

State of the College



Donald P. Christian, President
August 26, 2016



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In 2003, I was in my 6th year as Associate Dean for the Biological Sciences at the University of Montana and thinking about taking a next step to a dean position. I vividly recall a conversation about that possibility with a friend and colleague, Ray Callaway. Ray is an internationally known plant ecologist and considered one of the world's most influential scientific minds. He and I discussed the priority I gave to connecting with people, which till then had stood me in good stead as an administrator. I expressed my worry that this would be far less important in a higher position. Ray, with what I now know was great wisdom, said: "Even if you become a president, people will always matter most."

Then, the prospect of becoming a dean was daunting enough, and I certainly had never considered a college presidency! I have now been in this role for six years. I find myself writing and speaking often about budgets, enrollment targets, fund-raising, and strategic plan priorities – all things that as president I must care about. Yet the lesson still resonates. "People always matter most." Individually and collectively they are - we are - responsible for everything good that happens here. That's why each year in this State of the College address, I thank you for the dedication and hard work that makes New Paltz such a high-quality learning environment. Once again, I thank you for all that you do.





Today, I will focus more on considerations about people than I have before, as we continue our tradition of starting a new year by welcoming new members, celebrating our accomplishments, reinforcing our values, and looking to the year ahead. I want to highlight several efforts to improve the College by making life better for its people, and identify themes that I hope will continue to strengthen us as a community. Alas, you won't escape hearing a bit about budgets, construction and strategic plans!

Our annual Fall Convocation – at noon today in the Athletic and Wellness Center – is an important rite-of-passage for new students. Patricia Sullivan, Professor, Director of our Honors Program, and recent Chancellor's Award recipient, will be the faculty grand marshal and give the faculty welcome. Casey Silvestri, a Digital Media and Journalism major and honors student who transferred here from a community college will also speak. Providing the alumni welcome is Aaron Hines, Director of our MBA program, who earned his bachelor's degree in 2000 and his master's degree in 2004. I am grateful to the faculty who will don academic regalia to participate in Convocation, and hope that others will consider watching the live stream.



INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

Let's welcome new members of our community and acknowledge those who have stepped into new leadership positions. We will introduce new academic and professional faculty individually on September 16 and new classified staff individually at a meeting in October. But we ask that you all stand now to be recognized. Before you sit down, I would like to ask others who have been here for four years or less to also stand. This presence should help us all understand the pace of change at our institution and the influx of new energy, ideas, and talent that renew our community and bring new life to our academic mission. Please be seated.



Dr. Lorin Basden Arnold
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs



Wayne Brumfield
Interim Vice President for Student Affairs



Tanhena Pacheco Dunn
Associate Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion

New members of our administrative team include Dr. Lorin Basden Arnold, who joined us last month as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Arnold served for nearly eight years as dean of the College of Communication and Creative Arts at Rowan University in New Jersey, where she was Professor of Communication Studies with a specialty in interpersonal and family communication. The Provost is the chief personnel officer for all faculty and other academic personnel including the Deans, and has responsibility to develop, direct, and oversee academic programs. The Provost is “first among equals” of the six Vice Presidents, and plays a special role in day-to-day leadership of the campus as I devote greater efforts to fund-raising, donor engagement, and external relations.

Dr. Wayne Brumfield joins us as Interim Vice President for Student Affairs, while we conduct a national search for a new Vice President who will join us next July. Dr. Brumfield comes to us through an organization that places former and retired administrators into interim leadership roles. Dr. Brumfield has a rich background in student affairs, enrollment management, and student recruitment. He served most recently for 12 years as Vice President for Student Affairs at The University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Tanhena Pacheco Dunn has been Executive Director of Campus Climate and Compliance and Title IX Coordinator since 2012. I announced last spring her appointment to the role of Chief Diversity Officer, a natural extension of her original position. Last month I announced that she has agreed to take on further expanded responsibilities as Associate Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion, overseeing a newly aligned and more fully integrated Human Resources operation.



Emma Morcone
Deputy Title IX Coordinator



Shana Circe
Alumni Director

I am pleased also to announce that alumna Emma Morcone will join us next month as the Deputy Title IX coordinator. Some of you know her as Emma Hempel through her previous employment at New Paltz in Admissions and the Welcome Center, and the role she played in the establishment of the LGBTQ Allies program.

And I want to introduce Shana Circe, who last year took on the new role of Alumni Director. Shana is also a dual undergraduate and graduate alumna, and previously worked for 12 years in admissions and as director of on-campus recruitment.

I hope that you will introduce yourselves to your new colleagues and assist them in their transition to New Paltz or to their new roles.

Let me acknowledge several Directors of the SUNY New Paltz Foundation joining us today. Will you stand please? These business leaders, alumni, and committed citizens support the College and our students by raising private funds, and promoting us in the broader community. Thank you for being here today, and for all that you do.

GUIDING VALUES

I am continuing the tradition today of reinforcing who we are and what we value, to guide our work ahead. We value:

- ◆ A **personalized, residential campus** environment where students, faculty, and staff learn together through close interaction.
- ◆ **Rigorous academics** that bring together intellectually capable students and exceptional faculty committed to students and their learning, AND to research, scholarship, and creative accomplishment that support and advance the mission of a top-tier regional university.
- ◆ A commitment to build an **open, diverse, inclusive, and equitable college community**.
- ◆ A **spirit of exploration, discovery, and artistry** so critical for our graduates to excel in a rapidly changing society and economy.
- ◆ A commitment to **educating each student as a whole person**.
- ◆ And, being an **intellectual and cultural resource in the Hudson Valley** and serving regional economic and educational needs.

We have carved out a notable record of institutional success by adhering to these values, by reflecting them in a set of carefully constructed strategic plan priorities, and by being attentive to the changing world of higher education. As I've noted, it is people – individually and collectively – who are responsible for this success, and I will discuss several initiatives to support the people who comprise our community.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

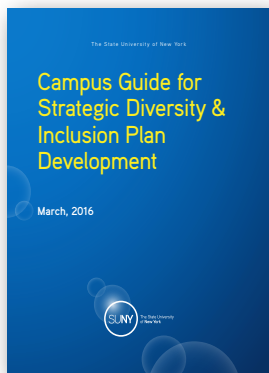
As I wrote to you recently, I know that we have all felt the impact of terrible events in the country and the world this summer. The senseless mass shooting on Latin night at a gay bar in Orlando. Several very visible shooting deaths of Black Americans by police, underscoring that race continues to define many fundamental inequities and injustices of American life. The targeted killings of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, highlighting the dangers faced by those who work to keep us and our communities safe. The commentary about immigrants and immigration. Increasing religious intolerance. Events around the world that raise great fears about our global future. The divisive, intolerant rhetoric in our national conversation.

We must talk honestly about these broader events and their impacts, always remembering that people have different levels of comfort and experience with these difficult conversations. Even as we focus on our core educational mission, we must confront these issues, and support and guide our students as they navigate them and advocate for social change during their time on campus. We must be more intentional in our work to create a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and safe campus, giving our students the knowledge and tools to live in and contribute to a just and fair society and future way of life. As I wrote last month, I am confident in our ability to work together respectfully at this challenging time.

Higher education is supposed to be a path for social and economic mobility. Yet U.S. higher education – as an enterprise - has been criticized for our limited impact on existing socioeconomic stratification. Elite institutions are seen by many as actually amplifying these disparities. More effectively educating a broad demographic and economic swath of Americans – giving them promise of brighter lives

than their parents had - is one of higher education's most pressing challenges. I have spoken before about a recently published "index of social mobility," in which SUNY New Paltz placed in the top 10% of more than 900 colleges and universities included in that ranking. As a top-performing public university we should be proud of the educational and social outcomes reflected in such a statistic. Yet, we must step up our game to address this equity challenge.

To these ends, we are developing a Diversity and Inclusion Plan, under the leadership of a task force of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni that this summer began working on our plan. The task force is led by co-chairs Rita Celariste, Assistant Director of the Educational Opportunity Program, and Professor Reynolds Scott-Childress of the History Department.



SUNY guidelines for these plans identify several essential elements, including recruitment strategies for students, administrators, faculty, and staff; a student retention and completion strategy to increase graduation rates and close achievement gaps; best-practice mentoring plans and strategies for diverse faculty and staff; and expanding cultural competency programming for everyone in our community. Our plan will build on the progress we have made on these and other areas in recent years.

