

Press Conference Transcript
SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher & Student Journalists
March 11, 2009

David: Hi, I'm David Belsky, Director of Communications for the SUNY Student Assembly. It is great pleasure to be moderating this first-ever press conference with our new Chancellor, Nancy Zimpher. This press conference is being held just for student journalists across the SUNY's 64 campuses. Many of you have emailed your questions already, but if you are logging in now, you can email questions to pr@sysadmin.suny.edu. As you all know, the SUNY Board of Trustees voted unanimously to name Dr. Nancy Zimpher the 12th chancellor of SUNY in February. Dr. Zimpher formally begins her job as Chancellor on June 1st, but she is here with us today in her first system-wide press conference because she is interested in hearing the voices of SUNY students. Chancellor Zimpher, it is a pleasure to introduce you to the SUNY journalists here with us today.

Chancellor: Thank you David and thank you to the student assembly for this terrific first. I am just delighted to be with you. I appreciate all of the student journalists who are joining us today and quite frankly I hope we make a habit of this David.

David: Me too, OK, I guess we will get started. A few of our student journalists have asked, "What does the SUNY Chancellor do"?

Chancellor: Wow, that is a great place to start, let me just say one of the big attractions for this position is on one hand, the aspirations of the State University of New York and all of its campuses to be the just the finest system we can be for New York, for the Unites States of America and for the world. And so I think my primary responsibility is to provide leadership in determining exactly what our future as a collective of diverse and wonderful campuses will be, how we can better serve the state of New York, and be a model educational set of institutions frankly for the world. So I think I am going to spend a lot of time in advocacy, in the development of Public Policy around the role SUNY campuses can play, not only in economic development, but the quality of life. I know from my prior experiences I spend a lot of time in meetings. I've even said lunch and dinner are sometimes viewed as committee meetings because that is really how you get things done. I expect to be traveling both personally to the campuses. I think you have heard that we will have these initial campus visits this summer all 64 campuses, but I will probably be spending a lot of time in this kind of technology so that I can communicate on a regular basis with constituents. And to just close this out David, because I could probably give you an hours worth of the answer to this question, I expect to be meeting and working with public policy makers, the Governor, Legislatures, Donors, Alumni, Civic Leaders, always, always as an advocate for the State University of New York.

David: Well, thank you very much. The next question is from Diana Hawkins from the Empire State College. She asks, "Chancellor Zimpher, will you please comment on SUNY's commitment to technology, distance learning and plans or growth in this area"? "Also, please comment on how the University system will support non-traditional and military students in the future"?

Chancellor: Well Diana, thanks for the question and thank you for the commitment to Empire State. By the way, my very first ball cap from any SUNY campus came from Empire State University, I believe the color was orange so my first comment was, "I love orange Diana". That said, I personally am a huge advocate in distance learning and I can say to you at the University of Cincinnati, we have believed to be some of the largest distance learning programs for the state of Ohio. I've learned what it takes to person distant learning programs. I know that the quality students advising and access to faculty members presents a real responsibility to get it right and do it well. But I absolutely believe the quality of distance learning can in its own way be comparable to the quality of residential learning. I've learned how to present distance learning programs to our creditors, so that they really understand that we stand for quality and I am optimistic that we will expand our distance learning exponentially for the

State University of New York, so I will look for leaders like Empire State, and other campuses that are already well engaged and I will be a promoter. What I would say Diana about assistance for what we might call non-traditional student all though I have to issue a caveat, maybe today most students are non-traditional coming to campus but also stepping out or being employed at the same time or mixing their residential experience with distance learning experience. Your very savvy consumers and so seek out what is available to you. So, particularly for our Veterans and Military given the nations renewed commitment to GI's and the new GI Bill, we have had a planning committee at the University of Cincinnati to be the most ambitious provider of military and veterans education in Ohio, so I am going to bring that ambition with me. I know our veterans need some special support systems, they need a sensitivity to timing to the fact they have families, and of course if we were to become the destination university for our veterans, we would bring them to New York, not just native new Yorkers, but we could actually bring people to new york who would get educated here as veterans, and stay to live and work here. So both of these novel and innovated processes are pretty high on my radar.

David: Our next question comes from Rachel Hunter from Jefferson County Community College. She asks, "what are your long term goals for SUNY"? "How do you plan to raise awareness of SUNY, also will you address financial aid in your strategic plan"?

