



The State University  
of New York

## **Senate Higher Education Hearing Testimony**

**“The Cost of Public Higher Education”**

**October 28, 2019**

Hello. I am Tod Laursen, Provost with the State University of New York.

On behalf of Chancellor Kristina M. Johnson, I would like to thank Chairperson Stavisky, members of the Senate, and legislative staff for allowing me this opportunity to discuss a matter important to all of us: ensuring an affordable and high quality education for all New Yorkers.

And I would also like to acknowledge and thank Chairman Merryl Tisch, our entire SUNY Board of Trustees for their leadership and support, and the great work of our executive leadership team and presidents across all 64 of SUNY's colleges and campuses.

SUNY is in the process of finalizing our SFY 2020-2021 budgetary proposal, which you will hear more about from Chancellor Kristina Johnson at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing in January or February. However, I appreciate the opportunity to share the most recent data we have on New York's transformative approach to an affordable and quality public higher education.

I know that you are aware that SUNY is the largest comprehensive system of postsecondary education in the nation. We serve more than 400,000 full-time students every year, and with credit bearing courses, continuing education, and community outreach programs, that total increases to nearly 1.4 million annually. We are a unique system and therefore have unique challenges: in addition to our community colleges, four-year colleges, and graduate and doctoral research centers, we operate medical schools, hospitals, a law school, and a national lab.

With the support of Governor Cuomo and state legislators, despite the challenges of a vast system with diverse needs, we have grown our commitment to being accessible and affordable, while continuing to excel on the quality of the education that we provide every student entering through our doors. In fact, I am very pleased to share that professor M. Stanley Whittingham of Binghamton University was just awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for one of the most profound inventions of our day, the lithium-ion battery. Every time you charge your smartphone, you can thank Dr. Whittingham for his work while at SUNY.

By the way, he is our 16<sup>th</sup> Nobel Laureate.

This story of affordability and quality extends to all of our campuses. U.S. News and World Report released its rankings last month of the nation's best colleges and 21 of ours were listed on the National and Northeastern lists, including Stony Brook University, University at Albany, University at Buffalo, SUNY Oswego, FIT and many more. Further, Forbes recently released its list of the 2019 Best Value Colleges, and 10 different SUNY schools topped the list, including Farmingdale State College, SUNY New Paltz, SUNY Maritime and others.

23 of SUNY's 30 four-year colleges were also featured in CNN/MONEY's 2019 list of Best Colleges for Your Money, including Buffalo State College, SUNY Purchase, SUNY Old Westbury, SUNY Delhi and more, while Kiplinger's ranked Binghamton University as the top public school for value in the country; 14 other SUNY schools made that select list.

Your ongoing support for our infrastructure and academic facilities that help to attract the best teachers and which deliver groundbreaking research, will help to further build on these achievements.

Because of the support Governor Cuomo and legislators have delivered on affordability, and because of the innovation of programs like the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Excelsior Scholarship, New York is truly set apart from many other states. You have prioritized affordable and quality education, and its showing in one of the most important metrics available: social mobility and the enormous impact SUNY and our students and alumni have on local economies in every region and corner of this state.

Because of this, one-third of the State's college-educated workforce have a degree from the State University of New York, with 55 percent of resident undergraduate students attending SUNY and CUNY tuition free.

How does that break down?

#### **Pell, TAP and Excelsior**

In 2017/18, 90,656 students at all SUNY campuses were offered a Pell grant; 51,004 (or 56.3% of Pell recipients) were offered the maximum Pell award allowable (\$5,920). Alongside Governor Cuomo and his team, we are working with New York's congressional delegation to see additional resources and better eligibility requirements for Pell – and Federal Work Study – in the reauthorization of the federal Higher Education Act (HEA).

New York's TAP program has been a life-changing experience for hundreds of thousands of students. Across all campuses last academic year, 108,095 students were offered a TAP grant; 63,319 (or 62.3% of TAP recipients) were offered the maximum TAP award.

And the Excelsior Scholarship program has opened the door to 24,000 SUNY and CUNY students in just its 2<sup>nd</sup> year of enrollment. This has been a particularly powerful resource for students at our Community Colleges where, because of the support from Governor Cuomo and legislators, students are able to focus on learning: Excelsior students at community colleges have a graduation rate of 30% compared, nearly 3 times higher than their peers. We have also seen an increase in the metrics for on-time graduation at 4-year colleges, with full-time Excelsior Scholarship freshman taking 15 or more credits their first semester increasing by 7.5%.

#### **EOP**

Since its inception more than 50 years ago, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has graduated more than 75,000 people who otherwise may not have gone to college, or have the supports needed to succeed while with us. Today, we have 11,284 EOP students enrolled at 48 campuses. These students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, with a family income of less than \$46,435 per year for a family of 4. They are academically underprepared when they start their time with SUNY, averaging 6-11 points lower than general admits on their high school averages, and approximately 250 points lower on their combined SAT scores. But because of the supports and services we are able to provide, EOP students have a first-time, full-time retention rate of 82.2% at our 4-year campuses, and a higher overall graduation rate than their non-EOP peers. Chancellor Johnson recently held the very first program honoring EOP students for their academic excellence, campus leadership, and perseverance at the 1<sup>st</sup> Norman R. McConney, Jr. Awards for EOP Student Excellence – named for the man who helped Assemblyman Arthur Eve shepherd this program into the success that it is today.

### **Re-enroll to Complete**

This past summer, we announced the first results of our unique and innovative program to re-enroll students who left a SUNY campus prior to completing their degree. So far, we have engaged students at 52 campuses in the months before their first student loan payment comes due, and I am proud to share that so far, 6,013 have come back to SUNY. More than half have returned as full-time students. In the process of re-enrolling these students, Re-Enroll to Complete has recovered over \$12 million in tuition revenue for SUNY campuses. In addition to recovered tuition, the project is expected to increase retention/completion rates and reduce the number of students who fall into student loan delinquency or default.

I want to highlight that this effort was the direct result of PIF funding – another initiative supported by the Governor and legislators. Thank you for that.

### **Community College Funding**

In the last state budget, Governor Cuomo and legislators delivered much-needed support for our community colleges with increased funding. These campuses are the lifeblood of the communities they serve, providing workforce training skills and economic security. In a good economy, when fewer people are looking for work, community colleges generally suffer enrollment declines. Because of the support you provided, they are better able to plan for future growth and local training needs.

It has been a privilege to come before you on behalf of The State University of New York, and I look forward to working with all of you during the upcoming legislative session.

I would be happy to take any questions.

**New York State Senate – Standing Committee on Higher Education**

**The Cost of Public Higher Education**

**Testimony from SUNY New Paltz President Donald P. Christian**

**Monday, October 28, 2019, at SUNY New Paltz**

Good afternoon and welcome to SUNY New Paltz.

Chairwoman Stavisky and Senator Metzger, thank you for holding this important public hearing at the College. As the mid-Hudson Valley's four-year public university, we are pleased to convene special forums like this where participants and attendees can learn from each other in meaningful ways. Senator Metzger, as our new Senator, we appreciate that you visited campus shortly after entering office and quickly expressed support for public higher education, and for our campus community and its needs.

Senator Jackson, you are a distinguished alumnus, having served on the New York City Council prior to your service as a State Senator. We have appreciated your engagement and support over the years.

Assemblymember Epstein, I know you serve with our Assemblymember Kevin Cahill, a New Paltz alumnus, on the Assembly's Standing Committee on Higher Education, and we thank you for your participation here today as well.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about the cost of public higher education and the financial realities and challenges that SUNY New Paltz and our students face, as we continue to deliver a high-quality, public higher education to New Yorkers, with a large proportion from the New York City boroughs, Long Island, and of course the Hudson Valley.

We are encouraged by your focus on state investment in SUNY and how to support campuses and students. Virtually all objective measures indicate that higher education has been worth the investment made by Governor Cuomo and the Legislature – both for the state and our students. SUNY New Paltz has been widely recognized for providing students a high return on investment and opportunity to enhance their

lives and livelihoods. New Paltz ranks in the top five percent in a nationwide Social Mobility Index, a measure of a college's effectiveness helping students climb the socioeconomic ladder. As we make the tough decisions about managing our costs and economy, our decisions are based first and foremost on what's best for our students.

SUNY New Paltz is an economic engine in our region. We contribute about \$359 million annually to the Hudson Valley economy, a phenomenal return on state investment in the College. We are the largest employer in Ulster County and one of the largest in a several-county area. That's also the case for many other SUNY campuses.

Governor Cuomo and the Legislature are essential partners in our ability to make public higher education accessible and affordable to students and help us serve the public good. Our campus's viability and success rely, in part, on the considerable support that you continue to provide. We see this in state tuition assistance programs, our Educational Opportunity Program, capital support, and employee fringe benefits.

The Governor and Legislature's indirect investments in SUNY New Paltz include supporting fringe benefits for nearly all employees and the debt service on bonds for non-residential buildings. In our campus budget forums and other conversations, we make certain that the broader campus community understands this support. Thank you for your continued partnership here.

Our campus Core Operating Budget consists of two revenue sources – direct state taxpayer support and tuition. These sources represent our spending authority. SUNY New Paltz has unique challenges within our system, as almost every campus does. Geography, for instance, plays out in different ways on our local economies. For example, New Paltz is

located closer to prospective students from population centers on Long Island and New York City than for campuses that are further upstate. On the other hand, the cost of living in New Paltz is more than other regions upstate.

Other cost factors we manage on a continual basis include heightened compliance and mandates, like cybersecurity, research compliance, changes in procurement requirements, sustainability, emergency planning, ever-increasing costs for technology and modernized data and systems investments.

Our financial situation would be far more precarious than it is today were it not for the 2011-2015 rational tuition policy.

Thanks to you, we have been able to invest in personnel and programming to support our increased attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion, clear priorities of our State leaders and of SUNY. Above all, we've been able to invest in the quality of every students' education.

The demographic shifts we're seeing in broader society are happening at SUNY New Paltz right now. This fall, we welcomed a first-year class with 48% of its members – almost half – from historically underrepresented groups. Our campus includes more black and brown students than ever, including more first-year black students than any year since 2000.

Like many other campuses in SUNY and across the nation, we have seen substantial growth in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics – or STEM – majors as demand for graduates in these areas has grown. I have strongly supported that growth and the unique experience we offer those students whose STEM majors are also rooted



in the liberal arts, even though educating a mechanical engineering major is more costly than educating an English or Sociology major.

How have those increasing costs been funded? Support from state leaders and tuition increases. Our tuition revenue is a function of both tuition rate and enrollment level. Because 95% of New Paltz students are New York residents only a small percentage of our tuition revenue comes from the higher non-resident rate, which is a very different dynamic than exists at the university centers which attract significant non-resident students. For that, we are thankful that the state has not cut direct state taxpayer support to New Paltz in nearly a decade, but I want to stress again: our challenges are unique.

We have gotten creative about revenue. For the past few years, we've been reducing expenditures and working hard to grow revenue by increasing enrollment, including through online and graduate program growth.

The Excelsior Scholarship Program has been another meaningful way to help our students. This year, nearly 900 New Paltz students received about \$4.1 million through this program. Were it not for Excelsior, the financial picture for 900 students on our campus would be far more dire.

I will speak now about our Educational Opportunity Program, or EOP, and financial aid programs. For 50 years, the program has fulfilled a critical mission in public higher education – providing promising students from challenging economic and academic backgrounds with access to a high-quality education and a robust, rewarding, residential college experience. We very much appreciate your recognition of this mission and continued effort to restore program funding in recent years.

Our nearly 600 EOP students are succeeding at rates that rival and sometimes exceed the success of their peers outside of the program, but struggle to cover the costs associated with attaining a four-year degree. SUNY has recognized our program's success. Provost Laursen spoke earlier about continuing performance improvement funding (a program created by Governor Cuomo and legislators) and how SUNY has seized that opportunity across the system. New Paltz was one of the first campuses to earn this funding for its program successes, receiving nearly \$300,000 to expand EOP by 100 students over a four-year period.

New Paltz's graduation rates are well above state and national averages. Nationally, there are significant achievement gaps in average graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students. At New Paltz, that gap is small – for Black, Latinx, low-income, first-generation and EOP students. Sustaining such student success is key to our mission as a public university.

In my nearly 10 years as SUNY New Paltz president, the campus's capital landscape has transformed in ways not seen since the Nelson Rockefeller era. Just last month, we celebrated the opening of a new Engineering Innovation Hub that supports New Paltz's rapidly growing engineering programs, fosters collaboration between the College and local industry, and creates opportunities for students and faculty. The facility was funded largely by a \$10 million award from the Governor's NYSUNY2020 grant program that was supported by the Legislature.

That project was part of a broader effort that has added a new science building and helped address deferred maintenance and renovate and modernize facilities to support our evolving programs. Despite that investment, our current non-residential space deficit is about 600,000 gross square feet. Capital remains an important need for us.

We ask that you continue the five-year capital plan as it allows us to address critical maintenance needs, and ask that you add opportunity for new construction projects.

I hope my testimony has provided you with a useful lens into current state funding and future potential funding opportunities, and the efforts we take to support our students and their success. The support we have received from Governor Cuomo and yourselves has been important and I hope that as the formal budget process begins in the new year, that we can continue this dialogue and be helpful.

Again, thank you for your interest and work on this subject and for inviting me to be here today.



**Senate Higher Education Hearing Testimony**

**“The Cost of Public Higher Education”**

**Dr. Alan P. Roberts**  
**SUNY Ulster**  
**October 28, 2019**

Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Alan P. Roberts. I have the honor and privilege of serving as the sixth President of SUNY Ulster, a two-year public community college that is part of the State University of New York, located around the corner in Stone Ridge, NY.

On behalf of the SUNY Ulster Board of Trustees, students, faculty, and staff, I am appreciative of the opportunity to address you, Chairwoman Stavisky, Senator Metzger, members of the Senate and Assembly, and legislative staff on this important topic.

SUNY Ulster transforms lives by fostering intellectual growth, cultural enrichment, and economic prosperity.

We are able to make a difference by providing affordable access to higher education while changing lives. Community Colleges help local economies grow, providing frontline workforce training and a quality education to the students we serve. This is done through state support, the funding of Pell, TAP, Excelsior, and scholarships through the Ulster Community College Foundation, Inc. Each of these programs plays an important role and is why New York State has been such a leader in affordable public higher education.

Because of your support, SUNY Ulster has been named as one of the top 100 public two-year colleges in the United States with the lowest net price after grant aid and scholarships every year since 2015.

Most of our students leave with little debt, and we are proud to see them *Start Here* and *Go Far*, often entering the workforce or continuing on their academic pathways at a 4-year institution.

The financial aid and support programs that Governor Cuomo and legislators deliver in the state's enacted budget each year are life-changing. For instance, one of our EOP students, Lena, recently had the opportunity to attend the Norman R. McConney Jr. Awards for EOP Student Excellence in New York City with SUNY Chancellor Dr. Kristina Johnson. This award celebrates EOP students who have overcome significant obstacles in life to achieve their educational and personal goals. Lena was so appreciative of the opportunity to attend and be recognized. She referred to it as "inspiring and humbling." I know that Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, Speaker Carl Heastie, Senator Robert Jackson and others were there for that meaningful night.

This past academic year, SUNY Ulster kicked off the New Start for Women program through the generosity of the NoVo Foundation and the vision and commitment from donor and foundation board member, Darlene L. Pfeiffer. This innovative program assists women in Ulster County who are living in poverty by helping them obtain an education, skills, and the professional network needed for gainful employment. Women interested in the New Start program will enroll in one of three SUNY Ulster certificate programs that have positive Department of Labor job projections for Ulster County: General Management, Administrative Office Skills, or Entrepreneurship. In addition to providing tuition and fees, the program will provide academic and personal support, career support and mentorship, and community-building to help students achieve their goals.

The barriers to completing a degree students often face aren't tuition related obstacles instead, it is the cost of textbooks, food insecurity, childcare expenses, transportation, and access to technology/laptops.

Thank you, Chairwoman Stavisky and Senator Metzger for all you have accomplished and done, to help our students and ensure their success. We look forward to your continued support of funding for community colleges and our future collaborations.

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Together we are all working day in and day out to serve our students and communities and to make higher education affordable, accessible and a reality for all. Thank you.

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The State University of New York  
Student Assembly

## **NYS Higher Education Committee**

### **Testimony of Trustee and President Austin Ostro**

#### **State University of New York Student Assembly (SUNY SA)**

**October 22, 2019**

NYS Higher Education Committee  
Testimony of Trustee and President Austin Ostro  
State University of New York Student Assembly (SUNY SA)

October 22, 2019

On behalf of the SUNY Student Assembly, and the 1.4 Million students of our great University system, I very much appreciate the tireless efforts of Senator and Committee Chair Stavisky for hosting a series of hearings across the State of New York to address the cost of public higher education, financial aid programs, and other challenges to the student with respect to affordability and accessibility.

The Student Assembly is the recognized system-wide student government supporting the students of SUNY. We are comprised of Student Leaders from across the state and represent the students of the many University centers, colleges, technology colleges, and community colleges. In addition, we are also involved in advocacy on the local, state, and federal level. The President of the Student Assembly serves as the head of the organized student government for all 64 campuses in the system and holds the position as the only student member of the SUNY board of trustees. Twice annually the Student Assembly brings together hundreds of student leaders from across the state and beyond to participate in student leadership conferences, where the organization's advocacy priorities are finalized, and members are offered the opportunity to network and learn leadership skills from students, campus and system administration, and world class faculty through various workshops and lectures.

Additionally, Student Assembly representatives meet on a monthly basis to coordinate advocacy efforts and further refine strategies towards the advancement of quality and affordability in public higher education. We operate a variety of committees focused on promoting academic excellence throughout the system and highlight areas of campus safety, disability services, gender equity, and sustainability.

The Student Assembly urges the state to recognize and act upon the magnitude in which under funding public higher education has on the delivery of services and the quality of education across the system. The Committee clearly identifies the benefit to the state as an accessible State University due to the return on investment made by students pursuing higher education in New York. <sup>1</sup>Graduates of SUNY are more likely to work and live in New York and continue to stimulate local and state economies through employment and taxes; currently SUNY campuses contribute \$28.6 billion annually to New York's economy. Adequately funding higher education holds the potential to yield a greater return on investment for the state as students, faculty, and staff from across the SUNY system continue to enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Schultz, Laura. "The Economic Impact of the State University of New York." *www.rockinst.org*, Nov. 2018, Pg3, [rockinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/11-1-18-BTN-SUNY-Drives-NYS-Economic-Engine.pdf](http://rockinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/11-1-18-BTN-SUNY-Drives-NYS-Economic-Engine.pdf).

State and federal financial aid programs continue to greatly benefit the students of SUNY. Above all, the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), New York's largest grant program, administered by the Higher Education Services Corporation aids eligible students in attending in-state postsecondary institutions.<sup>2</sup> TAP Grants are based upon New York State family taxable income at the maximum level of \$80,000. For qualifying students, Tap provides grant funds up to \$5,165 to cover the costs of tuition. As the panel can imagine this is enormously helpful in covering the cost of tuition for middle and low income students. The Number of SUNY students at state-operated campuses and community colleges have risen to represent 40 percent of the total number of TAP recipients across the state.<sup>3</sup> This participation rise represents both a silver-lining in covering the cost of education, but a bleak future for campus operating budgets.

There continues to be a consistent gap in the funding mechanism which penalizes campuses for accepting and matriculating students who utilize the Tuition Assistance Program. Institutions of public higher education across the state are obligated to cover the difference between the maximum TAP award and the cost of tuition at each campus. Currently, SUNY resident undergraduate tuition reaches \$7070<sup>4</sup>, while the maximum TAP award is \$5,165<sup>5</sup>, leading to a \$1905 gap in funding per student.

