

College Council Meeting October 21, 2020

Voting Members Present: Mr. Basch, Mr. Law, Ms. Hershenson (Student Association president), Dr. Scott-Childress (non-voting faculty representative), and Ms. Bishop (non-voting alumni representative).

Campus Administration Present: President Christian; Interim Provost Lyman; Vice Presidents Blaisdell, Halstead, Marks, and Wright; Tanhena Pacheco Dunn, Associate Vice President, Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion.

Interim Chairman's Report:

Mr. Basch called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

Mr. Basch welcomed Council members and thanked them for attending today's meeting.

The Council postponed voting on the minutes from the September 24, 2020, meeting, due to a lack of quorum.

President's Report:

President Christian said that the College continues to manage COVID-19 well, with testing of students and employees ongoing. The College went for about three weeks without a positive test, until early last week when an off-campus student tested positive. That student had been away from campus for about a week before testing positive, so we are hopeful this is a singular instance with no spread. The president said that this past weekend, we learned that two employees had tested positive for COVID-19. Both were tested at off-campus facilities. Health departments have been notified, and the employees will remain in isolation until cleared to return to work.

The president said that the College has now tested more than 3,800 students and employees on campus, with a positivity rate of 0.23% – well below the New York State average and down from the 0.8% rate the president reported to the Council a month ago.

President Christian noted that the College continues to pay close attention to compliance with masking, social distancing, and gathering sizes on and off campus – calling on both our educational approaches and appropriate discipline as warranted. He added that he would be issuing a special cautionary message with Vice President Blaisdell about Halloween gatherings.

As shared at last month's Council meeting, the president said that students will leave campus just before Thanksgiving and all final exams will be remote.

The president said that College leadership has begun planning our spring semester in conjunction with SUNY guidance. The plans for spring semester include a similar mix of face to face and remote course offerings as this fall, to accommodate both students who seek an on-campus experience and those whose health or financial concerns demand that they remain at home. The

College has canceled spring break to avoid students traveling and potentially bringing the virus back to campus. The president said spring break will be replaced with five “Mind, Body, and Spirit” days throughout the semester when no classes are held, to give students and professors a needed breather and mental health break from this intense work. The state has continued the telecommuting program through January 1 that has helped the College continue to conduct key operations while reducing human density on campus, and we anticipate that program will continue beyond that date.

President Christian said that SUNY Athletic Conference (SUNYAC) winter seasons have been canceled – for the College that includes men’s and women’s basketball and swimming. That decision was reached by campus presidents in conjunction with SUNYAC leadership including athletic directors, out of recognition of the health threats of close competition and travel. The president noted that this was a heart-wrenching decision as we know what it means to the full experience of our student athletes. The United Volleyball Conference, in which the College’s men’s team competes, will soon make a decision about that winter season. Decisions about spring sports will come later.

In an effort to support and care for students and employees during these stressful times, the president noted that the College has organized two events next week. One is a roundtable, in conjunction with faculty governance and union leaders, other faculty, and our Employee Assistance Program to be sure that people are aware of resources and flexibility that are available to support them through these difficult times, and to discuss other adjustments we might consider. Later in the week, the College is holding a virtual check in with students – Ms. Hershenson is a co-organizer – for some of the same purposes – to better understand their experience, discuss resources that are available to support them, and explore shifts we may need to consider to enhance their learning and success.

The president said that the College is progressing in its every-ten-year reaccreditation process through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. We have prepared our self study document that is now in draft form and being reviewed by members of the campus community. And this Friday we have our virtual visit with the leader of the review team – always a first step in the process. The president noted that he is grateful for the members of the Council who have agreed to meet with her later this week.

President Christian shared updates about the College’s inclusion in this year’s rankings. One is The Wall Street Journal’s ranking of the best colleges and universities in the U.S., with recognition for great outcomes like the College’s high graduation rates, engagement, and the learning environment we provide. The College is also ranked #9 among public universities in the nine-state northeast region by U.S. News and World Report. We received callouts as a best value school (#3 among SUNY campuses), best colleges for veterans, top performers on social mobility, best undergraduate engineering programs, one of the 15 best MFA programs in New York, and recognition for our business graduate offerings and our speech-language pathology program. When the president spoke about this recognition at last week’s virtual alumni reunion, he said he emphasized the mix of the traditional and the new there, and our pride both of our traditions and our innovation.

Mr. Basch said that the College's COVID-19 response is a model. He is thankful that things, so far, have gone so well and that the campus's success has to do with continued vigilance. He added that the response efforts are a testament to New Paltz students, faculty and staff. President Christian said that this has been a real team and community effort from employees and students across the board. The president added that students have been remarkable in their compliance with expectations.