In addition, I have asked the task force to recommend the structure and responsibilities of an ongoing diversity and inclusion committee to guide and support implementation of the plan. Examples of the kinds of work such a group might do are... advise administration when there is need for institutional response to bias or inequity, serve as trained external members of search committees, or share and model best practices in and out of the classroom.

With a SUNY deadline of November 1 coming fast, we do not have much time for consultation, but the task force is planning forums during September and early October to gather feedback that will be used in writing a final draft plan for my review and approval before the deadline. I hope you will join these discussions. Developing and implementing this plan and fleshing out important details will demand significant focus this year.

Moving the dial on these goals requires broad and deep involvement by the entire community. Every individual, no matter their position, has a role in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Even if the course you teach or your formal role has no apparent relationship to diversity, the students you teach or work with come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, deal with different forces that impact their learning, and need different support to achieve their goals. With a slight shift in thinking like that, we all become Chief Diversity Officers in our spaces and diversity becomes everyone's business. White people. People of color. All genders and sexual orientations. People across the full array of ability status and different religions and points of view. Students. Faculty. Staff. Administrators.



NEW MODEL FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

We are initiating a new organizational structure that draws human resources, diversity, and inclusion work together, under Tanhena Pacheco Dunn's leadership as Associate Vice President. This move is responsive to several identified trends in human resource management in higher education. One is a recognized need for an expanded role for human resources in building an environment of inclusiveness and enhancing institutional culture, alongside or on top of traditional human resources services such as appointments, benefits, employee relations, time and attendance.



Another is a cutting-edge trend to more fully integrate human resources, diversity, affirmative action, Title IX, and employee professional development. The connecting theme of these functions is to support and develop the people who form our organization, while abiding by SUNY, state, and federal policies and best practices. Some professionals forecast that such integrated systems will become a new standard for higher education in the next few years. As one who has spoken and written several times about the detriments that organizational "silos" present to our best purposes, I am very excited about this model and what it will bring to New Paltz.

This new structure will evolve over months as we hire new personnel, relocate offices within Haggerty, and develop new ways of doing this work. I have been heartened by the very positive responses to date from our Human Resources employees, SUNY system administrators, and our local union leadership.

This change comes at a time that Michele Halstead, Vice President for Administration and Finance, to whom Human Resources has reported in the past, takes on the significant new responsibility for Campus Auxiliary Services, and continues to guide our physical plant needs and our budget and financial planning in an era of continuing significant financial constraints.

SALARY ADJUSTMENTS

Recent Gallup-Purdue studies of college graduates identified several domains of well-being, including financial. I am keenly aware of the financial hardships that many New Paltz employees face because of recent, less than favorable collective bargaining agreements. Last spring, I communicated with SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher about our most significant institutional challenges, including the reality that employee salaries have not kept pace with the high cost of living in the Hudson Valley. I wrote: "This hurts recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators; contributes to low morale driven by financial concerns; and hinders building a vibrant campus community because many employees can only afford to live outside of New Paltz, where housing costs are lower."

Two years ago, we began analyzing internal salary inequities, and we allocated modest funds to address the most egregious cases. Last year, we undertook further analyses to create a path to increase the salaries of current assistant and early associate professors so that we can hire new assistant professors at competitive salaries, without creating compression or inversion. Interim Provost Stella Deen guided this work this past year, and Tanhena Pacheco Dunn and Provost's office staff Jodi Papa and Deb Gould conducted these careful and time-consuming analyses. In the next week or so, 54 faculty will be notified of salary increases resulting from this process. Our funding constraints – driven by no increase in state support and no tuition increase for this year – meant that we could not go as far with these adjustments as we wanted. But we have made a solid step in the right direction, and will do more as funding allows. We anticipate that the realignment of human resource functions will –over time – allow us to direct more attention to compensation analyses as a regular business practice.

Remember, salary increases require ongoing base funds, and cannot be supported with one-time funds, say from one year of strong tuition revenue. We will continue our advocacy for increased funding for public higher education, including for contractual salary increases when these are negotiated.

