

**OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY
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ACCESS, EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE AND THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

At their best, public universities provide an educational service (or a collective good) that enhances people's quality of life, imparts skills that are transferable to a wide range of economic endeavors (thus contributing to a flexible and adaptive labor force), harmonizes social relations by promoting understanding across racial and ethnic divides, heightens appreciation of the world and the U.S. role in this world, and instills the principle of life-long learning. America's ascendancy as a world power has been attributed not only to its industrial and technical prowess, but to a national system of affordable and accessible public higher education that is the foundation for economic development and scientific advancement. Equal access to higher education for all members of society, rather than a privileged few, has distinguished the United States from European educational systems for the better part of the 20th century. Since its inception in the late 1940s, access to public higher education for the people of New York has been a hallmark of SUNY.

One of the critical challenges facing SUNY in the 21st century is obtaining the requisite state funding to undertake a variety of initiatives to fulfill its obligation of providing access to New Yorkers; a population that is becoming increasingly multiracial, multiethnic and multilingual and that is suffering poverty rates above the national average. The people of New York expect the State University of New York system to deliver on these objectives.

We are confident this challenge can be met if New York State makes strategic investments in SUNY to develop initiatives to increase representation of faculty, graduate and undergraduate students from populations that have traditionally been underrepresented in public higher education. Access to education is only part of the solution. SUNY will need to sustain a vibrant academic environment that will attract excellent scholars, talented graduate students and our best and brightest high school students. Continued support for opportunity programs will contribute to increased recruitment and retention of students from economically underprivileged sectors of the state and from groups that are historically underrepresented in higher education.

The university's 2004-08 Master Plan reaffirms the principle that "as a public university SUNY remains committed to ensuring access to the full range of populations served; thus diversity...will be a priority."¹ As a public institution supported primarily by taxes and tuition, SUNY bears a special responsibility for

its workforce and student body to reflect the composition of New York State's population. The SUNY Master Plan also affirms the relationship between academic excellence and diversity. World-class universities have adopted measures to increase the diversity of their professoriate and academic staff, graduate and undergraduate student body and educational programs as part of a broader strategy to achieve academic excellence. Universities committed to diversity provide their students with an educational experience that prepares them to live and work productively in our multiracial and multiethnic democratic society.

DIVERSITY, POVERTY & ACCESS

New York has one of the most racially and ethnically diversified populations in the nation, and continually undergoes significant demographic change. It is also an economically diverse state, with sweeping differences in the socio-economic profiles of its numerous counties. These are challenges to achieving an economically just society and to the formation of a common national civic culture. However, these vexing characteristics of our society can be mitigated by providing accessible, affordable, quality public higher education to the people of New York State.

Educational equity, particularly enhanced access for the economically disadvantaged populations of the state must be a SUNY priority. While SUNY's educational mission cannot be confined to work force development, it has a special responsibility to provide the residents of New York an educational experience that empowers them with the requisite competences and skills so that they may achieve their potential. Countless numbers of studies document that education is the single best avenue to escape poverty. Historically public higher education has played an important role in leveling the economic playing field and creating new opportunities for upward social mobility for the economically disadvantaged. It is incumbent on SUNY to recommit to this promise to provide an affordable and quality education that is the basis for upward social mobility for its residents and citizens.

This is an especially critical task for SUNY since upstate New York poverty rates are approximately 30 percent. The poverty rate is much greater than the rest of the state, and is increasing at twice the national rate. Overall poverty rates in New York have increased from six percent in 1990 to 10 percent in 2005.ⁱⁱ Enhanced access for economically underprivileged sectors, combined with new educational equity initiatives aimed at the impoverished rural areas of the state is essential.

By enhancing educational access to economically disadvantaged sectors, SUNY can help to reduce poverty rates, and the accompanying economic marginalization, social alienation and deterioration of the family that disproportionately afflicts the poor. Although poverty affects many sectors of New York's population, census data reveal that poverty it is particularly acute for Latinos and African Americans.

ACCESS, INCLUSION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The percentage of individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups who are attending SUNY is lower than expected given their numbers in the state population. Consequently, any initiatives designed to maximize access to affordable, quality education should make special efforts to recruit students from these under served sectors of the state's population. In its official publications SUNY recognizes its responsibility to employ a workforce and educate a student body that is representative of the state's population. However, SUNY has not been able to recruit and retain senior administrators, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students in sufficient numbers to overcome the long-standing under-representation of people of color.

