

UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS



TESTIMONY

Testimony on:

**New York's Public University Systems' Use of State Aid and Revenue
Generated by Tuition Increases**

Presented to:

Assembly Committee on Higher Education
Chair: Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick

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President

December 12, 2013

Chairperson Glick, members of the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the tuition increases and their impact on New York State's public higher education system.

I am Fred Kowal, President of the United University Professions (UUP). UUP is the largest higher education union in the nation. We represent more than 35,000 academic and professional faculty and staff on 29 State University of New York (SUNY) campuses, plus System Administration and Empire State College. Our members serve hundreds of thousands of students and patients at academic institutions, health science centers and public teaching hospitals administered by SUNY.

Between the 2008-09 and 2012-13 academic years, state support for SUNY's State-Operated campuses has decreased by \$685 million. During this time, undergraduate tuition at SUNY's state-operated campuses increased by \$1,200 or 22 percent. Additionally, campus-retained revenue (tuition and other non-state support) has skyrocketed from \$918 million to over \$1.4 billion and is now 67 percent of SUNY's total revenue. It is clear that student's tuition dollars are being used to partially offset the gap in state-support. While we do not have detailed information on the exact use of the funding, we have sincere concerns about the use of student tuition dollars for economic development, and new initiatives that may have a negative impact on quality public higher education.

These initiatives appear to be moving forward, but we have received very little information on how they will be funded or implemented. SUNY's plans are being heavily marketed, but critical details have not been spelled out. Open SUNY, as presented by the Chancellor, is a multifaceted initiative that goes beyond the expansion of on-line education.

The following Open SUNY goals may compromise academic standards; limit access for high needs students and students who remain disconnected from high-speed technology services, and reduce diversity in SUNY programs. Open SUNY proposes to do the following:

- Rapidly expand online courses, possibly in areas that are not well suited to online delivery;
- Increase standardization of course content in order to facilitate interchangeable courses and registration of students across campuses;
- Deliver courses and services through private, profit-seeking corporations such as Coursera and McKinsey Consulting; and
- Graduate 25% of SUNY students in three years by 2015, which will speed up degree completion to an extent that may compromise student success and educational quality.

In addition, through its Seamless Transfer initiative, SUNY has imposed credit limits on associate and bachelor's degrees and increasingly standardized General Education curricula across all institutions. This component of Open SUNY may facilitate the expansion of large online courses for freshmen and sophomores who are ill-prepared for success in remote online courses.

We strongly support educationally sound expansion of online courses and efforts to facilitate transferability of courses across SUNY institutions. In fact, many SUNY professors are already providing quality online education to their students, developing each course with the best teaching and learning practices in mind. Online learning has been a part of SUNY since the launch of the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) in 1994, which now offers thousands of online courses along with more than 80 online degree programs. For example, Empire State College's Center for Distance Learning offers more than 500 online courses and includes support for students to work with faculty mentors, along with one-on-one communication with faculty and course instructors.

Unlike online course initiatives that have developed through faculty innovation rooted in an understanding of the conditions that allow for high quality online education and student success, Open SUNY is an administrative initiative. It has been rolled out with limited input from the SUNY academics and professionals who have teaching and service delivery experience.

Current Open SUNY plans may encourage the development of interchangeable courses and shift the control and responsibility from the campuses to for-profit consultants. We are concerned that a primary goal is to expand large, standardized online courses. This will diminish the diversity of SUNY campuses and programs, restrict student exposure to faculty and professional mentors with varying knowledge and perspectives, and reduce personal support services that are critical for many of our students. For example, SUNY's plan to rely on electronic advisement through creation of a digital concierge to assist in providing advisement services such as planning, navigating and completing course and degree selection will limit the face-to-face advisement and mentoring that many students need in order to successfully complete college-level work.

SUNY's focus on rapid degree completion underlies much of the Open SUNY/Seamless Transfer initiative as currently constructed. The broader agenda is to streamline, increasingly privatize, and drain substantive content from public higher education programs. SUNY's top down administrative process has robbed these initiatives of the assistance that students, academic and professional faculty, and other stakeholders could bring to a collaborative process aimed at advancing innovation and service delivery in public higher education in keeping with its public mission.

In a similar vein, the State Education Department's top-down imposition of new requirements in college teacher preparation programs has drowned out the voices of students, educators, and parents. The result is a chaotic and educationally unsound transition that threatens to unreasonably deny the current cohort of students their teaching certification, despite their successful program completion at our institutions. This new imposition will be a new assessment on graduating senior education majors in Spring 2014. The assessment – edTPA - is disconnected from the curriculum, training and education in which the students have been immersed over their last three to four years in college. And the students cannot be certified to teach in New York State without passing the assessment.

To clarify, the students have not been taught the materials on which they will be assessed. Why? Because the criteria for assessment were neither completely clarified nor made available to the Teacher Education programs in which the students have been enrolled in a timely fashion. Despite these factors, State Ed is implementing the edTPA with an acknowledged failure rate that could be as high as 50%.

Thus, SUNY students who have invested in their college education, who have worked hard, who have completed the teacher preparation program requirements successfully and who have been assessed by experienced educators to be prepared to enter the teaching profession may be denied teaching certification at unacceptable rates.