This combined figure cost SUNY and CUNY statewide a total of \$139 million dollars last fiscal year.<sup>6</sup> A funding shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars over the last 8 years. Individual campuses must finance this funding shortfall through operating costs before they are able to allocate funding for measures of quality education and critical student services.

There are two aspects of public higher education in New York State that remain true. The cost of tuition and the gap in funding for the Tuition Assistance Program both continue to rise.<sup>7</sup> Since 2009, tuition at state operated campuses has risen 63%, contributing to an increase in the SUNY TAP gap from \$20 million in 2012 to nearly \$65 million in 2018. The shortfall in funding for the program has required SUNY and CUNY to allocate millions of dollars of operating costs over the years in which the gap has existed. Overall, the gap has resulted in students and their families paying more for less. The lack of

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<sup>2</sup> "TAP Eligibility & Income Limits." *NYS Higher Education Services Corporation - TAP Eligibility*, [www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/grants/tap-eligibility.html](http://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/grants/tap-eligibility.html).

<sup>3</sup>The State University of New York, *An Analysis of the Tuition Assistance Program* <https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Attachment%20C1%20-%20Tap%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> SUNY Smart Track - Empowered Financial Planning, Tuition and Fees <https://www.suny.edu/smarttrack/tuition-and-fees/>

<sup>5</sup> Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC), TAP Award Amounts <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/grants/estimate-your-tap-award.html>

<sup>6</sup> It is time to fill the GAP in TAP, PSC CUNY [https://www.psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/GAPTap\\_Coalition.pdf](https://www.psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/GAPTap_Coalition.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>Reichman, Hank. "A New Deal for SUNY and CUNY." *ACADEME BLOG*, 2 Jan. 2019, [academeblog.org/2018/12/24/a-new-deal-for-suny-and-cuny/](http://academeblog.org/2018/12/24/a-new-deal-for-suny-and-cuny/)

investment by the state to provide funding in this matter has severely diminished the ability of individual campuses to provide services to students and enhance the quality of education offered. For example,<sup>8</sup> SUNY Fredonia's core operating budget has declined from an all-time high of \$17.8 million in 2008-2009 to approximately \$11.3 million in 2018-2019, for a cumulative loss over the last ten years of roughly \$53.2 million. This is due to the combination of stagnant funding, a widening TAP gap, and rising institutional operating costs, and Fredonia is not alone.

With increased investment by the state in institutions of public higher education students can receive quality services such as mental health counseling, academic advisement, and gender and sexuality resources at an affordable cost. It is imperative that the state invest in SUNY as the students have selected the State University for its commitment to providing the people of New York educational services of the highest standard, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional and vocational postsecondary programs.

No hearing would be complete without drawing attention to the plight of graduate students who suffer from insufficient support for stipends. Stipends aid students in offsetting tuition costs to advance their education. We urge the committee to review graduate student financial support and invest in research opportunities for students who are pursuing advanced degrees. Similarly, important programs such as EOP and CSTEP deserve your continued support.

With respect to loan programs, state policy should focus on enhancing grant availability, and accessibility, thus minimizing the burden of student debt. Availability for Excelsior Scholarships, NYS TAP, and New York Aid For Part-Time Study should be enhanced, and thresholds lowered to increase participation. We should concentrate our efforts on defining access to higher education as an economic investment in the future of the state of New York.

The Excelsior Scholarship, in conjunction with other student financial aid programs, allows some students to attend a SUNY or CUNY college tuition-free. This program continues to succeed as it aids students in graduating on time and with less debt. The Student Assembly urges the state to expand the promise of the Excelsior Scholarship and implement measures that would allow for a greater number of students to apply the scholarship to their academic success. Alterations regarding the course credit minimum for the scholarship would allow for typical students to pursue their education free from the 30-credit calendar year mandate in which it may not be viable for all. Furthermore, expansions of the program to cover additional costs associated with pursuing a degree such as fees, books, room, and board would alleviate excessive student debt and the need for additional employment while matriculated.

The Student Assembly urges the state to invest in public higher education by funding the shortfall created by the Tuition Assistance Program, making amendments to current financial programs available to students, and recognizing its fundamental role and responsibility to offer a world class education at an affordable cost. With an increase in funding and expansions of aid programs campuses across the state

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<sup>8</sup> "Fredonia Budget Issue 'Serious.'" *Fredonia Budget Issue 'Serious'* The Post Journal ,26 Dec. 2018, [www.post-journal.com/news/page-one/2018/12/fredonia-budget-issue-serious/](http://www.post-journal.com/news/page-one/2018/12/fredonia-budget-issue-serious/).

will be equipped to provide a higher quality education and student services that address the backgrounds and needs of all students.



**TESTIMONY  
OF THE  
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP  
BEFORE THE  
NEW YORK STATE SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
REGARDING  
THE COST OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
OCTOBER 28, 2019  
New Paltz, New York**

Good afternoon. My name is Tal Schwerd and I am a member of the New York Public Interest Research Group Board of Directors and a student at SUNY New Paltz. As you know, NYPIRG is a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by college students in 1973 to engage their peers in civic life. NYPIRG's broad programmatic work provides students with a range of opportunities to participate in public affairs and advance responses to social problems that matter most to them. In collaboration with and guided by professional staff—researchers, organizers, advocates and attorneys—students tackle pressing issues while learning and developing professional-level skills that will boost their prospects for success in college, the job market and throughout their lives. Our Board of Directors solely consists of college and university students elected from campuses with NYPIRG chapters across the State.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our perspectives on the costs of higher education in New York. As we have stated in previous testimony, NYPIRG intends to present testimony at each of the Committee's hearings. Today I will focus both broadly on higher education as well as the need to address budget shortfalls that are affecting the State University of New York system.

NYPIRG thanks the Legislature for passing the Jose Peralta DREAM Act this year, for restoring funding to critical higher education programs cut in the executive budget, and for advocating for the elimination of the "TAP Gap" and more robust "maintenance of effort" legislation.

Starting in 2017, NYPIRG has been interviewing students who were experiencing difficulties funding the costs of their education, from tuition and textbooks, to related costs like food and childcare. Scores of interviews later, we have gathered insights into the impacts of state divestment in higher education; state and federal financial aid, scholarship, and grant programs; and who benefits from current programs and who is still left out.

**Budget Short Falls Translate into Reduced Services for SUNY Students**

Through years of underfunding, New York State has starved CUNY and SUNY campus budgets

and put student support services and educational quality at risk. One problem cutting into CUNY and SUNY budgets has been the growing “TAP Gap.” The tuition price per student at senior colleges (\$6,930 at CUNY 4-year schools and \$7,070 at SUNY 4-year schools)<sup>1</sup> continues to outpace the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award (reimbursed to schools at a rate of \$5,000 per full-TAP recipient)<sup>2</sup> resulting in an increasing “TAP Gap.” While students who receive the full TAP award haven’t had to pay the difference, the individual colleges have had to absorb the loss in revenue. Last year, CUNY reported a \$74 million TAP Gap.<sup>3</sup>

Another problem has been the state’s underfunding of mandatory cost increases. While the state promised in 2011 to maintain its funding levels from year to year as it raised the tuition burden on students, the state has not included funding for inflationary or other mandatory cost increases like electricity and staff contracts. That has created another gap in state funding for mandatory costs.

According to SUNY New Paltz Vice President for Administration and Finance in 2018, revenues are simply not keeping pace with necessary increases in expenditure. One factor among others cited was no increases in direct state support since 2012.<sup>4</sup> As a result of budget shortfalls, Binghamton University cut their library budget and administering a hiring freeze on all staff positions aside from Adjuncts and Teaching Assistants.<sup>5</sup> The university is not replacing two retiring faculty members in the Department of Art and Design and put a temporary suspension on the graphic design minor.<sup>6</sup> Stony Brook University has enacted a hiring freeze as well, citing an \$18.5 million budget shortfall, and are eliminating their undergraduate pharmacology program.<sup>7</sup>

The erosion of state support and the creation of growing funding gaps is translating into an erosion of student services and quality of education. Students have experienced firsthand, the difficulty in getting into the classes they need to graduate, limited services such as library hours, and advisement gaps across the CUNY and SUNY system.

Evelyn Marks, a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) major at SUNY Cortland, is also concerned about graduating on time. With some of the classes that she needs conflicting with other required classes, she may have to push her graduation date out a year.

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<sup>1</sup> Supra 4.

<sup>2</sup> New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, The New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nvs-tap.html>.

<sup>3</sup> City University of New York, 2019-2020 Operating Budget Request and Four-Year Financial Plan; January 14, 2019, <http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/budget-and-finance/FY2020-Budget-Request-for-OBFSite-1.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The New Paltz Oracle, “Budget Cuts Costs on SUNY New Paltz Campus,” November 8, 2018, <https://oracle.newpaltz.edu/budget-cuts-costs-on-suny-new-paltz-campus/>.

<sup>5</sup> Pipe Dream, “Running Low on Revenue Binghamton University Struggles to Cover Employee Raises,” November 26, 2018, <https://www.bupipedream.com/news/101083/running-low-on-revenue-binghamton-university-struggles-to-cover-employee-raises/>.

<sup>6</sup> Pipe Dream, Kerr, Jake, “Department of Art and Design to Temporarily Suspend Graphic Design Minor,” November 26, 2018, <https://www.bupipedream.com/news/101025/department-of-art-and-design-to-temporarily-suspend-graphic-design-minor/>.

<sup>7</sup> The Statesman, Liebson, Rebecca, “College of Arts and Sciences Cuts Undergraduate Pharmacology Program,” February 25, 2018, <https://www.sbstatesman.com/2018/02/25/college-of-arts-and-sciences-cuts-undergraduate-pharmacology-program/>.

Haley Gray, a SUNY New Paltz student, shared her difficulty enrolling in the classes she needed to graduate:

“I am currently a Senior. When I decided that I wanted to major in art education I chose to come to SUNY New Paltz for their top rated art education program. Since the budget cuts, it’s been nearly impossible for me to get all of the classes that I need in order to graduate. When I first transferred here there were so many more sections of classes offered.

