
The Understory - President Kolison's Update to Faculty and Staff, March 15, 2022

President's Office <President.Office@fredonia.edu>
To: Faculty/Staff group <facultystaff@fredonia.edu>

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State University of New York at Fredonia

The Understory



Stephen H. Kolison, Jr., Ph.D., President



The Understory is President Kolison's update to the faculty and staff at SUNY Fredonia. The term "understory" is used in forestry to refer to the undergrowth of a forest below the canopy. The understory of the forest, which consists of new growth and other matter, is, to a large extent, the future of the forest.

March 15, 2022
Fredonia, NY

Thank you for reading the first installment of the Understory. Through this channel, I hope to keep the faculty and staff of SUNY Fredonia abreast of many of the endeavors that my office and the President's Cabinet are engaged in to advance the university.

Priorities for the New York State Budget

You may be aware that our leaders in Albany, NY, are engaged in discussions that will lead to the New York State budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year. The SUNY System is a part of these discussions. Like all state-supported institutions, we at SUNY Fredonia are making our interests in the State's budget known through various means.

We have been engaged in several conversations regarding the things that matter most to us as an institution. We have sought input from groups across campus in determining what we should advocate for now. These groups include the President's Cabinet, the University Senate Executive Committee, the Planning and Budget Committee, and other stakeholders. I have also attended meetings with other SUNY Comprehensive Presidents to glean thoughts about the State budget process and priorities.

Below is a high-level summary of the items that SUNY Fredonia will be advocating for in this budget process and perhaps beyond. These items are all in alignment with what we know at this time to be among SUNY's priorities for the FY 2022-23 budget:

- Adequacy of funds for the Tuition Assistance Program.
- Support for developing and implementing new enrollment strategies to address enrollment challenges across several of the Comprehensives.
- Support for the development of new student pipelines that include out-of-state and international students.
- Streamlining of the approval process for new academic programs at the state level.
- Funding for the addition of new faculty positions that would bring diversity and new talent to the SUNY system.
- Funding to assist Comprehensive Institutions to achieve distinction in areas of their choosing without requiring the institutions to become specialized.
- Funding to enhance the competitiveness of salaries offered to faculty and staff by Comprehensive Institutions in the SUNY System.
- Adequacy of funding to the State University Construction Fund to address the needed renovation of campus facilities.
- Funding to support institutions dealing with financial difficulties brought about by COVID-19 and by the impact of changing demographics on enrollment.

In advocacy work, it is always helpful when individuals who are on the same team are aligned in messaging. Hence, I hope that everyone advocating on behalf of SUNY Fredonia will find the sharing of these items to be helpful to our collective efforts.

Enrollment Challenges and Opportunities

As I indicated to the campus about a year ago, the decline in enrollment is our biggest challenge. This has happened for a variety of reasons, including demographic changes in the state and our reliance on recruiting students mainly from New York State and the WNY region. Indeed, this is an issue other institutions are experiencing across the Northeast and the Midwest as well. At SUNY Fredonia, we have been assessing this challenge and developing strategies to reverse the trend in declining enrollment. In this first installment of the Understory, I want to share a few of our efforts with you.

First, looking closely at this challenge, we are presented with two main options: (1) stop the current trend and work toward reversing it; or (2) become a smaller institution. Having pondered these two main options closely for the last year and a half, I have found that there are a number of options that we have yet to explore and pursue in addressing our enrollment challenge. In view of that, my thinking is that we do not yet need to consider becoming a smaller institution. I believe that it is possible to stop the decline and reverse the current enrollment trend.

Last Fall (2021), our enrollment was 3,780. As a Cabinet, we agreed that this is where we should hold the line. In other words, we should do everything to ensure that no Fall enrollment going forward should drop below this number. We want to stabilize our coming Fall enrollment at 3,780 and then rebuild enrollment numbers. In light of this, the goals that were set about a year ago will be adjusted. So, what are we doing to achieve this goal?

First, let me acknowledge that many of you are working every day to contribute to enrollment efforts. Let me also share with you a few highlights that I want the entire campus to be aware of:

- We have reorganized what was formerly the Division of Enrollment and Student Services and moved all enrollment management functions to Academic Affairs, where retention efforts and academic advisement are also managed. With all these functions now placed in a single division, under a single vice president, we believe synergies can be maximized and the areas of Recruitment, Admission, Retention, and Academic Advisement can be better connected.
- We have devoted significant efforts and resources to marketing our programs in new regions, including Ohio and Pennsylvania. I hope you have seen some of our commercials on TV.

