



New Paltz  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

STATE OF THE COLLEGE  
**2014**





President Donald P. Christian

# State of the College 2014

President Donald P. Christian

August 22, 2014

## Good morning, and welcome.

My excitement about the promise of the new academic year is dampened by the knowledge of the sudden death in a car accident earlier this week of our colleague Aleanna Luethi-Garreht, Associate Professor of Art. Those of us who knew her are deeply saddened by her loss. Please join me in a moment of silence to honor her memory and all that she brought to SUNY New Paltz and our students.

Thank you. Her closest colleagues are planning a memorial service to be held later this fall. Details to come.

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Aleanna Luethi-Garreht  
*Associate Professor of Art*  
1954-2014  
*photo by Andrea Frank,*  
*Art Department*

## RAPID PROTOTYPING AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

I will continue with a story that should inspire us to think in new ways about advancing our goals. This summer, several faculty, staff, and students built a prosthetic hand for Joseph, a Hudson Valley 6-year-old who was born without fingers on his left hand. His new "Robohand" – a product of our growing 3D printing capability -- will let him pursue life in new ways.

The typical prosthetic hand costs between twenty and thirty thousand dollars. Joseph's hand required about \$20 of material. Our team borrowed a design that others created and shared, instead of taking years to develop one. Within a month, they had tailored the design to fit Joseph. The first version was not perfect, but it worked well, and the team has already refined and printed a next-generation device, fitted just last week.



Joseph's Robohand is the best example of how our 3D initiative has developed. Students and faculty from across the campus are involved – from art, biology, engineering, our Hudson Valley Advanced Manufacturing Center; we've acquired new equipment; we've built new partnerships with business and industry; we've expanded the use of 3D printing on campus and in high schools and community colleges; and we've had positive impacts in the region, including on people like Joseph and his family.

One application of 3D printing is rapid prototyping. A prototype or preliminary model is developed, tested, and refined. 3D printing allows innovative ideas to be turned into end products more rapidly and at less cost than traditional methods of prototyping. We should think about rapid prototyping not merely as a technological innovation but as a different mindset about problem solving and creativity – whether we're talking about new devices, computer software, or business processes. 3D printing also lets us test effectiveness on a small scale before adopting a device or process broadly.

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This model carries lessons for higher education. Earlier this summer, a Vice President at the American Council on Education, Dr. Cathy Sandeen, spoke about cultural tendencies in higher education that hinder progress. I immediately connected her ideas with making Joseph's hand. She noted the academy's deeply rooted cultural tendency to pursue careful, slow, stepwise analyses, not coming to conclusions until we have asked all questions. Dr. Sandeen argues that this serves us well as scholars growing knowledge, but holds us back from achieving larger educational goals.

She spoke about the inspiration that higher education might draw from models of rapid prototyping – putting in place a “good enough” solution, immediately measuring its effect, improving it, trying the next version to advance toward our desired goals. I am reminded of our January online programming and how faculty and many departments leapt ahead to bring this about in a very short time, and improved it the next year. We

began on a small scale, and are expanding over time. We did not let insistence on perfection be the enemy of the good.

Her argument made me think about what we might accomplish if we approached, say, a new program or workflow, or perhaps a new curriculum – general education comes to mind - as if we were creating Joseph's Robohand. Why not solve such needs by seeking perfection as an end goal but not demanding it as a first step? Indeed, as I reflected on this metaphor, it struck me that we were able to create a prosthetic hand within a year of establishing our manufacturing center precisely because we had approached our entire 3D printing initiative with a rapid prototyping mindset. Not perfect at the start, but very good, and getting better.

## Careful, Slow, Stepwise Analyses vs. Rapid Prototyping



Cathy Sandeen

Dr. Sandeen also discussed another barrier to progress: the academy's cultural tradition of individualism. We often resist moving beyond our individual department or functional area to support bigger goals. And, we sometimes feel the need to invent our own knowledge rather than borrowing and adapting from others – what some call the “not invented here” barrier. Many successful practices and models developed elsewhere could be adapted to our circumstances, rather than “building our own” – in curriculum, pedagogy, program structure, governance, administration. Dr. Sandeen makes the case that a shift from individualistic to collective approaches would greatly speed our progress. If our 3D team members had not been willing to draw on each other's varied expertise and to borrow an existing design and adapt it for Joseph, they could not have made his hand in the time that they did.

