



New York State  
**Disability Services Council**

## **NYS Higher Education Plan 2012-2020**

### **SUNY**

Students with disabilities are largely ignored in the Higher Education Plan. The Plan as drafted cites the following data but offers no measures to address the issues:

- Only 44.6% of all students with disabilities graduate high school in NYS and of those, only 4.4% are considered college ready.
- Enrollment of students with disabilities across NYS increased a dramatic 36% between 2000 and 2010.
- Approximately 11% of all college students are self-identified as having a disability
- Veterans are enrolling in college in increasing numbers since the implementation of the Post 9-11 VA Bill.
- More data is needed to address the needs of students with disabilities

### **High School graduation and college readiness:**

When considering the data that only 44.6% of students with disabilities graduate from high school in New York State it is important to take into consideration that disability includes all individuals from those with the most severe intellectual and physical disabilities who are alternately assessed to those with above average intelligence with physical or mental impairments but who will graduate with Regents diplomas. The greater issue is that only 4.4% of the 2012 graduating class were deemed to be college ready. The State Education Department's P-12 division currently has a proposal before the Regents to lower the passing rate on Regents exams to 45 for Science, history and Global Studies and maintain the 55 passing grade for English and math to result in awarding a student a local diploma. This would increase the number of New Yorkers with high school diplomas which is part of the goal, but would also flood New York's public colleges with students in severe need of remediation at a time when the Chancellor is laying out a 10 year plan to eliminate remediation in SUNY quoting an annual cost of \$70 million. Those local diploma students will not gain admission to the SUNY operated campuses; they will flood SUNY's 32 community colleges. The \$70 million quoted by SUNY did not include the cost at the community colleges which receive no funding through SUNY or NYS to defray the cost of educating students with disabilities like the P-12 system and the SUNY operated campuses yet about 70% of students with disabilities are enrolled in NY public community colleges.

This influx of students will overwhelm existing programs and services ranging from the disability office to EOP, tutoring centers, testing centers, housing, financial aid and ESL centers. Each academic area of weakness will require one or more remedial courses extending the time for program completion and reducing their chances of reaching that completion. If the data on remediation in the Higher Ed plan from the US department of Education is correct only about 20% of the local diploma graduates are likely to earn a Bachelor's degree. Some will complete Associate's Degree programs but many will drop out or exhaust their TAP and Pell before they can complete their degrees. Some will have taken student loans. Without completing their degrees

their earning potential is decreased and the probability of defaulting on their student loans increases. A college's eligibility to grant financial aid is partly dependent upon their ability to maintain a satisfactory default rate on student loans. This eligibility may be jeopardized.

### **Increase in Enrollment:**

The 36% increase in enrollment is a double edged sword. On the positive side is the news that increasing numbers of students with disabilities are attempting the rigors of college and many are graduating. On the opposite side is the challenge to serve not only increasing numbers of students but also emerging populations like those with mental health issues, autism spectrum disorders and returning veterans. These students require the development of new support programs and services such as academic coaching, independent living skills and mental health services at a time when all campuses are dealing with reduced funding, limited staffing and trying to maintain existing services. A significant number of disability offices are staffed by only one person, many handle disability in addition to other responsibilities and some are less than full time.

The disability services provider faces other challenges. The disability service provider is often expected to be an expert on all things related to disability. Most service providers are also middle management which makes it difficult to tell presidents, vice presidents/provosts, chief fiscal officers and the head of Information technology that compliance with Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act is an institutional responsibilities and not exclusive to the disability office. The Dear Colleague letter issued by the Secretaries of the Department of Justice and the Department of Education in May 2010 regarding emerging technology is an excellent example. SUNY needs to issue a directive to campus presidents that web accessibility is not an issue to be ignored and that each campus needs to establish a team, do an assessment, and develop and implement a plan to achieve compliance.

### **Data:**

The Higher Education State Plan 2012-2020 states that data is needed to determine the needs—currently met and those unmet—of students with disabilities. While that is undoubtedly true, the issue cannot be ignored until such data is collected. There are 64 campuses in SUNY that can and are willing to supply information that will result in more comprehensive resource allocation of staff, space, technology etc. The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) and the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) have collaborated on the development of new standards for disability departments that were scheduled to be published fall 2012. In 2010 the federal Government Accountability Office published HIGHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY Education Needs a Coordinated Approach to Improve its Assistance to Schools in Supporting Students ([www.gao.gov/new.items/d1033.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1033.pdf)) reporting on visits to colleges, paper and phone surveys to colleges and universities across the US on the staffing, resources, technology, issues and challenges associated with making postsecondary education accessible to students with disabilities. These documents can provide the basis for developing an action plan to address the issues around students with disabilities on SUNY campuses. In addition, the SUNY sector members of the New York State Disability Services Council are willing and eager to assist in any way in developing such a plan. Penn State, the University of Florida and others have been cited by the Department of Justice for non-compliance along with Google, Kindle and other vendors. There is an atmosphere of foreboding over the disability services field that the Department of Justice and the American Federation of the Blind which brought suit in most of the cases are looking for another case. SUNY, one of the largest educational systems in the country already has the attention of the Department of Justice over the National Voter Registration Act law suit which they won. Ignoring the issue of web accessibility lays the whole system and each of its campuses open to attack.