

President's Report to the Academic and Professional Faculty January 23, 2014

Happy New Year, and welcome to the start of spring semester 2014 and what I hope will be a productive, engaging, and enjoyable second half of the academic year. I am continuing the practice of a January update even though we do not have a regular faculty meeting this month.

In my State of the College address in August, I developed themes of *connectedness* to frame our educational mission, our strategic plan and its priorities. I advanced the idea that we must work together *as a community* to continue our strong record of success and contribution and achieve the goals of our strategic plan. I begin this report by reminding everyone of the value of connectedness as a guide in our shared purpose and work. Keeping us connected with our broader mission, with progress on current initiatives and new developments, and with relevant aspects of our external environment will sustain our efforts and enhance our success in improving the student experience at New Paltz.

Faculty Numbers. The number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in fall 2013 was 274, the highest in any recent year and an increase from 268 last year and 258 in fall 2011. Full-time faculty in fall 2013 numbered 356, also the highest in any recent year, and up from 351 last year and 323 in fall 2011; the number of part-time faculty declined from 226 last year to 218 this fall.

The percentage of class sections taught by adjuncts (26.8%) increased slightly from last year (26.1%) but remained below previous figures of just more than 30% in 2008-2011 and 50% or higher a decade ago. I share these figures annually because of their bearing on our long-term goals of increasing reliance on full-time faculty and serving students well. They may be of particular interest this year because these data contradict views expressed in the survey report from the Budget, Goals and Plans Committee issued in November that our faculty numbers are declining and we are increasing our reliance on adjunct faculty.

We offered more class sections in fall 2013 than in any recent year (1,292, compared with 1,275 last year and 1,232 in fall 2009). The continuing issue of course availability despite this trend points to the need for ongoing refinement of our course scheduling, and perhaps raises questions about the mix of courses that departments are offering.

Admitted Student Questionnaire. Last year, we participated in the College Board Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) for the first time in several years. We have discussed the results of this analysis with Department Chairs and Directors, and I hope they have shared these findings with you. The ASQ is based on surveys of students admitted to SUNY New Paltz and to each of several "competitor" institutions. Accepted students were asked to compare our institution and the competitor on measures like academic programs, recruitment materials, financial aid, facilities, campus atmosphere, and cost of attendance.

In brief, we compare favorably with our top competitor institutions in student characterizations of an open-minded, accepting, friendly, and "fun" campus. These assessments are consistent with elements of our identity – a "come-as-you-are" learning community that values diversity and inclusiveness. We compare much less favorably with top competitors in student perceptions

and images about academic reputation, level of academic challenge, special academic programs, selectivity, preparation for career, academic facilities, and availability and quality of majors.

It may be tempting to dismiss such assessments, but accepted students (and their parents) make enrollment decisions based on *their* perception, not *our* sense of reality. We must work to correct misperceptions through our communication and marketing initiatives, both internal and external. For example, Admissions tour guides are already highlighting more strongly our academic strengths and we are showcasing stories of academic success on our website's homepage.

Marketing the College and communicating our strengths are everyone's job, and some efforts demand stronger faculty and department involvement. For example, in the discussion of ASQ findings at the December Administrative Council meeting, the point was made that perceptions formed by prospective students about our academic rigor are not enhanced by faculty websites that are outdated, contain no information about scholarly interests or accomplishments, or simply don't exist. Detailed instructions on updating your faculty listing in my.newpaltz.edu can be found [here](#). The savvy prospective students we want to recruit are curious about the excellent work being conducted by New Paltz faculty, and we must take steps to connect them with faculty interests and accomplishments.

At the February meeting of the Administrative Council, we will discuss an initiative to be accomplished in the coming weeks to create departmental "brag sheets" – 10 or so items that highlight major strengths and accomplishments of each academic and administrative department, to be incorporated into admissions material and throughout our department website pages. Such a project supports our strategic plan initiative of marketing New Paltz more effectively. The ASQ findings and enrollment concerns (see below) spur immediate action.

A Department Chair who took part in the December discussions about ASQ findings spoke with me later to raise the question that perhaps our level of academic rigor is not what we think it is. Beyond matters of perception, we must be open to asking such questions and to evaluating our academic programs and areas where they fall short of our aspirations. In my 2012 State of the College address, I shared results of the previous spring's survey of graduating seniors that showed that 85% rated their entire educational experience as "excellent or good," but only 37% rated it as "excellent." We should not be satisfied with this modest level of achievement.

