The common thread through the Critical Issues in Higher Education Conference Series and, indeed, the work of the higher education sector as a whole, is our mission to promote social mobility and economic growth through knowledge creation and the delivery of high-quality, accessible education. Yet, for all of its contributions, many are questioning whether or not higher education remains a worthy investment. There is a sentiment gaining popularity among policymakers, the press, employers, and most importantly, students and families: higher education is irrelevant, static, and old. This year, we will examine a timely question: How can we leverage the significant national attention we’ve been receiving to adapt and prove we’re far from obsolete?

Lately, no sector of society has been shy about holding us accountable for our perceived strengths and weaknesses. Persistent scrutiny is creating new incentives, driving innovation, pushing boundaries, and challenging traditions like never before.

SUNYCON 2016 will consider how higher education can:

- Learn from its critics to better adapt to a changing student population and economy;
- Use widespread local, national, and international attention as a positive force for realizing transformational change; and
- Remain anchored to its public mission.

A Note from the SUNYCON Team:

Central to the conference is the role of the media in shaping the public’s perception of higher education and how their coverage illuminates the sector’s struggles to tell our story. To that end, the panel titles are borrowed from headlines, which are just a sampling of the reporting that drove us to choose this year’s SUNYCON theme. We hope you will let these references inspire your thinking as you prepare to join us.
**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27th**

8:00 – 9:00AM  
REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST  
*Location:* Main Lobby of The Times Center

9:00 – 10:30AM  
WELCOME AND OPENING KEYNOTE  
*Location:* The Stage

Welcome: H. Carl McCall, Chairman, *The State University of New York Board of Trustees*

Introductory Remarks: Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor, *The State University of New York*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Judy Smith, Founder and CEO of Smith & Co., Crisis Management Expert, and inspiration for the hit TV show *Scandal*  
*Moderator:* Christine Romans, Chief Business Correspondent, CNN

10:30 – 10:45AM  
MORNING BREAK

10:45 – 11:45AM  
MORNING PLENARY: *Shut Up About Harvard*  
*Ben Casselman for FiveThirtyEight, March 30, 2016*  
*Location:* The Stage

Media depictions of “college” too often focus on elite institutions, overshadowing the experiences of the vast majority of American college students and alumni. How does the persistent media focus on elite institutions distract from the challenges that are most relevant to the future of public higher education?  
*Moderator:* Christine Romans, Chief Business Correspondent, CNN

**Jessica Luther,** Independent Journalist and Author, “Unsportsmanlike Conduct: College Football and the Politics of Rape”  
**Joseph Storch,** Associate Counsel, SUNY System Administration (SUNY Oswego ’02)  
**Donna Young,** Professor, Albany Law School

**The Debt Dialogue Must be Turned on its Head**  
*Michelle Singletary for The Washington Post, August 8, 2015*  
*Location:* NY Times Conference Center 15th floor

There is such a thing as good debt, but the media’s coverage would indicate that higher ed is in danger of losing that very argument. How can we better represent return on educational investment to students, as well as to society?  
*Moderator:* Keshia Clukey, Education Reporter, POLITICO NY

**Pauline Abernathy,** Executive Vice President, *The Institute for College Access & Success*  
**Ken Redd,** Director, *Research and Policy Analysis, National Association of College and University Business Officers*  
**Philip Trostel,** Professor, *School of Economics, University of Maine*

12:00 – 1:30PM  
LUNCHEON KEYNOTE  
*Location:* The Hall

**Marc H. Morial,** President & CEO, *National Urban League*  
*Moderator:* Rehema Ellis, Chief Education Correspondent, NBC News

1:45 – 2:30PM  
STRATEGY SESSIONS  
*There’s No More Denying Campus Rape Is A Problem*  
*Tyler Kingkade for The Huffington Post, January 20, 2016*  
*Location:* The Stage

Public safety issues including sexual assault put a magnifying glass on college campuses, which are in turn held largely responsible for issues that are subsets of larger societal ills. How are institutions improving climate and preparing for when prevention efforts come up short, particularly as related to educating the media?  
*Moderator:* Tyler Kingkade, National News Reporter, BuzzFeed

**Bridget Doyle,** Vice President, SUNY Student Assembly

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**Remedial Courses in College Stir Questions Over Cost, Effectiveness**  
*Josh Mitchell for The Wall Street Journal, November 17, 2014*  
*Location:* NY Times Conference Center 15th floor

This hidden cost of college will require unprecedented collaboration between P-12 and higher education leaders in order to protect students from paying the price – in dollars and time – for their lack of readiness.  
**Craig Heldman,** Chief Executive Officer, *Hobsons*  
**Julie Johnson,** Vice President for Research and Policy, *Complete College America*  
**Rebecca Martin,** Executive Director, *National Association of System Heads*  
**Alexander Mayer,** Senior Associate, *MDRC*  
**Amelia Parnell,** Vice President for Research and Policy, *NASPA Foundation*

**Leadership Workshops**

**Media Crisis: How to Communicate** – Presented by SKD Knickerbocker  
*Location:* The Hall

**Implicit Bias: How to Navigate** – Presented by Samuel Sommers & Keith Maddox, *Tufts University*  
*Location:* The Stage

**Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science** – Presented by Emily Lindenfeld & Valeri Lantz-Gefroh, *Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science*, *Stony Brook University*  
*Location:* NY Times Conference Center 15th floor

*This pre-registered session begins at 1:45pm.*

4:15 – 4:30PM  
AFTERNOON BREAK
CRITICAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

4:30 – 5:30PM
AFTERNOON PLENARY PANEL: The Travesty of Starving Our Best Public Universities
Location: The Stage
Higher education’s fight for relevance cannot be untangled from its fight for state and federal funding, which for decades was a given. Higher education leaders will share lessons learned from the challenges and opportunities presented by the current budget climate.
Moderator: Peter McPherson, President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Clayton Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System
Sara Hebel, Assistant Managing Editor, Chronicle of Higher Education
H. Carl McCall, Chairman, SUNY Board of Trustees
Gail Mellow, President, LaGuardia Community College

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28th
8:00 – 8:30AM
CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:30 – 9:30AM
WELCOME BACK: Conversation with NPR’s Terry Gross (University at Buffalo ’72) – Host of Fresh Air
Location: The Stage
Moderator: Gerald Benjamin, Director, The Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz

9:30 – 10:10AM
UP FOR DISCUSSION
Public Higher Education Should Be Universal and Free
Location: The Stage
With student debt on the rise, promise programs and other innovative approaches to tuition are being debated in legislatures across the nation. Who should pay for college and what does broadening access mean for institutions’ ability to support students through completion?
Matthew Chingos, Senior Fellow, Urban Institute and Author, “Game of Loans: The Rhetoric and Reality of Student Debt”
Sara Goldrick-Rab, Author, “Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream”

10:20 – 11:10AM
PLENARY DISCUSSION: The Morbid Fascination with the Death of the Humanities
Benjamin Winterhalter for The Atlantic, June 6, 2014
Location: The Stage
The value of higher education is too often based on graduates’ employability, putting STEM and liberal arts education unnecessarily at odds. Are reports of the death of the humanities grossly exaggerated?
Moderator: Benjamin Winterhalter, Features Editor, JSTOR Daily, contributor, The Atlantic
RG Conlee, Chief Innovation Officer, Xerox
Kristin Esterberg, President, SUNY Potsdam
Shane Kosinski, Deputy Director for Operations for the Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E), U.S. Department of Energy, (Binghamton University ’01, University at Albany ’03)
Amy Laitinen, Director for Higher Education, New America
Laura Lindenfeld, Director, Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science, Stony Brook University

11:10 – 12:00PM
PLENARY DISCUSSION: Misplaced Priorities in College Sports
The Editorial Board of The Washington Post, December 26, 2015
Location: The Stage
The media has held higher ed institutions and athletics organizations to the fire for putting the “student” in student athlete second. How do we reconcile the college student with the superstar athlete and incentivize institutions to support them equally?
Moderator: Doug Lederman, Editor and Co-Founder, Inside Higher Ed
Mark Emmert, President, NCAA
William “Brit” Kirwan, Chancellor Emeritus, University System of Maryland
Kendall Spencer, Chair, Division I Student Athlete Advisory Committee, NCAA
Kim Donaldson, Founder and CEO, Excelle Sports

12:00 – 1:00PM
DEGREES OF INFLUENCE: Dear 45
Location: The Stage
We will reflect on President Obama’s leadership on access, affordability, and completion and his legacy of support for the higher education sector. We will also distill what lessons our discussions from throughout the conference hold for the next President of the United States.
Moderator: Susan Arbetter, Reporter, Capitol Pressroom
Ken Daly, President, National Grid
Roberto Rodriguez, Deputy Assistant to the President for Education, White House Domestic Policy Council
LaVerne Srinivasan, Vice President, Carnegie Corporation
Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers