

State of the Campus Address
August 25, 2020

The information in this document is accurate as of August 25, 2020, especially with regard to cases and admissions numbers.

Good morning everyone. I'd like to take this opportunity to once again thank everyone for their excellent work from when we had to cease "live" operations in March through the summer. I know how challenging this time has been—trying to stay safe and conform to changing guidance on the pandemic; balancing work with family obligations; converting courses from face-to-face to 100% online; on-campus essential staff continuing to maintain and clean our campus; residence life staff working with students who had nowhere else to go and with students returning to retrieve their belongings; and administration having endless meetings to try to plan, respond to SUNY and the State, and adjust to rapidly changing circumstances. I'm hopeful that a year from now we will look back at this period and say: "it was challenging, but we rose to the challenge and successfully moved forward."

I'm going to be mentioning some people by name, and I'd like to apologize in advance since there's no way to actually mention everyone who deserves to be mentioned. That's actually everyone at SUNY Canton—you've all done such a great job, and I'm extremely appreciative of your efforts.

Let me start off with a bit of good news for you, and that's that I won't be announcing any big initiatives this year—we have a lot to contend with this coming year. We've already contended with a lot, and this is a year to deal with this newest normal, support our students in the best ways possible, rethink and reconfigure where we need to, and move forward.

Also, in the good news category, there are a lot of ways as a campus we have been able to respond to the pandemic.

- So far, we are the only college in the North Country to have zero cases of COVID on our campus—no one that I'm aware of in our faculty, staff, or on-campus students has gotten the virus. Last Monday, we did the testing for 67 of our early arriving students, and none of them had the virus either. Hopefully, that's a trend that will continue. Should someone ultimately test positive, we have good plans for helping them while they isolate and tracing anyone they would have come into contact with.
- We had to switch very quickly from face-to-face instruction in 70% of our courses to online instruction in 100% of our courses. I'm very proud of the way our faculty and staff made this transition—working out new ways of teaching; creating online materials; learning how to use Teams, Zoom, and other platforms; reaching out to students to make sure they were keeping up and finding new ways to help those who were having trouble; and being able to implement that elusive combination of being kind and rigorous at the same time. Some of you discovered your inner film director and on-screen talents through creation of educational videos and construction of classroom sets to webcast from in your own homes. Others modified their curricula to include content and project work related to the pandemic, and to allow students to address civic change. I want to thank everyone who worked so hard to make this shift possible—our faculty; our instructional designers, led by Director Tonka Jokelova; our academic support staff, led by Associate Provost Molly Mott; our IT staff, led by Chief Information Officer Kyle Brown; our Deans – Ken Erickson, Mike Newtown, and Phil Neisser; and our Provost, Peggy De Cooke. You did remarkable work, and our students are grateful.
- I'd like to thank our on-campus essential staff who worked so hard to keep our campus safe and clean, to box and ship essential materials to our students when they had to return home and to allow our students to safely return to retrieve their goods, and to set up for a lower-density, higher-sanitized semester. Al Mulkin, Mike McCormick, and John Kennedy and their staffs—thanks for all your good work! A special thanks goes to our Health Center staff, their Director Shanna White, and our volunteers who are

testing our students as they return this fall. You've all been fantastic. Another special thanks goes to Derek Converse, our Environmental Health & Safety Coordinator and our Campus Safety Monitor contact to SUNY.

- And I haven't forgotten the staff that had to shift to working from home for their innovation and support for our students. Working from home and balancing work and family needs is difficult—trust me, I found this out personally—and we appreciate your dedication. I'd also like to make special mention of Suzan McDermott and her staff in Human Resources who worked so hard to understand and implement the new rules and procedures coming from the State and Federal Governments.
- I'd like to make a special mention of a number of faculty and staff that have worked to help others during the pandemic in some extremely impactful ways. I know that there are others, and I apologize in advance for leaving anyone out.
 - First, I'd like to note David Penepent, Darien Frederick, and several student volunteers' work in helping to transport the deceased from New York City to crematories across the state in "Operation Hands with a Heart." Addressing this critical need was documented by multiple national media outlets, including the New York Times, CNN, and Univision.
 - Another important effort was undertaken by Matt Burnett, who worked closely with the Northern New York 3D Printing Network to 3-D print medical face shield components for local hospitals and schools. His work was integrated into a SUNY-wide effort that was recognized by many elected officials.
 - Something that's really important but a bit less visible on campus is the work done by our two Small Business Development Centers. All through the pandemic, our staff there has been working with local businesses about how to deal with the virus, plan for the future, successfully reopen, and recover. They've coordinated this work with a wide variety of economic development agencies and have made a real difference in our region's ability to move forward. I'd like to thank SBDC Director Dale Rice and all the staff for their critical work.
- All in all, our adaptability and affordability earned SUNY Canton a top-tier ranking from the organization Educate to Career.