Are the judgments of our graduating students rooted in shortcomings that prospective students also sense? Do these form their *a priori* judgments about our academic strengths that lead many strong prospective students to attend other institutions? Identifying and addressing such areas for improvement are the purpose of strategic plan initiatives "Nurture Innovation and the Learning Environment" and "Create an Engaged Living-Learning Community."

Fund-raising. In several of the ASQ comparisons, greater scholarship support was identified as a major attraction of a competing institution, underscoring the strategic importance of endowed scholarship support in our fund-raising priorities. Our December 2013 monthly and year-to-date fund-raising totals were strong compared with the past four years, and we continue to connect with new donors while strengthening relationships with current donors. We are developing

strategies to capitalize on naming opportunities in new and renovated facilities. For my meeting next month with our fund-raising steering committee, I am developing case materials to monetize some of our funding priorities and to address the sometimes unstated question among donors and alumni of “why should I give to a public university that gets its funding from the state?” – a seemingly simple issue but one requiring a nuanced response.

Enrollment Updates. More than 500 students enrolled in our winter online session, compared with 139 last year. This program was a resounding success. I am grateful to the faculty and departments who pitched in to plan and offer courses and to encourage students to seize this opportunity to advance in their academic programs and reduce semester scheduling bottlenecks. I am aware of the hard work of teaching online, and appreciate the dedication and commitment of faculty who gave time and effort during the break to serve our students and our academic mission in this way. In accordance with the priority placed on online learning in our strategic plan and the “Open SUNY” initiative, we will continue to evaluate this program and our other online offerings to advance student success and academic progress, being mindful of the role that this program can play in revenue generation.

Our spring semester enrollments are down slightly, although in the first week of class any assessments are preliminary. Overall graduate enrollments are steady with last spring’s numbers, although graduate enrollments have dropped by about 500 students in the last six years; enrollments in some graduate programs are relatively stable, while others continue to decline. The Provost and Graduate Dean continue to evaluate programs in which we must dis-invest to be able to reallocate resources to other areas.

We’re successful in spite of the deep external challenges we and other colleges face, given the steep competition for highly capable students. A slight decrease in undergraduate enrollment for spring semester stems in part from a great success: the unusually large entering class of 2008 had strong 4-year graduation rates, and the 5-year graduation rate this past spring was also very high (exceeding, for example, the 6-year graduation rate of the 2007 class, as I reported last month). Even though we exceeded our targets for incoming first-year and transfer students for this year, our total enrollment is down in part because the class of 2008 “moved through the pipeline” at a higher rate than we had anticipated a year ago when planning this year’s enrollment targets.

While we sought to compensate for this reduction by increasing the size of the incoming spring 2014 transfer student class, transfer student numbers this spring are about the same as last year. Our shortage of on- and near-campus housing was a clear detriment to meeting that goal. Admissions staff judge that we easily could have surpassed an elevated target with more housing. Numerous accepted transfer students complained about not being able to find suitable housing in the community; some asked to delay paying their deposit until they determined whether they would find appropriate housing. A number of students and parents at a recent transfer student orientation spoke with me about their disappointment in the value (cost and quality) of available housing in the community. And we know that many prospective transfer students don’t even apply to New Paltz because “the word is out” about our housing shortage.

I have been writing for some time about the threat that limited housing presents to our continued success. We are seeing that consequence this semester. We do not yet know the final spring revenue totals. However, healthy enrollment of new international students this spring is offsetting to a degree the lower domestic enrollment. Nonetheless, we expect some revenue shortfall this year. We will be able to use campus reserves to manage next year, but the completion of our new residence hall and construction of Park Point before the start of the 2015 academic year will go a long way in making such a gap a one-time, short-term challenge.

To date, our applications for fall 2014 admission are strong, both for first-year and transfer students. As I have written before, students apply to an average of about 8 institutions, and our challenge is not generating lots of applications but in convincing students to choose New Paltz. It will be important for us to continue to address both reality and perception that may lead students to go elsewhere.

