SUNY Excels 2015 Performance Improvement Plan
Attachment 1: Narrative Template

CAMPUS INFORMATION

Campus: North Country Community College
President: Dr. Steve Tyrell
Chief Academic Officer: Mr. Joe Keegan
Chief Financial Officer: Dr. Sherry Hawn

ABOUT THE PLAN NARRATIVE

- We ask that your narrative be no more than 15 pages in total.
- Note that your institution’s performance plan must be approved by the SUNY Board of Trustees and therefore will be a public document.
- We encourage you to be concise and reference data where appropriate to describe your progress, areas of excellence, and plans further improvement.

Your narrative should include the following three sections:

Section 1: Campus Alignment with SUNY Excels (the framework for the Power of SUNY 2020) and SUNY’s overall focus on completion

In this section, please provide information about how your institution’s current or proposed strategic focus (i.e., plan name, years covered, and a hyperlink to the plan) broadly aligns with the five priority areas of SUNY Excels and Chancellor Zimpher’s System-wide completion goals.

Section 2: Specific SUNY Excels Priority Areas and Metrics

In this section, specifically address your plans for continuous improvement and excellence in the five areas of Access, Completion, Success, Inquiry, and Engagement, including Chancellor Zimpher’s pledge to increase the number of SUNY graduates to 150,000 each year by 2020. Be specific about future plans and investments, with a particular focus on initiatives that will have the most impact on advancing your goals in these areas. There is detailed information in the Guidance Document to help inform your response.

Section 3: Conclusion and Expected Impact on your Campus

Provide an overview of your campus’s performance improvement plan and a statement on the broader impacts of the proposed activities on your campus – students, faculty and staff and the wider community – and more broadly the State of New York.
Introduction

The College has addressed a number of challenges over recent years so that it is better positioned to respond to the changing demographics of student enrollment in the North Country region. The College has recognized that if we want to capture a larger percentage of the high school graduate market in our backyard and also expand our reach beyond this particular population which has dominated our enrollment numbers for the last decade, we needed to realign our marketing and enrollment efforts immediately and analyze what opportunities the College could exploit in regard to academic program offerings and new modes of instructional delivery. These recent challenges are also tied to SUNY Excels’ emphasis on access, completion, student success, and engagement.

The College has revised its enrollment efforts both strategically and operationally in recent years. It has ramped up its marketing efforts considerably with a new brand, new advertising and new publications developed by our enrollment management staff. Collectively, our marketing, enrollment and information technology staff completed a two year process to fully redesign our College website – where it is now seen by others as a central marketing tool for the College and not simply an informational website. The College has a more vibrant social media presence to support current and future recruitment efforts. The College added two athletic teams in 2015-16 to bolster enrollment. The College has strengthened its relationship with regional partners in economic development, municipal revitalization and workforce development. The College has launched a new academic program that has presented a better option (Health Sciences) for a large number of students to remain in College by “internally transferring” into this program versus potentially leaving the College. An additional academic program with an “internal transfer” option (Environmental Studies) is currently under review at SED along with two other academic programs since summer 2015.

These accomplishments collectively have built a solid foundation for the College to meet the challenges before us in the years ahead. We are faced with declining high school populations in the region which predicts a 33% drop over the next 4 years. We are also experiencing a change in the mix of our student population with a growth in part-time students. Part-time students have varying needs related to instructional offerings and their level of student engagement outside of the classroom is often different than that of our residential and full-time students.

Finally, irrespective of student age; a growing number of prospective students across the region are weighing the value of a higher education credential against their concern with how one can quickly acquire an academic credential (whether associate or baccalaureate) that immediately translates into gainful employment for these educated consumers. With exception of a few selective programs that translate into immediate employment (in most instances), the College has been and continues largely to be a two-year college that provides its graduates with solid preparation to successfully pursue a baccalaureate degree at other institutions in the region. This core strength of our College is critical to preparing good citizens of the world; but we struggle with how this strength in quality instruction and student learning can be successfully leveraged to attract those prospective students who are primarily focused on achieving immediate gainful employment with an academic credential. The two are not mutually exclusive, but for some traditional age students and parents and for many non-traditional age students, they struggle to see the value of transfer even when we note the large number of our graduates that successfully are accepted into a four year college.
Section 1: Campus Alignment with SUNY Excels (the framework for the Power of SUNY 2020) and SUNY’s overall focus on completion.

