**University Faculty Senate**: **183rd Plenary Session – Fall 2019**

**SUNY System Administration**

**Albany, NY**

**CONGRATULATIONS!** Distinguished Professor M. Stanley Whittingham was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry (along with two other colleagues).

**Comprehensive Colleges Sector Issues and Concerns**

* **Presidential Searches:** This was a really big issue, both at our sector meeting and at the plenary session in general. (*See below*)
* **SUNY Online Initiative:** This was probably the biggest issue overall, with many of the same issues/questions expressed during the Comprehensive Colleges sector meeting and the Plenary session (including Provost’s Report); Concerns expressed during our sector meeting include:
  + Lack of academic strategic plan;
  + Unclear process for selection and implementation of programs; Current pilot programs are already-existing online degree programs, at campuses with IT capability (which will need to improve overall!)
  + Lack of assessment plan;
  + Potential impact on Open Educational Resources (OER).
  + Additional commentary:
    - Our bottom line: What is the unmet need of NY State residents (see SUNY Mission);
    - SUNY Bottom line: Increase revenue via new students (online only), within NY state and beyond;
    - If SUNY online costs to students are less than those of other online programs (such as U of Phoenix; Southern New Hampshire, etc.), that would be meeting a social justice need.
* **Initiative Fatigue** 
  + SUNY Online Initiative is “sucking all of the air” out of the room, which is full of initiatives.
  + The need for data to help determine which initiatives are working, and how newer initiatives will improve our functioning was expressed.
* **Budget Requests, Need for Funds** 
  + SUNY campuses are operating at less than 2009 funding levels (President Kay). All campuses are dealing with this, although University Centers are growing & getting more of the money.
  + Decreasing PIF (formerly, performance improvement funds; now, Provost investment funds) , and lack of post-PIF funding was another concern expressed. While it was acknowledged that PIFs are essentially startup funds, the problem is that campuses don’t have the funds to continue with programs, *etc.* started (or scaled up) with PIF.
* **Lower Enrollments:** While this is still more problematic upstate (*e.g.* Fredonia reported lowest enrollment since 1990s), the anticipated decrease in enrollments due to smaller cohorts of traditional college age is of concern state-wide.
* **Consensual Relationship Policy:** This was not brought up during the sector meeting, suggesting it was not of concern. My informal discussions with other Senators revealed no major issue with the policy, although some stated their campuses had stricter policies. The general consensus was to accept the union’s negotiations.
* **Major Concerns re: Students:**  The following concerns were expressed at our sector meeting:
  + Mental health concerns (many campuses; #1 problem at Brockport);
  + Increased marijuana use (many campuses); increased guns/robberies (just one Senator reported this, and implied a connection to the increased marijuana on that campus);
  + Sexual assaults (#2 problem at SUNY Brockport)
  + Racial incidents: hate speech/social media postings (several campuses; #3 problem at SUNY Brockport);
* ***Active Shooter Emergency Response Plan?*** 
  + *Hint: No campus had one (beyond the “Run, Hide, Fight” mandate.)*
  + *to be continued…*

**Major Topics the Plenary Session**

**Reports from:** UFS President Gwen Kay; SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson; SUNY Provost Tod Laursen; Student Assembly (SA) President Austin Ostro; Faculty Council of Community Colleges (FCCC) President Christine Fogal; CUNY UFS President Martin Burke.

**Special Guest:** Merryl Tisch, Chair, Board of Trustees (BoT)

**Budget:** The “**BIG money”** is in the Governor’s budget, which is still being determined and negotiated; We (the faculty) are strongly encouraged to advocate for funding for SUNY, our SUNY campus, and any programs or initiatives we believe are vital to both helping SUNY continue to be a topnotch public higher education system and facilitating student success, via reaching out to our representatives in Albany, as well as the Governor.

**Presidential Searches –** There are currently **20** searches across SUNY and CUNY.

* **SUNY Campuses:** College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), Fredonia, SUNY Old Westbury, SUNY Plattsburgh, Purchase College, SUNY Polytechnic Institute, Stony Brook University, Fulton-Montgomery Community College, Niagara County Community College, and Suffolk County Community College; (a fourth CC will soon also need a new president).
* Many vacancies (“turnover”) are due to “natural retirements”, esp. after a decade or more of service; others have stepped down because of specific circumstances, including one arrest and conviction.
* **Public vs. Representational Search vs. Confidential Search**
  + **Public (open) Search:**  As many members of the campus and surrounding communities may be allowed to attend and participate when presidential candidates visit the campus. This was discussed as the traditional type of search.
  + **Representational Search:** The search committee (which has representational membership) and invited guests know of and meet with presidential candidates;
  + **Confidential (closed) Search:**  At the SUNY Chancellor/BoT’s discretion, the search will be confidential, where not even the search committee becomes aware of the candidates’ names until just prior to the actual campus visit. Nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) are typically signed. One reason a search may be confidential is when candidates do not want current employers to know of alternative job seeking. In this context, a public search is presumed to result in a smaller pool of worth candidates.
  + Representational search ( or “hybrid” model) appears to be the more contemporary mode of searches.
  + Preference for public searches was expressed by SUNY UFS membership, FCCC President Fogal, and CUNY UFS President Burke.
* **Re: SUNY Old Westbury:** Given the recent death of our College Council President, who would have normally been the chair of the Presidential Search Committee, the College Council may designate a new chair of our search committee from its membership.

