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## The Understory - President Kolison's Update to Faculty and Staff May 30, 2023

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To: Faculty/Staff group <facultystaff@fredonia.edu>

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State University of New York at Fredonia

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# *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.

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May 30, 2023  
Fredonia, NY

Dear Faculty and Staff,

I thought about connecting with you through the Understory before this summer got fully underway. There are a few things I want to cover as we shift attention to the summer.

### **Spring 2023 Commencement Exercises**

We held two successful and exciting commencement ceremonies on May 20, 2023. Both the morning and afternoon ceremonies saw a total of 738 students

walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. A number of changes were made to this year's ceremony, thus departing from some practices while introducing some new features. Our two commencement speakers, The Honorable James A.W. McLeod, '71 (for the morning ceremony) and The Honorable Lynne T. (Bona) Ruda - '07, '09 (for the afternoon ceremony) were inspiring and superb. As individuals who graduated from SUNY Fredonia, they were able to connect with the students. So far, reviews for both ceremonies have been positive.



As one can imagine, a ceremony of such a magnitude cannot occur and be successful without good planning and hard work of many dedicated individuals. I am grateful to the [Commencement Committee](#), led by Ms. Rachel Martin, for

such exemplary work. Thank you. Sincere thanks to staff, faculty, students, community members, and members of the administration who supported and/or attended commencement. I extend special thanks to members of the College Council who supported the ceremonies through their attendance and their role of handing the diploma covers to graduates.

The planning for the 197th commencement will begin early in fall. Again, we will need volunteers to work on the day of commencement. Any UUP represented staff member volunteering to assist on commencement day will receive compensatory time on a day mutually agreed upon with their supervisor. There will be a call for volunteers as the planning progresses.



## **Sustaining the Beauty of a Campus**

I often tell colleagues and friends about the beauty of the SUNY Fredonia campus. The layout of the campus was beautifully done and the buildings and spaces designed with care. This is not to say that some of our facilities or spaces do not need upgrading or enhancement. Yes, indeed some of our facilities and spaces can use enhancements. This is why we see ongoing major construction projects around campus. But, what is needed between the time when buildings and spaces are newly established and the time when they must undergo major repairs and enhancements? Regular Care. Through the regular care, performed primarily by our facilities staff, we are all able to tell others that SUNY Fredonia is among the most beautiful campuses in the SUNY System. The work of the facilities staff keeps our campus and facilities clean and attractive. Their work enhances the longevity of our facilities and therefore saves the university a significant amount of money over the long term.

On May 25, 2023, I had the special pleasure of attending the Facilities Services Annual Meeting where some members of the facilities staff were recognized for their work. Among those recognized were: Jim O'Connor (1st

from left in the photo below) for Outstanding Administrative Services for Professional Trades and; David Racker (3rd from left) for Outstanding Administrative Services for Custodial Services.



Congratulations to Jim and David for distinguishing themselves in their work at the University. I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to each member of the facilities staff for all they do to keep our facilities functional and beautiful.

## **Enhancing SUNY Fredonia's Affordability**

I think most people know the importance of the Fredonia College Foundation (FCF) to the University. What I am not sure about is knowledge about the extent of that importance. I want to use this opportunity to discuss the importance of the work that the FCF performs on behalf of the University.

Students come to us with their dreams to obtain quality higher education. However, more than 40 percent of our students are from financially challenged backgrounds based on the Federal Government's standard for Pell Grant eligibility. For these and many other students, their ability to enroll and persist to completion is not without financial challenges. The FCF, through its work of

raising money on behalf of the university, makes it possible for many of these students to afford studying at SUNY Fredonia.

In the academic year that just ended (AY 2023-24), the FCF awarded \$1,290,950 in financial assistance or scholarships to our students. Over the past five years, a total of over \$6 million (\$6,016.450) raised by the FCF has been awarded to our students. Also, given their efforts, we will be able to offer an additional \$200,000 in awards to students this upcoming 2023-24 academic year from the Bicentennial Funds established in 2021 for access and persistence. I want to acknowledge their fundraising efforts and how those efforts have helped many of our students. Many thanks to the Board of the FCF for dedication to SUNY Fredonia.

## Faculty and Staff Awards

I am very pleased to recognize our colleagues who recently received significant SUNY-level awards. We will be formally celebrating them at the August All-Fredonia Faculty and Staff Conference Plenary on August 16, 2023. In the interim, kindly join me in extending congratulations to them.

- Professor Paul Mockovak of the Department of Theatre and Dance was promoted to SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor.