The College completed its first strategic plan in November 2012. The plan is structured as a five year plan that is updated annually. The last annual progress report for the College’s strategic plan shared with the College community in fall 2014 is attached. Recently, in the summer of 2015, the College realigned the major strategic goals in its’ strategic plan. Eight new Strategic Directions have been drafted to serve as the College’s major areas of focus to advance the College. The proposed strategic directions for the new strategic plan are (1) Implementing Effective Enrollment Management Strategies, (2) Creating Best Practices for Insuring Financial Sustainability, (3) Improving Facilities Infrastructure & Technology, (4) Enhancing Student Learning In & Outside the Classroom, (5) Promoting Student Life Opportunities, (6) Maximizing Employee Services, (7) Facilitating Economic & Workforce Development in the Region, and (8) Expanding Institutional Advancement. These eight new strategic directions are currently under review by the College’s shared governance group. A new plan will be finalized and presented to the Board of Trustees in early Spring 2016.

It is clear that six (Strategic Directions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) of the eight new strategic directions are closely aligned with the major elements in SUNY Excels. The College needed to realign its strategic directions with critical issues such as increasing student access and completion, promoting greater student success, improving the financial sustainability of the College, improving critical infrastructure challenges, and fine-tuning the College’s efforts to promote workforce and economic development in the region. These realignments support the College’s needs and as well echoes SUNY’s commitment to student access & completion, student success and student engagement.

Our two greatest challenges are declining student enrollment and challenging campus infrastructure issues. The former issue, declining student enrollment is primarily a result of rapidly declining high school populations in the North County region; a decline underway since 2011. As SUNY looks to increase student graduation and completion numbers (which the College also supports as a strategy), the College has seen a significant reduction in student enrollment in the region of our sponsoring counties over the past four years. The College is implementing new enrollment strategies that will target recruitment of non-traditional students in the region, market the College’s first on-line academic program (pending approval at SED), and delve into new markets beyond the North Country region. These enrollment initiatives and others not mentioned here closely align the College with many of the goals promulgated by SUNY; albeit our current regional enrollment projections themselves will make it difficult for the College to recover from declining enrollment projections until at least 2020. The number of high school graduates is projected to decline at an annual rate of 5-10% for the next four years. As SUNY looks to increase completion numbers by 2020 and beyond, many community colleges are challenged with how to curb declining enrollments projected thru this same period. With these sobering high school projections as a backdrop to our enrollment planning efforts, North Country is not likely to return to 2014-15 enrollment figures until 2021 or 2022.

However, our efforts to curb enrollment decline does not mean we will not strive to improve access goals such as acceptance and yield rates; and completion goals such as graduation rates. The College is also proud to be a part of a public higher education system in New York that recognizes that the conventional definition of student completion (utilized by IPEDS) is outdated for the community.
college experience. So many of our students in the community college sector have no intention of completing an academic credential and many part-time students do not plan to complete an associate degree in three years (as IPEDS notes as the completion success rate for an associate degree), and other part-time students will take 4 or 5 years to acquire a credential. North Country Community College is excited to see how SUNY will continue to redefine student completion in higher education; and we proudly support system administration’s good work to broaden the definition of student completion beyond that of graduation and be inclusive of those other motivations that drives a student’s intention to attend a community college in New York State. We look forward to how the expansion of the definition of student completion will become a part of future SUNY Excels’ metrics for our performance improvement plans.

Section 2: Specific SUNY Excels Priority Areas and Metrics

Introduction: Access and Enrollment Strategies in the Face of Projected Declining Enrollments

The College has undergone major changes in continuous improvement in recent years in relationship to improving access. The College enrollment management staff’s efforts (and in conjunction with faculty that greatly assisted in recruiting on and off campus) has led to an increased number of new student applications to the institution. The success of increased applications hasn’t yet led to an increased enrollment yield and that is where our work continues. As we see declining high school populations in the North Country region, the College has begun to lay the groundwork to target other populations in the region and to also expand recruitment in other parts of the State.

The first enrollment initiative is the establishment of on-line programs at the College. In 2014-15; College shared governance and the College’s Board of Trustees approved moving its’ first on-line degree program to SUNY. Being somewhat geographically isolated in the middle of the Adirondacks, the institution needs to begin leveraging its strength in the quality of instruction it has provided over the years in the traditional classroom. The College has been very successful in the delivery of on-line classes. In 2014-15, the faculty piloted new on-line instructional support software (Moodle Rooms) and embraced this new on-line platform as the technology necessary to carry our quality instruction forward with the decision to offer academic programs on line. The College hopes to introduce additional on-line degree programs following the approval of our first on-line academic program under review at the State Education department.

Offering fully on-line academic programs are important for attracting new students to the College. On line academic programs (and classes) are also the instructional medium of choice for non-traditional students looking to acquire new credentials to support their pursuit of gainful employment. In 2014, a regional report indicated that 70% of the 25 year old and older population in the North Country region did not have an associate’s degree or higher academic credential. At the same time, employers struggle to find skilled individuals to close the middle skills gap in the State and across the nation. Many non-traditional students can only attend classes on a part-time schedule given other responsibilities they are managing in their life. We have begun to market our traditional programs to the non-traditional market and we will be directing our recruitment plan toward this population for much of the immediate future. In line with SUNY Excels, this initiative promotes recruiting an untapped market of New York State residents in the North Country region and beyond. In regard to our
enrollment goals, this new market will likely be offset by declining high school graduate numbers in our region. After 2020, as high school populations in the region begin to climb again, the College believes it will see an increase in its overall enrollment thereafter. We hope the College will return to 2015-16 enrollment levels in the subsequent years and at that time, and then it will be evident how the College is contributing to SUNY’s goal to increase graduate and completion rates across SUNY.

Approximately 70% of the students attending the College reside in Franklin and Essex counties. With declining high school populations throughout the region, the College needs strengthen its recruitment efforts by expanding recruitment outside of the North Country region. Admissions staff is currently looking at increasing its recruitment efforts in the New York City boroughs and surrounding region downstate.

**SUNY Excels: Data Executive Summary**

**Access:** The College’s Fall FTE for 2015-16 is projected at 1,054 and our current headcount is at 1,613. Projecting a continuation of declining high school graduate population through 2020 and noting the new strategic enrollment initiatives described earlier, the College is projecting an annual decline of 5% in enrollment in the subsequent years through 2020. The noted values of headcount and FTE for 2018 and 2020 reflect this annual enrollment decrease (line 1 and line 2 of the Data Executive Summary, and Table 1 – Total Students and Planned AAFTE for 2018 & 2020).

Our current enrollment initiatives regarding the addition of on-line academic programs and targeting non-traditional students is critical to our future success. The College has steadily increased the number of applications it has received in recent years. Excluding specific requirements for admission into our selective programs, our academic programs are open access for enrollment purposes. Since 2009, our acceptance rate has declined approximately 10% (line 3) and thus our yield rates have risen simultaneously. We have set a goal to raise our acceptance rate back to 80% as a means to support increased access to the College and SUNY. We have lowered our yield rate goal only due to the fact that targeting the acceptance rate will have an impact on our yield rate (line 4) and noting that our yield rate was lower this year (Fall 2015 entering class). It is our desire to increase our yield rate as our marketing efforts are fully realized and our proposed new academic programs are implemented.

We have made slight adjustments to those enrollment goals related to our student profile. We have set a goal to increase the number of international students by 3% (line 7) as we may see an increase in this area with the addition of another athletic team in the next year or so. The College will also begin targeted recruiting in some downstate areas that may have a slight positive impact on increasing underrepresented minority students (Line 8b).

**Completion:** Due to the projected enrollment decline through 2020, the College has reduced the number of total degrees awarded for 2018 and 2020 to 250 degree (line 17). If the new academic programs pending approval at State Ed net additional enrollment in 2016-17, we may see this value climb beyond 250 as we will award more associate degrees in 2018 and 2020 (line 19). It is also important to reiterate here that the current notion of completion is evolving in the community college sector (and beyond this sector). It would be more accurate to track the number of degrees awarded solely with the number of students who intend to seek an associate’s degree (or certificate). A significant number of students attend classes at a community college have no intention of obtaining an
associate degree. These students are often “stopping out” of their baccalaureate college experience as they attend our College and then returns to their four year college a semester or year later.

The second concern with the definition of completion is the number of years calculated to determine the percentage of students who have completed (Line 15). It is common for full-time students to move to part-time status for all types of reasons. And with a significant number of part-timers choosing to complete an associate’s degree over a 5-6 year period (due to other obligations external to the College), the percentage of degree awarded at the three year mark (line 15) doesn’t truly reflect the intentions and success of many of our students in the community college sector.

**Success:** As enrollment decline is projected into the near future, if the number of full-time faculty remains relatively the same, the student to faculty ratio will continue to lower each year and through 2020 (line 26).

**Engagement:** The College will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2017-18. Our current fundraising efforts are on target to meet our scholarship goals for 2018 and 2020 (line 35).

**Table 2: Trends in Student Enrollment Beyond Fall Census - Other Enrollment Populations**

The College continues to work with non-business and industry initiatives mostly through SUNY workforce development grants. Most of these training programs occur off campus property. The current capital bond-match proposal for the Saranac Lake campus will support rehabilitation of some of our classrooms and lab spaces. It is possible that future capital bond-match monies utilized through this proposal may include the extension of a current lab with new technology that will meet future workforce needs in the region. If this capital funding is provided, the College will be able to increase the types and number of workforce training opportunities at the College.

**Table 3: Trends in First-Time Applicants, Acceptance and Enrollment Yield - Applicants**

Our enrollment strategy for increasing the number of applications includes purchasing 2,000 prospective student names from NRCCUA. Our goals to reach 2,000 applicants by 2018 (Fall 2015 saw 1794 applications). This 10% increase in applications is a viable goal. With the Admissions staff narrowing the results of the NRCCUA list so that it aligns with our academic program offerings, our geographic footprint for recruiting, and our targeted areas for bolstering enrollment (i.e., distinguishing between traditional students names on the NRCCUA list with non-traditional student names collected through non-traditional recruiting efforts, and requesting student names that align with new geographic markets (i.e., New York boroughs)), we have the potential to increase both acceptance rates and enrollment yield rates.

**Table 4: Geographic Diversity – US Non-New York & International Students**

A considerable number of our international students are athletes. The next team the College is exploring as an addition to our intercollegiate athletic program may also draw interest from an international student market. We have set a goal to raise the number of international students to 60 by 2018/2020.
Beyond our strategy to expand athletic offerings, we believe aggressive marketing especially in partnering with Open SUNY will draw US Non-New York students to our proposed on-line offerings. From a resource allocation standpoint, with the quality of on-line instruction currently offered by our faculty and the introduction of Moodle Rooms as our on-line instructional support technology, the College has the infrastructure to support a high quality on-line experience for students. We will double the number of our US Non-New York students by 2018 when we reach a goal of 100 students.

Table 6 and Table 7: Faculty Trends, with Diversity and Student Faculty Ratios – Race/Ethnicity and Campus Student/Faculty FTE Ratio

The College is situated in a region that is more than 90% classified as White Non-Hispanic. The College is committed to diversifying the faculty and staff, however, we have been unsuccessful in recent years in recruiting and thus hiring under-represented minorities. The College offered an Early Retirement Incentive program in 2014-15 and a number of faculty opting to elect retirement in 2015-16. We are hopeful that we will successful replace some retired employees with a new hires in the future that are under-represented minorities. Our student to faculty ratio will likely continue to narrow as student enrollment declines in the years ahead and faculty numbers remain relatively constant.

Table 8: Trends in First Year Retention for First-Time (FT & PT) and Transfer Matriculated Students – First Time-Full Time Cohort and Transfer-Full Time Cohort

We also estimate that our enrollment with our first-time full time and transfer-full time students will decline through 2020. These projections are consistent with the overall enrollment trend reported throughout this performance improvement program.

Table 9: Trends in Graduation Rates of First-Time Full Time Students

Our first-time full time students two year graduation rate for the 2011 cohort is identical to the sector average (11.8%). We are slightly below the three year graduation rate in comparison to the sector’s 3 year average. In recent years, the College has added a staff position in the learning assistance center in Saranac Lake and moved another learning assistance staff person to the Ticonderoga campus. Both initiatives were implemented in 2014-15 and we believe the 2014 cohort three year graduation rate will rise as a result of these efforts. We have set a goal to increase the graduation rate by 2% points for the plan of 2015, 2018 and 2020.

Table 10: Trends in Graduation Rates of Full-Time Undergraduate Transfer Students

The College has seen a decline in transfer student graduation rates since Fall 2009. We know a number of full-time transfer students transfer out of NCCC after a year (and sometimes back) to a baccalaureate institution. We have discussed but haven’t taken advantage of implementing a “reverse transfer” program. If we begin to reach out to these students at these baccalaureate institutions, we can assist them in determining whether they are eligible to receive an associate’s degree at NCCC. We will be looking at how best to implement a “reverse transfer” program in the future. If implemented, our full-time transfer student graduation rates should rise thereafter.
Table 11: First-Time and Transfer Student Time to Degree & Average Number of Credits at Graduation

In line with SUNY Seamless Transfer requirements, which mandates that all associates programs must have no more than 64 credits (with waivers for Nursing and Radiologic Tech), we continue to work toward bringing our average # of credits to align with 64 credits. We recognize that student requiring developmental education in English and Math wind up taking extra credits, depending on their program, which could alter this projection. We expect that this average number of credits will not vary significantly for first-time (native) or transfer students.

Table 12: Trends in SUNY Educational Outcomes

Most of our students who leave NCCC persist or transfer to a SUNY baccalaureate college. Our goals reflect this dynamic in the distribution of student between SUNY and non-SUNY institutions. Barring an anomaly with the data set for Fall 2012, we believe our current retention efforts and high number of student transferring to SUNY colleges will continue to increase the number of completions in the upcoming years, even though we predict declining enrollments for this period.

Table 13: Trends in Degrees/Awards Granted by Academic Level

Our 2015-16 projections reflect an on-going reduction in enrollment. For the goal sent for 2018-19, the enrollment picture continues to be downward trending for the College, but given the demand for our LPN Certificate program, we expect certificate numbers to remain relatively stable. We have no additional capacity at present to expand the LPN program further (due to clinical size restrictions set by hospitals). Other certificate possibilities under consideration could increase the number of graduates, but given that they are not yet realized, making a claim of an increase would be unwise at this time. Similarly, we project fewer associates degrees awarded in 2015-16 for the same reasons. We have two additional new programs and an addition of a fully online program pending approval at the State Education department which we believe will be attractive and assist with buffering our projected enrollment decline. If we assume a 5% rather than a 10% decline in enrollment in 2016-17 due to the addition of these new programs (which is optimistic given high school projections), we will see a stabilization of the number of degrees awarded.

Tables 14-15: Student Opinion Survey

The results of the student opinion survey echoes the claims made throughout this PIP for North Country Community College. Students’ impressions of the quality of instruction and advising indicate that both are exceptional. Students find that it is easy to get along with each other in a collegial setting where they express there is generally harmony between students and others. They would like to obtained additional library resources, see an increase in student activities and overall learn in an environment with more modern facilities (we suspect is a reference to the condition of the Saranac Lake campus).

The College continues to look at ways to improve the student experience outside of the classroom. Nevertheless, these student concerns remain in the context that they find our staff easy to work with, incredibly friendly and resourceful. The challenges before North Country Community College is that we
are a small rural college where many students are place bound in attending college. The College employee’s relationship with students is central to our success in helping many students build the skills and confidence to meet the academic rigor of a certificate or associate degree program.

**Table 16: Student Default Rates and Financial Literacy**

Our three year student default rate has been consistently at 19-21%. We have financial literacy information available to students at this time. We are exploring how best to implement an early intervention program on financial literacy with students when they first arrive at the College in the 2016-17 year.

**Table 18: Trends in Alumni and Philanthropy**

The College is currently fundraising scholarships in preparation of our 50th anniversary for the College. The celebration is being planned in 2017-18. The College’s goal is to double fundraising between 2013-14 and 2018-19.

**Section 3: Conclusion and Expected Impact on your Campus**

It is evident that the College’s number one priority is stabilizing enrollment and to implement recruitment strategies into new markets that will offset some of the projected decline in regional high schools populations that will continue in the upcoming years. If these efforts are successful, the College will realize the goals set forth in this performance improvement plan. In later years, the College will then begin to contribute to SUNY’s larger goal to raise the number of graduates in the SUNY system.

Our enrollment strategies will also begin to have varying degrees of positive impact on other SUNY initiatives such as increasing the number of students in on-line programs and increasing under-represented populations (to a lesser degree) amongst students and employees. The potential to increase the number of non-traditional students in our enrollment mix will largely be dependent how successful we are in marketing our programs to these students and how the College chooses to organize class schedules and class lengths to support these students’ needs. North Country Community College is excited to meet the challenges that are set before us. There are great people here who do great work with our students and in our surrounding communities, and these are the essential ingredients to move the College forward with its goals and that of SUNY.