I hope this example inspires us to think innovatively, adaptively, and collectively about how we approach our challenges. Obviously, we don't rapid prototype a new science building or a Tappan Zee Bridge. Not every problem or project is amenable to rapid prototyping. We need to be discerning about the right opportunities. But if the broad outline of a new program and what it will accomplish ring true to our goals, moving ahead with a prototyping mindset may help us advance. Beginning some projects in small ways makes sense, so that scale itself is not a barrier to advancing new ideas. And we can better achieve many of our goals by working collectively. I will return to these ideas later, and invoke them throughout the year as we pursue the goals of our strategic plan.



So, you're asking, why should this matter, and why now? Why are approaches that have served SUNY New Paltz and our mission well in the past not enough to sustain us in the future?

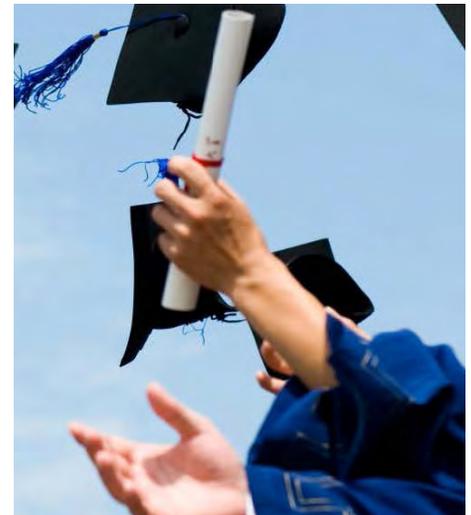
To answer that, we need only look beyond our campus and consider: clear signs that the pre-eminence of U.S. higher education is slipping ... lingering financial challenges facing states, the nation, students and their families ... technological disruption... declining numbers of high school graduates, especially those well prepared for university work.

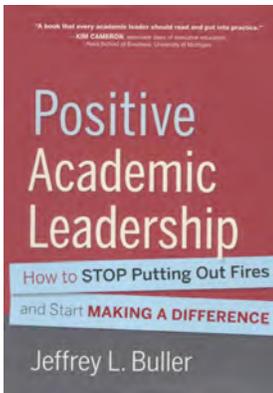
## HIGHER EDUCATION IN A NEW CLIMATE

Criticism of higher education has taken on a tenor that is arguably unprecedented. Many believe we are not doing enough to control costs, increase access, and help more students graduate on time. Some challenge whether college graduates are learning the essentials to succeed in and contribute to a complex 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Some question whether a college education is even worthwhile, unless it has a narrow vocational focus. Many skeptics call loudly for heightened accountability. Some believe that our priorities are not aligned with what society needs. We see little sign that public investment in higher education will increase soon. Indeed, some believe that we already have more financial resources than our work warrants.

American society is paying attention – political leaders at the highest levels, policy makers, influential business and foundation leaders, skeptical parents and their sons and daughters. Survey results show declining public trust in colleges and universities. This sentiment is embodied in a proposed new campus rating system that has the strong support of President Obama and the U.S. Department of Education. We might dismiss these forces, hoping they go away, but we almost certainly do so at our peril. We should be guided by a heightened sense of urgency, while not losing sight of our core educational values.

As we built our strategic plan, we paid careful attention to the external environment, and took into account the many assets, traditions, and resources of





SUNY New Paltz. As a result, we are in a position of strength, as long as we recognize that colleges and universities will thrive in this difficult environment by adapting, probably at a pace and in ways that are new to us.

New Paltz is one university, and we certainly cannot change the face of higher education. But we can create an ever-greater mark of distinction for New Paltz by responding innovatively and directly to the challenges that higher education faces.

I encourage us to embrace the attitude captured by Jeffrey Buller in his 2013 book "Positive Academic Leadership" - "It's not a crisis. It's just the environment in which I [we] work. Now how do I [we] go about making things better?"

Let's now focus on OUR institution and making things better in the coming year. In that spirit, I invite you to Fall Convocation at noon today. We will welcome our new incoming class and help frame their thinking about their education. Professor Jan Schmidt of English and Creative Writing will serve as Faculty Grand Marshal, and Physics and Astronomy Professor and Chair Stacie Nunes will welcome new students on behalf of the faculty. You will see a changed program this year that is one step toward engaging our students more fully, inspiring them, and bonding them to their new home and community. I want to thank the faculty and staff from across the College who met this spring to brainstorm new ways to make this a more meaningful experience for our students. We rapid-prototyped today's event and will improve on it next year based on what we learn.

I want to express how grateful I am to each of you for your dedicated work that makes New Paltz an exceptional institution ... for our students, the region, and beyond. Throughout the year, I hear from so many people whose lives were touched by a special effort you made that reflects your pride in New Paltz and your commitment to our mission. Know how much I appreciate what a difference you make.

## INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME



Laura Barrett  
Dean LA&S

Today we welcome new members of our community and acknowledge people who have stepped into significant new roles. New academic and professional faculty will be introduced individually at the first faculty meeting on September fifth and new classified staff at a meeting on October first. Today, I want to welcome all new members of our community. You've joined a wonderful institution, and we look forward to your contributions and to supporting your professional growth. I ask all of you to stand and be recognized. Our new employees include 34 full-time faculty, representing 11 new positions and 23 positions opened up by retirement or resignation that we've refilled. This reflects our clear and longstanding commitment to build the ranks of our full-time faculty.

I want to introduce new members of our administrative team. Please welcome Dr. Laura Barrett, joining us as the new Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Two long-term employees were promoted into new roles based on their exceptional previous work. Lucy Walker is our new Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research. Linda Eaton is the new Associate Vice President for Student Affairs.



Jason Gilliland  
Coordinator of Veteran  
Services

Two others have stepped into interim leadership roles – Dr. Kris Backhaus is Interim Dean of the School of Business while our national search continues. Robin Cohen-LaValle is Interim Dean of Students this year.

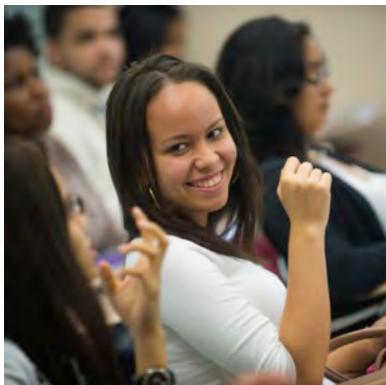
I also want to introduce Jason Gilliland, who joined us this summer as our first-ever Coordinator of Veteran Services, providing support and programming for our growing numbers of veteran students and their families.

Let me welcome several Directors of the SUNY New Paltz Foundation joining us today. These business leaders, alumni, and committed citizens support the college and our students by raising private funds, and the College's public profile. Thank you for being here today, and for your volunteer support for the College.

I am continuing the tradition at the start of the academic year of reinforcing who we are and what we value, as a beacon for our work throughout the year. **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 supports the mission of a comprehensive university.
- A commitment to build an open, inclusive, and equitable college community.
- Fostering 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.

A New Paltz education is rooted in the values of a liberal education. These are purposes that connect us all to a common educational mission, across disciplines. I will repeat my mantra that to serve our students well in a knowledge-driven world ... we must make their liberal education practical, and their practical education liberal.....a liberal education for the real world.



## Check our Rankings!

[www.newpaltz.edu](http://www.newpaltz.edu)

**#2** in the Top 50 affordable colleges nationally with a high return on investment.  
– *Affordable Colleges Online*

**#4** among the best public regional universities in the North.  
– *U.S. News & World Report*

**#5** of the Top 50 public colleges/universities nationally for best lifetime degree value.  
– *The College Database*

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Let's look back over the past year. SUNY New Paltz continues to be ranked highly, and we were included in several NEW rankings for great value and high quality. SUNY New Paltz was recognized as a "top producer" of Fulbright Scholars, reflecting the high caliber of New Paltz faculty and their many significant scholarly, artistic, and educational contributions that bring recognition to them and the College. Seven faculty and staff were awarded SUNY Chancellor's Awards, to be presented at the first faculty meeting of the year.

