22 April 2014

As we move into the closing stages of the 2013-14 year, I hope that all of you have had a successful academic year. I will update you in this message on System Administration initiatives, some aspects of the final State budget (you’ll hear more at the Plenary meeting), some Senate initiatives and activities, and summarize my own activities since we last met.

**SUNY Initiatives and Issues**

1. **Seamless Transfer Initiative.** Thanks to our efforts in the fall, and endorsed by the Senate at our Winter Plenary, Interim Provost Bringsjord moved forward with a re-visit of the Transfer Paths to clarify which courses faculty from across the system agree need to be included for a student to achieve true junior standing in a major. More than 800 faculty participated in the review and evaluation of more than 30 transfer paths. Chief Academic Officers and additional faculty were given the opportunity to comment on the proposed revised paths earlier this month. Now they’re being finalized, although a few have enough remaining issues that they may need to be deferred for further discussion.

   This was a remarkable process, affording an opportunity for faculty in a discipline representing all of the community colleges and state-operated colleges that have a relevant program to discuss (in a virtual community) what constitutes the common basis of our majors. While unanimity wasn’t reached in all cases, the doors have been opened to allow faculty to consider the essence of curriculum across the System rather than just in their own department. My hope is that faculty will continue to communicate about these issues, and that this process will lead to further cross-campus collaborations.

2. **Open SUNY.** The call for proposals for the second “wave” of Open SUNY online degree programs and courses was sent to the campuses on April 11. This time SUNY is seeking both existing degree programs in high-needs areas and courses that can shared across/between campuses to satisfy or complete offerings to meet the goals of the revised Transfer Paths (i.e. to help fill gaps in curriculum). The Provost’s Open SUNY advisory committee will make recommendations to the Interim Provost later this spring, with “winners” to be announced early in the fall semester. SUNY System Administration continues to explore how best to offer support services to students and faculty at a scale that can meet the Chancellor’s ambitious goal of adding 100,000 new students to the SUNY family.

3. **START UP NY.** Many campus plans (i.e. identification of possible locations) have been approved, and some campuses are in an advanced stage of discussion with potential companies. I am encouraged by what I have heard about the involvement of faculty governance in the process; administrators are engaging faculty governance in the decision-making, focused on the academic relevance of proposals. I look forward to hearing from campus representatives on the degree to which this is true.

4. **Teacher Education.** As I write this, I have not been informed of any progress by Interim Provost Bringsjord in the establishment of an advisory committee on teacher education. In the meanwhile, I have been working with our colleagues at UUP regarding the edTPA initiative of the State Education
Department. By the time we meet, the requirement that edTPA be passed by a student in order to achieve initial teacher certification either will have been delayed by the Legislature, or it will be in force beginning May 1. The Executive Committee passed a resolution earlier this month that calls for a removal of the edTPA as a requirement for initial certification; we will ask the Senate to endorse the resolution. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Council of Community passed a resolution endorsing ours, and the Student Assembly of SUNY passed a similar resolution. Meanwhile, I have sent our resolution to legislative leaders, the Commissioner of the State Education Department, and the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the State Board of Regents. An Assembly committee hearing is scheduled for April 30. I am cautiously optimistic that the legislative process will place a hold on implementation, providing time at least for our student teacher candidates to be more prepared.

5. **LICH and SUNY Downstate.** Many changes since January. SUNY agreed to conduct a new call for proposals to purchase the LICH properties, leading to a settlement of all litigation over the closing of the hospital and layoffs. SUNY is currently attempting to negotiate a contract with the top-ranked proposer; there has been considerable media attention. With luck, this will succeed by May 4; otherwise, SUNY moves on to the next highest-ranked proposer. The bottom line: SUNY is allowed to exit LICH operations after May 22. We probably won’t know more by the time of the Plenary, though I will update you as the process moves forward. However, we still don’t know what the ultimate financial liability will be for the SUNY System as a whole. There remains the potential that SUNY will be on the hook for at least $300 million. Some of this could “go away”, but some percentage of it will have to be covered somehow.

6. **SUNY Budget.** The 2014-15 budget for SUNY doesn’t provide everything we need to cover mandated costs, including negotiated salary increases and inflationary costs. However, at least SUNY ended up with a better financial situation than the last couple of years—a small increase in State operating aid, an increase in EOP funding, an increase in the maximum TAP award (which could be beneficial to SUNY), and a substantial increase in capital funds. You’ll hear much more about this at the Plenary meeting.

**Additional Activities.**

I have nearly completed my visits to all of your campuses. It has been a pleasure to meet with you, whether in your Executive Committee (or its equivalent) or your campus senate (or whatever you call it on your campus). I’ve learned a lot—about what’s working and what’s not, about what issues we share across the campuses, and about issues that are of paramount importance on your campus. Shared governance is alive and well on most of our campuses; the challenge is to find ways to improve on those campuses where one or more senior administrators is less open to sharing governance.

I know that a number of you were able to join us at the first SUNY Voices Conference on Shared Governance. Although I’m writing this before the conference is held, I’m sure from reviewing the proposals and working with Tina Good and other members of the steering committee to develop the program that it will be both a stimulating and enlightening meeting, perhaps with controversial positions expressed at times, but with some great insights into successes of shared governance in SUNY and beyond. And we’ll follow this with our second campus governance leaders orientation, this time for both faculty and students, in early June; my especial thanks to Rochelle Mozlin and Sharon Cramer for their integral work in organizing this event.
Perhaps one of the most important things we have done this year is to engage more closely with our colleagues (and ourselves) at UUP. While we were unable to avoid a scheduling conflict with our two meetings this spring, we have nonetheless been able to work closely together this year. I had the pleasure of being the evening speaker at the winter UUP DA (though I had to make my remarks brief to avoid conflict with the Super Bowl—finishing in time that dinner was served before SUNY Potsdam alumna Renee Fleming sang the national anthem). But the highlight of our work this year was the first-ever joint meeting of campus governance leaders with UUP chapter presidents, facilitated by UUP President Fred Kowal at UUP’s spring leadership conference in Cooperstown. I think it’s fair to say that all of the participants appreciated the opportunity to share concerns, to learn more about each other’s approaches to issues of common interest, and in some cases to make connections on their own campus that they hadn’t made before.

One of the advantages of being UFS president is the opportunity to pursue one’s own initiatives. It is a continuing delight to be able to see outstanding student artwork in the System Administration building every time I walk to my office; the legacy and tireless effort of past president Joe Hildreth lives on at SUNY System Administration, at the SUNY Global building in New York City, at the State Museum in the summer, and from time to time at the governor’s Washington D.C. office. I’m very pleased that we’ve been able to move forward this year on two initiatives that are very important to me. The Research Foundation has led an effort to increase funding for undergraduate research opportunities across SUNY, and members of our Undergraduate Committee have contributed significantly to this ongoing effort. And we are going to sponsor a workshop in early June on sustainability across the curriculum, an effort organized by Deborah Howard and Taya Owens from System Administration along with Shishir Singh from our Graduate and Research Committee.

Carol Donato helps so much to make all of this happen. She cannot be thanked enough for her dedication and excellence, as all of you know.

Finally, my thanks to all of you for your support during this very busy year. I reiterate how important it has been to me to visit all of the State-operated campuses and get to know all of you on your “home turf”. We’ve got a great System of public hirer education, and you and your colleagues make it happen. Let us together continue to support our students, researchers, and colleagues in their quest for success.