MEMORANDUM

January 14, 2014

TO:            Members of the Board of Trustees
FROM: Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor
SUBJECT: Degree Authorization for the State University College
          at Old Westbury

Action Requested

The proposed resolution authorizes the State University of New York College at Old Westbury (SUNY Old Westbury) to confer the Master of Arts (M.A.) degree, subject to approval by the New York State Board of Regents ("Regents").

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Resolved that the Chancellor be, and hereby is, directed to seek the authorization of the Regents for the State University College at Old Westbury to confer the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.).

Background

Approval of this resolution will authorize the State University College at Old Westbury to confer the Master of Arts (M.A.) degree, subject to approval by the Regents. Degree authorization is necessary as the award represents the College’s first use of the Master of Arts degree.

The College proposes to offer a Liberal Studies program leading to the M.A. degree that is consistent with its mission. The program will provide an on-site, affordable, accessible, regional opportunity for graduate students. The proposed program builds on existing graduate programs at the College, including a Master of Science (M.S.) in Mental Health Counseling registered in 2009 and several Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) programs registered in 2008. The College has also offered M.S. programs in business fields since 2003.

This degree will make affordable graduate education available to adult, working students in central and western Long Island, in particular, and in the New York City metropolitan region, more generally. The program’s emphasis on analysis, cultural
sensitivity, ethical decision-making and community engagement address clearly-defined employer priorities for workers, as documented by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, making it highly relevant to emerging workplace challenges. The degree will further expand the College’s ability to provide access and the opportunity for graduate degrees to students with the ability, motivation and aspirations to benefit from them.

The College expects to enroll 8 students (5 part-time) in the program’s first year and 26 students (19 part-time) after the fifth year. Estimates of demand for the program are based on multiple sources: national enrollment growth at the master’s level, the College’s 2011-12 survey revealing that 75% of its undergraduates wish to pursue graduate study, its online survey of its graduates about their interest in this specific program, a national survey showing that employers value the skills arising from rigorous, liberal arts preparation, the program’s appeal to adult students already in the workforce who seek master’s degrees for career promotion and advancement, and the program’s affordability compared to similar programs at independent institutions in the region.

Two external evaluators gave the 30-credit Liberal Studies curriculum positive reviews. It requires all students to take a 3-credit core seminar in inter-disciplinary study and 7 or 8 elective courses selected from a range that includes new Liberal Studies electives, existing Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) content courses and selected Master of Science (M.S.) in Mental Health Counseling electives. Students will be able to select from two options. The first, the thesis option, allows students to develop a research plan and write a formal master’s thesis under the guidance of a faculty mentor. The second, the internship option, allows students to pursue a community field placement within the College’s partnership network. Students pursuing the thesis option will take a two-semester sequence, a Thesis Research seminar and a Thesis Workshop. Those pursuing the internship option will take a three-credit field placement, for which they will write an analytic paper at the close of the semester that draws connections to their elective coursework. This approach to graduate study in the liberal arts originated in the 1950s at Wesleyan University and is now practiced across the U.S. at a wide range of public and private institutions.

The College has the necessary resources to offer the program, notably a new academic building and a highly committed and enthusiastic faculty across disciplines in the School of Arts and Sciences. As one of the external reviewers noted, “The faculty…are an exceptional group. They bring a wide range of expertise and broad backgrounds… which is crucial for an interdisciplinary program training students in diverse areas.” Students will have access to a state-of-the-art, newly-renovated library facility, as well as remote access to scholarly journals, e-books, and a variety of computer labs.

The program serves the College’s mission and SUNY’s strategic priorities for creating relevant and rigorous graduate learning opportunities to a diverse population of students at a reasonable price. The program serves Old Westbury’s and SUNY’s mission and goals for community engagement, inter-cultural and global understanding, cradle-to-career education, and experiential learning by building on existing relationships with a network of partners connected to the College’s Community Action, Learning and Leadership (CALL) program.

Overall, the Liberal Studies M.A. program is well-designed to meet Old Westbury’s and SUNY’s strategic goals, providing much-needed graduate opportunities to a diverse and heavily-populated region of New York State.