Making my schedule last semester was a nightmare because the classes I needed for my major and the classes I needed in order to fulfill my general education requirements conflicted in time slots. I had to repeat studio courses that I had already completed just to fulfill the requirements for my major. This semester I had the same experience. Not being able to take the studio courses in my concentration negatively impacts my educational development and my ability to teach in the future. I’m paying for a quality education but due to budget cuts out of my control, my education is being compromised.”

Luisa Garcia, a Nassau Community College student, shared her difficulty getting the advisement she needed:

“Right now, I am working towards becoming a physical therapist but have had issues trying to find the classes I need. I went to the advising office on campus, but was only told what classes I would need to get my general degree and not what would best prepare me to transfer. The office attempted to help, but because they had to help so many other students, I wasn’t able to get the advising that I need to make sure that I will be prepared for life after college. Also, due to budget issues the school does not have all of the classes I will need to continue my education, so I will be behind when I transfer schools.”

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to enhance funding for CUNY and SUNY by closing the “TAP Gap” and include mandatory costs in its base funding equation in order to help students get the classes they need to graduate, reduce class sizes, and bolster student advisement.**

### **SUNY Students Struggle with Rising Tuition and Other Costs**

Despite the clear benefits of public higher education for the health and prosperity of the state, students have been shortchanged: the state routinely underfunds CUNY and SUNY and costs get pushed onto students and their families. Beginning in 2011, nearly constant tuition hikes have raised tuition rates by more than 42%.<sup>8</sup>

Recently, NYPIRG released an analysis of the overall financial impact of the SUNY2020 legislation. It found that New York State has charged public college students nearly \$4 billion

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<sup>8</sup> SUNY tuition for Academic Year (AY) 2010-2011 was \$4,970, and CUNY was \$4,830. The so-called “rational tuition” policy allowed for \$300 annual increases for 5 years, or a total of \$1,500 by July, 2016. NY’s Final State Budget for AY 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 allowed for three \$200 dollar increases, bringing tuition to \$7,070 at SUNY and \$6,930 at CUNY, hence tuition has increased 42%. See: <http://www.suny.edu/smarttrack/tuition-and-fees/> and <http://www2.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/tuition-fees>. Calculations performed by NYPIRG.



more as a result of scheduled tuition hikes at SUNY and CUNY. Even when considering additional assistance provided by the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the new Excelsior Scholarship program, students have paid \$2.5 billion in additional tuition.

The added tuition dollars have added up over an approximate 9-year period resulting from passage of the "SUNY 2020" law first enacted in 2011 and actions by local governments impacting community college costs. This year's tuition increases will drive that number even higher.

While New York's substantial financial aid and opportunity programs have shielded some students from these hikes, there are many who fall through the eligibility cracks or who cannot apply for reasons outside of their control. We'll review some of these shortfalls later. With every tuition hike, New York continues to rely on students and families, many who struggle to keep up with rising costs, rather than addressing years of state underfunding.

Fabienne Lescouflair, a recent SUNY New Paltz student shared:

"While I was at my 2-year school, both of my parents ended up paying for half of my tuition while I worked my brains out and paid for the other half myself. Now, my mom can't help me out anymore because of the tuition hikes, which forced me to take out loans in the middle of the semester to cover the tuition. It's not ideal but it's better than dropping out."

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to freeze all tuition rates at senior and community colleges to protect college affordability.**

### **Students Succeed In Proven Opportunity Programs – Why Are They Routinely Cut in The Executive Budget?**

Opportunity programs, which are designed for educationally and economically disadvantaged students, have a steady track record of success in increasing graduation rates among the most at-risk students.<sup>9</sup> In general, students in opportunity programs are individuals who have come from low-income communities and often rank low on traditional measures of collegiate admissions standards, such SAT scores, high school GPA, and class standing.

New York State has several opportunity programs in place to help increase access to higher education: Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK), Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), College Discovery, Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), and Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). These programs take a comprehensive approach to college access and affordability by building in academic counseling, mentoring, and coverage of related costs such as free metrocards, textbooks, and child care. This approach works, and increases graduation rates. All students deserve this model of a holistically supported education and New York State and City must make the investments to make it happen.

Ariyah Adams, a SUNY New Paltz student, credits the Education Opportunity Program (EOP) for their success in college.

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of the success of opportunity programs, see State University of New York's Office of Opportunity Programs, <http://system.suny.edu/oop/>.

"I am currently a junior majoring in communications with a concentration in public relations and double minoring in theater and business. I pay for tuition through TAP and Pell Grants, as well as take out loans to cover the rest of my bill. After I graduate, I plan on attending graduate school at either SUNY New Paltz or a different SUNY. I am still undecided about that. I plan on paying for graduate school through applying for grants and scholarships.

Right now I am working two jobs, I work at the dining hall on campus and I have a work study job. I don't depend on money from my parents so usually I pay for my textbooks and food on my own or a split the cost of the textbook with a friend or classmate in the same class as me. I am also a student at the Educational Opportunity Program at my school which has helped me a lot, getting through navigating financial aid. If this program didn't exist, I'm not sure if I would be in college. The EOP program has helped me grow into a strong individual and has offered me tutoring, mentors and advisors that always have my back."

Despite the track records of the successes of these programs, each year the Executive Budget proposes cuts and forces the Legislature to fight to restore programs instead of building on them.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to expand funding to the opportunity programs listed above.**
- **NYPIRG recommends that the state looks to programs such as CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) as a model for free public college which addresses the all-in costs of higher education and has proven to increase graduation rates.**

#### **Current State Financial Aid Programs Fall Short – And Students Fall Through Cracks**

Inflexible award schedules do not support on-time graduation for too many students. Both Excelsior Scholars and TAP recipients are limited to accessing their aid in fall and spring semesters alone. The Excelsior Scholarship mandates 30 credits per year to maintain eligibility (or else the scholarship turns into a loan), the award is not available for summer and winter sessions. While scholarship recipients can maintain eligibility by taking 12-credits per semester in the fall and spring, they must pay out of pocket for the additional 6 credits in the winter or summer sessions. Meaning, the state's new "free tuition" scholarship is not always tuition-free, even for those who qualify, maintain eligibility, and receive the award.

What's more, the Excelsior Scholarship is a last-dollar program. It does not provide any aid to qualifying students whose tuition is covered already, but who could, for example, use Pell Grant money to offset textbook, housing, or transportation costs.

Sarah Pulinski, a SUNY New Paltz and Excelsior scholar shared her experience:

"I received the Excelsior Scholarship. The problem with Excelsior is that it's more difficult to qualify for than initially advertised and there's a lot of hoops you need to jump through in order to get it.

I have been on the phone with Excelsior this semester a total of 4 times. The financial aid office here has even gotten involved and I still have not received the money. It's very frustrating and it's like they want you to struggle to get it even if you do qualify. Tuition increases would mean more people wanting to receive this money and probably put more pressure on HESC which already seems to be struggling to help students get the money promised."

TAP recipients are eligible for the award in the fall and spring semesters as long as they take a minimum of 12 credits per semester. However, with the exception of some opportunity programs or for some students with disabilities, the award is only available for up to 8 semesters. In order for students to reach the credits required for graduation on time (often 120), they must take 15 credits per semester or add summer and winter session classes. And when TAP recipients take winter and summer classes, they must pay out of pocket.

Chelsea Grate, a SUNY Cortland student, was worried about graduating on time but still elected not to take summer classes and pay out of pocket:

"This is my second year of college, but my first year at SUNY Cortland. I transferred here from Hudson Valley Community College. I'm a Political Science major with a minor in Communications, and I'm somewhere between a sophomore and a junior because of the credits I transferred in with from HVCC and high school.

I am concerned about graduating on time. If I had six more credits I'd be considered a junior right now. I didn't want to do classes over the summer because I didn't want to have to pay for that out of pocket on top of everything else. Once I do graduate from Cortland I'm going to grad school, preferably at U Albany or Syracuse. I pay for school with financial aid, TAP, and the Pell Grant. I also work at Target and Market 32 on breaks to pay for textbooks and food for the semester. If I didn't get financial aid, I would probably be working full time at Target, and I don't think it'd be possible to go to school at the same time as that."

For some students, a 15-credit course-load is a reasonable ask. This is supported by the 12 percent increase in students taking 15 credits per fall and spring at CUNY and the 4 percent increase at SUNY. However, 15 credits per semester is simply unrealistic for some. The issue is particularly acute for working students. Currently, students nationwide work an average of about 30 hours per week. At least a quarter of all students – and about a fifth of all students who enroll on a full-time basis – are also employed full-time while enrolled.<sup>10</sup> We've heard from students who struggle to balance their full-time course load, jobs, and personal obligations. In a recent report put out by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, of students that work, 79 percent reported that they work to pay for living expenses and over a third of those who work believe that having a job negatively impacts their academic performance.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 2016 Student Experience Survey, CUNY, [http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016\\_SES\\_Highlights\\_Updated\\_10112016.pdf](http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> City University of New York, "2016 Student Experience Survey A survey of CUNY undergraduate students," [http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016\\_SES\\_Highlights\\_Updated\\_10112016.pdf](http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf).