OK—I'm going to turn now to the part that many of you really want to know—how is the College doing fiscally? The truth is that there are still many unknowns. There was a time in my life when colleges could predict what enrollments and budgets would be like in the coming year with reasonable accuracy. In 2008, when the great recession hit, everything related to the budget was up in the air for the next six years until a new normal was established. When I came to SUNY Canton in 2014, we could reasonably predict the budget and enrollment for the next several years, but due to the pandemic, everything about 2020-2021 and what will happen in the next several years is up in the air.

We don't know what our enrollment is yet and probably won't for another week. Despite tremendously hard work by our Admissions staff, led by Melissa Evans, we're estimating that it will be down 12%. Housing will also be down, though the final numbers aren't known yet either, because some fraction of students have decided "if everything I'm taking is going to be online, why do I need to live on campus?" Almost all of the drop we're seeing comes in the First-Year student class, corresponding to the "gap year" predictions seen in the press. Both these facts will put severe strain on our budget. Will things improve this Spring? It all depends on what happens in the fall, and if a vaccine becomes available, but we believe that there will be some opportunities there.

On top of the unknowns I've already mentioned, many decisions outside our control have not yet been made. For example, we don't know what our tuition is this year and won't know at least until the Board of Trustees meets in October. The legislature approved an increase of up to \$200, but it seems unlikely that the Board will approve an increase that high or perhaps any increase for the fall semester. We don't know if the Excelsior Scholarship will be extended to this year's students, as this will depend on whether the federal government will extend further aid to the State. We are facing a cut in our State support. How big? We don't know, but the

common wisdom is 25%. We have been in regular communication with our State and Federal representatives and they are trying to help, but it remains to be seen whether additional funding for higher education will be available.

Putting this all together, we're likely going to be facing a deficit of about \$6M. Because of careful fiscal planning in the past several years, we have reserves of about \$16M, so we'll be able to absorb this, assuming we are allowed to access our reserves. How does this compare to other SUNYs? Well, on August 17, Politico noted that Stony Brook's president reported that Stony Brook is facing a deficit of \$110M and will need to take \$80M from their reserves—thus depleting them by more than half. Many of our sister SUNY campuses have no reserves at all. So, we're similar to some and better off than others.

As you know, we've already begun to adjust to deal with this deficit. At an earlier Faculty Assembly meeting, I mentioned that we began cutting discretionary spending—those items that we have a choice about—and would try to preserve jobs. We have instituted a hiring freeze, with only the most critical needs being approved for new or replacement positions. Not everyone who retires or leaves will necessarily be replaced, and we will evaluate each open position to see if it is truly critical and whether it can be addressed by reorganizing. This plan will continue into this year. Travel has been cut, as have most capital purchases not having to do with safety. We've consolidated course sections in light of enrollment and restructured so that we will no longer have curriculum coordinators. This has resulted in a drop in the number of adjunct faculty we need. We also have reduced the increases associated with promotion and continuing appointment, though we are still awarding more than is required by our union contracts. All in all, we have reduced our budget by something like \$1.5M. That's a lot, but we will likely need to do more as we move forward.

OK—enough about what we don't know and budget woes. Let's talk about what we do know and about moving forward. There is a bit of good news here too.

- We have been able to make some critical new hires, and I'd like to introduce some of them to you. [See attachment on Full-time Appointments.]
- I'd like to acknowledge some recent award winners on our campus. First, let's all congratulate our two Chancellor's Award recipients: Ali Zaidi in the Humanities Department for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities and Tina Demo in the School of Business and Liberal Arts for Classified Service. We had two students who also won Chancellor's Scholarships: Sarah Atanasio, a Health and Fitness Promotion graduate who won a Graduate Fellowship and will be going to SUNY Cortland for a master's in Athletic Training, and Adam Petric, who won an Undergraduate Scholarship Award. Adam completed his associate's degree in Business Administration and will be continuing at SUNY Canton for his bachelor's degree in Management.
- I'd also like to acknowledge our Meritorious Service Award recipients Christina Martin from the Early Childhood Education program, and Teresa Minckler, Associate Athletics Director and Senior Woman Administrator in the Athletics Department.
- We have received about \$2.7M in CARES funding of various types, a little less than half of which allowed us to support students who were in a tight spot due to having to return home this past Spring. The other half is to help the campus cover expenses related to the pandemic. We're grateful for the assistance and hope that more is forthcoming.
- Our Advancement Office successfully raised some \$67,000 for the Student Emergency Fund, which was matched with \$54,000 from SUNY, for a total of \$120,000. This is the most the Emergency Fund has ever had, by more than a factor of 10. Thus, we'll be able to assist our students with any issues that arise in these challenging times. A big thank you to Tracey Thompson, everyone in Advancement, and everyone that donated.
- We just heard that we have been awarded \$309,500 per year for the next five years to support our TRiO program—that's more than \$1.5M in all. A big thanks to Brenda Miller, Betsy Adams, Molly Mott, Kevin Elliott, and the TRiO staff for their work on this.

