
[FacultyStaff] Message from President Stephen H. Kolison, Jr., August 30, 2024

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

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

August 30, 2024

Dear Faculty and Staff,

Welcome to a new academic year! I hope your first week of students returning and your first week of classes have been exciting. It is great to see the campus much more alive than during the summer. Thank you for being a part of this excitement. I wish you all the best for this academic year.

Incoming Class and Retention of Students

I am particularly excited by the larger incoming class (1,033 new incoming students as of August 15) that we have this year and the retention rate of first year students (77.8%) that we have achieved. To put this retention rate in context, the national first-year retention rate for institutions of our size is 76.5% and SUNY's retention rate target is 77%. These outcomes for recruitment and retention did not happen without very hard work and strategic investments. We spent the last couple of years building the infrastructure, team, collaborations, and strategies aimed at achieving these kinds of results. Hence, I want to thank everyone, especially those involved in enrollment management and retention

efforts, for what we have achieved regarding these outcomes. Certainly, these outcomes will have a positive impact on our financial outlook. And, we must work even harder to sustain this kind of performance if we are to achieve optimal enrollment and financial stability. I am glad to say we are headed in the right direction and I am grateful to everyone who made it happen.

All Fredonia Faculty/Staff Conference

Thank you to those of you who were able to attend the meeting last week. It was good to recognize several of our colleagues for their achievements and contributions to our university. Again, congratulations to everyone that was recognized. I hope everyone who attended found the updates provided during the plenary and in the afternoon sessions to be helpful.

In my presentation, I shared my thoughts on the future of our university. I made observations about the things that make me believe that the future of our university is bright, notwithstanding the difficult financial challenges we currently face. I also indicated what I believe would be necessary for us to achieve a brighter future, which included my vision and goals. I will continue to share updates on these throughout the semester as I meet with various groups such as the university senate and president's networking group.

Financial Outlook

I want to thank everyone who attended the open forum on our financial outlook on May 20, 2024. At the meeting, Provost Starrett provided information on the financial picture and progress that we were making to develop a required plan to eliminate the structural deficit by June 30, 2029. That meeting was followed by a discussion that afternoon at the University Senate. The discussions in the two meetings underscored the difficulty that we, as an institution, have had in addressing the structural deficit, which began about 14 years ago.

Unfortunately, during that period, the structural deficit has grown and is severely impacting us. During the last three months, cabinet members, including me, have been working intensively with SUNY to determine an approach to eliminating our structural deficit by the required timeframe. Early next week I will lead a team to meet with our SUNY partners in Albany to discuss the elimination of the deficit. As I have indicated previously, SUNY's financial support will be necessary in each of the next five years leading to the elimination of the deficit. Obtaining such support and an understanding of the various conditions required to sustain that support is among my goals of this

meeting. I will get back to you when our discussion with SUNY about a path forward concludes.

The Road Ahead

As we have worked intensively on our financial challenge over the past year, I have taken some time to scan the national higher education landscape. Across the US Northeast and the US Midwest, many institutions face severe enrollment and financial challenges. I have no doubt that many of us have friends, or know people at those institutions. The good news is that many of those institutions are not giving up, and are innovating and working hard to thrive in this new higher education landscape. It is really encouraging to see those examples of resilience. As I discussed at the meeting, we have so many reasons to believe that we can overcome our current challenges and achieve the brighter future that we deserve for the benefit of our students, this community, and region. I truly believe that each of us, doing our part - supporting students and helping them and colleagues belong; encouraging prospective high school graduates to attend Fredonia; developing and improving programs and services; keeping our campus clean and beautiful and; conserving energy and other resources - will help get us there. These are just a few examples of ways we can work together to achieve that bright future. Of course, getting there will not be easy. But, we cannot give up. So, I ask you to please keep the faith and remain positive as it is so easy to become negative under these kinds of circumstances. Imagine us repeating the level of success that we achieved this Fall in bringing in our largest incoming class in three years and our increased retention rate.

Have a wonderful and safe Labor Day weekend.

Very truly yours,
Dr. K

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

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