

UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS



TESTIMONY

**Testimony
on the Issues Affecting
the State University of New York**

Presented to

The State University of New York Board of Trustees

By

**Frederick E. Kowal, Ph.D.
President**

March 19, 2014

Chairman McCall and distinguished members of the SUNY Board of Trustees, thank you for providing United University Professions (UUP) with the opportunity to speak about the issues affecting the State University of New York.

I am UUP President Frederick E. Kowal. UUP is the nation's largest higher education union, representing more than 35,000 academic and professional faculty and staff at 29 New York state-operated campuses, including SUNY's public teaching hospitals and the health sciences centers in Brooklyn, Long Island, Buffalo and Syracuse. Our members serve hundreds of thousands of students and patients at SUNY academic institutions, health sciences centers, and public teaching hospitals administered directly by SUNY.

Potential Merger of the SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome and the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering

I would like to begin by focusing on the potential merger of the SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome (SUNYIT) and the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering (CNSE). I am here today to urge the Board of Trustees to proceed with caution regarding the merger of SUNYIT and the CNSE. As this merger will impact the faculty and students attending these institutions, UUP should be a key stakeholder consulted and involved in the decision-making process as progress toward this merger is made. We appreciate that CNSE has met with us on several occasions to discuss some of our concerns. However, we received a copy of the SUNY Board of Trustees resolution to transfer the CNSE to SUNYIT yesterday, the same day as it was being considered by the Academic Affairs Committee. This is a complex issue that UUP and its faculty should have had a chance to provide input on before SUNY moved a resolution forward to merge these two institutions.

While some may be focused on the role that these institutions play as economic engines – I am more concerned about making sure that these institutions do not lose their academic focus or individualized academic missions. It is clear to me that for this merger to work, several things are necessary: SUNYIT must continue as a degree-bearing entity that provides a comprehensive range of high-quality undergraduate and graduate programs, as stated in the college's Mission Statement. It is necessary to preserve the academic mission of SUNYIT. Further, the college must be allowed to continue creating quality, accessible, affordable educational opportunities for students in the region and across the state.

It is imperative that SUNYIT continue as the degree-granting institution, working as a partner in any formal relationship with the CNSE. Under no circumstances should SUNYIT be absorbed by the CNSE, and subsequently cease to exist; that is something UUP will not stand for.

Any movement toward a merger must be made willingly by both entities, and done in an open forum with all parties represented. We do not want to see the Board of Trustees make the missteps that led to its 2011 decision to acquire the Long Island College Hospital (LICH), and the subsequent move to make the near-bankrupt hospital part of the SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

The acquisition of LICH is a prime reason for the Brooklyn hospital's dire financial situation, according to a January 2013 audit of SUNY Downstate by the state Comptroller's Office. Hundreds of jobs have been cut and a number of important health care services at Downstate have been downsized or dropped since SUNY Downstate began subsidizing LICH in 2011.

We are hopeful that SUNY will have a detailed plan and take a more deliberate path as it moves forward with discussions that might lead to the merger of the CNSE and SUNYIT. As this happens, UUP must have a seat at the table, which has not been the case in a number of recent SUNY-supported initiatives, all of which will have a direct impact on our members.

Implementation of START-UP NY

One example of an initiative that is moving forward and will clearly have an impact on faculty and students is the START-UP NY initiative. The state has opened our campuses up for business – they will serve as hosts for businesses – including private, for-profit entities – with no guarantees that these relationships will improve or benefit campuses in the long run. Further, it is uncertain whether the businesses will stay or abandon campuses and communities once the initiative’s tax-free incentive ends. Instead, START-UP NY may rob valuable space and resources from future academic needs, at a time when support for SUNY’s state-operated campuses continues to decline and enrollments increase. UUP is concerned about the apparent lack of compliance with the notification requirement that is provided for under the START-UP NY law. We have heard that there are a number of plans have been submitted, but we have received very few copies of such plans. I am asking that SUNY include UUP in the process to help ensure that the selected businesses correspond with the academic mission of the campuses.

Consultation is Key

The potential merger of CNSE and SUNYIT, START-UP NY, Open SUNY, and the new edTPA high-stakes teacher certification requirement – are all issues that I believe require UUP consultation. Our input on these issues will provide a necessary voice for our members throughout the SUNY system, while also providing expertise to ensure that these and similar efforts do not fail.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide UUP’s perspective regarding some of the issues and concerns facing the State University of New York.