- We have signed an additional articulation agreement giving our students a pathway to graduate programs, this time with SUNY Empire State, for students majoring in business and healthcare management.
- We are continuing to work on new program development. Our newest degree, Crime Analysis, is launching this fall and is being offered on SUNY Online.
- We have continued our leadership in eSports by hosting a SUNY-wide tournament and co-hosting a second one with the University at Buffalo.
- While we bid farewell to Chancellor Kristina Johnson, the SUNY Board of Trustees acted quickly to ensure that we have solid leadership at System. This past week, they appointed Dr. Jim Malatras to the post. As I noted in my message last week, I have worked with Dr. Malatras and look forward to continuing to do so.

It's also important to note the national social upheaval and movement in support of Black Lives Matter.

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis has been the catalyst for nation-wide protests, including here in the North Country. His death is the just latest example of a legacy of racial injustice that is all too present in our own communities, across the country, and indeed, around the world. We recognize that we are not immune to the issues of systemic racism and discrimination in the North Country or at SUNY Canton, and we are committed to doing better to address these issues, and strive to become an anti-racist campus, as I wrote in a letter to the community on June 1.

I'd like to bring everyone up to date on our plans. SUNY is also encouraging a similar response called "64 Changes on 64 Campuses" which our plan has been incorporated into. We are committing to five projects that you may be interested in working with us on.

- We have formed an **Anti-Racism Task Force** that already has more than 20 participants from across our faculty and staff.
- Our Advancement Office is establishing a **Promises Kept Pathways Scholarship** that we have started to raise funding for. The scholarship will have three different "flavors": to support Black *applicants* to become students at SUNY Canton; to support Black students so that they will be *retained* at SUNY Canton; and to support Black students *graduating* from SUNY Canton to obtain a graduate degree. We hope to offer the first several of these scholarships in 2021.
- In cooperation with the Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley (ACSLV), we will be offering an **Anti-Racism Speaker Series** of nationally known speakers. If everything goes according to plan, the first of these speakers will speak as part of a **Black Solidarity Day Program** on November 2, 2020. The plan would be to have such speakers every semester.
- Also, in cooperation with the other Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley, we will be organizing either a **Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Workshop or Conference** to coordinate with the ACSLV's Conference on Diversity & Inclusion. We anticipate that this will first occur in Spring 2022, but it could possibly be sooner.
- Finally, we are conducting a survey of faculty at SUNY Canton regarding including **Racial Justice Content and Projects** within existing courses, expanding the number of courses on the subject of Racial and Social Justice, and examining the issue of online equity. A goal would be to have faculty and students present on the work they are doing in these courses, including at the abovementioned Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Workshop or Conference.

I'd like to thank our two co-Chief Diversity Officers, Lashawanda Ingram and Emily Hamilton-Honey, as well as members of our Diversity Council, the *ad hoc* Anti-Racism group, and folks from the Advancement Office, who have been meeting over the summer to plan and frame out some of these ideas. These are critically important projects, and I invite and encourage all of you to participate in them.

This has been one heck of a past year and promises to be a pivotal new year for our College. I'd like to thank the people who have been engaged in practically non-stop meeting and planning sessions ever since March—the folks on the COVID-19 Task Force, all the people on the various planning committees and subcommittees, and our Executive Team—Courtney Bish, Peggy De Cooke, Shawn Miller, Tracey Thompson, Lenore VanderZee, and Michaela Young—who have been of immense help and have kept me mostly sane. Peggy and Tracey—this has been quite a first year for both of you—talk about drinking from the fire hose—you've both been amazing.

Finally, if we were all in the same room, I'd be asking each and every one of you to stand up so that we can collectively acknowledge the fine work you've done under such challenging circumstances and the work we're counting on you for as we move forward. Since I can't do that online, what I'd like you all to do is the next best thing—to unmute your line (I'll wait a minute so that you can do that) and now—let's have a round of applause for each other. Thanks to all of you—we couldn't have done it without you.