



UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

# 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

UUP is entering year three of our NY HEALS agenda. Over the past two years, we've achieved tremendous success advocating for necessary federal and state resources to carry our campuses and institutions through the worst of the coronavirus pandemic. Now, we must refocus our efforts. This year, UUP will continue to pursue policy solutions for our workplace and communities in Healthcare, Education, Accessibility, Leadership, and Sustainability.

## COMPREHENSIVE COLLEGES



## HEALTH SCIENCE & ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTERS



## TECHNICAL CAMPUSES



## UNIVERSITY CENTERS



# Health care

## Make SUNY Hospital Debt Service Permanent

The state's 2022-23 budget included debt service relief for SUNY's three public teaching hospitals, finally providing parity as they are now being treated like every other state agency. Other state agencies annually receive debt service relief from the state for their capital projects in the state budget.

For years, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, Stony Brook University Hospital and Upstate Medical University were forced to bear these costs without state support. This forced the hospitals to divert resources that would have been invested in patient services, medical professionals and staff, and physical improvements.

The SUNY public teaching hospitals are a crucial piece of the state's public healthcare system, and it is necessary to continue to support them so they can carry out their mission to provide care to New Yorkers across our state. With the debt service relief from last year, our public teaching hospitals were able to reinvest nearly \$70 million back into their operations and improve our public health care system.

UUP urges that the state make debt service permanent for SUNY's hospitals in the state's capital budget plan.

## Restore Critical Mission Funding to the SUNY Teaching Hospitals

The state chipped away at funding for SUNY's hospitals from 2008 to 2018, when the state subsidy was completely cut from the budget. This decade-long depletion has resulted in a loss of over \$1 billion in state support for the hospitals. SUNY hospitals are safety net hospitals that care for the most vulnerable members of our community, regardless of the patient's ability to pay for care. Throughout the pandemic, the SUNY hospitals played a vital role in treating COVID patients and vaccinating New Yorkers. These hospitals stepped up for New York in a time of need and now they need New York to do the same.

Mission funding for SUNY hospitals is necessary for the continued success of these life-saving institutions, which provide medical services to more than 1.3 million people each year—including cutting-edge and specialized care that private hospitals can't or won't provide. Yet, SUNY hospitals remain as the only state agencies/institutions required to pay salaries, fringe benefits and debt service for hospital maintenance and operations. Mission funding was allocated in 2001 to help offset this burden, and the state needs to reinstitute it now so that SUNY hospitals can continue to provide quality health care for all New Yorkers.

UUP urges the state to restore essential mission funding and allocate \$175 million to support the SUNY hospitals.

## Create a Center of Maternal and Child Services at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

SUNY Downstate is at the epicenter of a critical maternal morbidity crisis. As a safety net hospital, Downstate's mission is to serve the Central Brooklyn community, regardless of a patient's ability to pay for care.

As an academic medical center, Downstate can play an integral role in researching and addressing maternal morbidity and children's health care issues. With proper state support, SUNY Downstate could provide social workers for postpartum and labor and delivery units; prenatal clinic medical assistants; nutritionists; additional nursing staff for labor and delivery and postpartum units; increased data collection and review; quality improve-



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ment efforts; and a nurse educator on labor and delivery and postpartum units to allow for continuous nursing education.

UUP applauded the 2022-2023 budget inclusion that directed the state Department of Health to study the need for a women's and children's hospital in Kings County at SUNY Downstate. The state must provide the support Downstate needs to expand its mission and services to become the premier center of maternal and child services in Brooklyn. Additionally, we support the passage of the Chisholm Chance Plan (S.322/A.7454 of 2021-22) introduced by Sen. Myrie and Assemblymember Jackson.

UUP urges the state to commit the resources to make Downstate Health Sciences University the center of maternal and child care in Brooklyn.

## Continue to Expand the Medical Educational Opportunity Program (MEOP)

The pandemic has further stressed New York's already overburdened health care system. Through MEOP, SUNY has a unique opportunity to support the health

care industry which has struggled with staffing shortages even before the pandemic.