Gallup domains of well-being

Purpose

Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals

Social

Having strong and supportive relationships and love in your life

Financial

Effectively managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security

Community

The sense of engagement you have with the areas where you live, liking where you live, and feeling safe and having pride in your community

Physical

Having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis



MENTORING

I said earlier that effective mentoring of faculty and staff is an essential element of a sound diversity and inclusion plan. More broadly, better mentoring is also key to improving the working lives of employees. There are opportunities to more effectively mentor all faculty and staff within existing structures and processes. This year's reappointment, promotion, and tenure review process reinforced the need – in my judgment – that at all levels we can provide more formative assessment, especially for faculty and staff during their probationary or pre-tenure years. That means giving concrete feedback that creates

a roadmap for each employee to reach and exceed expectations. This is in contrast to the summative assessments that dominate our review process: here's our bar, you have – or have not – yet reached it, with limited guidance on how to reach it. I encourage the Provost and the Deans to work with Department Chairs and faculty to be more attentive to this mentoring opportunity and responsibility.

There remains substantial uncertainty and confusion about our institutional expectations for faculty reappointment, tenure, and promotion. I know that some believe that the Board of Trustees' criteria contain all the information and guidance that any faculty member or reviewer should need. However, those criteria apply across a diverse array of 27 state-operated SUNY campuses – university centers and doctoral-granting institutions, comprehensive colleges like New Paltz, and technical campuses each with very different specializations – like SUNY Maritime Academy that has its own ship!

One way to reduce anxiety and uncertainty is to translate the rather brief and generic Trustees' criteria to the specific context, mission, purpose, and demands upon faculty on our campus. Hence, the recent administrative push to develop department guidelines for reappointment, promotion, and tenure that place these expectations more thoughtfully in disciplinary and institutional contexts. These are not to counter or contravene the Trustees' criteria but to more clearly articulate them for our college and our faculty. We are moving in the right direction, and I hope that faculty, department chairs, deans, and the Central Committee will continue to refine these guidelines and their use. These guidelines must be more than formulaic. Specifying, for example, a minimum number of journal articles or scholarly presentations does not provide an adequate foundation for judging the complex and nuanced nature of faculty work. Faculty – and our institutional progress - deserve more thoughtful guidance.

Board of Trustees criteria

- Effectiveness in performance
- Mastery of specialization
- Professional ability
- Effectiveness in University Service
- Continuing growth



This year, the Central Committee noted that several pre-tenure assistant professors had perhaps raised their hand too often to take on service assignments, and encouraged a different balance in their workload. And I agree wholeheartedly. Yet we cannot overlook the difficulty faced by an untenured assistant professor in saying “no” to a request by a Department Chair or senior professor. Department Chairs can guide pre-tenure faculty to have sufficient time and opportunity to develop their scholarly agendas and hone their teaching capabilities – while also building a record of engagement in the life and work of the department and the institution.

I will comment on one more “people” consideration. We live in an era of heightened awareness to

issues of campus sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. That heightened awareness and attention is fully warranted and appropriate. We pay careful attention to training and educating students and employees about SUNY, state, and federal laws and guidelines, about affirmative consent, bystander intervention, and supportive and respectful relationships. We have well-designed and very well-regarded practices and policies for investigating allegations of sexual assault, harassment, and violence, providing support for survivors, and pursuing appropriate disciplinary action.

We focus much of that attention on interactions and relationships between students. Consensual sexual or romantic relationships between employees and students present a different dynamic. Incidents and experiences at colleges and universities across the U.S. tell us that we must address this issue more clearly than we have. More than 20 years ago, the Academic Affairs Committee passed a motion that there be no new rules governing such relationships, but requested that the Administration



