfer across the system and into the major programs.

The promise that SUNY made in 1972 for seamless transfer within the system to students on every campus is finally close to being fulfilled. Many faculty and a handful of administrators, as well as persistent members of the Board of Trustees, had a major hand in achieving this level of progress. In his letter to the members of the Joint Committee for their work, Provost Lavalley summarized this collaborative process wrote: “As I hope you appreciate, a state-wide program guaranteeing transfer of courses in the academic major has never before been accomplished through a faculty-led effort. We do all know that we were being strongly encouraged by the Board, but they showed their trust in academic process to give us the time we needed.”

The recent changes in SUNY policy regarding general education are in the process of being worked through local governance bodies, and we will know much more about the effects of these changes on student mobility in the next year.

**Summary:** And so, we find ourselves in something akin to limbo, awaiting what increasingly looks like bad budget news, but trying to keep our focus on our work. There is much to do, and we need to get on with it as long as we can. While the political leadership struggles with the burdens of distributing the finite resources at its disposal in the most socially efficacious manner (admittedly, I’m taking the high road here!), we must continue to do our work: creating knowledge, developing new ways of seeing the human condition, educating our students, and providing the manifold services we offer our communities. We owe them that, but even more, we owe it to ourselves. These are the reasons we have chosen to dedicate our professional lives as we have, and they are the sources of our professional passions.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kenneth P. O’Brien, President  
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