Robust financial aid programs exist to safeguard low and middle income students from the financial barriers which can impede college completion. Financial aid barriers in the winter and spring semester must be lifted. It could even promote early graduation for those looking to jumpstart their careers or postgraduate studies.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to provide TAP and the Excelsior Scholarship during winter and summer sessions and to expand aid for use beyond covering tuition.**

Despite prisons being called “correctional facilities,” they do a dismal job in turning lives around. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nationwide about two-thirds of released state prisoners were re-arrested within three years and three-quarters within five.<sup>12</sup> Too often, prison is a revolving door. And it’s a revolving door that impacts certain communities worse than others. According to the Cuomo Administration, nearly half of New York inmate population is African American, nearly one quarter is Hispanic, and nearly one quarter is white.<sup>13</sup>

The currently high recidivism rate helps no one. The connection between higher education and reduced recidivism has been well established. A study conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that “[a] \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in education will prevent more than 600 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration.”<sup>14</sup>

While prisoners can sometimes get access to educational courses now, they are ineligible for the federal Pell Grant program as well as TAP. Since the vast majority of inmates are low income, they usually cannot afford college courses while in prison.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to provide TAP eligibility for incarcerated individuals.**

Graduate TAP began in 1974-1975, helping 22,253 New York graduate students with an average award of \$302 with a maximum award of \$600. The program has fluctuated greatly over the years with regards to the number of students receiving the award, the maximum award available, average award distributed, and the amount of money the state invested in the program. Before TAP for graduate students was completely eliminated in 2009-2010, it served 7,251 students.<sup>15</sup>

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that jobs requiring master’s degrees and professional

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “3 In 4 Former Prisoners In 30 States Arrested Within 5 Years Of Release,” April 22, 2014, see: <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/rprts05p0510pr.cfm>.

<sup>13</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, “Under Custody Report: Profile of Inmate Population Under Custody on January 1, 2013,” see: [http://www.doccs.ny.gov/Research/Reports/2013/UnderCustody\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://www.doccs.ny.gov/Research/Reports/2013/UnderCustody_Report_2013.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Audrey Bazos and Jessica Hausman, UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research Department of Policy Studies, “Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program,” p 2, March 2004, see: <http://www.ceanational.org/PDFs/ed-as-crime-control.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, “Graduate Level TAP AY 1974-1975 thru 2009-2010,” Neal Warren, September 2013.

degrees will grow by 22% and 20%, respectively, from 2010 to 2020 – faster than any other level of education.<sup>16</sup> According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, a worker with a high school diploma can expect to earn \$1.3 million over a lifetime, while a worker with a bachelor's degree will earn \$2.3 million and a worker with a master's degree will earn \$2.7 million over a lifetime.<sup>17</sup> While the benefits of advanced degrees are clear, financial aid programs are either non-existent or uninviting to prospective graduate students, many of whom already hold student loan debt.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to expand TAP to eligible graduate students.**

#### **Vulnerable Students Need Support Services to Access Higher Education**

The goal of effective college aid shouldn't be to just cover tuition, but to cover the added costs that can hamstring student success. If costs including textbooks, transportation, food, housing and childcare are standing in the way of a student's educational success, then they must be addressed.

The cost of child care can be a significant barrier toward accessing a degree. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, just 8 percent of single mothers who enroll in college graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree within six years, compared with 49 percent of women students who are not mothers.<sup>18</sup> Single mothers with only a high school diploma are over three times as likely to live in poverty as single mothers with a bachelor's degree.<sup>19</sup>

While the average cost of private child care or daycare in NYC can be prohibitively expensive (roughly \$25,000 a year<sup>20</sup>), enrolling a child in daycare at CUNY can cost as little as \$5 a day. It's unsurprising that access to affordable child care increases degree completion rates. A study by Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY, found that student parents that used the child care center there were 30 percent more likely to stay in school. CUNY and SUNY child care centers are a unique and powerful tool for socio-economic mobility.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to robustly fund CUNY and SUNY child care centers.**

NYPIRG commends the work of CUNY and SUNY staff, often in collaboration with our campus NYPIRG chapters, student governments and the community at large, to stock and maintain food pantries in compliance with the mandate from Governor Cuomo that every CUNY and SUNY campus create food pantries. That mandate came in part as a response to a report by groups

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<sup>16</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, Projections 2010-2020," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/projections-overview.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings," Page 2, August 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/collegepayoff-summary.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: Costs and Benefits to Individuals, Families, and Society." <https://iwpr.org/publications/investing-single-mothers-higher-ed/>.

<sup>19</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: Costs and Benefits to Individuals, Families, and Society." <https://iwpr.org/publications/investing-single-mothers-higher-ed/>.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard, Tara Siegel. "Choosing Child Care When You Go Back to Work." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 Nov. 2013. [www.nytimes.com/2013/11/23/your-money/choosing-child-care-when-you-go-back-to-work.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/23/your-money/choosing-child-care-when-you-go-back-to-work.html).

including NYPIRG entitled *Hunger on Campus*. The report looked at food insecurity on campus, and how that may undermine the educational success of untold thousands of students.<sup>21</sup> Consistent with prior studies, 48 percent of survey respondents reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days.

Taking a closer look at the approximately 1,800 students who reported experiencing food insecurity, thirty-two percent believed that hunger or housing problems had an impact on their education, from foregoing textbook purchases, to missing or dropping classes. Students that are hungry and homeless must get the services they need.

- **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to include monies in the budget to support operating expenses food pantries across campuses at SUNY and CUNY.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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<sup>21</sup> NYPIRG, *Hunger on Campus, The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*, October 2016, [http://www.nypirgstudents.org/reports/Hunger\\_on\\_Campus\\_NYPIRG.pdf](http://www.nypirgstudents.org/reports/Hunger_on_Campus_NYPIRG.pdf), accessed November 30, 2016.

## UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

Chairperson Stavisky and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, thank you for providing the opportunity for United University Professions (UUP) to testify at this hearing regarding the cost of public higher education in New York State, its effect on the Tuition Assistance Program and other important student aid offerings, as well as the affordability and accessibility of a SUNY education.

My name is Dr. Frederick E. Kowal and I am the president of United University Professions. UUP is the largest higher education union in the U.S., representing more than 37,000 academic and professional faculty and staff at 29 State University of New York campuses, System Administration, Empire State College, and SUNY's public teaching hospitals and health science centers in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Long Island and Syracuse.

Our members serve hundreds of thousands of students and patients at our colleges and universities, health sciences centers and state-operated public teaching hospitals directly administered by SUNY.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support and approval of programs and initiatives that we see as vital to the students and patients we see and serve every day.

And as we seek to incorporate everyone into a diverse society and a prosperous state, I thank you for your support for SUNY's opportunity programs and your decision to vote to restore funds cut to these incredibly successful programs in the 2019-20 Executive Budget. We thank you and other legislators for your keen interest and support in closing the "TAP gap"—the difference in state State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) aid and SUNY tuition that must be made up by colleges. Details about the situation follow further into this testimony.

And thank you for this chance to address the issue of funding for public higher education in New York state.

### **The cost of education**

SUNY's mission statement requires the State's University to "provide to the people of New York educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional and vocational postsecondary programs including such additional activities in pursuit of these objectives as are necessary or customary."

Yet, access to SUNY is a major obstacle for thousands of New Yorkers, some of whom simply can't afford the cost of a SUNY education. Others don't receive—or don't qualify for enough—student aid and are forced to take out tens of thousands of dollars in student loans as they work toward their college degrees.

In its May report on student debt, the U.S. Federal Reserve reported that 54 million Americans took on debt—including student loans—for education. U.S. student loan debt surpassed \$1.6 trillion in 2019. Last year, 2 in 10 students who still owe money were behind on their payments, the Reserve report said.

In New York, the average student-loan debt per borrower expanded to 36 percent from 2007 to 2017, rising more than \$8,000 to \$30,899, according to report by LendEDU, a student loan finance company. Our state is No. 7 in LendEDU's ranking of the 10 states with the highest student debt.

Students must also factor in room and board, books, incidental expenses, lost income, and other related costs of attending college—which far exceed SUNY's tuition. Full-time student fees and room and board at SUNY state-operated campuses total to roughly \$19,000, more than two and a half times tuition. Tuition itself accounts for about a quarter of the total costs to students of attending college each year.

### **Lack of state support**

As student debt rises, so does the percentage SUNY students pay for their education—in large part because of the lack of new state funding for SUNY. In 2007-08, tuition and fees from SUNY students accounted for 25 percent of SUNY's operating budget, with the state providing the rest of the funding. In 2019-20, students are paying 65 percent, with the state



chipping in the remainder. This is unfair to students and is unsustainable formula for SUNY.

SUNY's state-operated campuses have never recovered from a series of slashing state funding cuts that took place during the Great Recession; aid dropped from \$1.36 billion in 2007-08 to \$700 million this year—that's a decrease of nearly 50 percent, or a third of its core operating budget.

Of all state agencies, SUNY took the greatest hit in terms of budget cuts—and unlike other agencies, the University has never been made whole. Several years of flat funding for SUNY has only served to harm and financially hamper cash-strapped campuses even further.

These cuts have caused financial chaos at campuses like Fredonia, where the college last year considered cutting undergraduate and graduate programs to help close a nearly \$13 million budget deficit. In May, Fredonia officials proposed an academic reorganization that could help the college save about \$1.6 million which still leaves a large budget gap.

Stony Brook University, which faced a \$35 million deficit in 2017, instituted a hiring freeze. Last year, the university merged three foreign language programs into a single department, and suspended admission to undergrad programs in theatre arts, cinema & cultural studies, comparative literature, adapted aquatics and pharmacology. Binghamton University also ordered a hiring freeze in 2018 to help reduce a \$12 million budget gap.

In January, SUNY Downstate Health Science University's College of Health Related Professions was cash-strapped to the point where there wasn't enough funding for it to hire enough staff and faculty. This could jeopardize the school's reaccreditation.

### **The need for support**

With proper state funding, SUNY's focus can move to expanding programs and hiring more full-time, tenure-track faculty, initiatives that will make the University more accessible to New Yorkers seeking a quality public college education. These moves will also help SUNY campuses attract—and more importantly—retain students.

One way to achieve that is by increasing funding for SUNY's successful Educational Opportunity Program. These are proven, life-changing programs that provide clear paths to a college education—and often, good-paying jobs—for those who might otherwise be denied access to college.

Through the EOP, students—many of whom are from some of the state's most economically distressed areas—receive specialized advisement, counseling, tutorial services, and summer programs. These students, who are mostly underprepared for college work when they enter the program, thrive in the EOP.

The EOP graduation rate exceeds 65 percent, exceeding the national average for public higher ed colleges and universities. More than 70,000 EOP students have earned SUNY degrees. And with smart, targeted investments in this critical program we can do even more.