- We are working expeditiously to establish a summer bridge program for selected cohorts of newly admitted students to support their retention.
- We have set aside financial resources that will be used to facilitate the development of degree programs in high-demand areas. This includes adding new graduate programs as well as establishing new delivery modalities for new and, as appropriate, existing programs that will attract nontraditional students.
- We are adding faculty positions to ensure that high-demand programs can meet the instructional needs of students.
- We are developing incentives to be awarded to academic departments for meeting and exceeding enrollment targets.
- We are collaborating with JCC to deliver selected baccalaureate completion programs on JCC's campus in Jamestown beginning Fall 2022. This is intended to benefit place-bound students who are unable to attend classes on the Fredonia campus.
- We are exploring mutually beneficial recruitment and retention opportunities with the University at Buffalo.
- We are actively raising private funds to enhance student access and persistence at Fredonia. Given that 48% of our full-time first-time undergraduates are awarded Pell grants (meaning they come from low-income families), these funds will play a significant role in our ability to attract and retain students.

We are continuing to think about other initiatives we could pursue to be successful in addressing our enrollment challenge. Obviously, we did not come upon this challenge overnight. Hence, we will not solve it overnight. Overcoming this challenge will require sustained efforts. As a campus community, we must face some difficult realities: Enrollment challenges have implications for the budget, and budgetary challenges have implications for morale. Yet I feel confident that we can overcome these challenges by developing the right attitude. We must help each other maintain a positive attitude and a high level of optimism buttressed by innovation, hard work, and persistence. We must be willing to collaborate and show openness to change. We must also be patient. All of these challenges will require nothing less than our total participation, with each of us playing an appropriate role. In my meetings with various groups across campus in the coming weeks, I will discuss how each person or group of individuals can play a role in helping us get to success. Also, in his meetings, EVP and Provost David Starrett will

provide more details on some of the efforts that I presented above. Remain hopeful. We can do this!

Departure of Mr. Jeffrey Woodard

Since June 2016, Mr. Jeffrey Woodard has served as the Director of Marketing & Communications for SUNY Fredonia. When I arrived here, I asked Jeff to join the President's Cabinet. Since then I have had the pleasure of working with Jeff in communicating strategies for controlling the spread of COVID-19 on campus, as well as for promoting the university. Recently, Jeff has been instrumental in leading our efforts to market the university and its programs to new and larger audiences. The impact of his work on the university has been significant. I am very appreciative of all his contributions to SUNY Fredonia and will miss him and his counsel. Please join me in extending thanks and appreciation to Jeff and in wishing him success in all his future endeavors. His last day on campus will be March 21, 2022.



SUNY Distinguished Professorship

I am very pleased to announce that Dr. Ted Lee, Professor and Chair of Biology, and Dr. Junaid Ahmed Zubairi, Professor and Chair of Computer and Information Sciences, have been selected for the SUNY Distinguished Professorship.



As you know, the SUNY Distinguished Professorship is among the highest awards and recognitions that can be conferred on a faculty member in the SUNY System. Please join me in extending congratulations to Drs. Lee and Zubairi for this achievement and for their contribution to the prestige of SUNY Fredonia.

Correction to Observer Article

On March 12, 2022, the Observer reported that the university saved \$672,855 by pausing three administrative positions. The amount reported was accurate, but the attribution of cause was not. If you recall during the January 20th All-Campus Meeting presentation, I indicated that we had taken several actions, including pausing these three positions, restructuring a division, and eliminating other positions. Collectively, these actions yielded this total cost savings.



Commencement

We are excited to be planning an in-person Commencement on May 21, 2022. It has been a long two years since we have enjoyed a traditional ceremony. Already there is a feeling of positive energy around the planning of this event. I am looking forward to this as it will be my first traditional Commencement here at SUNY Fredonia.

We are very pleased to be welcoming U.S. Attorney Trini E. Ross, the United States Attorney for the Western District of New York, as the speaker for the morning Commencement ceremony. We expect to name our afternoon speaker very soon. Both Commencement addresses will be recorded and made available to the graduates.

Please visit the [Commencement website](#) to stay updated as additional details develop.

Next Understory

In the next Understory, I intend to discuss the planning for SUNY Fredonia's FY 2022-23 budget. I will also discuss our new policy on the retreat of senior academic leaders from their administrative roles to faculty roles.



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Office of the President | 280 Central Avenue | 138 Fenton Hall | State University of New York at
Fredonia | Fredonia, NY 14063