

**President's Report to Academic and Professional Faculty**  
**March 28, 2014**

Our long, cold, snowy winter has tested everyone's spirit (and stressed our utilities and snow-removal budgets!), and the recent, halting signs of spring are certainly welcome. It is difficult to comprehend that we are now well beyond the half-way mark of spring semester. The pace has been fast, and there are many important updates and news items to share with you.

**Kiplinger's Rankings.** Earlier this month, we were included in two new *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* rankings – 30 Best College Values in the Mid-Atlantic (New Paltz is one of 10 public universities in the ranking, along with 10 private universities and 10 liberal arts colleges), and 25 Best College Values under \$30,000 (#17 on this **national** listing!). New Paltz was one of four SUNY campuses included in each of these rankings, and one of only two (along with Geneseo) included in **both** rankings.

These accolades are based on factors like admissions rate, first-year retention rate, student-faculty ratio, and four-year graduation rate. Our strong showing on these important measures of institutional effectiveness reflects our continuing commitment to access, quality, affordability and success. For this we can be duly proud.

**Construction Updates.** It was exciting last week to see steel supports and beams going up on the new residence hall, even as concrete work continues to complete footings and foundations. The LeFevre residence hall renovation continues on schedule. Lefevre's new sloped steel roof and dormers will avoid the many challenges of maintaining flat roofs and will enhance its "public face" along Route 32 – we've received several positive comments from community members in the past few days about the improved appearance, even though the roof is incomplete. You likely have noticed that the construction site for the new science building is fenced off, resulting in elimination of parking in the Plattekill lots. You read earlier this week about the steps we are taking to ensure pedestrian safety while crossing South Manheim Boulevard, and we encourage extra care by both pedestrians and drivers on that route, especially during these next few weeks as people learn new patterns. We are planning a ground-breaking ceremony for the new science building this spring.

The two small, white frame houses along Mohonk Walk will be razed in the coming weeks to make way for site preparation for the science building. These buildings have a long and storied history on the campus, having served as home to various academic departments; sites of many meetings, receptions, and guest visits including for international students and visitors; presidents' residence in the mid- and late-1960's; and spillover space for departments displaced by campus emergencies. As far back as 30 years ago they were targeted by the State University Construction Fund for removal because of the cost of needed repairs and code compliance, and the high energy and other costs of maintaining such small, old buildings. Their time has passed, yet I know that many are watching the preparation for the demolition with mixed thoughts and emotions.

**Budget Update.** As the New York State Assembly and Senate finalize their separate budget proposals, I have been advocating in recent weeks for SUNY budget priorities with our area legislators and their staff, and with the staff of Assemblymember Deborah Glick and Senator Kenneth LaValle, chairs of the respective Higher Education Committees. I also had the opportunity to join other SUNY campus presidents and SUNY System leaders in a meeting with Senator LaValle to advocate for SUNY.

The priorities include:

- funding for contractual salary increases, which would allow us to invest increased tuition in initiatives that enhance student success;
- creating a “firewall” to protect SUNY campuses like New Paltz from financial liability for the bailout of LICH (Long Island Community Hospital);
- expanded capital funding for new initiatives and for critical maintenance;
- support for increasing the maximum TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) award (which would free up some of the increased tuition revenues we have been required to allocate to make up the difference between TAP awards and tuition under the rational tuition plan).

The funding picture for higher education will be somewhat clearer in the next week or so, as the Governor and the Legislature move toward agreement on the state budget. At this stage, we have little new insight into the likely outcomes of this highly fluid situation. In the meantime, as Provost Mauceri has outlined in his report, we are progressing very successfully with 34 searches for tenure-track faculty.

Vice President Halstead and I met recently with members of the Budget, Goals and Plans Committee to discuss our budget and the status of requests for new funding that we will consider fully once we know our budget situation for the coming year, and to respond to questions.

With implementation of our institutional strategic plan and alumni relations plan underway, a new Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations on board, and expanding opportunity in a major initiative (3-D), I am now moving ahead with allocating funds from a strategic initiatives budget line described in our April 2013 budget forum. I have shared before that the strategic plan and its priorities will play increasing roles in our decision making, including budget allocations – while we also attend to enrollment pressures and student support needs. These decisions reflect that context.

These allocations include the following positions:

- an elevated gifts officer position in the Development Office;
- an alumni relations officer to support our expanding alumni engagement activities (noted below);
- the top priority position in the Office of Communication and Marketing;
- two positions (one in Fine and Performing Arts, one in Science and Engineering) to sustain the momentum in the 3-D printing/Digital Design and Fabrication initiative.