Inspired by our faculty and staff, New Paltz students were recognized for their achievements in theatre, film, a cappella musical performance, studio art, marketing, athletics, chemistry and other fields. People all over the country were touched and moved by the integrity and commitment of two students and their roommate who returned \$40,000 in cash they found in a \$20 Salvation Army couch.

Our latest six-year graduation rate of 73% is the highest in our institution's history, and far above state and national averages. But it also lags about 10 percentage points behind our top SUNY competitor. Our 4-year graduation rate is also above the national average, but lower than it should be given the academic preparation of our students. This is a call for us to work collectively to improve course scheduling, academic advising, integrity of curricular design, and other key factors. Our graduation rates are good but not great, and not where they should be.



We continued to improve our campus climate. Last night speaker Michael Fowlin returned to campus to help our students develop skills and perspectives to live and study on a diverse campus that values equity and inclusiveness. We enhanced our recruitment approaches to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce. We developed a process and a form for students to request use of a preferred name, rather than their legal name, on certain university documents.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. Our society has made strides since 1964, but much work remains. I think here of recent happenings in Ferguson, Missouri. Our campus is a microcosm of that broader society with all of its strengths and shortfalls. As a community, we must remain attentive to these issues in and out of the classroom, an imperative highlighted by the fact that this fall's first-year class has the highest percentage of students from historically under-represented groups in our institution's history.





We celebrated the renewal of a local tavern owners' agreement and related programs to reduce excessive alcohol consumption and help keep our students and the community safe. I was invited to share these model practices at a national conference and to represent higher education at a White House forum on sexual assault, reflecting the growing recognition of the excellent work our campus is doing in these areas.

We continue to play our role as a regional convener, hosting conferences on diverse topics - such as watershed resiliency, Asian Studies, multicultural education, crisis communication, the Hudson Valley economy. Our 3D printing initiative garnered \$1 million of state economic development funding, and we formed a first-in-the-nation partnership with the top manufacturer of desktop 3D printers. 3D at New Paltz is attracting growing interest in the region, and infectious student enthusiasm. Our plan for the START-UP New York economic development program was approved. And we had the most social media activity ever when HBO's show "Girls" filmed on campus last month. Many students and some staff had the great experience of serving as extras.

We expanded our January online programming, and changed course scheduling to better serve our students. Fewer of this year's graduates said that poor course availability delayed their graduation than in the past, but we still have lots of room to improve on that front. Our staff did wonderful work to improve internal processes - a goal of the plan. Our staff dramatically reduced the paperwork to approve extra service for teaching, saving time and wear and tear across all academic units. Staff from several units worked together to implement the new Degree Works student records and academic progress software. Our online system for vehicle registration implemented last year has drawn even more use by students and employees, further reducing lines and foot traffic.

Dean Michael Rosenberg and School of Education faculty launched a literacy program in Newburgh that meets a pressing community need while also providing opportunities for our students. New Paltz was selected as a regional host for the State's Master Teacher program, a great collaboration between our schools of Education and of Science and Engineering. These are key examples of initiatives that left the runway quickly and continued to be built after take-off.





We continued to make progress on our fund-raising goals, including honing a statement of priorities for the next three years and exceeding several fund-raising benchmarks of previous years. To support another strategic goal, we established new ways to engage alumni, including a new SUNY New Paltz Alumni Association and a new Alumni Advisory Council. We supported the region with our Distinguished Speaker Series, arts, musical, theatre, and writing programs, business engagement, and an impressive array of employee and student volunteer efforts.

We met our fall enrollment targets for incoming undergraduate students, bringing in a class that is academically very well prepared. The several-year decline in graduate enrollment has slowed, but we have a long way to go in recovering from these losses. We expanded our marketing presence through regional advertising and created new tools to better tell the New Paltz story, including a new homepage design, new ways to showcase departmental “Points of Pride,” and a new up-to-the-minute news page. This work supports student recruitment, fund-raising, and alumni engagement.



Our campus is increasingly beautiful and well maintained. These improvements are guided by our long-term facilities master plan and the great work of Facilities staff. They are critical to remaining competitive. Funds for our many major construction and renovation projects come from long-term state bonds that are paid off by taxpayer dollars or residence hall fees. We cannot use such borrowed funds to hire faculty and staff, raise salaries, or support students, a point that I hope you will help our students and your colleagues understand.

Three major projects will transform the academic core of the campus – the Wooster renovation, the new science building, and the library renovation.

The renovated LeFevre residence hall opened this fall, and our new residence hall - named Rigeview Hall - will open in fall 2015. Our construction and renovation projects are built to LEED Silver standards, with extra effort aimed at achieving LEED Gold.

We have tried to keep you informed about the Park Point housing project. In brief, the Town Planning Board did not approve the site plan, because Park Point was granted a tax incentive that reduces its tax bill for the student-housing part of the project. The developer, joined by the

SUNY New Paltz Foundation, is seeking a judicial ruling on whether the Planning Board's action was within its legal purview. Even with the PILOT, Park Point will be the largest taxpayer in New Paltz and will pay as much or more tax as existing apartments (even the newest), reinforcing my view that this project is good for meeting the College's critical housing needs - for students, faculty and staff - and it's good for the community compared to alternatives we could pursue. We believe that the impacts of this project on community services have been highly exaggerated by vocal opponents, and that benefits will far outweigh costs.



We completed a "transportation hub" in our Route 32 parking lot -- buses will no longer stop on the state highway, improving safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bus passengers. We are evaluating ways to improve crosswalk safety.

Our budget is stable but constrained, and we are wary about the future. We ended last year's budget process and began this year with almost no new recurring resources to invest. The rational tuition policy is nearing its end, and it is uncertain whether we will see increases in tuition revenue beyond next year. Certainly the national conversation about student debt and high tuition costs will influence this debate. So, in brief, we are not rich, but okay, and cautious.

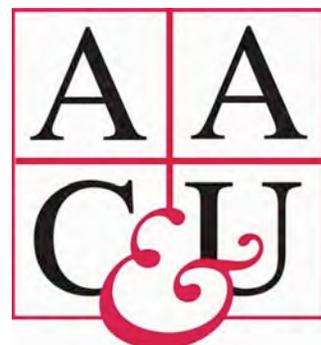
## THE YEAR AHEAD

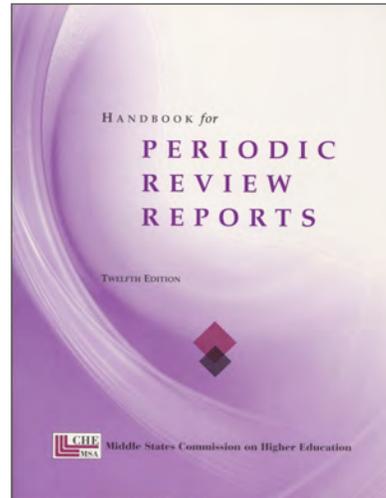
The initiatives and priorities of our strategic plan will be at the forefront of our work, and of our budget decisions. We are seeing the fruits of previous decisions that support the plan, and we will allocate and reallocate resources to support these priorities. We have reassigned several vacated faculty positions from areas of declining enrollment to growth areas, and will continue to do so. Our recurring funds are limited, but we can be more flexible in allocating one-time monies to support the strategic plan. You will be hearing in the next few weeks about our process for allocating one-time funds. Those allocations will be tightly linked to advancing initiatives of the strategic plan. But I also remind everyone that not all of the plan goals require money; some mean changing the way we do our work with current resources, including developing new collective approaches to improve.



This year, members of the President's Cabinet will be increasingly involved in advancing the strategic plan – both within their units and as partners in a senior leadership team. They will work closely with the Strategic Planning Council and its chair, Dr. Ray Schwarz. No individual or unit can be responsible for this work. Progress on our plan must be a collective effort.

I will speak today about our goals for student learning and establishing an engaged living and learning community. These are initiatives that touch most directly on our academic core and, either directly or indirectly, on the work of all employees. Survey results last year showed that





students do not compare us favorably with our top competitors in academic reputation, level of academic challenge, and availability and quality of majors. I am reminded of conversations with faculty who quietly shared the concern that perhaps we are not as good academically as we think we are. I think of the mixed picture of success in our graduation rates, noted earlier. Such observations should propel us full-bore into advancing these parts of our plan.