Thirty-three percent of SUNY's state-operated campuses have EOP graduation rates ranging from 70 to 88 percent. Not surprisingly, the EOP is a program in high demand; SUNY annually receives more than 30,000 applications for just 2,500 available EOP seats. More funding will allow the programs to expand, increasing access to thousands more students each year.

### **TAP gap woes**

More state funding is also necessary to close the TAP gap—the portion of SUNY tuition that campuses must waive for TAP awardees. The gap has swelled to \$70 million. TAP and other state financial aid programs help provide accessibility to a public college education, which is still out of reach for many qualified students.

About a quarter of students at state-operated campuses receive the maximum TAP grant of \$5,165—which covers only 75 percent of SUNY undergraduate tuition. SUNY campuses must cover the remainder out of their budgets. In many instances there is a correlation between the SUNY Campuses that accept the most TAP eligible students and our campuses that are facing financial shortfalls.

From 1974 to 2010, TAP covered 100 percent of SUNY tuition at state-operated campuses. But the gap has grown as state aid funding to SUNY has dropped. More than 40 percent of TAP students attend SUNY schools; over one-third of SUNY students at state-operated campuses receive TAP aid.

The TAP gap is equal to the annual salaries of over 500 new full-time, tenure-track faculty. These additional hires could increase advising, counseling, tutoring, and course offerings necessary for students to complete their education, and complete on time.

### **SUNY medical schools hurting**

Our state-run academic medical centers in Brooklyn, Stony Brook and Syracuse hold dual roles—as safety net hospitals serving all who walk through their doors regardless of their ability to pay, and as teaching hospitals that provide accessible, affordable medical education to student doctors and medical professionals.

Both are important, and both require adequate funding to serve their students and the tens of thousands of patients they treat each year. Yet, state support for the hospitals was reduced in the 2019-20 budget due to the elimination of \$87 million of state operating funds in 2018.

Our hospitals rely on this funding—which was at \$153 million before the Great Recession—to help offset costs associated with caring for large numbers of underinsured and uninsured patients and fund the medical schools by more than \$200 million annually.

This show of support from the state wasn't without a price; in return for this funding, SUNY's academic medical centers pay for their employee fringe benefits and debt service costs, a total annual expense nearing \$500 million.

The elimination of this portion of operating funds will undoubtedly impact the ability of the medical schools to provide an affordable, accessible education to thousands of students each year. SUNY's state-owned hospitals do not turn a profit and shouldn't be expected to do so. That is not their purpose.

Without full state support, the hospitals will be hard-pressed to properly fund their medical schools, which attract most of their students from the Empire State.

More New York City physicians have trained at Downstate than at any other medical school; 67 percent of its students are New York City residents. In February, SUNY Downstate's medical school was ranked fourth nationwide by Castle Connolly Medical (a healthcare rating company for consumers) for training the next generation of physicians. At Syracuse's Upstate Medical University, 80 percent of its class of 2021 is made up of students from New York State.

### **Focus on transparency at SUNY campus foundations**

In February 2018, the state Comptroller issued a hard-hitting report that found that more than half of SUNY campus foundations haven't been audited by SUNY over the last 10 years. Of those foundations, two of them—the UB Foundation and the Stony Brook Foundation—control as much as \$1.1 billion in assets, which is more than half the assets of all the campus foundations combined.

The Comptroller found that contracts bid by the UB and Stony Brook foundations—including services for lobbying, fundraising and entertainment—were not bid competitively and were awarded based on referrals or companies they had worked with before. The report said that the UB Foundation paid nearly \$240,000 in salaries and fringe benefits to two retired UB staff members who returned to work, allowing the employees to bypass Retirement and Social Security law finance caps.

Since SUNY isn't auditing the foundations on a regular basis, the inner workings of these organizations are murky, to say the least. The public has a right to know how much money the foundations have, where it came from, where it's going and how it's being used.

Our cash-strapped campuses need help, and the foundations are doing precious little to provide that help, even though they were established to serve the academic missions of our colleges and universities. In fact, most people who donate to the foundations don't know—or realize—that

these non-profit organizations are private; many believe they are donating to the campus.

The foundations use their SUNY affiliations to raise funds, which are invested in higher risk, higher reward investments. It helps them avoid regulation and transparency requirements that other state entities must adhere to.

UUP has been behind AO4367/S06275, which if approved would compel CUNY and SUNY campus foundations and their subsidiaries to submit annual reports and to post them on the SUNY website. Those reports would include financial information, contract vendor data, and a list of foundation and SUNY employees, including salaries, job titles and descriptions.

What we have now is a situation where the issue is not just the lack of transparency, but serious concern over how these hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent. These dollars should be used to help campuses and aid students in their pursuit of a college degree—and a better life. Making SUNY foundations accountable and transparent is a solid step toward making public higher education a priority again.

### **Conclusion**

On behalf of the entire UUP membership, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Our union appreciates this opportunity to provide the committee with detailed information to help it examine and address these important issues.

Our hope is that the information we've provided will help shine a spotlight on these problems and explain why it's imperative that the state make a solemn commitment to investing in the future of public higher education in New York state.

We greatly appreciate your time.

Thank you.

## Testimony to the New York State Higher Education subcommittee October 28, 2019

My name is Kelly Keck, and I am the Manager of Educational Technology and Instruction and the UUP Chapter President at SUNY Delhi. I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak to them regarding the issues facing both the SUNY system and SUNY Delhi. SUNY Delhi is located in Delhi, NY, which is the county seat of Delaware County in the Western Catskills and is also located in the New York City Watershed. I will be addressing several issues currently facing both the SUNY system and technical colleges like Delhi both in the written and spoken testimony including: general budget and enrollment issues, Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) gap funding, concurrent enrollment issues, inadequate laboratory and equipment for trade programs like Mechatronics, and a lack of diversity of faculty and staff at some upstate campuses.

It is projected that all upstate higher education institutions will continue to experience a drop in enrollment into the foreseeable future based on the changing demographics of the region. Smaller technical colleges will suffer most when facing low enrollment because of the higher percentage drop that each individual represents. This means that smaller colleges cannot easily offset or mitigate the loss by having an overall larger student population as some university centers may be able to do. In addition, technical colleges accept a high percentage of TAP recipients, which includes the college taking on the funding gap between the award and the tuition. Combined, this means that technical colleges are hurt most by each individual loss of enrollment, while at the same time are hurt most by the TAP gap because of the higher percentage of students historically enrolled receiving the award.

At the moment, where we are experiencing an overall drop in enrollment, we are actually turning away potential students for our applied technologies programs such as Welding and Mechatronics. We turn students away in these programs because we lack adequate laboratory space and staff to accommodate a larger student population. These programs require expensive laboratory equipment and trained faculty and staff, and we have many equipment and space needs to consider if we were to expand these programs as they could be to meet the needs of our students. In addition, university centers are lowering their admission criteria to compete with technical colleges. At the same time, there are discussions regarding concurrent enrollment for high school students that could exclude technical colleges because of cost and no clear jurisdiction restrictions for community colleges. Community colleges may be able to expand their concurrent enrollment into counties that do not have a community college but have a SUNY technical college, further limiting our overall impact on our students and general community.

Another challenge facing SUNY's smaller technical colleges is the lack of faculty and staff diversity. We recently had an Asian-American woman working as a lead programmer and a Caucasian-American man working as a nursing faculty, a predominately female field, leave Delhi

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because of lower pay when compared to private industry and other local SUNY campuses. Addressing this issue requires more financial resources be provided for staffing to our technical colleges.

We are experiencing an overall challenge in higher education across the nation. SUNY needs to be creative and reasonable when drafting proposals for reinventing under-enrolled programs and meeting the needs of the modern students while also protecting the rights of all its workers. UUP stands ready to work with SUNY and New York State on maintaining our level of excellence in higher education while also ensuring the working conditions of faculty and staff across the system.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

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**Written Testimony**

**César Barros A.**

**Associate Professor**

**Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures**

**Director, Latin American & Caribbean Studies**

**SUNY New Paltz**

Dear Chairman Stavisky and members of the Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education,

My name is César Barros. I have worked as a professor here at SUNY New Paltz since 2012. I hold a PhD in Romance Languages and Literatures, a Master of Arts in the same subject and another Masters in Latin American Studies. I am currently Associate Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, and the Director of the Latin America and Caribbean Studies Program. I am also a proud UUP Delegate. I am an immigrant. I came to this country 15 years ago from Chile, where I was extremely lucky to be able to go to college. I was lucky and privileged to study there because in Chile going to college, even at the public university, is an expensive privilege. During a horrendous dictatorship, in one undemocratic sweep, the public university system of my country was completely defunded, leaving to students the burden of paying for the complete system that offers them their education. In my country studying can be an economic burden that haunts you for life, and too expensive a “service” for many of my neighbors and friends to even consider the possibility of pursuing a degree. I never imagined that students would face something similar here in the United States. A mixture of too much TV and remnants of colonial mentality made me naïve enough to think that higher education would be a right in the richest country in the planet, not a paid privilege, not an economic burden. As you are well aware, I was wrong. Everything I am now, for better and for worse, is because of the opportunities opened to me by attending college. And it is because of that that I know going to college should be a right for every individual who wants to do it. Especially in New York State



that prides itself on being an engine of change and democracy. I am extremely proud of being a professor at the State University of New York because of its democratic promise, because its main purpose is to give every person who lives in this territory the opportunity to develop their critical minds and to learn about their place and the place of their community in the world.