Governor’s State of the State and Executive Budget. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* article on January 3, 2014 assessed what colleges and universities across the nation should expect from state budgets in the coming year. Here are some excerpts: “The new ‘good budget’ is the no-reduction budget”... “Colleges that do hope to see larger appropriations are increasingly having to prove to lawmakers that they deserve them. Accountability has become the watchword of legislators”... “...spending on higher education remains lower than in 2008, and the lukewarm expectations for the next budget cycle reflect overall concerns about the nation’s economy”...”What nearly all public colleges can expect during the coming legislative session is higher expectations for how they use the state money they receive” ... “Legislators are also putting the brakes on tuition increases at public colleges over concerns about affordability and student debt.”

Governor Cuomo’s State of the State address on January 8, 2014 revealed an ambitious agenda that focuses heavily on improving New York’s economy, especially that of upstate New York that lags behind that of New York City and the rest of the nation. His vision for SUNY includes continuing the NYSUNY 2020 program (New Paltz has a proposal pending under the current year’s program to support growth of our mechanical engineering program and the 3D printing initiative); NYSUNY 2020 is very clearly a targeted, performance-based funding model. The Governor has proposed a program to provide full scholarships to top high school students who enter STEM fields and work in New York for 5 years after graduation. Such an initiative would help New Paltz sustain the increased student interest in STEM majors we have seen the past several years; no details are available at this time on structure and funding of such a program.

The Executive Budget released by Governor Andrew Cuomo on January 21 is fiscally restrained, with limited increases in state funding and a goal to reduce taxes. In its summary of the Governor’s budget, the Division of Budget (DOB) used the phraseology of “stable and predictable” funding for SUNY. The budget includes a tuition increase as continuation of the rational tuition policy, with clear expectations of enhanced performance (e.g., increased course offerings, improved graduation rates, and continued access and affordability). The Executive Budget includes \$110 million for a new and expanded NYSUNY2020 and NYCUNY2020 program and \$8 million for the new STEM scholarship program. The budget includes new funding for critical maintenance of facilities but none for new construction and major renovation.

The status of Downstate Medical and its major hospital affiliate remains a major financial concern for all of SUNY, including comprehensive campuses like New Paltz.

As we have shared before, the state budget is not final until acted upon by the Legislature. We hope that the budget will be approved by the statutory April 1 deadline so that we can proceed with our plans.

State of the University. In her State of the University Address on January 14 ([here](#)), SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher highlighted priority initiatives for the coming year. These include:

- **Open SUNY** - launching eight new online degree programs along with making all 12,000 online SUNY courses accessible to every SUNY student. A key goal is to reach the nearly 7 million adults in New York with a high school diploma but no college degree.
- **SUNY Works** - SUNY's cooperative education and paid internship initiative, to be expanded by engaging Fortune 500 companies and other large employers to expand experiential learning opportunities for students.
- **New "Network of Excellence"** – in Arts and Humanities. This and the current four networks (Energy, Healthcare, Neuroscience, and Manufacturing) are intended to encourage research and commercialization by supporting workshops, collaboration, and proposal development for external funding.
- **Diversity Task Force** – to be established to evaluate SUNY's diversity and make strategic recommendations for its effective expansion.
- **College Readiness Initiatives** – to prepare more young New Yorkers for college and decrease the state's reliance on remedial education by communicating to high school students the academic skills they need for college; creating incentives for high school students to take more mathematics; develop approaches to assess student progress toward college readiness.
- **Incentivizing STEM Careers** – to encourage more students to pursue teaching careers in STEM, collaborate with Governor Cuomo on scholarship program for high-school graduates to pursue STEM careers and remain in New York after graduation.

The Chancellor's SUNY highlights for 2013 ([here](#)) include several call-outs to SUNY New Paltz: the \$1 million award to support our 3D printing initiative; our certificate program in digital design and fabrication; athletic accomplishments in swimming, field hockey, and women's volleyball; inclusion in *U.S. News and World Report*, *Princeton Review's* Guide to Green Colleges, *Kiplinger's* 2013 Best Values, and *Washington Monthly's* "Best Bang for Your Buck" rankings.

Budget Process. Requests for new budget allocations were submitted to Chairs and supervisors by the end of fall semester. Deans and Directors have reviewed those requests and forwarded priorities to Vice Presidents. We will now review those prioritized requests in the context of the campus strategic plan, and develop a ranking of campus priorities to share through consultation with groups identified in the budget timeline on my.newpaltz.edu. As shared previously, we anticipate having substantially fewer funds to allocate for new priorities than the past several years. As noted above, it will be late spring before the state budget and our revenue projections are known so that we can complete this process.

