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**[FacultyStaff] The Understory - President Kolison's Update to Faculty and Staff**  
**October 11, 2023**

2 messages

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**President's Office** <President.Office@fredonia.edu>  
Reply-To: president.office@fredonia.edu  
To: Faculty/Staff group <facultystaff@fredonia.edu>

Wed, Oct 11, 2023 at 4:56 PM

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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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October 11, 2023  
Fredonia, NY

Dear Faculty and Staff,

I hope your Fall semester has been going well and you are enjoying the Fall colors that are underway. While these Fall colors signal to us what is ahead weatherwise, they are sights to enjoy. If time permits, I will visit the College Lodge next week to take in the view. I hope I am not too late. Allow me to share with you a picture that I took last year (October 7, 2022) at the early start of Fall colors at the College Lodge.



Please allow me some moments of your time to share a few things. As always, this is my way of connecting with you about matters that might be of interest to you.

## **Human Sufferings**

As I write this Understory to you, I cannot escape thoughts about places around the world where armed conflicts are precipitating extreme human sufferings. As someone who has personally experienced the impacts of armed conflicts, I am always saddened by the distress, injuries, loss of lives, and the hardships caused by war or armed conflicts. In particular, this past weekend, I was horrified by the images coming out of Israel. Seeing images of young children and civilians killed was very sad. So, I am praying, based on my faith, that there will be divine intervention and peace; and healing will be realized in the war between Israel and Hamas. I am also praying for a peaceful end to the war between Russia and Ukraine, the end to the armed conflict in Sudan and the end to other armed conflicts around the world. As you know, the world is becoming a smaller place. As such, our connections to others across national boundaries, seas, and oceans have grown and continue to grow closer. What happens in one part of the world could have the potential of impacting others in different parts of the world.

I am thinking about our campus community and connections that members of our community may have in these places, and the impact that these conflicts may be having on them. Hence, if you are a member of our campus community and impacted by any of these wars in any way, I want you to know that you can seek help on our campus. If you feel that you need to reach out to seek support, I encourage you to do so. You can find free and confidential resources that can provide support for you and your family through the [Employee Assistance Program](#). Also, if students contact you for assistance, please refer them to the [Counseling Center](#).

## **Addressing the Structural Deficit**

I understand that the entire campus community is eagerly awaiting more information regarding our financial plans to reduce the structural deficit by \$10 million. As I am sure that you can imagine, this is a very complex and challenging undertaking. There are multiple variables, or factors, that are being explored as vehicles to achieve this reduction. We continue to work with our partners in SUNY to ensure that we can obtain the necessary financial support as we reduce the deficit in a responsible manner over a five-year period. Also, as appropriate, we are meeting with the leadership of campus governance groups about our thoughts on how the goal of a \$10 million reduction in the deficit might be achieved.

Here are some things that I can share with you at this time regarding the reduction in the deficit:

1. Addressing the deficit is about positioning SUNY Fredonia for success in the future. In my view, if we do not address this challenge now, we will be putting at risk our ability to remain a strong, evolving, and vibrant place for learning and the pursuit of professional endeavors. Simply put, if we do not address the deficit now, we will put at risk our future relevance as an important regional comprehensive institution;
2. In addressing the deficit, we should not rely solely on cuts and hope that those will be sufficient to position us for success in the future. Hence, as I have indicated to various groups across the campus, our plan to reduce the deficit will include:
  - a. Growth in revenues from enrollment and other sources;
  - b. Increasing operational efficiencies;
  - c. Reduction in expenditures.
3. Regarding areas targeted for growth, the Cabinet and I have agreed tentatively on a number of variables. We are now looking more closely at the feasibility of those variables and discussing them with our partners at SUNY. I will be happy to share those as soon as we have a good sense of their viability. Let me add that I have discussed many of the variables with some governance leaders and will continue to do so.
4. Regarding achieving greater operational efficiency and reductions in expenditures, those require much deeper conversation with our partners at SUNY prior to discussing them with the campus community. Please note that to achieve the goals of these variables, the work has to be done with care to avoid confusion, disruptions in our operations, and violations of policies.
5. We will be sharing aspects of the deficit reduction plan as appropriate and feasible. Kindly understand that there are multiple moving parts to these kinds of efforts that require time, and hence, it may be helpful to share the components as they are complete. For example, matters dealing with growth could be completed much earlier and presented so that the work can begin as quickly as possible.

I appreciate your patience. Thank you.

## **Strengthening Enrollment as a Part of the Deficit Reduction Strategy**

At the State of the University address, I shared with the campus that enrollment remained a challenge for us. Here are the key levels of our total enrollment: First Time First Year (FTFY) Students (undergraduate); Transfer Students (undergraduate); Graduate Students and; Retention of Undergraduate Students.

This year, we achieved positive gains in transfer students, graduate students, and student retention. This is a direct result of the hard work carried out in the last two years by many of you. However, we are still experiencing declines in the number of FTFY students. Unfortunately, the gains in the other levels were not enough to offset the declines in the FTFY. At the time of census on September 11, 2023, our total fall enrollment stood at 3,236.

Because enrollment is a significant part of our deficit reduction strategy, we are continuing to work very hard to strengthen our capacity to recruit and enroll more students. Here are some operational actions we have recently taken aimed at strengthening our enrollment management infrastructure and reversing the decline in our enrollment:

1. Appointed Jeff Handler, a consultant with the Registry, to provide strategic leadership for enrollment management. Mr. Handler has extensive and successful experience in transforming enrollment challenges into successes at multiple institutions;
2. Filled the Financial Aid Director position left vacant by the departure of Brandon Gilliland last summer. Mr. Jeremy Corrente is now providing leadership for the area;
3. Filled Admission Director position on an interim basis. Ms. Kimberlie Ball is providing leadership for this role;
4. Launched a national search for a Vice President for Enrollment Management who will serve as the chief enrollment officer for the university and provide strategic leadership for all our efforts aimed at reversing the decline in enrollment. We are being assisted by RPA, a search firm, to help us find a capable and experienced leader for this very important area. I am grateful to the Fredonia College Foundation for providing funds to make this position more affordable for the university. Many thanks to the leadership of the University Senate for their support in this endeavor;
5. Established the Fredonia Affordability Council to review all the various scholarships and policies and make changes, as appropriate, that will allow us to leverage our scholarships more effectively;
6. Appointed a new Scholarship Committee to oversee and coordinate the awarding of all applicable scholarships strategically;
7. Restructured the areas of recruitment, admission, and financial aid to become more networked and work more closely together;
8. Hired a Digital Marketing Manager to ensure we are leveraging social media outlets to promote programs to prospective students and their parents. In addition, we have also recently filled the Videographer/Editor vacancy. We are currently also searching for a Web Marketing Specialist to ensure our web pages are engaging and effective.

In addition to the above, the following are actions that are underway:

9. Establishing dedicated websites for recruiting students from various geographic areas;
10. Implementing key recommendations from Simpson-Scarborough to help tell our story to prospective students and their parents;
11. Enhancing our capacity to leverage CRM Slate and other technologies to recruit and enroll students;
12. Deploying Ocelot AI Chatbot to address questions by prospective students and their parents during evenings and nonwork hours;



13. Developing a new Enrollment Management Plan with emphasis on the “how” to achieve its goal;
14. Ensuring appropriate levels of staffing in the areas responsible for recruiting and advising prospective students.

To summarize, we have taken and continue to take steps aimed at having a robust and very competitive enrollment management team at Fredonia.

## **Campus Morale Working Group Recommendations**

You may recall that last semester I asked a Special Working Group on Campus Morale to take a look at various sources of feedback and to make some suggestions about what we can do to improve faculty/staff wellbeing. The results of their work and recommendations [can be found here](#). We are working to achieve the recommendations.

## **New College Council Member**

Ms. Tamu Graham-Reinhardt was appointed on September 29, 2023 by Governor Hochul as a member of the SUNY Fredonia College Council. Ms. Graham-Reinhardt earned her B.A. in Spanish from the State University of New York at Buffalo and her M.A. in Public Relations from Ball State University. She currently serves as the Coordinator of Student Support Services for the Jamestown Public School District, where, among many other duties, she oversees the English as a New Language Program, leads the development and implementation of the strategic plan for the multi-tiered student services department, collaborates with multiple stakeholders to secure grants, and delivers professional development on culturally responsive teaching and other content-specific strategies.

## **Ms. JoAnn Niebel Concludes Tenure as College Council Member**

Ms. JoAnn Niebel, who was appointed to the Council in May 1997 by then Governor Pataki, concluded her appointment as a member of the Fredonia College Council on September 29, 2023. Ms. Niebel’s tenure spanned three Presidents of SUNY Fredonia: Dr. Dennis Hefner; Dr. Virginia Horvath; and myself. She chaired the Council from 1999 to 2009. I am appreciative of Ms. Niebel’s years of service to SUNY Fredonia. On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students, I extend thanks to her for all her efforts to advance SUNY Fredonia.

## **Welcome to Chief Gordon Carpenter**

As you may know, Chief Carpenter began his career at SUNY Fredonia in mid-September, and on Tuesday, October 3, 2023, we officially welcomed Chief Carpenter during a swearing-in ceremony. Chief Carpenter holds a B.A. in Political Science/Public Administration from the University of Maryland, and a M.A. in Strategic Leadership from St. Bonaventure University. Before joining SUNY Fredonia, he was Special Police Chief in the Division of Public Safety at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, NY, and served for 16 years in the Howard County Police Department.



## Return to Lanford House

My family and I are very pleased to be **returning** to live in Lanford House at the end of this month. We lived in the Lanford House from August of 2020 to the end of October 2021 when we had to move out for needed repairs that were scheduled prior to my presidency. When we moved out, we anticipated to be back within 8 to 12 months. Unfortunately, the project was plagued with many contractor-related issues, causing long delays. Although Phase II of the repairs remains to be completed, my family and I will live in the residence full time during the remaining phase of the repairs, which will be mainly on the outside. We are very much looking forward to returning to the Village of Fredonia and the surrounding region and to being close to campus.

BTW, if you are out and about trick-and-treating on October 31st, there might be some treats awaiting you at Lanford House between 7 PM and 8 PM.

## Open Office Hours

I will continue to hold open office hours at various locations on the campus. I will make every effort to provide notifications about 24 hours in advance. Please feel free to come by if your schedule permits. I have enjoyed talking with people who have come by to talk with me.

Everyone, thank you for your work and every effort you make on behalf of SUNY Fredonia. I look forward to another opportunity when I can send you another Understory.

Very truly yours,

Dr. K

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

President and Professor



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Fredonia | Fredonia, NY 14063**

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Visit this group at <https://groups.google.com/a/fredonia.edu/d/forum/facultystaff>

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**Naomi Baldwin** <Naomi.Baldwin@fredonia.edu>

Wed, Oct 11, 2023 at 4:58 PM

To: "Mr. Joe C. Johnson" <jjohnson42@windstream.net>, "Mrs. Cynthia A. Ahlstrom" <leg.keith@gmail.com>, "The Honorable Frank A. Pagano" <pagano.frank@gmail.com>, "Mr. Anthony J. Dolce" <adolceconsulting@gmail.com>, "Mr. Richard J. Morrisroe" <richm@vandettelaw.com>, Tamu Graham-Reinhardt <tamu.a.reinhardt@jpsny.org>, "The Honorable Stephen W. Keefe" <stephenkeefe@netscape.net>, "Mr. Richard Alexander" <rlalexander83@gmail.com>

Dear College Council members,

Please see President Kolison's latest message below:

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