**SUNY Online Initiative – Update and Issues to be Addressed**

* 234 “unique” students enrolled in Fall 2019, the pilot rollout, across seven campuses, in nine, already-established fully-online programs (including three Masters’ programs);
* There are numerous remaining questions/issues to be addressed, including:
  + The financial model is still unclear; Where will the revenue generated from the online initiative go? Currently, all the money from the pilot programs is going back to the offering campuses. Will this hold in the future? If some percentage of the revenue is kept, explanations as to why that percentage is not returned to the offering campuses, as well as were it will go, must be provided.
  + Impact on other initiatives (e.g. OER) is not known;
  + The challenge of determining which of three paths, SUNY online initiative, OPEN SUNY, or programs on individual campuses may be better for each student remains;
  + Little governance has been involved;
  + Uncertainty exists re: whether students will be placed into SUNY Online Degree courses;
  + Uncertainty exists re: whether some (traditional) courses will be outsourced to SUNY Online initiative;
  + Questions related to faculty workload, the roles of adjunct faculty and graduate TAs, *etc*. need to be addressed
  + Concerns were expressed re: use of online grading systems [*e.g.* PACBAC (sp?) is being piloted at Binghamton];
  + Concerns were expressed re: competition (and possible cannibalization) among SUNY campuses over online programs in the same areas;
  + Following students/evaluating student success in this arena remains a challenge;
  + Reducing response time to students’ inquiries, and marketing, in general, both need more work; AND,
  + Last, but not least, the (annoying) bandwidth problem must be dealt with.
* **SUNY Admin needs our help!! Our input, feedback, ideas, suggests, *etc*. are requested.**

**General Education – Update**

* Assessment of Gen Ed continues; a Gen Ed task force is currently being appointed to address issues during this AY year, including:
  + Middle States concerns/aligning SUNY Gen Ed with Middle States;
  + Other concerns raised, such as allowing for flexibility in Gen Ed offerings across campuses;
* As of now, no committee is in place, and there is no specific charge or target date for the results of the task force’s findings, leading to new Gen Ed standards;
* UFS President Kay thinks it will be another 20-24 months before we get a new Gen Ed policy;
* **Our continued feedback is requested!**

**Seamless Transfer – Update**

* Now have some pre- and post- data from campuses, and can begin assessing what has been effective;
* Early findings include:
  + The percentage of two-year and four-year transfers is increasing;
  + More students are earning Associates’ degrees along the way;
  + Time to completion is trending downward, including for URM students;
  + Number of “extra credits” (that don’t apply to degrees earned) is also trending downwards;
  + Also identified: top 10 disciplines where seamless transfer “is not working”, or worst case scenarios; (Sorry, folks, but the slides at the plenary were pretty much impossible to read, and the Provost’s Report had not been posted on the UFS website as of the writing of this report. My brain did recognize the blurry template for “psychology”, which was ranked #9.]
* Additional evaluations to be done with these initial data include:
  + examination of the paths of 13 “high priority” academic disciplines, to identify relevant issues per path;
  + examination of data on “repeats” (courses that have to be taken again at a new school because the original credits were not accepted).

**Elsevier Contract Negotiations**

* SUNY’s contract with Elsevier (and subscription to Elsevier’s Science Direct) ends December 31, 2019, and negotiations between SUNY and Elsevier over the past year or so have not resulted in what may be considered a fair and equitable contract.
* Our contract with Elsevier (Science Direct) has allowed the SUNY community to have access to a considerable amount of published materials necessary for research, as well as teaching and learning purposes. SUNY has paid close to $45 million over the life of the contract, including $9 million last year for access to Science Direct. Elsevier gets 25% of SUNY’s overall expenditures on journals/journal access. If negotiations are not successfully resolved by the end of this year, our contract will lapse, which may impact our accessibility, or students’ accessibility, to published materials. (For example, students, and/or others who are not authors may have to wait longer, or worse, pay for articles needed.)
* Other school systems, such as the University of California (UC) system and international university systems in Germany, Switzerland and Norway have cancelled their subscriptions with Elsevier after failed negotiations. Germany has negotiated an agreement with Springer, where all faculty scholarship is published in Springer journals and then made available on Open Access. UC system is negotiating for a similar arrangement with Wiley, and the Big 10 schools are now also considering alternative arrangements.
* While there is some concern about faculty backlash, as such relationships with publishers such as Elsevier are vital to their professional activities, SUNY is seeking support from the faculty/UFS body through this negotiation process, and a resolution addressing this issue was passed at the plenary. (SEE attached Resolutions).
* Additional discussion at individual campuses is also essential, with any and all feedback, ideas, or recommendations that may address this matter (at both the campus- and SUNY-wide level) are welcome.

**Student Issues and Concerns**

* Considerable attention is now being given to mental health problems among students; Of note, while depression and suicide remain high priorities to be addressed, anxiety and anxiety management (stress management) is becoming a dominant concern as well.
* Some PIF funding being held for reallocation to support student Health and Wellness programs that are working or warrant scaling up (Provost Laursen);
* Health and Wellness Initiatives at System include:
  + Re: Food Insecurity: Food pantry access is now available on all 64 campuses.
  + Re: Mental Health: SUNY has been given a five-year award ($225,000) aimed at fostering suicide prevention via training faculty, staff and students to better recognize and learn how to talk with distressed students. This award is expected to train thousands, in eight-hour training sessions.
  + A state-wide crisis text line will be made available to students (for free), who may have concerns or be feeling distressed, but not necessarily to level of an emergency. In addition to providing another avenue for students to communicate their concerns, it will allow for identifying reasons students are texting, i.e. help identify specific student concerns.
* SUNY’s Mental Health Task Force, which is to make recommendations to the Chancellor, could use more faculty representation (UFS President Kay).
* **NOTE:** SUNY must address mental health concerns of community college students, as they typically do not have mental health services available to students on their campuses;
* **NOTE:** How to provide mental health services to exclusively online students also needs to be addressed.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Morris

University Faculty Senator