Start-Up NY. Start-Up NY is the “tax free” economic development program developed by Governor Cuomo to expand existing business and industry and attract new businesses to the state, through partnerships with college and university (especially SUNY) campuses. Those partnerships build on the academic strengths and priorities of each campus.

Each campus’s participation in Start-Up NY is guided by a campus plan. We have been learning more about this evolving program and expectations for campus plans. In late December, we submitted our draft campus plan to the Research Foundation and SUNY System for preliminary review. After we revise the document based on that feedback, we will share it for broader comment on and beyond the campus, as stipulated in the program requirements. As outlined in our plan, the primary criteria we will use to select firms to engage with SUNY New Paltz include: alignment with specific elements of our campus mission and ability to enrich academic programs; opportunities for involvement of faculty (e.g., through enhanced research opportunities) and current students (e.g., through internships); and likelihood of hiring appropriately educated and qualified New Paltz graduates. All of these, of course, are above and beyond the requirement to generate positive economic impacts (new jobs). We have had inquiries from companies that may be interested in joining us in this collaboration, in diverse areas including 3D printing, digital media production, software development, and biotechnology.

We have surveyed commercial real estate availability in the vicinity that could be matched with needs of particular companies joining us as partners. This is the approach that we must take because we have virtually no on-campus space to allocate to the program. Indeed, the Governor's program is explicit that space cannot be taken away from existing academic programs for Start-Up NY.

We recently acquired a house and 3.6 acres of land at 82 S. Manheim Blvd., part of which *could* be made available for Start-Up NY purposes. We have not determined how this property will be used, either for Start-Up or other purposes. The previous owner of this property approached the College about our interest in 2011, well before Start-Up NY. This property – directly across from the Hasbrouck quad – is particularly strategic for future needs of the College. We took advantage of this opportunity, but are not actively seeking property to purchase.

I will keep you apprised as we receive feedback on our draft Start-Up NY plan and as the parameters of this program are clarified. We must approach our participation in this program as long-term: the final date for companies to be accepted into the program is December 31, 2020.

Poetry Out Loud Regional Competition. SUNY New Paltz will host this event for the Mid-Hudson region on February 6 (6-9 p.m.), CSB Auditorium, as part of a SUNY- coordinated effort that will culminate in the State Finals at SUNY System Administration in Albany on March 4. *Poetry Out Loud* is a national recitation contest, created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation and administered in partnership with state arts agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The Teachers & Writers Collaborative, The National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and The Poetry Foundation are co-sponsoring this event with SUNY New Paltz. Students from nearly 20 public and private high schools across the Hudson Valley will visit our campus for this event. Samples of the exceptional caliber of recitation that this program inspires may be found [here](#).

I am grateful to Professors Nancy Johnson (English) and Tom Meyer (Secondary Education, Hudson Valley Writing Project) for their collaboration in leading the organization and planning of this event, which highlights the value we place on contributions in the humanities, supports our strategic plan goal of regional engagement, and connects us with the K-12 community.

Ottaway Visiting Journalism Professor. Sonia Shah is this spring's Ottaway Visiting Journalism Professor. She is a noted science, health, and global policy journalist (www.soniashah.com). She will be teaching a science journalism seminar next semester to upper-level journalism and honors students. We will introduce Ms. Shah to the campus community on February 4 at 6 PM in the Honors Center, when I will interview her about her life and work (one of my most enjoyable events of the year!).

Closing. Elements of this report highlight continuing strengths, accomplishments, and opportunities at New Paltz along with external constraints and realities with which we contend. Initiatives of our strategic plan address precisely many of these issues – academic quality, communication and marketing, stronger philanthropy, process improvement, as examples - focusing and inspiring our work to improve New Paltz during the 5-year life of the plan. The following language from the plan highlights a common purpose in the priority initiatives: *Most bear directly or indirectly on our students and on improving their educational experience. Indeed, a clear focus on students and their success must be an overarching framework for this plan and its implementation.*

It is good at this point in the academic year and at this stage of our strategic plan implementation to remind ourselves of that focus and renew our commitment to that overall goal. Only by *connecting* – with each other as a community, with our broader purpose, with the goals of our plan, and with the resolve to work within the external constraints we face will we achieve our goals.

Best wishes for a productive spring semester.

Sincerely,

Donald P. Christian
President