Greetings to all of you. My first few months as UFS President have been busy, what with familiarizing myself with some of the layers of System Administration with which I was unfamiliar, as well as staying abreast of all the rapidly evolving SUNY initiatives. There’s a lot on which to update you.

1. Open SUNY. Several pieces of the broad Open SUNY initiative will roll out in January. In order for the Senate to be nimble and responsive, I asked the Executive Committee to support the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on Open SUNY. You’ll find a copy of the committee charge in your packet. This group will report to the Senate on emerging issues related to Open SUNY, and thus will complement the Provost’s Advisory Committee on Open SUNY. We felt that the significance of the Open SUNY initiative, its potential for both good and bad outcomes, and the aggressive timetable all converged to demand a separate UFS committee.

You may be aware that SUNY signed a contract with Coursera over the summer to use their platform for MOOCs, should campuses and faculty wish, and this has given Stony Brook the opportunity to offer a MOOC this fall, with credit restricted to (as I understand it) matriculated SB students. SUNY has yet to work out a mechanism for approval, oversight, credit, transfer, use of other institutions’ MOOC offerings, campus versus System control, etc. But MOOCs are only one part of the initiative. Prior Learning Assessment, expansion of online courses and online degrees, cross-registration of courses to allow students from one campus to seamlessly take an online course from another—these are just a few of the other elements. You’ll hear more about the initiative from Carey Hatch and Ken O’Brien during the Plenary.

2. START-UP NY. Again, a rapidly moving topic. The legislation was passed by the Legislature in June with only a few days’ advanced notice. Campus Presidents have been told to deliver some “wins” for the Governor by January, and several are prepared to do so. I urged the Presidents at their September to take seriously the fact that the legislation emphasizes that projects need to be consistent with the “academic mission” of the campus and that the Presidents need to consult with faculty governance. I have sent talking points to the CGLs to help them take a pro-active position on this; this document is also in your packet.

3. LICH and SUNY Downstate. It would take another dozen pages to explain everything that’s been happening over the last few months. Here’s the CliffsNotes version.

Litigation has kept SUNY from closing the Long Island College Hospital. Two Brooklyn judges have weighed in, and Bill de Blasio rode the issue to the Democratic nomination for mayor of New York. LICH had shut down its emergency room and most other parts of the hospital by July, but had to reopen the emergency room and some other services in September. And LICH will have lost an estimated $89 million for the year by the end of October. Meanwhile, SUNY has undertaken significant steps to guarantee the longevity of University Hospital in Brooklyn (Downstate Medical University’s main teaching hospital). It remains unclear how all of this will end, how/if SUNY will be able to close the hospital, and what will be the financial impact on the rest of the campuses.
4. CNSE-UAlbany separation. The Board of Trustees passed a resolution at a special July meeting to separate the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering from the University at Albany. The wording is significant: “the Board of Trustees fully endorses the Chancellor taking immediate steps to implement the separation of CNSE and UAlbany, and to identify and assist in the implementation of the actions required to establish a new degree-granting structure that shall include CNSE...” Exactly what form this will take is uncertain, although it was covered in the media as setting up the 65th SUNY campus. The Chancellor has set up a number of administrative workgroups to sort out various issues in the separation. These groups lack faculty membership, and I have met with the CGL at UAlbany and the equivalent faculty member at CNSE to ensure that they are aware of the process and can be certain to provide appropriate input.

5. Budget for 2014-15. We’ll be moving into the 4th year of “rational tuition” and “maintenance of effort”. But the latter isn’t exactly what’s been happening; instead, what we’ve seen is no cut to SUNY’s State allocation, but also no maintenance of the budget in real terms (for example, I understand that the UUP contract is going to cost $47 million next year). So SUNY is trying to figure out how to frame a request for additional funding. The Chancellor has floated “performance-based funding”, which has met with both support and opposition. But SUNY is looking to try to convince the Governor that he should invest more in SUNY, given that SUNY has (in essence) done his bidding on START-UP and other initiatives. As this unfolds, we’ll use the Operations Committee to keep us all up to speed.

6. Shared Services. The shared services initiative moves forward rapidly this year with focus on six “back-room” areas designed to save money across the system (including purchasing, IT, others). This initiative likely will continue to produce some tensions between campus autonomy and “systemness”, although the emphasis has shifted to sharing of items for which savings can be made at scale.

7. Educator preparation. The Board of Trustees passed a resolution aligning SUNY policies in our schools of education with recommendations as yet unfinalized from the Governor’s New NY Education Reform Commission. This includes a minimum 3.0 or top 30% of high school class entrance requirement; use of GRE and SAT scores required for admission; comparative report card of student results; and 35% of professional course credits in clinical practice. Deans of Education schools were given a few days notice to provide feedback, but no such opportunity was presented to the UFS or the Faculty Council of Community Colleges. We pushed the Board of Trustees to delay implementation until 2015-16 and to require that SUNY work to identify adequate placement opportunities, but that was as far as we could move the resolution. You have received two resolutions that address both the process and the substance of this Board resolution.

8. Student mobility initiative. The development of the initiative was essentially completed by the formal delivery of the Memorandum to Presidents early in the summer. This year, campuses are expected to review their programs (majors, transfer information) to align with the seamless transfer requirements, with preliminary reports due by the end of January. This clearly should involve
considerable faculty input, all the way down to the department level. Yet there remain differences in interpretation, with the Interim Provost insisting that areas in the MTP that say campuses “should” adjust programs to include Transfer Path courses really means a requirement; that’s not how I read the wording of the MTP.

9. SUNY Voices. After some delay in funding decisions by SUNY System Administration, we are set to move forward with the first SUNY Voices Shared Governance meeting in April as well as a second annual workshop on shared governance for CGLs. More on this later in the year.

10. Presidential Initiatives. I’m particularly excited about two initiatives this year. The Research Foundation has established a working group, including faculty from the various sectors, to develop a funding model to support undergraduate research (initially in the STEM fields) at (large) scale across SUNY. I am optimistic that this will lead to major grant proposals later this year. A second initiative is one that has been hanging around for a couple of years: sustainability education. I’m looking forward to a workshop for May 2014 to bring together teachers of sustainability from across the System to consider best practices and possible strategies for improving and integrating principles of sustainability into the curriculum.

So there’s a lot going on, and much to discuss. I look forward to hearing your input, questions, comments, concerns, and advice.