

**United University Professions
Testimony to the Board of Regents
On the Statewide Plan for Higher Education
December 3, 2012**

My name is Jamie Dangler and I'm here today to speak on behalf of United University Professions, which represents more than 35,000 academic and professional faculty at 29 state operated SUNY campuses plus System Administration and Empire State College. UUP is an affiliate of New York State United Teachers. I am UUP's Vice-President for Academics and an Associate Professor in the Sociology/Anthropology Department at SUNY Cortland.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today about New York State's Plan for Higher Education, particularly as it relates to SUNY's state-operated campuses. Thanks to Commissioner King, Deputy Commissioner D'Agati, Chancellor Tisch, and members of the Board of Regents for your attention to the perspective UUP has to offer.

The draft Plan clearly identifies the importance of higher education for the future of our State and its citizens. There are many innovative and exciting elements in the Plan. My comments today will focus on two general areas of concern:

- I. The absence of an analysis of and recommendations regarding inadequate funding and staffing for higher education;
- II. A mismatch between broad-based initiatives and realistic opportunities to realize goals given limited resources and already overburdened institutional structures at the ground level.

I. The Plan should call for more investment to support the basic mission of New York State's public higher education system and restore a reasonable balance between full-time and part-time faculty.

Over past decades, the level of state support to SUNY's state-operated campuses failed to even remotely keep pace with inflation. Since 2007, state support has been dramatically reduced by over 30 percent, resulting in a loss of almost \$700 million annually. While student enrollments stabilized during the 1990s, recent years have seen a prolonged period of substantial growth. Thus, sustained funding cuts have come at a time when the citizens of New York are in need of greater access to public higher education.

One manifestation of these funding shortfalls is a serious imbalance between part-time and full-time staffing. There is clear consensus that higher education, like elementary and secondary education, requires faculty-student ratios that permit sufficient personal interaction between teacher and pupil. While part-time instruction is a viable concept if not used excessively, an overreliance on adjunct teaching was identified by the Governor's Commission on Higher Education, among others, as one of the greatest threats to quality in higher education. This threat to quality comes not from shortcomings among the part-time faculty themselves, as SUNY employs many highly qualified part-time instructors. This threat to quality comes from the

circumstances of their employment and the effects of having a substantially reduced population of full-time faculty available to provide the full range of educational services needed to sustain high quality programs and support systems for students.

The circumstances of most of SUNY's part-time faculty include very low wages and lack of stability in employment prospects from semester to semester. As a consequence many need to hold multiple teaching jobs at different colleges and have limited and highly circumscribed obligations to SUNY campuses and our students. They are not expected to offer, nor can they offer, the kind of out-of-class mentoring, help, and participation in broader departmental and institutional support systems that our students need to ensure their academic success.

It has become increasingly common for SUNY General Education courses, which provide gateways for incoming students and are critical for their adjustment to college-level work, to rely extensively (and sometimes fully) on a transient part-time work force. SUNY has placed great emphasis on the need to address the fact that increasing numbers of high school students are underprepared for college. It is critical to acknowledge that strengthening the academic pipeline from K-16 requires that we fill substantial leaks that occur at the point of students' transition to their first year at our colleges and universities. The freshman year experience, the adjustment of transfer students to new academic institutions, and the adjustment of adult learners entering college for the first time are highly impacted by the quality of their first-year experiences. A severe shortage of full-time faculty who are able to engage new students in the development of a college experience that includes classroom teaching plus the academic and social support mechanisms they need outside of the classroom, continues to undermine the broader goals associated with creating a seamless academic pipeline and a high level of college readiness. High school students are never fully "ready." Their readiness develops and is enhanced during the critical first year experience they have at our colleges and universities.

In addition to an overreliance on part-time faculty in General Education and introductory courses, there is a similar overreliance above the introductory course level in major components of many academic programs. This causes instability and frequent last-minute changes in the availability and staffing of courses as many academic department chairs are in a constant scramble to find qualified instructors – a task made very difficult given generally low salaries and unstable prospects for continued employment.

The scope of this problem is clearly revealed by changes in full-time/part-time ratios in conjunction with student enrollment trends. Declining state support coupled with enrollment growth has led many campuses to implement a prescriptive decline in full-time faculty – even while the number of students has increased dramatically. In 1994, of SUNY's total faculty, more than 72 percent were full-time. By 2007, the percentage of full-time faculty had declined to 54 percent, with further declines in recent years. Adjusting for enrollment, SUNY would need to add 2,700 full-time faculty positions today just to achieve the full-time faculty to full-time equivalent student ratio that existed 20 years ago.

This dramatic decline has occurred not only in the context of rising student enrollments but also in the context of expanding programmatic and institutional objectives, an increasing population of high needs students, and increasing demands for assessment, data collection, and

community/university service work. Indeed, one of the draft Plan's *Topics of Concern* is to "Strengthen Connections of Higher Education with Other Functions of the University of the State of New York." The *Power of SUNY* initiatives outlined in the Plan speak to an extension of the partnerships and collaboration that have been an integral part of SUNY for decades. A shrinking pool of full-time faculty is available to perform the ever-growing demands of our college and university environments. We see the consequences of this at the institutional level, where faculty are increasingly diverted from their teaching mission as a result of overextended ancillary commitments. Part-time faculty can not contribute to meeting the increasing service, data-collection, and assessment requirements demanded of campus faculty.

It's not possible to put students first in the new equations that characterize our institutions without a reasonable balance between full and part-time faculty. Nor is it possible to fully engage in the "Power of SUNY" initiatives.

In sum, student learning and the advancement of knowledge are the ultimate objectives of public higher education. These things fundamentally depend on students, professional and academic faculty, support staff, and the institutional context in which they all interact. The severe loss of full-time faculty is one of the most significant developments that must be addressed in a statewide plan for higher education. We believe, as most professional educators have acknowledged, that the problems of faculty-student ratios, availability of needed courses, student retention and graduation rates, and the capacity of our institutions to meet expectations with regard to broad SUNY initiatives are all intertwined. If we don't have enough people available at the ground level to confront expanded expectations, we are destined to fail.

Finally, while sustained declines in funding are affecting all of SUNY's state-operated campuses, with the part-time/full-time faculty ratio as one salient consequence, it is important to acknowledge the particular problems of our teaching hospitals and the State's potential failure to fulfill its mission to provide public health care and medical education.

SUNY's medical schools produce most of New York's primary care physicians and many of its healthcare specialists by offering affordable, accessible medical education to the next generation of doctors, nurses, and other health care providers. SUNY's Health Science Centers at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, Stony Brook Health Science Center on Eastern Long Island, and Buffalo Health Science Center in Western New York provide top-quality medical education and produce cutting edge medical research.

Reduced State Medicaid spending along with years of state underfunding has resulted in an enormous negative impact on SUNY's teaching hospitals. Furthermore, the purchase of financially troubled private institutions by Upstate Medical University and Downstate Medical Center has seriously exacerbated financial problems at these institutions. The State's Plan for Higher Education should address the public's need for the health care and medical education provided by SUNY's Health Science Centers.

We implore you to establish and implement a Plan for Higher Education that addresses SUNY's funding shortfalls, including the dire situation facing its teaching hospitals, and includes restoration of SUNY's cadre of full-time faculty to levels that will create the full array of institutional supports that our students need and deserve.

II. There is an apparent disjuncture between broad-based goals and clear plans for developing the institutional supports and implementation structures to achieve those goals.

The proposed Plan calls for greater integration of the efforts of K-12 and higher education to implement the Regents Reform Agenda and meet the requirements of Race-to-the-Top funding. Examples include proposed changes in teacher and school leader preparation programs, development of a P-20 data system, and the development of new assessments and curricula. I will provide a partial illustration of the concerns we have in order to underscore the need for more implementation details and an assessment of the broad goals of the draft Plan.