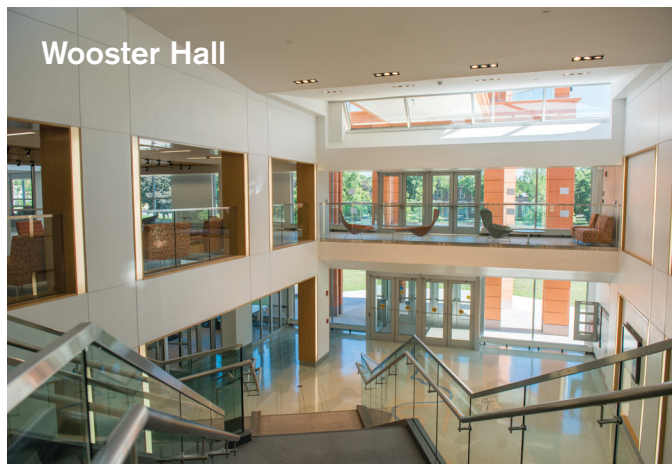
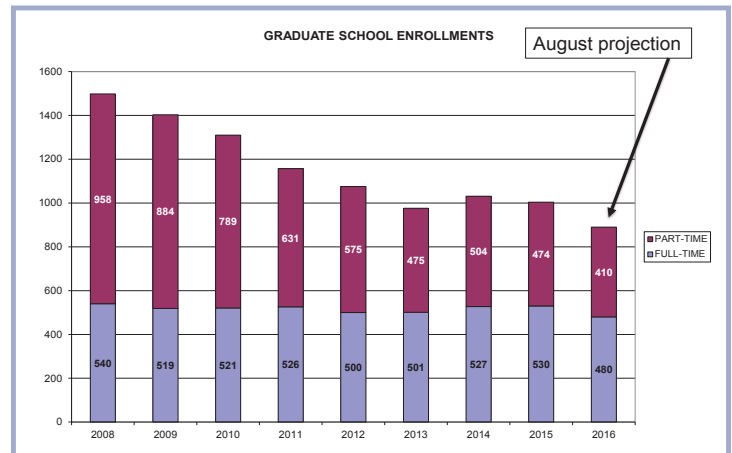
provide information about the kinds of relationships and conduct that had led to charges or complaints. That guidance has been included in the Faculty Handbook. I believe it is time to reexamine this policy to ensure that our campus is best positioned to safeguard against the harm that often results from such relationships. Our students certainly deserve the protection of a more clearly articulated policy that recognizes the power differential between student and professor inherent in many such relationships.

That policy must also honor the imperative that we provide a safe and supportive learning environment. Faculty and staff would also benefit from increased clarity about what is and what is not appropriate. One of our goals for the year will be to develop and implement such a policy.

ENROLLMENT AND TUITION REVENUE

I want to touch briefly on a few developments and initiatives you may be more accustomed to hearing about from me! Our undergraduate enrollments are robust and undergraduate tuition revenue is sound. Our incoming class is diverse, and academically strong – we have maintained our selective admission standards while meeting our enrollment targets in a highly competitive recruiting environment.

However, our graduate enrollments continue to drop. This has implications for our overall tuition revenue and operating budget. Indeed, the combined effect of decline in graduate tuition revenue and the status quo in state support and tuition demand that we take significant – and difficult - steps this year to adjust our economy. You will be hearing more about this throughout the year, including how you can help address our declining graduate enrollments. All of that said, I will tell you that the New Paltz economy is one of the healthiest among the SUNY campuses.



CONSTRUCTION

Some of you have moved into Wooster Hall and others will be moving in soon. I hope you will join us for the ceremonial ribbon cutting on September 14. The “brutalist” architecture of this building served 1960s needs well, but the beautiful, bright, and lively renovation will better serve students, faculty, and staff in the 21st century. Over time and as people adjust to a new environment, I think it will have the same transformative impact on our campus as the renovated Sojourner Truth Library and the Atrium.

The science building is scheduled for completion in December. This spring, we hope to break ground on the Engineering Innovation Hub, and to open this building in 2019. In December, we will vacate 50-year-old Bevier residence hall for another of our fast-paced, floor-to-ceiling renovations to be completed before move-in day one year from now. I remind everyone that these major construction and renovation projects are funded by state-issued bonds, and those funds cannot be redirected for program support, faculty salaries, or other operational purposes.

We are entering the third year of our major gift initiative that aimed to double our previous annual averages of private fund-raising, to \$10 million over three years. We are on pace to achieve that goal, as we expand our engagement with alumni, friends and donors.