The MEOP, a proposal from UUP, was launched in summer 2021. The 2022-23 budget included \$1 million to continue the program. New York needs to support and nurture the next generation of health care professionals, and ensure that programs are in place to serve the diverse population of this state. The pandemic has highlighted a great need for health care professionals in several areas, not just doctors and nurses. We are seeing shortages of speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, physician assistants, advanced practical registered nurses, and nurse anesthetists. All these positions require advanced degrees.

SUNY must expand MEOP, which would provide life-changing opportunities for students who are seeking to pursue careers in these important medical fields. With increased state support of \$5 million, we can increase access to more students, who will become our state's future doctors and health care professionals. This funding will also help improve our overburdened health care system.

UUP requests \$5 million to expand the Medical Education Opportunity Program.



## Mental Health

SUNY employees have worked nonstop to reach every student in need of help. But at SUNY and campuses across the country, college students are facing a mental health crisis. Anxiety and depression rates have nearly doubled over the last decade. The pandemic has only exacerbated this crisis. It is clear that we must act now to save our students—as well as aid the faculty and staff who assist them.

Starting college can be a difficult transition for students, especially since many live away from home, removed from their social support networks. Many students experience their first struggles with mental health while at college. More than half of students with mental health issues end up dropping out of college.

SUNY must advance a comprehensive approach to mental health, ensuring that our students have access to the care they desperately need. SUNY staff, many of whom are UUP members, have sacrificed their own mental health, suffering burnout and working long hours to help students achieve academic success. It is time we provided the resources needed to care for the well-being of staff and students.

## Hire 50 Additional Mental Health Counselors Across SUNY

SUNY counseling centers are severely understaffed and underfunded. Student demand for services far exceeds the resources that campuses can provide. Too many students must go weeks or months waiting for an ap-

pointment, while others are referred to private providers, placing a financial burden on students to cover the cost for care. We cannot allow this to happen to students who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.

The International Accreditation of Counseling Services recommends a ratio of one psychologist for every 1,000 students. SUNY falls drastically below this standard. UUP requests \$7 million to hire 55 additional mental health counselors, which would bring every campus up to the recommended ratio.

This would benefit students by increasing provider options, reducing wait times, and allowing for more frequent appointments. Hiring more counselors across the fields of licensed social workers, licensed mental health counselors and psychologists is essential to mitigate excessive workload and burnout among our current counselors, who work hard each day to support our students.

UUP requests \$7 million to hire 50 additional mental health counselors.

## Create a Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP)

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has been a widely successful SUNY program for decades, and the recently implemented Pre-Med EOP (MEOP) has also proven successful.

UUP advocates for the creation of a Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP) to expand the mental health workforce and the diversity of mental health professionals. There is a huge disparity between the demographic make-up of behavioral health professionals and the general population. The state must do more to recruit mental health providers from diverse backgrounds. This is especially crucial as many individuals' mental health struggles stem from trauma related to racism and economic distress. We need counselors that reflect the student body and understand students' experiences—especially on our diverse SUNY campuses.

UUP requests \$4 million to support students pursuing degrees that will lead to careers in mental health, including psychology, sociology, social work, mental health counseling, and addictions counseling.

UUP requests \$4 million to create a Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP).



## Continue Gov. Hochul’s Investment in Hiring New, Full-Time Faculty

Last year, Gov. Kathy Hochul acknowledged the need for more full-time faculty and diversity within SUNY’s faculty. The enacted 2022-2023 budget included her proposal for \$53 million to support hiring across SUNY. Unfortunately, this funding was directed most heavily at SUNY’s university centers which received \$35.7 million. Only \$12.7 million was directed at the remaining 25 state-operated SUNY campuses.

For our entire system to transition to more full-time faculty and stop the overreliance on part-time and adjunct instruction, we must continue this program this year and into the future. With another round of funding, campuses can also move existing part-time faculty and staff into full-time positions.

UUP requests \$55 million for hiring new, full-time faculty with an emphasis on underrepresented communities of color.

## Expand TAP to Cover Student Fees and Books

In 2021, the state budget included language to freeze tuition at SUNY for three years. Even though tuition costs did not increase, mandatory student fees have. The range of student fees for state-operated campuses is between \$1,260 and \$3,440. On top of mandatory fees, students still need to pay for supplies and books which can cost over \$1,000 per year.