I can attest that here at SUNY New Paltz full and part-time faculty, professionals and all my coworkers, in spite of all the challenges that have come from the State divestment in our university, are deeply committed to our students and to making their experience here a truly life-changing event. I am proud to say that after eight years working here I can't count the thankful messages and in-person visits from students when they are graduating or after graduation when they find a job, when they are accepted to grad school or when they want to share with me a special accomplishment or event in their post-graduate life. I am here to give testimony and I think the best way of doing that is telling you a little bit about what it means to be a professor at SUNY New Paltz. I teach several classes each academic year. Teaching means designing syllabi that can engage every student in the classroom, a classroom that, because of the lack of funding from our State government, has been steadily growing in numbers with all the pedagogical problems this entails. Teaching means updating syllabi to make them current with the discussions in whatever subject I'm addressing. It means preparing each class with care, trying to foresee discussions, problems and pedagogical potentials. It means grading and reading assignments, and, more important, giving meaningful feedback to each one of my students, who can be 90 or more in a semester. Teaching means conversations with my students outside of the classroom. Teaching means staying current with the latest trends on research in Latin American Studies, Visual Culture, Philosophy and Decolonial Theory. Teaching also means advising. I advise more than forty students besides my class students each semester. Many of my advisees

are students of color and immigrants who need me to help them navigating a complicated and challenging system (a system that I myself am still learning how to navigate). Being a teacher means organizing or participating in events around migration, race, gender, Spanish language cultural problems, inviting scholars, artists, organizing film projections, conferences, and art exhibits. Without these events New Paltz wouldn't be the great place it is and I would not be doing my job if I did not actively participate in these instances. To organize them I need to rely on the extreme generosity of my colleagues in other departments who can chip in \$50 or \$80 dollars from their department's ever shrinking allocations. I also do research, of course. I work to publish periodically and go to national and international conferences to have dialogues with my peers. I participate in department committees to make sure our curricula makes sense for an ever-changing student body, and to make the program feasible in the face of fewer and fewer resources. I also participate in central committees where, alongside colleagues from different schools and positions we get together to make our student experience here the best that we can. I am proud to say that I also have a life of my own and loved ones to love and care for.

I love to do all of this. I genuinely love it. Sadly, my colleagues and I have to do this important and challenging work with fewer and fewer resources, with, in the case of full-time colleagues, a salary that is on average 30% less than the average salary for colleagues in 4-year public institutions, and in the case of our many part-time colleagues, a shameful three thousand dollars per course a semester. We work in an environment in which these same part-time colleagues don't know if they will have a job the upcoming semester, in which students are worried about the debt they are accruing, on a campus with a fiscal deficit and with all the austerity measures they have decided to implement to face it.

Since I started working here, every year has been more challenging. We have always been in a deficit, in a budgetary crisis—this is what we hear every time we have an initiative. The administration can be supportive but there will always be this specter of austerity. My strategy, once I understood this trend, was, and still is, to do as much as I can during the current academic year because I know the next year there will be less resources, more work and an unchanged salary. All of this means that we are asked to do more for the same compensation. Because our campus gets its budget in big part from tuition and not directly from the State, our student body has grown without the necessary growth in faculty. This is a trend and it is making our job more difficult. Tuition has also risen, with all the problems this entails. These are all severe challenges that come directly from the State divestment in SUNY.

I've heard too many times this phrase here: "We want cost-free solutions". "Cost-free solutions": in our contemporary world this expression, which here is a directive, is what in other contexts we call magic. Making a rabbit appear from a hat out of nothing is cost free. But in our world even magicians need to buy the rabbit. There are no cost-free solutions, only more or less visible cuts to this or that program, this or that position, this or that infrastructure. Only more hiring of part-time colleagues with shamefully low wages. The deficit gets palliated by our work, work that becomes invisible: more advisees, more service, same compensation, same call to identify with an employer, the State, that seems to have forgotten us. It is hard to maintain oneself in those conditions. I have many full time colleagues that have had to resort to second jobs to make it to the end of the month—over the weekend one edits academic texts, another does translations, another promotes consumer products. In the case of part-time colleagues this is even more dramatic. The more the budget stays this way the more need will be to hire low paid part-time workers there will be, and less convenient it will be to maintain a steady faculty body. I've seen

so many excellent professors and professionals leave, not only because the wages are low but also because they don't see a prospect of this changing in the future. Once they leave, we are not sure if we'll get a replacement, and if there is no replacement, then it is very difficult to move forward because we inherit their work, their service. Our students have lost so many good professors in this process. No one is replaceable but here it is always a possibility that we won't even try. Why, because there is no budget. We are dry. We are in a crisis. We are in a deficit. We want our students to be successful. Not successful just in the current standards of success but successful changing those same standards. That is our mission. Our job is to facilitate that path for them, and it is hard to do this when our own future is at risk. Because of my line of work I am lucky to have so many students who are the first ones in their families to go to college. It is beautiful to see these young minds so actively engaged in becoming more knowledgeable and civically engaged. But it is a challenge for them to see their professor leave, or to know that they might not come back.

Moral is very low among so many of my colleagues. We don't see our wages reflecting our work. No opening in sight showing us that our future and our family's future will be better. I know that what I am telling you could be said in public universities in other states. But we are not in another State. We are in New York. We are the biggest public university system in the country because New Yorkers decided that they wanted quality higher education for everyone who chooses to get one, not for everyone who can afford it. As I said, I am proud to serve in this institution because I believe in this democratic promise. Since I got here I have had the feeling that this university system is slowly being dismantled by stagnation, and this feeling is shared among students, faculty, professionals, staff, and members of the community. The State has left campuses to deal with growing challenges without investing. It's the campuses that are paying

for our “raises”, and I say “raises” in between quotation marks because they are below the inflation rate. And because of this, we are on another, bigger deficit. And it is the employees with their work that have to bear the cost; it is the students with the tuition hikes who are bearing the cost.

But, as I said, we are committed to our student’s development and the development of the community that lives in this territory. I am not going to ask you to give us the resources we need to make this place a better place. This is not a plea; it is rather a reminder of your duties. It is your duty to put back the resources the State cut during the crisis; it is your duty to fairly compensate us for our work; it is your duty to make sure the people in charge of the education of our community have the resources to do their job in peace.

Thank you.

**Testimony for New York State Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education  
by Beth E. Wilson, UUP-New Paltz Chapter President  
18 October 2019**

Thank you for the invitation to testify at this hearing.

My name is Beth Wilson, and I am the UUP-New Paltz Chapter President. I am appointed as a full-time contingent (non-tenure track) Lecturer in Art History here at New Paltz.

I started teaching at New Paltz in 1994 as an adjunct, so I have been here long enough to witness a number of long-term trends, including the ever-increasing impact of reduced State operating support for the College. When I began here, the maximum class size for most lecture courses was 25. That number has been increased to 35, which has been the upper limit largely because thankfully, we do not have that many classrooms with a larger capacity. But that doesn't stop the Administration from trying—just this semester, we learned that our maximum number of students would be raised to 36. One of our dedicated art history classrooms has a fire marshal capacity of 37, so that would allow for a maximum of 36 students plus the instructor; this means that regardless of the crying need a student might have for a class being taught in that room, the instructor would not be able to over-enroll the section.

We are operating at the limits of our capacity. Our campus has been running a deficit for several years running, and the Administration's response has been a plan to admit hundreds of additional students each year, using their tuition dollars to try to close the budget hole. My chair tells me that we have been running at around 96% capacity in the classes offered by our department each semester, for the last few years, which means that any student who needs to add/drop at the beginning of the semester will have difficulty in doing so, regardless of whether or not the change in schedule might be necessary to stay on track for on-time graduation. It is unclear how all of these additional students will be served by the existing academic and professional faculty we have here—staff whose numbers have been eroded by selective replacements of retiring/departing employees, a mandatory 'hiring frost' for most positions, and high turnover rates due to the increasingly demanding working conditions and relatively low salaries being paid.

At the beginning of the Fall semester, the director of the Sojourner Truth Library sent an email to our campus-wide listserv, informing everyone that due to a lack of sufficient staff, faculty who wished to schedule a library session for their classes should do so well in advance—and acknowledged that they simply would not be able to accommodate everyone who wished to have one of our librarians walk their students through the various research tools available to them through the library. We have experienced a tremendous amount of turnover in recent years at STL, in no small part due to the insistence of our administration to shave salaries there to the minima stipulated in the statewide Agreement with UUP.

It is expensive to live in the mid-Hudson Valley. At the beginning of the semester, there was an email on our fac-staf list announcing a studio apartment in New Paltz, in walking distance to the campus, which posted at \$1,200 per month. I recently saw an advertisement for a newly-renovated, two-bedroom apartment in Kingston (20 miles away), which was asking \$1,800 per month. These rental rates give an approximation of the challenges presented to those looking to buy a home as well. Unlike employees at some other campuses in areas with high costs of living, we do not receive any regional differential pay—despite the fact that State workplaces in the counties directly to the south of us (Orange) and across the river (Dutchess) do receive such supplemental support. Without this regional supplement, housing costs can easily devour half of a new hire's net pay, given our modest starting salaries.

The toll of these financial stresses is real. Several years ago, there was one junior faculty member whose family was still in New York City but whose starting salary was so low she couldn't afford to rent an apartment to stay in during the week, and so she had been sleeping in her office. When she was informed that she could no longer do this, she was unable to continue at New Paltz, and so she is no longer here. I have met with full-time, non-tenure track lecturers under tremendous duress, who wanted to ask me what would be the repercussions of quitting half way through the academic year, because their health was literally being endangered by continuing to work at this college for the poverty wages being paid and the high workload heaped upon them. I have seen junior tenure-track faculty struggling to start families, laboring under incredible student debt loads of \$100,000 or more, whose starting salary in most departments is \$55-56K. A number of these faculty members find it necessary to take second jobs to supplement their income, and these constant stresses have contributed to divorces and other negative impacts on family life.

There is a public perception that being a college professor is an easy life, being paid a handsome salary for sitting and thinking about things, and taking the summers off. This could not be farther from the truth. The reality is that the median salary of our Associate Professors (those who have achieved tenure after seven years) is just shy of \$70K, with our full Professors being paid a median salary of about \$80K, hardly enormous salaries.