For example, the Latino population of New York grew by 33.1 percent between 1990 and 2000, and made up 15.1 percent of the state's population. By 2006 Latino's made up 16.1 percent of the state's population. Yet, Latinos accounted for only 5 percent of the student population in the state-operated/funded units of SUNY. African Americans are also underrepresented in SUNY, although their percentages are better than those for Latinos. In 2005 African Americans accounted for about 7 percent of the student population in SUNY state-operated/funded campuses. Blacks comprised 17.4 percent of the state's population for the same period. As is the case with Latinos, Blacks are also seriously under-represented in the SUNY campuses. The numbers are also dismal for Native Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

The figures on Black and Latino student enrollments in SUNY universities and colleges are consistent with the findings published in an Education Trust study of public flagship universities that documents disproportionate under representation of low-income and minority students. The study reported that the percentage of students who are Black, Latino or Native American was 12 percent for the flagship universities nationwide and 24 percent for all colleges and universities. ⁱⁱⁱ The corresponding percentage for all State operated/funded SUNY institutions was 12.3 percent in Fall 2005. The low enrollment of minority populations is surprising given the demographics of the state. It is incumbent on SUNY to develop new initiatives to redress the significant gap in representation

The report observes that flagship public universities are failing to make progress "in better serving the vast breadth of our citizenry." Although SUNY does not have a flagship university, the low percentage of students from historically under represented populations enrolled in its doctoral granting institutions are comparable to the public flagship universities. New York State should provide SUNY with the resources to implement effective strategies and best practices, so that it can stand as an exception to this discouraging national trend in public higher education.

Black and Latino representation in the faculty ranks of the state-operated/funded campus also fails to reflect the composition of the state's population. In 2006 only 6 percent of the faculty in research universities (centers) were Black, Latino and American Indian/Alaskan. In the comprehensive colleges only 7 percent of the faculty were from these underrepresented communities. An analysis of Latino faculty employment by the office of Assemblyman Peter Rivera reveals that SUNY lags substantially behind the state's private universities and the City University of New York in the number of Latinos in its full time professorial ranks. SUNY has made significant advances in achieving gender balance in its graduate student population. In Fall 2006 females comprised 58.6 percent of graduates in all SUNY Institutions.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation reported African Americans and Latinos are the largest underrepresented group in higher education relative to their numbers in the general population. The report notes that only 7 percent of the Ph.D.s U.S. universities conferred on U.S. citizens in 2003 went to Latino or African American students.^{iv} Currently, students from these minority groups make up 8.1 percent of the graduate student enrollment in SUNY, only marginally better than the figures cited in the Woodrow Wilson report.

It is alarming that African American and Latino representation in tenure track ranks is actually below the percentage of doctorates conferred to this sector of our population. The implications for SUNY are significant, since the presence of more faculty from historically underrepresented sectors of our society will enhance the university's prospects of achieving greater success. Moreover, New York State may face a serious social policy issue in that as incoming generations of students will be increasingly drawn from Latino, Black and other non-white populations, their professors and teachers will remain overwhelmingly white.

ACCESS, THE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND THE OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

SUNY officials are aware that in order to effectively address its institutional aspirations for excellence and respond to broader social concerns expressed by diverse constituencies, it has to enhance its record of access, particularly for those sectors of the population that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education. The Office of Diversity and Educational Equity was established specifically to increase access to educational opportunity on a system-wide level and aid in the diversification of SUNY's workforce. Once it is adequately funded, the Office of Diversity will work closely with campus units to devise measures to increase the numbers of faculty and students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education and from economically disadvantaged sectors regardless of gender, sexual orientation or disability status. In conjunction with campus units, innovative approaches will be employed to recruit and retain a diversified faculty body of stellar academic quality, and attract and support training for superb graduate students from disenfranchised communities.