The Plan states that “[i]t is essential that P-12 teachers and leaders are prepared to the highest standards and enter the elementary and secondary classroom with a knowledge base and skill set grounded in research-based practices and clinically rich experiences.” While this stated goal is widely accepted, and has been operative at our institutions for decades, these concepts are being reduced to a very limited and questionable list of specific directives with unreasonable timelines. It is essential that the statewide Plan address the need for real opportunities for college and university teacher and school leader preparation programs and institutions to become true partners in the development of implementation plans and an assessment of limitations on achieving lofty goals. Our programs and institutions are already doing many things mentioned in the Plan very well. We see great danger in the possibility that the imposition of new goals without adequate resources and reasonable implementation plans will dilute our most important functions and compromise our ability to maintain basic, high-quality public education programs.

Many of the Plan’s goals are abstract and relate to new mandates that are being imposed without adequate and reasonable timelines needed to revise curriculum and redesign programs in a way that allows for viable transitions. This is affecting program delivery as well as our students’ ability to complete program and state requirements in a timely fashion and within reasonable cost allowances. Academic and professional faculty in teacher preparation programs, as well as campus administrators, have been scrambling to meet new requirements in a resource-scarce environment. While money from Race-to-the-Top funding is being allocated for professional development, there are many other equally important needs stemming from new unfunded mandates. In terms of the immediate impact on the education of our students, a substantial cadre of academic and professional faculty is being diverted from their essential teaching focus and basic program functions in order to meet new data collection, assessment, and curriculum development mandates. New directives have been piled on at an unprecedented pace. Additionally, a huge segment of the workforce expected to implement new directives are part-time faculty disconnected from campuses and unable to be fully integrated into implementation plans. For example, many of our SUNY campuses rely almost exclusively on part-time employees to supervise student teachers in locations across the state and they will have extensive new responsibilities with the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). It’s not clear that this can be managed adequately under existing circumstances and timelines.

All of this is occurring in the context of serious questions about compromised professional standards and inadequate research-based justifications for many imposed changes. This combination of factors does not bode well for achievement of overarching goals. Too many

important implementation rungs are missing from the Race-to-the-Top and Regents Reform Agenda ladders and key stakeholders have felt that their professional expertise and experience is being overlooked and undervalued.

Another serious concern is an apparent contradiction between new initiatives and stated goals. While enhancing clinically rich experiences is emphasized, preoccupation with the results of high-stake tests and new performance assessments for student teachers is leading to a reduction in available student teacher placements for our teacher preparation programs. While stated objectives include building a new clinically rich infrastructure, serious harm is being done to the viable and highly successful clinical experience program we've had in place for years. Furthermore, SUNY's interest in developing simulations for student teaching is raising serious concerns about the possibility that we will see extensive financial investments in a high-tech process that ends up reducing our students' actual clinical experiences in the field. While such simulations may be beneficial as enhancements to actual clinical experiences, are their costs justifiable given the much more basic funding needs our programs are experiencing and the increasing importance of having college students interact with K-12 pupils in the actual, and highly diverse, classroom environments they will encounter as teaching professionals?

I have provided selected illustrations of what UUP sees as general shortcomings of the draft Plan. In sum, we recommend that greater attention be given to the following questions:

- How will specific goals be implemented?
- How will new initiatives be integrated into existing functions in our programs and institutions?
- If there's no new funding from NYS, how will new initiatives be financed?
- What are realistic expectations and timelines for implementing specific outcomes related to broad goals?
- What are the risks and adversities for our students, our programs, and our institutions of taking on broad, new initiatives without adequate resources?
- Given limited resources, is available funding being spent wisely, with an eye toward the primary mission of public education?

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. United University Professions welcomes opportunities to work in partnership with SUNY, the State Education Department, and the Board of Regents to address our public charge to provide high quality, affordable public education to the citizens of New York State.