Seven of our colleagues were recipients for the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in various categories.

- From left to right in the photo with me are: Mr. Anthony (Tony) Pagano - Excellence in Classified Service; Dr. Angela McGowan-Kirsch - Excellence in Teaching; Ms. Rebecca Cuthbert - Excellence in Adjunct Teaching; Mr. John Stone - Excellence in Adjunct Teaching; Ms. Andrea Wasiura - Excellence in Professional Service; Dr. Natalie Gerber - Excellence in Faculty Service; Dr. Anne Kissel - Excellence in Teaching.

## **Fulbright Award 2023-2024**

I was very pleased to receive a letter from the U.S. Department of State and Fulbright Program informing me that Distinguished Teaching Professor, Dr. Ted Lee, was selected for a Fulbright Scholar Award to Honduras. As you may know, Fulbright is a prestigious national-level program that offers teaching, research, and learning opportunities abroad. Fulbright awards promote relationships between the United States and other nations to strengthen the relationships among people and our countries. The level of competition for these awards is intense, and Ted's selection is a testimony to the quality of his work here at SUNY Fredonia. Please join me in congratulating Dr. Lee for such outstanding recognition.



## **Village Water Study**

I recently sent a letter to Mayor Doug Essek of the Village of Fredonia in support of a comprehensive water study that the trustees have approved to be conducted over the next few months. As you know, there have been concerns regarding the reliability of the Village of Fredonia water infrastructure. Given that we are, perhaps, the largest single entity that utilizes the Village of Fredonia water supply, we have an interest in working with the Village in improving its water infrastructure to ensure quality and reliable water supplies for the campus and citizens of the Village of Fredonia.

You may be aware that, under the direction of Dr. Matthew Lanning, Assistant Professor in the Department of Geology and Environmental Sciences, SUNY Fredonia's students are currently collaborating with the Village in mapping the Village's water system to enhance its ability to locate valves and breaks. Not only do I think that this collaboration is important for both short-term and long-

term planning, it demonstrates our commitment to working with the Village on matters of mutual benefit.

## Call out for President's Awards for Excellence

In my last Understory (dated April 11, 2023), I indicated that the President's Awards for Excellence were being redesigned to ensure that they were more inclusive and aligned with some of the areas that we wanted to enhance at Fredonia. I am pleased to inform you that we have completed that work and nominations for the awards are now being accepted. Information about the awards [can be found here](#).

The goal remains to present these awards at the same time as the Chancellor's Awards for Excellence on August 16th at the All-Fredonia Faculty and Staff Conference Plenary. Please support the work of deserving colleagues by nominating them for these awards.

## Report from the Special Working Group on Campus Feedback

In my Understory on April 11, 2023, I shared with you that I had asked a [working group](#) to assist me in reviewing results of various surveys conducted by different groups and at different points in time. I asked the working group to categorize items resulting from the surveys in terms of practicality, impactfulness, and affordability. Of the practical, impactful, and affordable items, I asked them to make recommendations to me regarding five items that might be accomplished by the end of this calendar year, and another five items that might be accomplished by the calendar year 2024. When I assigned this task to the working group, I knew it would be a challenging task given the varying interests and the complexity of the issues involved. Hence, I am very pleased to inform you that the working group has completed its work and made its recommendations to me.

I found recommendations from the working group to be thoughtful, reasonable, and achievable. I also found the recommendations to be in alignment with the strategic plan that we will initiate this Fall. It is obvious to me that a significant amount of work was expended to arrive at the recommendations. Therefore, I appreciate the work, and thank the working group for taking on this task and delivering results. The President's Cabinet will discuss the recommendations at its forthcoming retreat, after which I will share the recommendations from the report with you and begin work on the recommendations.

## A Big Thank You

As we have now arrived at the conclusion of the 2022-23 Academic Year and as I reflect on the year, I want to say thank you to all of you for all that you do on behalf of SUNY Fredonia. Yes, none of us can or should pretend that our journey was all “blue skies” - enrollment challenges, the structural budget deficit, and our emergence from a global pandemic. Notwithstanding, we have all worked very hard to achieve many wonderful things and deliver on the mission of the university. I appreciate all you have done and continue to do to sustain our reputation as one of America’s institutions consistently distinguishing itself in making a difference in the lives of students - social mobility. I am grateful to you for your commitment to SUNY Fredonia. Thank you. Have a wonderful summer. Cheers!

Very truly yours,  
Dr. K

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



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