Chancellor: Well, those are 3 really important questions. Let me begin with long term planning and again Rachel, thank you for a very very good question. Um, the charge of the Board of Trustees for me as your new Chancellor is to lead a strategic planning process, a vision for the State University of New York. That pays particular attention to the campus plans that already exist, the diversity of mission and vision on each of our 64 campuses. To work hard, however, at articulating what it is that together we can do that is greater than anything we would do alone. I think you will here from me a lot of talk about collaboration and partnership. It is my intent however to engage you in this strategic plan. It will begin as I visit the 64 campuses through June, July and August. I will be asking you questions while I am on your campuses. Your ambitions not only for your campus, but for the whole State University of New York. I will be collecting input, I've already read 2 times, I think I am on my 3rd reading of the Commission on Higher Education reports of a year or so ago and that will provide input. We will tap the constituents across the state, not only faculty, staff and students, but our alumni and our friends, legislative leaders, and my commitment is to have at least a five year plan with a 10 year projection available for the general public sometime in the Spring of 2010. But rest assured, we are going to find a very direct way for representation of the Student Assembly to inform this plan. If I were speculating Rachel, I would say it will cover our academic aspirations, our collective research initiatives of issues of access, of issues of accessibility, our relationship with elementary and secondary education and our role in economic development. But you are going to help provide the skin on those, the meat on those bones if you will. Um, that said, you asked me also, If I can read my own writing, um, I think it is about access and um, financial aid, so I want you to know that I think access to high quality of education is about the most important gift we give to the state of new york, and to this country and I know it involves being well prepared for college. That's work we need to do with High Schools, Junior High Schools, Middle Schools and Elementary Schools. I know that (inaudible) a place to go to college, and I think we have systems in place, but we can grow more and I know most importantly access is a function of financial aid and support. I am going to be with you as your advocate for both state and federal support for bringing down the cost of higher education by enabling, um, tuition support and supporting universities so that we can keep tuition affordable for you. Did I miss something Rachel?

David: I think she also asks, "How you plan to raise awareness of SUNY in general".

Chancellor: yes, that was the word I could not read my own writing David, so you will have to help me out. Well, I am really committed as Chancellor to being a spokesperson for the wonderment that is SUNY. Already the day that my appointment was announced, we had a number of

media events, ah we had television exposure, radio exposure, we had a lot of print media exposure, a lot of web exposure so, I hope to be an inspiring advocate for SUNY. I am very eager to advance our web presence. I am delighted the student assembly took me right into You Tube the very first day of my appointment was announced. I think we can use the vehicles that you find most convenient obviously that might be You Tube, or into blogging, into twitters, whatever 3 months from now is the latest technique for communications. So I hope that we are very aware and that we use all of these devices to tell the story of the State University of New York and your campus.

David: Our next question is from Hunter Harrison, Hudson Valley Community College. Hunter asks, "How will community colleges benefit from your leadership"? He also asks, "What do you plan to bring to SUNY that past Chancellors haven't, and do you plan to stay the course"?

Chancellor: Well Hunter, terrific questions, let me first say that one of the huge appeals of this position and of the State University of New York is that it is inclusive of community colleges, comprehensive colleges, technical schools, medical schools and medical centers and of course our doctoral research universities. I am such a strong believer in what I would call a system of education that literally begins with early childhood, some would say birth, and culminates well into a persons career or multiple career choices. And I really think in this country we are quite challenged, these systems in many instances do not work well together and I hope that we can be a device for a better collaboration across the board and clearly that means greater linkages with and between and among our community colleges, our comprehensives, our research universities and our K12 partners. I have been in Ohio the co-chair of a committee we call, "articulation and transfer," I would interpret that as student mobility, for the past 6 years that I have been in Ohio. I have been a champion for ease of mobility, transferring credits, electronic transcripts, electronic banking of credits so that you know what counts when you move from institution to institution. So I just think community colleges are pivotal to that. I am also by training a teacher educator and I know that nearly 40% of this nation's teachers begin at community colleges. So I see a tremendous role not to even mention, but I will the immense impact community colleges have on regional economic development. So I truly hope to be a great partner with all of the community colleges, and as you know, I will be visiting with each and every one of them this summer as well. I, um, about the question of what I bring to The State University of New York, beyond of what other Chancellors have brought, let me just say my goal and greatest pride is lifting up this great set of universities on the basis of the work done by other Chancellors. I think it is fair to say anything that we cause to happen during my tenure will be on the shoulders of these prior Chancellors. I didn't bring this with any intent of using it but, this is a 1968 Time magazine cover of Chancellor Sam Gould and I have become a student of his work and I will be of the other Chancellors because the first week in April at UAlbany, we will be celebrating, actually you will be celebrating and I will be joining as the Chancellor elect, the 60th anniversary of The State University of New York. So I hope I can learn from each and every one of the Chancellors. Already several of the former Chancellors have reached out to me and I hope I bring the kind of commitment and enthusiasm and thoughtfulness that obvious they have brought to the table and then because we always, always want to grow. I hope I bring a sense of aspiration and a real appetite for the greatness that will move this institution forward.