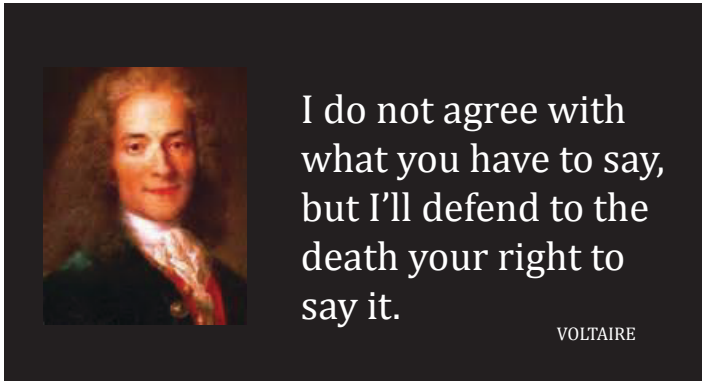
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The Strategic Planning Council will advance three new initiatives this year to increase student retention and completion. They include an online process to withdraw from a course that helps students better understand possible negative consequences of dropping; an early-warning system that outlines a three-

pronged approach to identifying and intervening with students at risk; and the possibility of registering for more than one semester of courses at a time.

We must implement different models of course scheduling to address persistent concerns about course availability while balancing faculty teaching loads now and in the future.

We are expanding and enriching the work begun last year to more effectively integrate transfer students into our community and to enhance their success. Our goal is to be known as the most transfer-friendly campus.



A faculty task force worked during the summer to develop a program of events early this fall centered on free speech and open debate, underscoring our commitment to the key principles of a democratic society and the purposes of a university. You will hear more about these activities in the coming weeks.

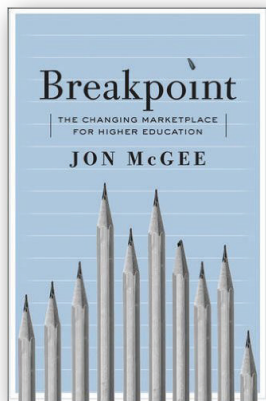
We submitted our Periodic Review Report to our regional accrediting body, Middle States, marking mid-way progress since our reaccreditation review in 2011 and the next review in 2021. We've received a positive preliminary report, and expect official word this fall affirming our accreditation status.

SUNY is undertaking a system-wide strategic enrollment plan that will require significant attention. We don't yet know what this means, but the project involves some October deadlines, overlapping with our work on the Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

We're expanding our sustainability efforts, including installing low-energy LED outdoor lights across the campus, and a photovoltaic array and solar energy storage project that will reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and test new technology in support of distributed energy sources. This is technology that many people across the nation are talking about but few are implementing even on a trial basis. We are undertaking new initiatives to reduce our water usage. For example, Wooster has a 12,500-gallon cistern to collect rainwater that will be used as the gray water in the building's toilets and urinals. And I am trading in my high-mileage university car – a hybrid – for an electric vehicle that will further reduce the environmental impact of my required business travel.



CHALLENGES IN THE HIGHER ED LANDSCAPE



I want to end today's address with reflections on the substantial demographic, economic, and cultural changes we must navigate, and our priorities and initiatives for doing so. I will draw heavily on John McGee's 2015 book about the dramatic changes in the current higher education environment. These thoughts focus on people, and the people at the core of our mission and purpose: our students.

To capture that sense of change, McGee titled his first chapter "A Liminal Moment." "Liminal" means transition, an intermediate state, or occupying a position on both sides of a threshold. He begins with the opening passage from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity," ending "we were

all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.” Dickens used these words a century and a half ago to set the stage for his classic novel about the French Revolution; McGee uses them to describe, quite aptly, higher education today.

McGee presents five key ideas around which to organize thinking about the rapidly changing landscape for higher education. These ideas may be familiar from my earlier talks with you and from our strategic plan. All warrant our consideration as we look to the year ahead. I will largely borrow McGee’s words to outline these points and key questions they raise:

Accessibility: who will have access to a college experience? What will that experience be like? Will our institutions be places of destiny for the privileged, or places of opportunity for the vast majority who are not privileged?

Affordability: How will students and their families pay for college? Without question, cost has become the central challenge facing colleges and universities everywhere.