On the other end of the spectrum, our contingent faculty include full-time lecturers, who are expected to teach 30 credits (usually, 10 courses) per year, with a starting salary of \$45K. I have had semester when I taught five courses, which included 160-170 students—with no teaching assistants, no sabbaticals, and no access to promotion or to tenure, ever. Our adjuncts—who number around 250 or so per semester at New Paltz—can expect a starting salary rate of about \$3,300 to teach a 3-credit semester course, most of whom are working on semester-to-semester contracts, with no real job security. We are all required to have advanced degrees, which means many of us are laboring under large student debt loads as well. Our institution relies far too heavily on these underpaid, over-exploited contingent workers to deliver the courses that our students need, with none of the protections of academic freedom, nor much support for continuing their scholarship, which we are told is important (at least for tenure-track folk) for raising the level of our teaching in the classroom.

As someone who served on the UUP statewide Negotiations Team for our most recently-ratified Agreement, it was frustrating to spend the better part of three years and hundreds of hours with our Team to get the best possible contract with the State—only to find that once it was ratified, there was essentially no additional money coming to our campus to pay the modest raises we had gained at the table. The increases in State funding to SUNY have all gone to pay for benefits (health insurance, etc. that is not on the local campus's books) and debt service for capital building improvements, but with essentially zero additional dollars added to operating funds to cover basic inflation, or our negotiated pay increases. When our Agreement was ratified, there was a huge impact on our campus bottom line to cover the retroactive raises that it included—a problem that has only been 'solved' by creating what I am told is a 'magic window' shifting payments from the State to SUNY to take advantage of the offset in their official fiscal years. This financial legerdemain is now something that we have to hope will be continued in perpetuity, which is not a very reassuring proposition. How can the State negotiate a contract, and then fail to appropriate the money to pay for it? In this, I can say that I am in full agreement with our campus Administration, which has shared their own frustrations with the lack of additional resources to cover the contractually mandated increases to the payroll.

Our students have been suffering as the funding for SUNY has shifted steadily away from State subsidy, with tuition increases leaving the students and their families to shoulder more and more of the cost. While an increase of \$200 might not seem like much, for our most vulnerable students, it can be the difference between taking a full load of courses and finishing their degree on time, or dropping a course because they can't afford the textbooks for it, delaying their academic progress to a degree, and in a number of cases, never finishing it. We have students in our excellent teacher education program who cannot afford the cost of their certification exams, more and more students who have to work several part-time jobs (often totaling more than 40 hours per week) in addition to their classes, and thus have no time available to take advantage of supplemental review sessions or optional field trips offered to enrich their educational experience.

I have privately been told that "we will never get additional money from the State, and so we must rely on increases in tuition." I truly hope that this is not the case, as continuing on the path we have been on for the past decade is most definitely not sustainable. The mission of SUNY is to provide high quality, accessible higher education to the people of New York. **Public higher education is a public good**, and one that cannot be privatized via that back door of ever-increasing tuition and austerity budgeting. I call upon the members of the Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education to do everything in their power to reverse the dangerous course that has been taken with regard to funding SUNY's operating budgets in recent years, and to enable our institutions to put our students first, once again.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth E. Wilson



10/21/19

Greetings,

I appreciate the chance to speak on behalf of my fellow professional faculty members at SUNY New Paltz. We need adequate resources to allow us to continue to what has been described as excellent work supporting the mission of the College. Support for SUNY needs to dramatically increase immediately or this College and SUNY as a whole will inevitably stumble in the simple goal of ensuring that the state of New York has a reasonably well educated populace.

A few points:

Expansion of programs, including the opening of new program-specific buildings, has not been supported by an increase in professional faculty. A new Engineering Hub and a new Science Building are spectacular additions to our Campus, but the enlarged and enhanced programs they house do not have additional lab technicians to support the increased number of students. One lab technician now covers these deservedly very popular programs in both buildings. Our computer technicians are each individually responsible for 400 computers and users, a ratio higher than other SUNY colleges.

Too many of us need to choose between professional development to keep up with changing technology and priorities and meeting the immediate needs of the increased numbers of students we have. Very few of us have back-ups; a day or so at a conference for training to keep up with changing standards and expectations is a hard choice to make if students will be left stranded, however briefly.

“Work creep” is generally accepted as inevitable, but it rarely results in increased pay, because the money is not there, or in reduction of other duties, because the people to pick up those duties are not there. The general assumption is that a duty added to a performance program will be matched by a duty subtracted, but who then covers that duty? Few of us are willing to say, “Not me!” and let it go at that. Does SUNY rely on professionals’ sense of responsibility rather than paying appropriately?

Even more pervasive than simply adding more duties to a person's performance program is the problem of dealing with increased complexity and depth of the work we already do. If a particular project now takes three meetings instead of one, or needs to dive deeper into a problem than before, or has a domino effect on other programs that have also increased in complexity, more hours of thought and work are critical. We work according to our professional responsibility, not hours in a day, and there is a mismatch between the goals we need to meet and the hours in which to get there.

I have two points to make specifically relating to the support required by our academic faculty:

- There are considerations, many long overdue, relating to equity, social justice and accessibility, that the entire campus needs to attend to. But why are our academic faculty putting in extra hours on the learning curve to make their course materials accessible, when other colleges have teams of professionals with technical training handling this vitally important job and keeping up with changes as the technology advances?
- Academic advising is an acknowledged weak spot on our campus. Why are junior faculty, already under pressure to publish, given up to 55 advisees, when teams of full-time, embedded professional faculty advisors could support our academic programs? Why do we not have the financial resources to make these hires?

As our entire Campus works toward our Middle States review, some of us wonder if we are meeting the standard of being a "public" institution. You would be forgiven for thinking that "public" suggests "supported by the public," or "for the benefit of the public." Our campus is supported on the backs of students and their parents. We have students who do not have enough food, who sleep in their cars, and many who have multiple jobs and childcare to pay for. The governor and the state need to provide for these students (may I remind you that they are voters?).

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Merritt

Grievance Officer, UUP-New Paltz Chapter  
Assistant to the Dean of Education

Assemblymember Jonathan G. Jacobson (104<sup>th</sup> AD)

Thank you for holding today's hearing and letting me address one of the most pressing issues facing many young adults and most families with children: how to pay for college and other post-secondary education. This is not only a serious concern for those graduating high school, but also for those who are already in the work force.

In the United States today, an estimated 43 million Americans collectively owe \$1.5 trillion in student debt—and that figure continues to rise. As a result, New Yorkers—unless they have comfortably well-off parents or that rare employer who pays for them to attend school—must weigh the value of a college degree against the prospect of entering the workforce tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. This is a sobering fact given that most Americans will need to retrain two to four times during their life to stay employed.

Unfortunately, in New York State, we have not addressed that problem.

In 2017, New York launched the Excelsior Scholarship Program which pays for tuition at our community colleges and four-year schools. However, this scholarship is **only available to full-time** students and provides nothing to those who arguably most need assistance: those who cannot afford to attend college fulltime. Similarly, the Excelsior Program provides nothing to New Yorkers pursuing vocational training either at our community colleges or BOCES.

This is why I introduced Assembly Bill A7486. And I am happy to note that Senator Metzger is carrying the bill in the Senate as S5821.

This bill would expand the Excelsior Scholarship Program to support part-time students at our State community colleges and four-year schools including CUNY as well as those taking vocational training at community colleges, CUNY, and BOCES.

Why is it so important to support our part-time students? If someone already in the work force wants to go back to school and expand their skills in order to get a better job or stay competitive while they are working, that person—except in rare circumstances—would not be able to go fulltime. Their bills are not going to magically disappear. They need the income from their jobs to pay for housing, transportation, insurance, and food—not to mention the textbooks they would need for their classes.

Even many recent high school graduates are unable to go to school fulltime due to their financial circumstances. Some need to work to buy a car to get to school or to provide income for their family.

My bill would reduce the requirement from attending school fulltime to taking at least two courses a semester. Most people could handle going to class two evenings a week. A Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday schedule is doable for those who must also work.

Thousand of workers need vocational training, but not a two or four-year degree. This bill would address this need as well.

This bill has another major benefit: it would address the issue of declining enrollment at our public colleges. New York State has not lived up to its promise to support community colleges. By reducing the cost of college for more New Yorkers, this bill would drive enrollment at our State colleges, as well as at BOCES.

I have also introduced A8566 which would require the parents or guardians of high school seniors to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as a requirement of graduation.

On August 9, 2019, the New York Times reported findings by the National College Access Network (NCAN), a nonprofit group that promotes post-high school education. NCAN discovered that students who complete FAFSA are significantly more likely to continue their studies after high school. Moreover, this correlation is particularly strong among low-income students who most need financial aid.

Other states have enacted similar laws. Beginning in the 2017-18 school year, Louisiana required students to complete the FAFSA. Louisiana now leads the nation with nearly 79% of its high school seniors completing the FAFSA compared to only 44% in 2013. This legislation would help New York achieve similar success.

Illinois and Texas passed laws this year joining Louisiana in requiring graduating students to complete the FAFSA. California, Indiana, Michigan and the District of Columbia are considering similar legislation.

Of course, not every graduating senior wants or needs to continue their education after high school. New York—like other states mandating the completion of the FAFSA—will give parents, guardians, or the students themselves—if they are 18 or legally emancipated—the option

of signing a waiver stating that they understand what the FAFSA is and have chosen not to file one.

This bill will also help families who may have difficulties—due to language or other barriers—by requiring high schools to provide assistance with filling out either the FAFSA or the waiver. It also requires the Commissioner of Education to create rules and regulations to require school districts with at least one high school to provide the necessary support or assistance for compliance.

Currently, too many New York students are unaware of the FAFSA and scholarship opportunities like the Excelsior Program. This is often because their guidance counselors are failing to share information about these programs. In order to address this situation, this bill also requires the Commissioner of Education to create rules and regulations to require each high school to notify its seniors about State-sponsored scholarships, financial aid, and assistance at least four times during the school year.

In order to take care of our residents and educate our future workforce, New York must equip our students with all the available tools and resources needed to attend college or post-secondary educational institutions with as little debt as possible.

**We can make college more accessible by making it more affordable.**

**Together, these two bills go a long way towards achieving that goal.**