Instead, the competence and preparation of our students will be judged by employees of a private corporation who develop and score the edTPA. The students will have to pay \$300 for the edTPA – and if they fail, will have to wait an undefined period of time to retake the edTPA. We might add that this private corporation may actually stand to gain by student failures.

Other problems with edTPA revolve around the student teaching assessment. Student teachers will be assessed after only two to three weeks of their classroom placement – not enough time to learn, let alone demonstrate mastery. And the assessment will include videotaping classroom students, which may be a privacy issue for some schools and parents. We do not know if district or parental refusal to allow taping will mean the student will fail.

Teacher Preparation Program faculty were not given the materials needed to adjust curriculum in time to meet the requirements of edTPA by Spring 2014. Some programs are experiencing difficulty with student teaching placements because of the videotaping requirement. Our requests to delay implementation were denied.

While these initiatives are all likely to have a long-term impact on New York State's public higher education system, the SUNY Downstate "Sustainability Plan" is an initiative that is having an immediate impact. This is a plan that has caused hundreds of layoffs at Downstate, and threatens the public mission of SUNY's hospitals and the important "safety-net" services such as SUNY Downstate's outpatient dialysis, asthma and kidney transplant centers. This downsizing plan is moving forward as New York State continues to invest hundreds of millions of state dollars to support projects that would encourage private industries to do business in New York State.

This plan is not just a threat to Downstate – it affects health care and medical education throughout the SUNY system and New York State communities. SUNY's plan will force SUNY Health Science Centers to shrink the size of their facilities, cut educational programs, and reduce the number of new students—many of whom are drawn by the schools' affordable tuition and high-quality teaching hospitals.

SUNY's Downstate "Sustainability Plan" does not provide a long-term solution to the current healthcare crisis in Brooklyn. The answer to the Brooklyn's health care problem isn't to reduce hospital beds and close hospitals. The answer is found in our widely supported, proactive hospital rescue plan. We believe this proposal is the answer to Brooklyn's health care situation.

It guarantees safety-net services for millions of Brooklynites, and provides vital health care for many with little or no insurance and no other means to pay. It also preserves thousands of jobs in Brooklyn and will provide a needed boost to the borough's weak economy.

One of the common themes across all of these initiatives is the lack of communication and sharing of information. START-UP NY (SUNY Tax-free Areas to Revitalize and Transform Upstate NY) is no different. This initiative promises to promote entrepreneurialism and job creation center around SUNY campuses and other campus communities. The law states that the businesses must be aligned with or further the academic mission of the campus. Beyond that declaration we have not heard any details on oversight or implementation. We have heard that projects are being planned under START-UP NY, but we have not received notification or a copy of such plans as required under the law.

Individually any one of the initiatives that SUNY is currently forcing on the system would have the potential of changing the direction and momentum of the SUNY colleges. However, when initiatives, such as Open SUNY, seamless transfer, the SUNY Downstate sustainability plan, reforming SUNY's Teacher Education programs, and START-UP NY, are implemented all at the same time – the end result, if not done carefully, may be a radical repurposing of the core mission of the campuses.

These initiatives have been put forth without a clear plan that identifies the resources such as full-time teaching faculty and professional support personnel to accomplish SUNY's massive and ambitious plans. As currently staffed, SUNY's teaching and professional faculty cannot support the proposed increase in students and the need for advisement and other support services. Declining state support has not kept up with the enrollment growth. As a result, SUNY students have encountered increased class sizes and reduced access to student services. UUP fully supports a statewide endowment that would rebuild SUNY academic departments and provide adequate instructional resources for New York's students. We recognize the positive impact that low faculty/student ratios can have on a quality public higher education and the current need for more full-time faculty, professional, and supporting staff. In addition, we recognize that adjunct faculty play an important role and are valued members of the university – but they are grossly underpaid and exploited. This endowment also provides a mechanism to ensure continued support for our valuable part-time, contingent, and adjunct faculty.

I wanted to bring your attention to all of these initiatives because these are some of the issues that will have a long-lasting impact on New York State's public higher education system, but the details are not readily available. Given recent events, the lack of transparency and accountability within SUNY should be of concern to everyone.

UUP has tried to obtain information such as copies of the contracts that have been entered into under these plans, details regarding the budgets of campus foundations, and more. We have faced the obstacles of trying to obtain information from organizations that receive and spend millions of public dollars each year to advance the purposes and objectives of the agencies they serve. Organizations, such as the Research Foundation and campus foundations, are helping to carry out the public missions of state agencies, but under current law they are not subject to

the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). This remains true in the face of a situation where decisions were made by SUNY Downstate using its campus foundation to help purchase and run a SUNY hospital – and the result of that decision now threatens 8,100 jobs. The campus foundation information should be just as public as the SUNY hospital. We have asked for information, we have FOILED for it, we have been denied, and we have appealed. We are forced to appeal FOILs and wait for responses, in spite of the fact that an Albany County court case on the issue was resolved voluntarily by SUNY stating that the Research Foundation is fully subject to and compliant with FOIL. We are asking for better communication – it is a public institution – it is information that should be accessible by everyone.

I just want to thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and to also express our appreciation for the continued support from the Legislature on SUNY Downstate. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns.