Provost Report to the Faculty

October 2013

Two weeks ago I attended the annual fall SUNY CAO Conference in Cooperstown that brings together the 64 provosts in the SUNY system. Organized by Interim Provost Elizabeth Bringsjord, the meeting focused on updating everyone on the various initiatives that SUNY is undertaking. I was delighted to make a presentation on our campus' successful efforts to increase retention and graduation rates over the last decade, as part of SUNY's strategic enrollment initiative. Some of you who were here in 1998 may remember a headline in the *Times Herald-Record* that described as "dismal" our six-year graduation rate of 49 percent. Our subsequent success in this area took time, careful planning and an evidence-based approach that used data to inform decision making in multiple units on campus. We have indeed come a long way and should be proud of the efforts of everyone on campus who worked tirelessly to raise the success rates of our students while strengthening the quality of a New Paltz education.

Over the last months, I have heard some faculty voice apprehensions about several SUNY initiatives. It has become clear to me that greater communication about them is needed, lest anxiety, fears, rumors and misinformation take hold. Clearly we must all remain alert to the direction that these initiatives take, at the same time we are open to the benefits of system-wide collaboration. I want to take the opportunity in this report to review some of these initiatives and assess how we at New Paltz will engage with them to help us advance our mission.

Seamless Transfer/Student Mobility

Students are far more mobile today than in decades past. Nationally, one-third of students transfer to another institution at least once in five years. Forty-six percent of SUNY graduates are transfers, with 26 percent of those students transferring from four-year to two-year institutions and 36 percent transferring from two-year to four-year institutions. The Seamless Transfer Requirements were promulgated by SUNY Board of Trustees Resolution 2012-089 in December 2012, and implementation guidance was distributed to campus presidents in June 2013. This important initiative will facilitate the mobility of students within SUNY and thus improve retention and graduation rates across the entire system. There is nothing in the seamless transfer requirements that dictate the content or instructional rubrics of courses, both of which are clearly protected by academic freedom. Our current transfer paths with community colleges are consistent with the new goals that have been set out and are designed to allow

transfer students to complete their degrees within two years of full-time study (or 60 credits, whichever is greater). The SUNY-GER (General Education Requirement) remains as revised in 2010: at least 30 credit hours of approved courses; a minimum of 7 of the 10 approved areas; completion of two competencies (critical thinking & information management); and allowance for local and programmatic GE requirements as long as they do not exceed credit caps for programs. We continue to review our curriculum, as we always do, and if we find something inconsistent with the goals of seamless transfer, we will refer it to the Curriculum Committee for advice and recommendations, which is the appropriate venue for these issues.

Language Pact/SUNY Language Consortium

New Paltz offers 11 languages, right behind Binghamton (with 18) and Stony Brook (with 13). Furthering language education is an essential step in our effort to promote a globally aware population. As part of the "SUNY and the World" Big Idea, SUNY Global has been facilitating discussions among faculty across system campuses to find ways to collaborate in language education. The SUNY Language PACT (Pipeline-Access-Culture-Technology) initiative, begun this year, seeks to facilitate and continue that dialogue. By making the most effective use of SUNY's resources – its vast language offerings (35 languages are taught in the SUNY system), faculty expertise, and technology – we will enhance learning opportunities for students and significantly increase their access to language study. An initial workshop earlier this year, at which Mary Christiansen, Chair of Languages, Literatures & Cultures, served as a panelist, has led to further discussion about creating a SUNY-wide consortium for language education. SUNY faculty have taken the lead in examining the benefits, possibilities and potential drawbacks of such an approach, and those assessments are ongoing.

Open SUNY

Open SUNY is a system-wide effort designed to support and facilitate online learning, providing broad access to educational technologies and resources that can enhance instruction, promote student success, and support timely degree completion. Through this initiative, online courses offered at all 64 campuses in the SUNY system will be accessible via a shared and comprehensive online environment.

Open SUNY has prompted concern among faculty, some of whom fear it may result in mandated online courses or replacement of on-campus faculty with MOOC instructors from distant campuses. There is no question that rapidly changing technologies present us all with challenges, from changes in how our students communicate and learn, to increased access to low-cost knowledge, to a serious rethinking of how we measure

learning: credit hours (i.e., time sitting in a classroom) versus mastery of defined competencies acquired through a variety of educational experiences. These are realities of today's higher-education landscape, and we need to be prudent in our approach to them, investing our time and resources in efforts that are most likely to be effective. In an attempt to provide greater guidance on effectiveness and ensure a stronger faculty voice in Open SUNY, an Advisory Council for Open SUNY, chaired by former SUNY Faculty Senate Chair Ken O'Brien, will be studying ways SUNY can strengthen quality assurance and provide frameworks for multi-campus online programs, MOOCs, and prior-learning assessments, among other areas of interest.