We must undertake this work with clear attention to the best thinking about liberal education. One hundred years ago, the Association of American Colleges and Universities – the AAC&U – was formed to address threats to liberal education, a mission that continues today. AAC&U, through its research and its partnerships with faculty, universities, and foundations, has developed curricular models, assessment tools, and communication materials to advance liberal education goals. These are readily available for our use, and we have not capitalized on them sufficiently – harkening back to my earlier point about collective action and the “not invented here” barrier. For example, the AAC&U has worked with teams of faculty at more than 100 campuses to develop and test VALUE rubrics – an acronym for Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education. These show far more promise to provide meaningful assessment of student learning than any standardized test.

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These recommendations use the collective judgments of faculty about students’ own complex work as the focus of assessment. Much of this work is beyond the classroom – such as individual creative performances and projects, research, service learning, internships. These approaches link directly to key elements of our strategic plan – and we must tap into them more fully.

I look forward to this fall’s faculty governance discussions about bringing liberal education principles to revision of our general education curriculum. The Provost and I respect and support the primary role of faculty in designing the curriculum, and in the spirit of shared governance stand ready to support this process in all ways that we can. That said, both of us believe that our general education program needs significant revision to prepare our students for their lives and livelihoods.

We will be measured more stringently than before on how much our students learn, and on our ability to provide meaningful evidence of their learning. We must have this in mind as we develop our Middle States Periodic Review Report, due in spring 2016, and as we prepare for our next 10-year review in 2021. A committee chaired by Associate Provost Laurel M. Garrick Duhaney will begin work this year on the Periodic Review Report. This group will collaborate with the Strategic Planning Council and the two standing assessment committees, to integrate strategic plan goals, assessment, and accreditation. Middle States will hold us to a much higher standard on assessment and student learning in our future reviews than in 2011.

We will also be judged by both a new SUNY "Performance Management System" and the proposed federal system for rating campuses that I mentioned earlier. How these systems will be used is not yet clear, but we cannot ignore them or their implications. The SUNY measuring system will include things like program completion, graduation rate, and the value of a degree appropriate to each SUNY campus. The Provost and I support this effort, even if it is imperfect.

The proposed federal system similarly relies on measures of access, cost, completion, and outcomes related to landing a first job after graduation. This system lacks a key element: evidence about what students know, and what they can do with their learning.

We certainly will be judged by our performance on the federal measures and must keep improving. But we will bring this institution even greater distinction by doubling down to enhance student learning and our assessment of it, as we prepare our students for successful futures.

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I began this address by drawing inspiration from 3D printing and rapid prototyping about innovation and collective action. I want to end with inspiration from another initiative this year. We will commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Wilderness Act. This anniversary draws special attention here because New York and New Yorkers helped set the stage for this environmental legislation.

Beyond the Act itself, we may draw deeper meanings from our relationship to wilderness and nature. Even as we enthusiastically expand our emphases in 3D printing and engineering, the spirit behind the Wilderness Act reminds us of the need to put bounds on our faith in technology, and of not losing sight of other values that wilderness brings to mind –historical, cultural, artistic, and aesthetic. Such values must remain prominent in our academic programs, adapted to meet modern challenges and opportunities.



The authors and supporters of the Wilderness Act clearly viewed designated wilderness as lands largely unaltered by European human activity. We now live in a world touched entirely by humans, as a result of climate change and other human footprints. Serious scientists and policy makers are giving sober thought to actively managing and intervening in wilderness areas. Fifty years ago, such ideas would have been untenable. Do we take no action and risk entirely losing these special places? Or, do we now manage wilderness to preserve it, inevitably changing what we have valued in the first place?

As we teach and learn about wilderness this year, let's recognize that re-thinking wilderness is relevant to re-thinking higher education. Higher education faces the consequences of dramatic climate change. We must respond by adapting our work – preserving key values, while recognizing the imperative for change. Holding on tenaciously to all that we have known will not serve the future well.

From what I have seen in my first five years at New Paltz, I have every confidence that we have the conviction and the wherewithal to excel in this new climate.

**Thank you for your attention, and for your work in meeting these challenges in the year ahead.**







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