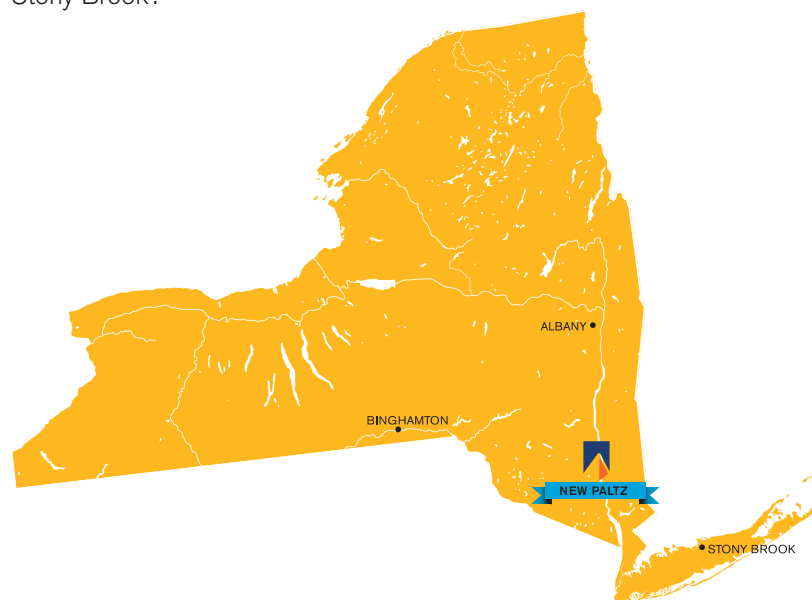
Accountability: What kinds of outcomes should students, parents, and society expect of higher education? What kinds of promises do we make to our students, and how well do we deliver on those promises? McGee wrote: In homes, in the halls of government, and among philanthropists, we face a singular central question: is this an investment worth making?

Sustainability: McGee was writing here not about photovoltaic energy sources, but about whether colleges can generate the resources needed to continuously improve our academic and developmental purpose while also remaining accessible to students of all economic means. Importantly, he points out that at less wealthy institutions – certainly public universities like ours – these values compete.

Differentiation: How will individual colleges distinguish themselves and their value in the face of a society that increasingly regards a college education as a transactional good rather than a transformational one, a necessary experience for success and security in a new economy? If – in his words -- every institution describes itself as a friendly, caring learning community dedicated to academic excellence and the development of the whole person, how does any one institution set itself apart, and what truly defines that special nature? Why is New Paltz special, and different from its competitors Binghamton, U Albany or Stony Brook?

Key Elements of Our Changing Landscape

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Accountability
- Sustainability
- Differentiation



Those of you familiar with the SUNY New Paltz strategic plan will recognize that we have already targeted each of these five ideas, perhaps in different language:

- ◆ Continuously **improve the teaching and learning environment** in the classroom and beyond ...to help all students develop knowledge, skills and capacities for a good life and livelihood, contributing to goals of accessibility and accountability.
- ◆ Expand our resource base and support student financial needs by **increasing our philanthropic success** ... including by engaging alumni more effectively in the life of the College.
- ◆ Market New Paltz internally and externally ... to better **tell OUR story** and differentiate New Paltz from other institutions that students, parents, and employees might choose.
- ◆ **Improve processes** to make life better for employees and students, and to increase our efficiency and effectiveness with constrained financial resources – key elements of accountability and sustainability. One particular dimension that members of our community increasingly recognize as needing improvement is our system of faculty governance. The reviewers of our Middle States Periodic Review Report encouraged us to pursue this work aggressively. I've expressed before my strong interest and support for developing a new governance model, and will continue that support and encouragement with our new presiding officer of the faculty, Anne Balant.
- ◆ **Strengthen our regional and community engagement**, for several purposes: to increase our distinctive profile among prospective students and their parents, to create opportunities for students and faculty beyond the boundaries of our campus, and to elevate the success of our region and its economy.

The work that we will do together during the year ahead will advance these values and outcomes. We have made progress, and have more exciting work ahead. I wish everyone a productive, rewarding, and healthy year, and look forward to working with you to achieve our vision for New Paltz.

Strategic plan

- **Improve the teaching and learning environment** (Accessibility and Accountability)
- **Increase our philanthropic success** (Affordability)
- **Tell OUR story** (Differentiation)
- **Improve processes** (Accountability and Sustainability)
- **Strengthen our regional and community engagement** (Differentiation and Accessibility)

As we go about this work of educating students and building an even better university, remember the words of my friend, Ray: "People will always matter most."





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