Minutes of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York
September 24, 2019

Pursuant to a notice of meeting duly given on September 20, 2019, the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York held a meeting on September 24, 2019 at SUNY Plaza in Albany, New York.

Committee Members Present:
- Trustee Litow, Chair
- Trustee Fogal
- Trustee Kay
- Trustee Lewin
- Trustee Ostro
- Trustee Spielvogel
- Trustee Staller

Committee Members Not Present:
- Trustee Socarides

Other Trustees Present:
- Chair Tisch
- Vice Chair Perales
- Trustee Corngold
- Trustee Spiro

Others Present:
- Chancellor Johnson, Provost Laursen, Ms. Casey, Mr. Knox, Ms. Hassan, Mr. Haelen, Ms. Duncan-Poitier, Ms. McLoughlin, Ms. Miller, Mr. Megna, Mr. Pratt, Dr. Wang

Meeting Convened

Trustee Litow convened the meeting at 1:15 p.m. He recognized and commended Dr. Tisch on her appointment as Chair and welcomed new Committee members Austin Ostro and Christine Fogal.

Approval of Minutes

After confirming a quorum was present, Trustee Litow called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Committee’s May 8, 2019 meeting. A motion was made and seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair’s Report

Trustee Litow said the meeting would follow a slightly different format—a series of shorter briefs and one, more extended, focus topic—designed to ensure more time for discussion. He briefly reviewed the agenda and then asked Provost Laursen to begin the first update.

Provost’s Report

Provost Laursen shared positive news about the State’s Excelsior Scholarship program. He said that on-time (two-year) graduation rates for Excelsior students at SUNY community colleges is expected to be 30% as compared to the non-Excelsior rate of 11%; and that full-time SUNY
freshmen taking 15 course credits or more in their first semester increased from 54% to 58%. He said that the completion incentives associated with Excelsior were beginning to take hold.

Provost Laursen then shared what he emphasized were preliminary fall 2019 numbers. He said that system-wide enrollment is down just 1.5% this fall over last fall (from about 424,000 to 417,500), with state-operated campuses essentially flat and community colleges seeing a close to 3% decline. He explained that System-wide enrollment is actually at about the same place it was prior to the all-time high enrollment years of 2009, 2010, and 2011. Provost Laursen noted that the official fall census date is in mid-October and that he should be able to share final enrollment numbers in January.

With respect to overall enrollment management, Provost Laursen announced the appointment of a new Vice Provost for Strategy and Planning. He explained that strategic enrollment strategy and continued focus on retention efforts will remain a priority.

The Committee indicated that it would be helpful to see how SUNY institutions were performing as compared to their national peers.

[The Committee took a brief 15 break]

Provost Laursen then updated the Committee on the soon-to-be established Provost’s Advisory Task Force on General Education. He said initial priorities came out of the work done to date by the University Faculty Senate and Faculty Council of Community Colleges and include:

- Review and revision of the Information Management Competency and the nomenclature for the “Other World Civilizations”;
- Consideration of the language of General education for the 21st century global citizen;
- Assuring alignment to Middle States accreditation;
- Discussing the number of content categories and the number of required categories for all SUNY students; and
- Considering reducing the number of General Education credit hours required in the first two years of study.

Committee member comments included the need to look at general education through a global lens and to ensure the Task Force was comprised of forward looking individuals who would think innovatively.

There was some discussion on the importance of campus mission statements and of SUNY stakeholders having easy access to information about what makes each campus unique.

The next brief focused on the Provost’s plan for a strategic review of international education. He explained that the work would begin with an inventory of international opportunities for students and of partnerships for dual degrees and other collaborations. He said that this review will include a study of current policy and end with development of a strategic vision for moving forward. Provost Laursen said that this work will be done under the direction of Associate Vice Chancellor Sally Crimmins Villela and newly appointed Associate Provost Dan Lincoln.

The Committee discussed the need to review lessons learned from other academic institutions in this area and to address the underrepresentation of PELL recipients in study abroad.

Provost Laursen then shared an update with the Committee noting that the “Gradwages” Dashboard, developed in partnership with the New York State Department of Labor and showing the wages of SUNY graduates, was publicly available. The Committee discussed upcoming plans to add national wage data to this database and suggested a connection between this webpage and those on financial aid and admissions.
The next brief was a status update on SUNY Online. Provost Laursen said the new system went live on August 21st for fall 2019 and features: a singular information technology platform; validated single-sign-in across the seven pilot campuses; new marketing campaigns; a new prospective student development, management and application system with dedicated staff to lead those processes; and refreshed course instructional materials and instructional design support. Provost Laursen said that the initial program offerings were intentionally focused in high-demand areas: cybersecurity, accounting, psychology, healthcare, and business/finance. He said that interest is significantly building and among the right student population; early tracking reveals messaging is hitting adults age 25-41.

The Committee discussed the importance of communication with those campuses not in the pilot about the work underway to alleviate any questions or concerns. Also discussed was the need to ensure accurate data collection and reporting on student outcomes.

Provost Laursen then introduced the focus topic of seamless transfer. He began with a brief overview of SUNY’s Seamless Transfer Policy, in place for fall 2015. He shared the significance of transfer across SUNY, with nearly 30,000 students transferring in multi-directional pathways from one SUNY campus to another. He said that his office recently began what will be an ongoing assessment to ensure policy effectiveness. As SUNY is just three years out from implementation, the focus was on initial associate degree outcomes, comparing the 2015 “post-policy” cohort to the 2011 “pre-policy” cohort. Provost Laursen said the percentage of two- to four-year transfers has increased by 7% (49% to 56%); and the percentage of students transferring with associate degrees completed increased by 2% (41% to 43%).

He shared early findings of a survey of 1,073 SUNY faculty on the effectiveness of the 52 existing transfer paths in popular majors: 72% of respondents believed that the Transfer Path in their discipline did not need to be reviewed at this time; and faculty from thirteen academic disciplines indicated that the paths needed updating will begin the work in October 2019 and complete by Spring 2020. Provost Laursen also reported some early student outcomes data. Results show statistically significant improvements across the board: average active terms-to-degree for all students decreased by .15 terms and for URM students by .20 terms; and average credits-at-completion for all students decreased by 1.16 credits and for URM students by 1.40 credits. Provost Laursen said that the positive financial impact of these findings was significant. The total credit reduction for the cohort, estimated at over 9,000 credits, results in an approximate savings of over $1.7 million in tuition and fees for students; and, given the average cost of community college tuition and fees, completing a degree one term sooner saves a student approximately $2,800.

The Committee discussed wanting to better understand: why students transfer before completing their associate degree and/or what the specific policy elements are that supported the increases in transfer the Provost has reported; how SUNY can support more students transferring within as opposed to outside of SUNY; the need to ensure that changes in general education don’t disrupt seamless transfer; and, how to better understand student experience with the policy. There was also discussion about the role of AI or technology in this process; even a competition among students to help solve some key challenges.

Referring to the new meeting format, Trustee Litow asked for identification of one or two issues stemming from the focus area discussion at each meeting that the Committee will hear updates on before Spring. The Provost said the upcoming study on whether not it was necessary for students to repeat courses would be one; another would be more details on the review of transfer paths.

Adjournment

Confirming that there was no further business before the Committee, Trustee Litow adjourned the meeting at 2:53 p.m.