Open SUNY is whatever we as a campus want it to be. The initiative aligns with our strategic plan; how we utilize it is completely up to us. We are currently using the Open SUNY framework for our three-week Winter Session, which this year will offer 20 intensive online courses. As you know, Winter Session primarily targets "bottleneck courses" or traditionally oversubscribed courses that have hindered students' progress toward graduation. These courses are posted on the SUNY Learning Network and are available to any student in the world. Moving forward, we will also be looking at select programs that can be delivered online, particularly professional Master's-degree programs that are in demand by student populations not currently served by on-campus programs. The School of Business, for example, is preparing to launch its online MBA that will provide an accessible, high-quality MBA for working professionals. The School is also working on a certificate in Health Management.

Harnessing "Systemness"/Shared Services

During the last two years, SUNY has been exploring ways for campuses to work collaboratively by sharing some of the services they provide in areas such as IT, purchasing, financial aid, and career development, among others. Efforts to share services have been high on the agenda of university systems around the country as well as in large schools like Yale and Harvard. It has been estimated that SUNY can save as much as $100,000,000 per year – funds that would stay on system campuses. Most of those savings would result from using the buying power of 64 campuses in purchasing equipment and supplies, sharing data centers with nearby campuses, and consolidating financial planning reporting. Arguably, these are not the axes along which SUNY campuses distinguish themselves from each other. In addition to generating significant savings, sharing services within and across SUNY has the potential to encourage campuses to learn from one another and to experiment with processes that have been successful in other locales.

Of course, achieving true shared services is not without its challenges. For example, many SUNY campuses have unique local processes for procuring or delivering services, and accommodating such "homegrown" processes can be difficult. Likewise, it can be challenging to establish the trust and positive working relationships required to permit individuals from another campus to access our servers or to consider relocating our servers to another campus. Nonetheless, it is worth exploring opportunities to share services with other SUNY campuses where such partnership can save money and maintain a high level of service.

START-UP NY

Launched here at New Paltz during the spring, START-UP NY is Governor Andrew Cuomo's initiative to attract new and expanding businesses to New York State by providing them with 100 percent exemption from property, sales and income taxes for 10 years. Although not strictly a SUNY initiative, START-UP NY relies on the intellectual capital of SUNY to power the initiative, with the colleges providing expertise and research collaborations for new businesses that locate in the tax-free zones established near designated colleges and universities. The tax-free businesses in turn provide college students and faculty with access to real-world, cutting-edge business and industry experiences that can support their educational missions.

Many states see their public colleges as potential engines of economic growth, a view that has a long tradition in American higher education, starting with the creation of land-grant colleges. As a public institution, we certainly have an obligation to serve the broad public needs of our region and state. Since the announcement of the Governor's initiative, our campus has received inquiries from several interested businesses. Though some SUNY campuses have offered space to house business start-up incubators, severe space constraints on our campus limit our ability to take this approach. However, businesses can locate nearby our campus. One area that offers promise is the 3D Printing initiative. As you are aware, this program offers a unique curriculum in Digital Design & Fabrication, aimed at advanced-level workforce development and a facility of state-of-the-art equipment available to businesses and industry. Active recruitment of 3D-printing enterprises with access to venture capital and a network of equipment and collaborative educational programming in the Hudson Valley make this an ideal match for the START-UP NY initiative.

SUNY Networks of Excellence

A relatively new initiative that is still being refined in cooperation with the Governor's Office, SUNY Networks of Excellence promise to more effectively capitalize on the

research capacity of SUNY campuses. Tim Kileen, SUNY Vice Chancellor for Research and President of the Research Foundation, spoke of SUNY Networks of Excellence as an effort to facilitate system-wide collaboration by bringing together faculty and harnessing institutional expertise to address key problems for the country and world. Each network would engage scholars from different campuses in a joint program of research on a specific topic and would incorporate experiential learning to enhance students' education. The hope is that by bringing together the different experiences and expertise across the system, SUNY can become more competitive in its grant applications, better prepare students for jobs, and raise the research profile of the system as a whole. The first Network of Excellence was unveiled by Governor Cuomo in September as the "4E Network," covering Energy, Environment, Economics and Education. Future networks will include SUNY Health Now, SUNY Brain, and SUNY Materials and Advanced Manufacturing.

SUNY Comprehensive Sector

Provosts from the 13 SUNY comprehensive colleges met as a sector to discuss issues of special interest to our campuses. The most pressing topic of discussion was the SUNY-wide mandate to raise to 3.0 the minimum GPA required for admission to teacher-education programs. Most comprehensive campuses currently require either 2.50 or, like New Paltz, 2.75. Of major concern is the impact of such an increase on enrollments, which have already been declining, especially in economically depressed areas further upstate. Vice President David Eaton and the Office of Institutional Research & Planning are examining the potential impact of this change, and we will carefully monitor its effect on both access and enrollment.

Feel free to share your thoughts with me on these or other issues.

Sincerely,

Philip Mauceri
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs