

Testimony offered in response to Regent's Statewide Master Plan for Higher Education

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Good afternoon:

First, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today as part of this important planning process. It is good to know that those of you in leadership positions seek and value input from those of us on the implementation end of the master plan.

I am William Short, HEOP director at St. Lawrence University way up north, past president of the HEOP Professional Organization, and currently serving as an outreach ambassador for HEOP PO. As such, my dual responsibilities include both advocacy on behalf of the programs and liaison with other groups and organizations to create the kind of coordinated efficiencies that are called for throughout the draft master plan. By way of examples, I serve specifically as a conduit between HEOP PO and other New York State organizations with an interest in issues of access and success for underrepresented and disadvantaged individuals in New York, including the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, the New York State Association for College Admissions Counseling, and New York Opportunity Programs United bringing EOP and SEEK together with HEOP for advocacy and professional development. I also serve on the board of the Tri-State Consortium of Opportunity Programs, connecting New York's flagship programs with our peers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

As that introduction is meant to suggest, my remarks today will be less on the advocacy side of my role with HEOP PO, because we are well aware and most appreciative of the fact that the State Education Department has been a strong advocate for and excellent steward of New York State's funds with which we operate. Instead my remarks will be more focused on the kinds of contributions to the larger system we expect to make as HEOP in the independent institutions and as collaborators and partners embedded within the whole.

We are delighted that HEOP is already identified in the draft master plan as an important piece of the whole, recognition of the outstanding performance of our programs across the state for the last four and a half decades. We also note in the plan summary the fact that our institutions have picked virtually all of the increased costs over that same period of time, and therefore it is very important to recognize and give credit to our colleges and universities for the deep commitment this represents.

In addition to the roles already identified for HEOP in the plan, we believe that, with the right resources and support from the state we can provide additional support under the first, third and fourth priorities as outlined in the master plan.

The first priority category stresses the importance of better connections among programs that serve low-income and otherwise disadvantaged populations, specifically state funded programs like Liberty Partnerships and the Science and Technology Entry Program as well as federally funded programs like Upward Bound and GEAR Up. In fact, HEOP professionals frequently do outreach programs with each of these already. I myself, for example, have made presentations about all of New York's opportunity programs, about navigating the college admissions and financial aid processes, about how to address your disadvantages positively in college application essays, and more to students in SUNY Canton's Liberty Partnerships program, the Upward Bound programs at both SUNY Plattsburgh and Pace here in Manhattan, and the North Country STEP program at SUNY Potsdam. I have also provided staff development workshops for GEAR Up staff through clcu during the last grant cycle. Many of my fellow HEOP professionals have done the same. While these efforts so far have been ad hoc and on a regional basis, the HEOP Professional Organization is experienced and ready to take a leadership role in further and more formally building these bridges.

In addition to these already identified groups, we have also been offering our expertise to others in the field as well. For example, I have offered workshop sessions every summer for the last five years at the NYS ACAC conference and also their Summer Institute for new college and admissions counselors, and annual updates for the membership of the College Admissions Consortium of New York here in the city, which connects high school, college, and community based organizations. Again, we are already doing this kind of outreach and connection, and are quite ready to take that on as a more formal role because we are ideally situated to understand both the demands of higher education curricula and the achievement gap into which all HEOP students, by definition, fall.

The third priority stresses the importance of addressing the achievement gap, and also of keeping students in New York. Though we have not always been our own best publicists, the track record of HEOP throughout its history is one of doing exactly that with the best results of any programs of the kind. Of course we don't want to suggest that the best time to address the achievement gap is after a student has landed in college; but rather we want to point out that we do know what the gap consists of in specific terms and we do know how to address it with this population of students. My point in all this is that we are a rich resource located at colleges across the state with deep experience that we are willing to share with other practitioners and decision makers engaged with the same issues.

As for keeping students in New York, the kind of academic and financial support we offer has become known, such that we get about 10 applications for every program spot. Broadening access to these support systems would be a component of a more comprehensive strategy to attract New York's young talent to stay here. Furthermore, our research indicates that some 80% of HEOP alumni choose to stay in New York after college graduation, making strong contributions to our communities, economy, and tax base.

The fourth priority already notes the place of HEOP in addressing these concerns, but there are a few other aspects on which I'd like to comment. Increasing graduation rates is what we've been about for decades. We are ready to share our expertise and best practices in that regard. Indeed, on many of our campuses larger, campus-wide, retention efforts have been modeled on HEOP already. HEOP programs

frequently lend academic support and social connection to students on our campuses who are not on our rosters but who are similar in important ways to those who are. I believe that is what is intended by the phrase “building on HEOP”. We are ready to do our part, for as long as HEOP can remain the solid foundation for the building.

A final note: the draft plan calls for expansion of access to undocumented students in a homegrown version of the federal Dream Act. HEOP professionals support the goal, but I feel it is important to point out that, in the absence of an enacted federal law, such students would not have access to important federal aid including Pell grants, loans, and Work Study. If New York wishes to be successful in granting access to TAP and opportunity programs, some consideration will have to be made for how to make up for these resources. Independent institutions already contribute the greatest share of financial aid grant funds to HEOP students, and are unlikely to be able to come up with even more. At least, not without reducing the numbers of students served, and that seems counterproductive to me.

Once again, I thank you on behalf of the HEOP Professional Organization for the opportunity to meet with you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have either now, or at any time.