Expanding the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to allow awards to cover fees and books would be a lifeline for many students struggling to pay for school. Many SUNY students are graduating with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, exacerbating the student debt crisis in this country.

Expanding TAP to cover fees and books will also help address the racial wealth gap in our state and nation. While Black/African Americans make up about 10% of SUNY’s total enrollment, 52% of Black students are Pell



Grant recipients and 32% are eligible for TAP. In contrast, only 25% of white students are Pell recipients, and 19% qualify for TAP.

SUNY is a public good and can, with proper funding, create a more equitable and just New York. Expanding TAP to help cover the ever-increasing costs of student fees and books is just one common sense step we can take to alleviate some of the financial burden on our students.

UUP urges the state to expand TAP to allow awards to cover mandatory fees and books.

## Reform and Expand the Excelsior Scholarship

Created in 2017, the Excelsior Scholarship has been touted as a free tuition program for middle class New Yorkers. However, the program has been underutilized, as there are many obstacles to the program that make it difficult for students to access the scholarship.

More than \$400 million previously allocated to the program has gone unspent. Utilized properly, the Excelsior Scholarship can increase access and affordability to more New Yorkers. UUP is calling on the state to:

- Increase the family income threshold to \$180,000 annually to help more people qualify for the program.
- Adjust the credit hour requirement and reduce the requirement from 30 credit hours per academic year to 12 credit hours per semester. This would bring the Excelsior Scholarship in line with the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP).
- Expand Excelsior to cover student fees and books.
- Remove the three-year financial look-back.

Students should be able to focus on their education and not have to worry about paying back insurmountable amounts of student debt upon graduation. The state has been allocating hundreds of millions of dollars to this program. Now the state needs to remove barriers and make it easier for New Yorkers to access these funds to help offset the costs of college.

UUP urges the state to increase the income cap for and reform the Excelsior Scholarship Program.

## Enhancing Support and Services for Students with Disabilities

There are multiple points of intersection between disability services on campus and the mental health of students. Academic stress is one of the leading causes of mental health crises on campuses. One of the most requested services is the accommodation for extra time taking tests—yet many campus student accessibility service centers lack the space and infrastructure to meet the needs of students. Across the SUNY system, there are thousands of students who require this simple accommodation, yet our centers can only provide a handful of desks for all these students. This is just one of the many examples of how we are leaving our students with disabilities behind. We must invest in our student accessibility services to ensure equitable access to higher education.

UUP urges the state to invest \$10 million to support Services for Students Disabilities.

## Increase Educational Opportunity Program funding

SUNY's Education Opportunity Program (EOP) has been remarkably successful, empowering more than 78,000 students to earn a college degree, and consequently promoting upward social mobility and financial prosperity. Nearly three-quarters of EOP students complete their bachelor's degree within 6 years and EOP students have an 82% retention rate. More than two-thirds of EOP graduates live and work in New York after earning a degree. With such high success rates, we must continue to invest in EOP to help alleviate the economic hardships of attending college, expand current programs and support new programs, and intensify EOP recruitment efforts.

UUP urges the state to allocate an additional \$4.5 million to EOP.



# Leadership

## Stabilize Financially Distressed Campuses

After more than a decade of austerity budgeting, SUNY's campuses have done more with less for so long that they have reached a breaking point. Combine this with the end of federal pandemic funding, and our campuses are on a fiscal cliff. All but 6 of the state-operated campuses have structural or projected deficits. In total, 19 campuses across SUNY are facing an estimated deficit of \$160 million. Without adequate state funding to fill these gaps, campuses will have no choice but to cut programs, staff, and the essential services our students need to achieve success.

UUP requests \$160 million to address funding shortages and provide for faculty retention and student support at 19 state-operated campuses.

## Invest in Campus Operations, Stop Tuition Hikes and Crippling Student Fees

As a public university, SUNY has limited ways of funding operations, two of which are student tuition and state operating support. Tragically, the funding of our public institutions has fallen increasingly on the backs of students and their families. Direct state support to SUNY campuses has remained flat despite rising operational costs and increased operational needs.

The costs for these increased needs have been met with increased tuition and fees and offloading services onto auxiliary enterprises, which charge our students and their families even more. Faculty, staff, and visitors to campuses are also forced to absorb that financial hit. As a result, students are putting in \$2 for every \$1 of direct state operating support. This is an untenable situation that has gone on for far too long. It is time for the state to fund SUNY fully and fairly.

UUP calls on the state to provide \$110 million direct state support to SUNY campuses in operating aid to expand academic programs.

## Fund the New York State Higher Education Endowment (Section 92-ee of State Finance Law)

In 2007, the state enacted this endowment in the custody of the comptroller to supplement appropriations from the state in support of New York's public higher education systems. Amounts deposited in the endowment shall be used to provide funding for full-time faculty, student financial aid, grants for research and development, and for other authorized purposes. To date, this endowment has never been funded.

UUP calls on the state to provide startup funding in this year's state budget.



# Sustainability

## A Greener SUNY for a Greener NY

The effects of climate change are already being felt across the state. SUNY has a vital role to play in combatting climate change in New York and across the country. UUP represents employees at the 29 state-operated campuses located throughout the state, and SUNY campuses make up about 40% of the state's total property. To meet the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), SUNY needs to step up and be a part of the solution.

## Create the Office of Environmental Sustainability at SUNY

Sen. Robert Jackson and Assemblymember Monica Wallace have proposed legislation to create the Office of Environmental Sustainability at SUNY. This office and its director would be responsible for coordinating, planning, and implementing policies and programs to fulfill the system's sustainability goals and targets. In 2019, a similar position was posted but never filled.

SUNY and the state have set several ambitious climate action goals, but campuses are mostly left to figure out how to meet them. Campuses need coordination and leadership from SUNY System Administration so that

they can stay on track with meeting these targets. If SUNY and the state are serious about reaching these climate goals, we need leadership that will provide a consistent voice, a clear set of standards, technical assistance, and oversight to our SUNY campuses.

UUP urges that the state provide annual funding to create and staff an Office of Environmental Sustainability at SUNY.

## Hire Sustainability Professionals at State-Operated SUNY Campuses

Legislation proposed by Sen. John Liu and Assemblymember Anna Kelles would require SUNY to hire a proportionate number of sustainability professionals in waste management, energy management, and education and outreach. It is vital that SUNY campuses have sustainability professionals to help facilitate necessary changes to meet the goals of the CLCPA and ensure that SUNY is leading the way in combatting climate change.

UUP urges that the state include \$15 million annually to hire and maintain sustainability professionals at state-operated SUNY campuses.



# Non-Budgetary Priorities

## UUP Environmental Legislative Package

In Spring 2022, UUP announced a package of legislation aimed at combating climate change and increasing sustainability on SUNY campuses. Since then, Gov. Hochul instituted an Executive Order with sustainability metrics that all state agencies must meet. Our proposed legislation will help SUNY meet the governor's goals and goals set by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

### We support:

**A SUNY Zero Waste Action Plan.** Legislation introduced by Sen. Brad Hoylman would require the SUNY Board of Trustees to develop a system-wide zero waste action plan and that every campus create a zero-waste action plan to achieve zero waste by 2030. (S.9040 of 2022)

**Amend the State Surplus Property Program.** The state's surplus property program is antiquated and leads to a lot of waste. Many items that are still usable, yet good items end up in landfills because other state agencies did not have a need for them and the state was unable to sell them at auction. We recommend that the state allow these unwanted and unsold items to be offered to a pre-approved list of nonprofit organizations. This will allow for these items to be recycled instead of adding more waste to our landfills. Such a program would save the state money as there is a financial cost for the storage and disposal of these items.



## UUP also supports:

The New York Health Act, which would provide comprehensive, universal health coverage for every New York resident and worker.

Mandating that SUNY undertake a review and accounting of all capital project debt by all auxiliary corporations, foundations and public-private partnerships at each campus.

The Build Public Renewables Act, which would allow the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to own, build and maintain renewable energy generation projects and provide renewable energy to customers. It will also require NYPA to provide renewable energy to all state owned and municipal properties by 2035.





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