The positions in development, alumni relations, and communication/marketing bear directly and immediately on our success in three initiatives of the strategic plan that carry benefit to the entire institution; requests for these positions grew out of thoughtful unit-level planning to advance the goals of the plan. The 3-D printing/Digital Design and Fabrication positions are essential to growing an effort that helps build an innovative, distinctly interdisciplinary learning environment while creating exciting avenues for engaging the region – both priorities of the strategic plan.

**Strategic Plan.** At next month's Administrative Council meeting, the Strategic Planning Council will engage members in discussion about departmental initiatives that can be adapted, directed, or expanded to support the institutional goals of the strategic plan. The purpose of this effort will be to encourage departments to use the strategic plan as a framework and guide for their unit planning and activities, and to have the plan become a greater force to spur thinking about institutional improvements during the next five years. Of course, we cannot allocate new resources or reallocate existing resources for every unit priority that supports the strategic plan. Priority will be given to initiatives that advance the entire institution or that support efforts involving multiple units.

**Development and Alumni Relations.** There is much progress to report on these two important priority areas in our strategic plan. Our year-to-date cash giving is the highest of the past four years; since December 1, nearly 100 prospective major donors in nine states have been visited individually or in small groups. We are searching for a new senior gift officer, and will soon launch searches for an annual fund coordinator and an alumni relations officer to extend our outreach to alumni nationwide. We have recruited three, and perhaps four, new members of the Foundation Board to join us in July.

Jim Langley, who Vice President Erica Marks and I met at a fund-raising institute in the fall, conducted fund-raising and alumni workshops on campus this week. Jim engaged with chairs, directors, deans, and faculty about these topics, reflecting our view that our success in these areas necessarily involves individuals in diverse positions throughout the institution. I appreciate the commitment of time, great energy, and attention by the 68 individuals who participated in the first day's session, 53 in the second. Langley also conducted an evening workshop with Foundation Directors, focused on linking institutional mission with philanthropic goals.

We have established the new SUNY New Paltz Alumni Association, and launched the inaugural Alumni Advisory Council that includes 14 alumni and two student representatives – both of these are actions growing out of the recommendations of last year's alumni relations task force. Alumni Relations is working with the Career Resource Center to increase student internships sponsored by alumni, an effort that will be highlighted in this spring's *New Paltz Magazine*, and is working with deans and others to bring more prominent alumni to campus to speak with students, engaging alumni and benefiting our students. Development and Alumni Relations staff, with tremendous collaboration from several faculty and deans, held several alumni events around the country in recent weeks. These are great opportunities to help our alumni stay apprised about "New Paltz now" and to increasingly engage in the life of the College and with our students.

**Accepted Students Days** are scheduled for March 29 and April 5. We will retain the same general format as last year, including an official welcome and more personal one-on-one interaction with faculty and staff. As always, I appreciate the work of departments and faculty and staff to ensure that accepted students and their families are welcomed to the campus and able to learn as much as they can about our programs. We receive frequent feedback about how much students and parents value these conversations with professors and staff – your work makes a real difference in recruiting bright and capable students. I thank you in advance for your contributions to Accepted Students Day programs.

As always at this time of year, we are tracking our enrollment numbers closely. We lead SUNY comprehensive colleges in the number of applications, as we have for the last 25 years, attesting to our popularity. As I have shared before, students now apply to multiple institutions, and it is the yield of matriculated students that is the more critical measure. Our numbers of paid deposits for both first-year and transfer students are on par with recent years, although we are still early in the cycle – and we are cautious about comparisons with other years because the timing of Accepted Students Day(s) has varied. The Admissions Office is implementing several new strategies to increase our yield of well-qualified students, and information will reach departments soon for your direct outreach to accepted students who have expressed interest in a particular major. I am grateful for the work of deans, chairs, faculty, and departmental staff for this critical outreach.

**Commencement.** Please mark your calendars for this year’s commencement ceremonies on Friday, May 16, 6 p.m. (graduate) and Sunday, May 18, 10 a.m. (undergraduate). Strong faculty participation reinforces for our graduates, their parents and families, and other members of the public the scope and scale of the institution that deserves their support and the critical role of faculty in the educational experience of our students. Guidance on participation by faculty and staff will be out soon.

We will take specific steps this year to sharpen the focus of our ceremony on graduates and this special day in their lives, along with shortening the ceremony script and making it more “crisp.” For example, we will depart from recent practice by not recognizing faculty and staff receiving Chancellor’s Awards; we will do so at the first faculty meeting in the fall – which we believe will also be a better venue for celebrating the achievements of these outstanding faculty and staff in the midst of their new and longtime peers. We will welcome our graduates as members of our new Alumni Association, part of our strategic plan initiative to engage alumni more effectively – and do so without lengthening the ceremony. Our commencement speakers have always been directed to be brief, and to focus their comments on the graduates. We will re-emphasize this with this year’s speakers.

**Town-Gown.** College personnel joined village, town, and community members earlier this week to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Tavern Owners Agreement, which emphasizes the necessity of being at least 21 years old to consume alcoholic beverages, and encourages establishments to avoid “drink specials” that promote high-risk drinking or sexually exploitive drink specials. Members of the New Paltz Tavern Owners Association members re-signed an updated agreement to promote responsible and lawful consumption of alcohol and appropriate civic customer behavior. In addition, we launched two new community collaborations

encouraging safe and responsible behavior by students. These efforts resulted from the work of Student Affairs professionals, including University Police Department, and community members and tavern owners committed to the safety and well-being of our students and the community. Taverns will post “Respectful Community” signs, reminding patrons to be considerate and respectful of neighbors, and “Think Before That Last Drink” posters in their establishments. These campaigns, which complement the “[Good Neighbor](#)” and “One Less” initiatives on the New Paltz campus, encourage students to make responsible and safe decisions. As a result of new practices implemented earlier this year, the College is reaching out to our students whose acts initiate behavioral or legal issues in the community, reminding them of the importance of civil behavior and of the possible consequences of repeat actions. We want the College and all of its members to be, and be seen as, positive citizens and members of the community, and these are excellent steps to support that goal.

**Wilderness Act of 1964 and Fall-Semester Educational Programming.** This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Wilderness Act, unquestionably one of the most important federal environmental policy acts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and SUNY New Paltz has been asked to join a statewide effort to commemorate this act and its legacy of land protection and conservation. Joining New Paltz will be the non-profit Adirondack Wild, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government (SUNY’s public policy research arm), and other colleges and universities with the goal of invigorating/reinvigorating conservation values and understanding of the natural world. The “forever wild” clause introduced into the New York State constitution in 1894 established the Adirondack and Catskill forest preserves. That action is regarded by many environmental historians as the most important forerunner of the federal Wilderness Act of 1964, and 20<sup>th</sup> century New Yorkers played prominent roles in conservation efforts leading up to the 1964 legislation. As a result, this effort is attracting considerable attention across New York.

The Rockefeller Institute is coordinating the involvement of other SUNY institutions and private colleges, especially in and around the Adirondacks. Our role will focus on the Catskills and the “exurban” mixed landscapes of the Hudson Valley. We will partner in this effort with the Mohonk Preserve and the Walkill Valley Land Trust, organizations with which we have strong and growing collaborations – as I wrote about last month. We likely will draw in additional partners from the region.

Our major event will be a public lecture on campus during September or October – co-sponsored with our regional partners – on a relevant topic of interest to the public, our students, and the educational mission that we share with our partner organizations. It is possible that we will integrate this event into our fall semester Distinguished Speaker Series. We are working to identify a speaker, and will announce name and topic as soon as possible.

I am sharing this information now in skeletal form so that faculty and staff might think about fall-semester educational activities that could link to this broad effort – Provost Mauceri and I envision opportunities in an array of fields spanning the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities: perhaps a multi-disciplinary panel of staff from our partner organizations and our

faculty to engage our students in this topic, during the same week as the public lecture, and fall semester course activities that will build off of the public lecture or panels.

I have asked Provost Mauceri to work with the deans to coordinate academic connections to this effort. Please reach out to your Dean or the Provost if you are interested in learning more, or in helping to organize a panel discussion for our students. The “wilderness50” initiative will be launched officially on May 7 in an event at the Rockefeller Institute.

**Start-up NY** is the “tax free” economic development program 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. Since I reported to you in January, our draft campus plan has been through several iterations of review by SUNY, the SUNY Research Foundation, and Empire State Development (ESD, New York State’s primary economic development agency), at the same time the Start-up NY program itself continues to be refined. As stipulated, our draft campus plan has been shared with municipalities, governance groups, and employee unions to solicit feedback that we may consider in revising the plan; that written feedback is due April 2. We met earlier in the month with student governance leaders to discuss Start-Up NY, and with New Paltz Village and Town leaders this week.

The College and ESD continue to receive inquiries from companies interested in partnering with us on Start-Up. Some are from companies whose focus has no real linkage to New Paltz’s academic strengths and priorities, and we are not pursuing such relationships. Others, in areas such as 3-D printing, advanced manufacturing, and digital media production, show promise. Because of our campus space shortages, virtually any such partnerships would rely on vacant commercial space away from campus – hence, the interest and involvement of surrounding municipalities. Use of such off-campus space will be negotiated between the company and the property owner; it is expected in these instances that no property would come off the property-tax rolls, but the company would benefit from other tax benefits of the program. We will share our final plan with the campus after we have integrated relevant input and our plan has been approved by SUNY and ESD.

I look forward to seeing you at the Faculty meeting on Friday, March 28, where I will be available to respond to questions or comments you may have about this report.

Sincerely,

Donald P. Christian  
President