

**University Faculty Senate  
Executive Committee  
158th Plenary  
SUNY Fredonia  
April 16, 2011**

**RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF A FIVE YEAR TUITION PLAN FOR  
The State University of New York**

**WHEREAS**, the mission of the State University of New York is to provide broad access for students, irrespective of economic status, to public higher education of the highest order, and

**WHEREAS**, in fulfilling its mission and meeting its commitment, the State University is supporting the economy, the culture and community life across New York State, and

**WHEREAS**, direct state support for the State University has been reduced by more than \$1.4 billion in the past four years, and

**WHEREAS**, SUNY's resident undergraduate tuition rate is \$4,970 per year, the lowest for public universities in the region and among the lowest in the nation; and

**WHEREAS**, SUNY tuition raises have been historically unpredictable, with 13 raises over the last 48 years, which have ranged from 7% to 43%; and

**WHEREAS**, SUNY, the largest comprehensive university system in the United States, has the potential to create unprecedented opportunities for current and future college students and their families, for businesses and industries, for educational, social, and cultural agencies, and for the workforce of the State of New York; and

**WHEREAS**, SUNY campuses need fiscal stability to realize this potential; and

**WHEREAS**, a five-year tuition plan that is fair, predictable and responsible for students – and that keeps all tuition revenues at SUNY campuses – will enable current and future students and their families to plan adequately; and

**WHEREAS**, an effective five-year tuition plan entail a commitment by New York State to meet a specified portion of the mandatory operational costs for the University, beginning with the restoration of the cut in the current adopted budget, and to maintain that level of support in the future; and

**WHEREAS**, Governor Cuomo indicated in a press conference that a “rational tuition plan” was worthy of serious consideration and that the current method of legislative action was broken;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the SUNY University Faculty Senate strongly supports the State University's proposal for the enactment of a five-year tuition plan.

**158-01-1  
Resolution in Support of a Five-Year Tuition Plan  
Passed without Dissent  
April 16, 2010**

## Background

On Tuesday, February 1, 2011, Governor Andrew Cuomo released his Fiscal Year 2011-2012 Executive Budget, in which he recognized the pressing need for the New York State to change the way it conducts its fiscal business. For the first time in many years, the Governor submitted a budget that actually cut total spending, rather than merely lowering the rate of growth.

The State's public universities (SUNY and CUNY), like other state agencies, received a 10% cut to their operating budgets. If this were the first reduction in state support for its public universities, it would not be unwarranted, especially given the looming \$10 billion deficit facing the state. But, it is not. This reduction is the fourth in as many years, leaving SUNY with three-quarters of a billion dollars less (well over 30% of state support) with which to fund its core operations.

This budget proposal continued recent cuts in state support for community colleges, the gateway to higher education for so many of New York working citizens, and further eliminated all state support for SUNY's teaching hospitals. The loss of \$130 million in public support to the hospitals, which is in addition to the 10% to the SUNY operating budget, would have significantly reduced their ability to serve patients in their respective regions, who are often the poorest in the area. Additionally, these cuts would quickly result in the loss of thousands of jobs.

In the months that followed, it was recognized that despite the dire condition of New York State's public finances, reductions of this magnitude were unwise. The final resolution of the political process has been a budget with modest restorations for community college support and a \$60 million restoration of the hospital subsidy, which still left a \$70 million cut to institutions that provide medical services to otherwise underserved populations. Modest regulatory reform was also included in the package, but there was no restoration for the operating budget of SUNY's 32 state-operated campuses and there was no tuition increase in the budget package.

Unlike all other state agencies, public universities constitute investments in our collective future, and as such they are important continuing investments in our state's infrastructure. The public university system in New York educates people from all walks of life, enriching their lives and, because better educated citizens earn more, and hence pay more taxes, they enrich the state's coffers. In this way, the public earns compound interest on its investment in higher education, a claim that can be made by no other public investment.

Both the University Faculty Senate and the SUNY Student Assembly embraced a solution for what is clearly becoming a funding crisis for public higher education in New York, a rational fiscal policy. Such a policy, which the Faculty Senate first advocated almost a decade ago, would have three components: 1. The state's commitment to maintaining its support for public higher education at predictable levels, levels sufficient to cover the core mandatory costs, now and in the future; 2. An aggressive campaign by the universities to generate new streams of income (such as government grants and contracts, foundation and alumni gifts); and 3. Mandatory, moderate annual tuition increases.

A responsible fiscal policy for higher education asks students to do their part by funding a bit more of their educations each year through modest tuition increases. Make no mistake; the increase is needed now, beginning this fall. Modest annual tuition increases would provide the means necessary to deliver educational services and would eliminate the need for those sudden, large increases that have so often come without warning in the past.

This is precisely what Chancellor Zimpher and the Board of Trustees advocated with their five-year tuition plan that is “fair, predictable and responsible.” And, it is what the SUNY Student Assembly has supported in each of the past two years, and it is what the University Faculty Senate has supported for a decade.

With fewer resources, the public universities have often been forced to adopt a number of cost-saving strategies, such as replacing retiring full-time staff, both professional and teaching, with part-time employees, a short term solution that in the long-term consequences for educational quality. In some cases, they have increased class sizes and in others have recommended the elimination of academic programs. Students on some campuses may soon find fewer options available to them, both in terms of programs (a number of campuses have already announced the discontinuance of programs) and the number of sections offered. Between the Fall 2009 and the Fall 2010 semesters, SUNY lost approximately 2700 course sections, which translates into many thousands of seats that are no longer available to students. And more will be lost by Fall 2011.

SUNY and CUNY must do their part to address both the short-term fiscal problems and the long-term possibilities by working ever more efficiently, by examining closely how each dollar is spent, and by safeguarding those expenses essential to the continued delivery of educational opportunity to students. And, they must also aggressively pursue every possible means for increasing funding from external sources, whether through public-private partnerships consistent with their educational missions and respectful of traditional personnel patterns or through grants and gifts.

But, the state must also do its part, through regulatory relief, a firm commitment to maintenance of effort and a responsible long-term tuition policy. Each of these is an important element in creating a stable, predictable funding base for public higher education in the state.

At one point in the past six months, the Governor told us that tuition is not a tax. He’s right, it isn’t, if the tuition collected remains on the campus and used in support of education. If anything, it constitutes a fee for services. But it is more; tuition represents the investments that students and their families are making in the future. The community college system, which came late to New York State, was modeled on such a funding plan, with the state paying a share, localities paying a share and the students themselves paying a share – each share representing an investment in increasing the human capital necessary for productive, fruitful lives.

Today, we know that some believe that current economic realities dictate continued cuts our public and private support for public higher education, but that view is really being penny-wise and pound-foolish. Education pays dividends, monetary benefits to the individuals who attain it and to countless others to the larger community, through the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary for the full participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. SUNY committed itself to provide that education to millions of our citizens when it adopted the motto, “to learn, to search, to serve” almost forty years ago, and our commitment to education as public service was renewed last year through our strategic planning process. Today, SUNY is willing and able to continue meeting the complex educational needs of our fellow citizens for higher education, but to succeed, it needs much more reliable funding. And, it needs it now. The place to begin is the Governor’s call for a summit in early May and an agreement on a rational fiscal policy for the State University of New York.