David: Thank you very much, our next question comes from Robert Pape from the University at Buffalo, Robert asks, "how do you feel about the proposed legislation being reviewed by the NYS Senate and Assembly that would allow UB increased flexibility in how it can utilize owned land, funds and even tuition to best execute the goals of UB 2020, our strategic plan for growth"?

Chancellor: Well Robert, I first want you to know that I am very, very eager to visit your campus, I heard about UB 2020 and I think it is an extraordinary example of how strategic planning can really work for a campus and frankly I hope we have the same great good fortune to craft a strategic plan for The State University of New York as a whole. That said, let me say I have

only just begun my introductions to the Assembly and the Senate, the New York State Legislature. I have had the great good fortune to meet what is called the Conference of the Assembly, and it was widely attended, and I was hosted by Speaker Silver. I have also met Senator Malcolm Smith, President of the Senate, I have met with leaders of the Higher Education Committee in both houses, I have met with Aides, and I have only begun my briefing of these legislative proposals, but I do know this, that it is certainly true on the state of Ohio, as well, the best way to have economic impact as public universities for the state in which we reside is to have the kind of flexibilities that are being put on the table and so I am familiar, at arms length, because these interestingly enough are the very same issues we are dealing with in Ohio. So my advocacy over time as I learn more will be towards those kind of flexibilities, but the case I will make is that this must be the partnership between The State University of New York and the state of New York a partnership with other state systems if you will, our CUNY partners, members of the private institutions and I think together we will reason what are the trade off relationships we need to make it in these tough economical times. But, I wish UB luck in the legislative process, and I will be coming up to see you shortly on these issues myself.

David: Thank you. Our next question comes from Melissa Rodriguez from SUNY College of Old Westbury, she asks, "tuition rose a total of \$620 a year, and our President Dr. Calvin O. Butts, informed us that 90 percent of it is going back into the pockets of the government". "As the new chancellor, what are your plans to assist in getting more for the dollar"?

Chancellor: Well, first of all Melissa, I am delighted to note that I will be meeting with your president this afternoon and I am really looking forward to getting to know the institution better and the president. I see myself as a real advocate for tuition affordability. I have been in the state of Ohio and I have been in my own work with congress and the delegation from Ohio. By the way, I have spent 3 hours with the federal offices of SUNY in Washington, so I have begun to get the briefings. I will do, Melissa, everything in my power to advocate for affordability, I know how important it is, I know what an issue it is, I know that the voices of our students are being heard all over the state and rather than advance into particulars of the legislative actions at the moment, I can only say that I will demonstrate the highest advocacy for affordability in partnership, I might add, with the student assembly and with the students all over the state, your families, our faculty and staff, and alumni.

David: Thank you. Melissa also had something to ask, "with SUNY-wide budget cuts, we students at Old Westbury are witnessing a slight decrease in functionality of the University Police. Safety is a HUGE issue on campus that is 605 acres located in an isolated area surrounded by trees". "What are you going to do to increase the safety of students on campus"?

Chancellor: Well Melissa, I think I begin by saying as a person who served first as a Chancellor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, then as President of the University of Cincinnati, safety has always been upper most on our minds. Quite frankly, during my tenure at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, I was actually in Washington on 911 and drove all night to be back at my campus to assure the student body that their safety was our highest priority. That's not just rhetoric, that has everything to do with how we support our safety program, police and the partnerships that our police build, quite frankly, with community policing and then at the University of Cincinnati as the result of events at Virginia Tech, I can tell you that we have every, that we have exhausted every possible response to that kind of emergency. Safety, as well, in fact in my state we have had the first capacity to broadcast in all university properties buildings, kind of safety and warning signals. In that kind of prices can be very responsive. But I would add to that it is not the same as living in isolated areas surrounded by trees, but the University of Cincinnati is in very densely populated Urban area and therefore since many, many of our students live in off campus housing, in apartments, in rooming houses, in every nook and cranny of these communities, we have gone out of our way to inform students about good safety practices, we have done door knob hangs that have a big influence about teaching students moving late at night, about walking with other

students and protecting each other . We've done ambassador programs with police. Our program of Criminal Justice at Cincinnati, I know you have outstanding programs of Criminal Justice in The State University of New York, have been instrumental reducing crime on our campus. So I have experience in crime reduction, more importantly in teaching students about safety and saying to parents who are worried about your safety this is what we are going to do to protect you. So I am going to be very, very conscious of this issue and I as Chancellor, as President, I take personally any incident that has or brings and harm to our students. So I will be a vigilant partner with you.

David: Thank you. Melissa had one last question, which I believe is my favorite question, "what is your five-year plan for SUNY"?

Chancellor: Well, I think Melissa that this question is related to one I approached earlier, I have very strong and well hanged perspective on the issues that Higher Education faces the 21st century. I've spoken all over the country and in International venues about the information age, the age of innovation, our increased role with business and industry, our impact on regional economical development, the quality of the student experience which is central to our work advancing our academic and research agendas. But I don't really want to articulate that set of goals in particular without the input of all the key players who are going to help us realize our vision. So what I am promising to you, you will have a 5 year plan in short order, but it will be a plan which is very inclusive and involves the opinions and aspirations of our various constituencies. So rather than pre-empt those conversations, which I could do because I have opinions in this direction, believe me I am going to lead an integrated and inclusive discussion where your opinions matter to and I think that is the fair way to proceed. I am on record saying this will be available widely to the general public, frankly, about 9 months after I arrive and that is my public promise and help me stick to it.

David: Thank you very much. One more question we had that came from several student media is, "what is your impression of the other costs related to paying for college in New York"?

Chancellor: Well, I probably don't know the other costs you experience here in New York, but I know that housing is a cost that is very real for students, transportation is a cost. I have done a lot of work with a number of national entities about Americas approach to transportation and while we have a great public transportation system emanating out of New York City, I suspect across the state transportation remains an issue. So I will be an advocate for public transportation to ease the costs of students getting from campus to campus, campus to home, to work. That said, I think text books are a big issue, the costs of text books, and I have been very interested in the digitations of text books. We are experimenting with this at The University of Cincinnati, as are many campuses. So I think these are some profound directions we can go and then I think there are services which traditionally have been provided by campuses that perhaps we should think about out sourcing to more competitive private sectors endeavors and maybe help bring the cost down that way. So nothing is off the table in terms of costs.

David: Thank you. Another question several media had is, "what are your primary concerns as you join SUNY"? "What will be your first priorities as the new chancellor"?

Chancellor: Well, it is very clear that I am making a big transition from being a campus President to being a system Chancellor. I have often remarked myself, one of the ways I like to solve problems is to call everyone in the room who is engaged in that problem, fully fact the issues, make decisions and put them into action. I am going to have to learn to do that in a totally different environment. In fact, the mechanisms that you, the leaders of technology, the student assembly has shown us today. But my real priorities are to become as acquainted as possible, as quickly as possible with the campuses, with the presidential leadership, and the various constituencies, to dive deeply into the mission and vision of these campuses as I visit them, to get us organized for this strategic planning process and at the same time since our

board is deeply engaged in a concept called re-engineering which has such issues as student mobility, and International Programming and communications on its docket, I want to help move these already presented decisions forward into action. So I would say I will be moving on 4 or 5 fronts at the same time getting better acquainted with our political leaders and civic leaders across the state. I guess in short I expect to be really, really busy.

David: Thank you very much. Our next question is from Larry Byrd of the Fashion Institute of Technology, and Larry asks, “why hold a news conference for student journalists, before opening it up to the “real press”?”

Chancellor: Well, you know these days I suspect we all have different definitions of the real press, so let me talk a little about that, but let me first say, was it Larry, I did not write it down David, but if it was Larry, I just wanted to let you know I had the great privilege of meeting with your President, President Brown. Actually delivering her to Fashion Institute of Technology, so I know where you live and I know how to find you. I also want you to know that I come from a program where fashion and design are really huge priorities for the University of Cincinnati. I participated in the annual fashion shows, I have been very, very proud of our students and I look forward to meeting you where you live. That said, besides the media access that was available to us on the day of my appointment that was announced in February which involved numerous media that you would call the real press, from the New York Times, to the New York Post, to the Albany Times Union, to other print media that was in the room, when the Governor announced, introduced me to the State house population, to New York television, to Albany radio, we had a lot of exposure to the standard, I don't know I would say real, you are the real press, but most importantly, what I want to say is that this first ever web exchange and video conferencing with David is just the perfect way to start a relationship with the constituencies that matters most and that is our student body. So, while I understand the importance of staying in touch with the organized professional media, I can not think of a more important way to begin any relationship with the student press then what we are doing today. David, I can imagine that every year we can start out with an editorial at the virtual editorial board meeting and that you can have your editorial boards in the room as you connect with us. We will get increasingly sophisticated about teleconferencing and video conferencing and so we might be able to do this a couple of times a year. If we really like ourselves, we might do it more often than that. So I am very proud of the place we started, and how we are doing this today.

David: I have a feeling my media contacts on the campus are real excited about that promise. Our next question is from Kyler Klix of Plattsburgh State, “In addition to several questions that we have already covered, how does it feel to be the first woman chancellor of SUNY”?”

Chancellor: Well, in a word it feels great. I'm terribly excited, but let me respond to what I think the underlining question is. I have been the first women Dean of the college of education at the Ohio State University, the first woman Chancellor at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, the first woman President of the University of Cincinnati, and now the first woman President of The State University of New York. So I have to do this by telling a little story, I let students shadow me, so maybe some of you would be interested in running around with me some day as well. I had a student shadow me in a day I spoke to the downtown Cincinnati rotary and of course I was introduced as the first woman President of the Cincinnati University and driving home, because I drive my shadows around if they do not have wheels, he said to me, “don't you get tired of being introduced as the first woman whatever?” It was a question that took me aback at the time, but what I said I think reveals what I think, when it doesn't need to be said anymore, it won't be. Until then as we increase in our ranks, let's celebrate the evolution.

David: Thank you. Our next question comes from Kyle Larson & Chris Huntley from Onondaga Community College. Kyle and Chris asked several questions, some that we already covered, but

here is a new one, "because of the cutbacks in state funding to our schools, what effect on educator quality will likely be experienced across SUNY"?..."Will salaries be decreased, and if so, will salary decreases dissuade top-candidate educator prospects from taking positions at state schools"?

Chancellor: Well, while I lived in the Higher Education community for as long as I have, nearly 30 years, I know that we have gone through a period after period of reductions and budget cuts and cost efficiencies and I also know that our country is in a very challenging environment at the moment. So make no mistake the cuts that we are making now on top of decades of iterations, of cost reductions, are going to effect student faculty ratio, the quality of our laboratories, our abilities to remain competitive, and the retention of our faculty, our ability to recruit faculty, the balance between full and part time faculty and the entire culture of the education experience. At the same time our leadership is absolutely required as we join with Public Policy makers, Legislators, and the Governor in making these tough choices. I understand that I am going to be the incredibly best partner I can be to the Public Policy makers and the strongest advocate for what we need to maintain quality decisions. I know that this represents a series of trade offs, I know that this country will turn around its economic fortunes. I look forward to being a part of that turn around, to be a partner there but these are tough questions, these are very tough issues and lets not kid ourselves it is going to have an impact on our ability to deliver the quality programs we want. And this is sort of where my advocacy is most important.

Dave: Thank you. Dr. Zimpher had generously given us a good portion of her time and unfortunately we will have to make this our last question. If you have emailed your question and we have not been able to get to it during this broadcast, the communication staff will do their best to answer it afterwards. The last question comes from Juliet Price of SUNY Oneonta, "SUNY Geneseo just lost a dear member of their student body to alcohol abuse, do you see an abuse of alcohol and other drugs as an important issue for students and what do you think as the SUNY system as a whole can do to protect and educate students about this"?

Chancellor: Well Juliet and to all of our student audience, I am incredibly saddened to learn not of only this death, but of another as well and I can not tell you personally how much I wish to extend my condolences to students who were friends of these students and to their families. I believe as Chancellor my responsibility and my heart goes to the mourning of the passing of these young bright lives. It is my responsibility as Chancellor to ensure that we take every opportunity to educate our student body about substance abuse, health and wellness, the entirety of their physicality. I am sure we have a number of programs that have been put forward, and I will tirelessly advocate for those programs. I have a 25 year old son, he was a college student, I am not naïve or blinded to the challenges, the exposures that students have. But I do, I truly do believe that education is the answer and that we have to help other. When we have friends who are in trouble, who are experiencing and excess of consumptions or behaviors that aren't natural to who they are, we need to help them, we need to join with each other and I will be very interested in the programs that exist and make sure that those programs are expanded. Nothing could be really more important to us as the health and wellness of the student body and you are those people and the student assembly and the advocacy that you use, utilize in your local campus newspapers could be critically helpful to us. So it is appropriate in this discussion we end where we began, and this is with the importance of your experience as students in the great State University of New York.

David: Chancellor Zimpher, I would like to thank you for your time and for participating in this news conference and would also like to thank the student journalist for participating and sending questions today. This concludes the Chancellor's student press conference and I am sure we all look forward to seeing her again soon in the same medium. Thank you.

Chancellor: Thank you David and thank you everyone.

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