Mr. Basch asked about the protocols for the spring semester. The president said that SUNY leadership is cautious, recognizing that we'll be in a colder season and people will be moving indoors. He noted that there are clear expectations that the College not relax compliance mandates and these will continue to be enforced in the spring, along with all public health guidelines.

Mr. Basch asked if there are any classes during intersession. Interim Provost Lyman said that the College would be running its typical winter session all online with more courses offered this year compared to past winter sessions.

Budget Update:

Vice President Halstead noted that she did not have the typical budget report document to share with the Council, given continued funding uncertainties in light of the pandemic.

Vice President Halstead said that the College held a budget forum last week to share information about the budget challenges the institution faces and the uncertainties that are unlikely to be settled until after the November election, including state taxpayer support and the potential for a federal stimulus package. Once we have greater clarity on funding, New York State and SUNY guidelines, the vice president said that the College would undertake an open, consultative process, following the process used during past budget cut challenges. Vice President Halstead said that the priority is safeguarding all that the College has built over the years to make New Paltz a top-tier institution, so the institution is stronger post-pandemic.

Mr. Basch asked how COVID-19 testing has impacted the budget. Vice President Halstead said that she didn't have precise figures but it seems that testing is running approximately \$9,000-\$10,000/week for about 600 weekly pool tests. But the vice president said that this was based on all negative pool tests and cautioned that those figures could change if we were to have confirmed positive pools. She added that there are also delivery and PPE costs that are factored in as well. The vice president said some COVID-19-related expenditures are slowing, as we're stocked well with wipes, masks, hand sanitizers, etc.

Mr. Law asked if the College qualifies for COVID-19 testing funding. Vice President Halstead said that she hadn't heard of any programs for this, as of now. She added that the College qualified previously for CARES Act funding and supplemental mental health funding. The vice president also said that the College tracks COVID-19 expenses, just in

case we qualify for FEMA funding or another funding mechanism that can be pursued in the future.

SUNY-wide COVID-19 Compliance Directives:

Vice President Blaisdell updated the Council about SUNY's uniform sanctions related to COVID-19. These are not new policies but are intended to provide consistency across campuses in terms of how violations are enforced. The vice president said that sanctions are most severe for isolation or quarantine violations, but they do extend to repeated mask and social distancing violations as well. Under the new guidance, sanctions range from suspension of in-person classes and campus access to expulsion. Vice President Blaisdell said that the College has not had to impose any expulsions so far but that we have had to move to the higher range of consequences. She added that for these sanctions, there is still due process, and campuses can take individual student circumstances into consideration, such as not having a safe place to live off campus.

The vice president said the directive also indicates that restricting access to campus by turning off card access is an administrative action and not considered disciplinary in nature. As a result, it does not have the same due process requirements. Consequently, the vice president said that the College is now turning off card access for students who fail to submit health screenings for three consecutive days or miss their mandated testing requirement.

Vice President Blaisdell said that the College announced SUNY's compliance updates to the campus community twice, as required by the directive. She noted that a presentation on the changes was also provided to student leaders and residence staff, and published in the College's Daily Digest, via text, and on social media platforms.

Mr. Basch asked about compliance from off-campus students. Vice President Blaisdell responded that the College has communicated clearly to non-residential students that these directives extend to them as well as residential students. The vice president also said that senior leadership has gone into the community to talk about these expectations and advocate to students that they continue to follow public health guidelines.

Mr. Law asked if there are any voting facilities on campus. Vice President Wright responded that the College has a polling place on campus for the resident students who live here, District 9. Vice President Blaisdell said that a few members of the community are registered in the district and come to campus to vote as well.

Ms. Hershenson said that the SA Executive Board is working with UCAT to provide transportation to early voting sites in town for resident students.

Federal Title IX Process Changes:

Associate Vice President Pacheco Dunn updated the Council about changes to Title IX that were announced by the U.S. Department of Education in May. Campuses were advised to implement the updates by August 14.

The associate vice president said that the changes are focused specifically on the way cases are managed and due process is afforded to individuals who are accused under Title IX. She noted that the changes in the federal statute do not impact the approach or practice that the College will continue to have with Title IX cases. The associate vice president added that the College will continue to maintain its best practices and is a recognized leader in the System in this regard.

Associate Vice President Pacheco Dunn said that the College will also continue to support individuals coming forward with Title IX cases, as well as provide due process for all parties involved. She noted that the College is required to include the updates in the Student Handbook, which are in the form of a sidecar policy, as recommended by SUNY General Counsel.

President Christian shared, particularly for new Council members, that the Council has responsibility to review and approve changes to the Student Code of Conduct. He said that these Title IX changes are conduct-related but not part of the Code. But it is the College's practice to always share and discuss items like this with the Council.

Wrap-Up:

Mr. Basch said that Vice President Wright will select meeting dates for the spring. He extended well wishes to everyone.

Mr. Basch adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Winters", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Winters
Director of Community and Government Relations