Substantial funds will be required for the Office of Diversity to aggressively recruit highly sought after scholars of underserved and underrepresented communities, and to provide them with competitive start up packages and support to mount and sustain an active research profile. Coordinated initiatives to effectively identify, recruit and situate outstanding scholars in the most academically favorable setting within our system are necessary. If SUNY is to reach a level of parity with its peer institutions, New York State will need to substantially increase the size of its professoriate. The Office of Diversity can assist in this broader initiative to elevate the standing of our university system by expanding the size and quality of its faculty.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity and Educational Equity will assist campus units in creating an academic infrastructure to improve undergraduate success rates. An array of targeted initiatives including, but not limited to, STEM diversity scholarships, special undergraduate scholarships programs, student mentoring programs, guided undergraduate research opportunities, and public service internships, will enhance recruitment and success outcomes for students from communities traditionally underrepresented in higher education, as well as students from economically underprivileged sectors. It is worth noting that undergraduate success is positively correlated with a diversified faculty.

The Office of Diversity and Educational Equity will partner with all campuses to fortify existing areas of excellence and/or to develop academic initiatives that advance their distinctive mission. Ultimately the goal is to strive for academic excellence in the context of carefully devised programs to enhance access for scholars and students of color, economically underprivileged students, and from other sectors of our population not adequately represented in higher education. SUNY has a remarkable wealth of experienced professionals who have a normative commitment to enhancing the diversity of this fine institution and the quality of the educational experience it offers its students. This is a resource that the Office of Diversity will mobilize to develop system-wide diversity initiatives that will elevate SUNY's national reputation. Through the creative marshaling of resources, collaboration with campus units, and strategic investments, the Office of Diversity will develop a more focused approach aimed at enhancing access, diversity and academic excellence.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND ACCESS

Community colleges can play a crucial role in preparing students for success in four-year institutions. The Association of Presidents of Public Community Colleges (APPCC) reports that:

The primary mission of New York's community colleges is to provide access to all persons with a high school or equivalent credential, or who have the ability to benefit from post-secondary education.

One of the critical issues facing the community colleges is their obligation to accept all students with a high school degree who apply for enrollment, even if these students lack the basic skills to succeed in college. Lack of adequate funding restricts the ability of the community colleges to render the intensive academic support needed for these students to be accepted into the colleges and to succeed academically. The community colleges require a funding mechanism to provide basic-skills education necessary for students to transition to the colleges. When the Office of Diversity and Educational Equity acquires the requisite resources and staff capabilities, it can work, if invited to do so, with the leadership of the community college system to explore, devise and underwrite promising efforts to facilitate the preparation, graduation and transition of students into SUNY's baccalaureate granting institutions. A number of community colleges are located in rural areas that are experiencing high levels of unemployment and structural poverty. Any system-wide educational equity initiative must be sensitive to this reality, and partner with the community colleges in developing targeted programs to enhance recruitment and success for students from these communities.

ACCESS, DIVERSITY AND EXCELLENCE

SUNY faces a challenge that if successfully met will elevate the stature of our university. New York is undergoing a demographic transition of a magnitude and diversity not experienced in this state in over a century. Moreover, sweeping technological changes, economic restructuring resulting in relentless deterioration of traditional industries, disruptions to local labor markets caused by the globalization of the state's economy, impose remarkable pressures on SUNY to reassess how it can meet its responsibility to society. SUNY can respond to this challenge by developing a new vision that integrates the goals of expanded access, diversification of the faculty and student body, and new educational approaches that prepare students to meet more rigorous academic standards.

Individuals who are academically prepared and have acquired the cognitive skills that only higher education can provide will be able to adjust to the changing labor market conditions. By maximizing access to quality higher education SUNY can educate broad sectors of New York State's population to meet the challenges of a changing economy and population. Access to quality public higher education is paramount for New York State's continued development. Successful initiatives to diversify SUNY's faculty and student body will not only enhance the quality of the academic experience, but prepare its graduates to compete effectively in a demographically changing world buffeted by global economic forces.

SUNY is poised to develop a unique model for success based on the implementation of concrete programs that promote an academically rewarding synergy of access, diversity and excellence.

ⁱ Mission Review II, p.21.

ⁱⁱ http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/publications2007/SOWNY/SWNY07_ExecutiveSummary.pdf).

ⁱⁱⁱ Danette Gerald and Kati, Haycock. *Engines of Inequality: Diminishing Equity in the Nation's Premier Public Universities*. Education Trust, 2006.

^{iv} Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, *Diversity and the Ph.D.*, May 2005, p. 12.