

Comprehensive Colleges Sector Report

Fall Plenary at Environmental Science and Forestry, Oct.23-25, 2014

Although the senators from the comprehensive colleges stated several concerns about the proposed SUNY Excels initiative and seamless transfer, the best way to summarize the concerns is to say that we are worried about what is perceived to be a quick pace in the erosion of faculty input into academic programs. For example, the centralized set of metrics that SUNY System will use to determine finances for SUNY Excels thus far has been written without faculty feedback. If it will indeed be an increase in base aid to comprehensive colleges then the MOUs must spell out what each president (and college) is accountable for and must stress options if the campus doesn't reach a stated goal.

When one gets into the particulars there is a great deal of disparity, above and beyond base funding, with SUNY Excels. We all agree that our base funding needs to increase, but it seems that the SUNY Excels initiative has too much emphasis on Open SUNY. We are not opposed to online learning but there is also a priority need to address fundamental challenges: We need full-time faculty and staff. We understand where SUNY Excels is coming from and we realize there have to be goals, but not meeting goals should not be a punishment as long as base funding is maintained. Therefore, the senators from the sector are asked to send to the sector rep by the Thanksgiving break thoughts on:

- **What elements they feel would be appropriate for their campuses**
- **What elements they would be inappropriate for their campuses.**

Other concerns: The feeling among comprehensive college senators was that the efforts put forth on transfer paths, although well intended, produced some troubling results. We support the goal of allowing students to transfer without impediment and allow students to arrive at a common point between colleges. But several senators said what was created out of the work was a new curriculum. Therefore, senators will work with the provost's office to find ways to help students transfer without roadblocks in the transfer path that respect individual campus concerns in majors.

Other concerns that were raised included General Education requirements across the system and are found in the table below in response to a survey. Not everyone had a chance to fill in the survey before preliminary results were released, primarily because of technical problems in distributing the survey.

Gen ed: We are getting pressure from the AVP to do something with the GE that we didn't agree to or vote for. We decided on allowing for double dipping, but really no change in the format of our GE or "college-wide" requirements as we held that the courses we expect are the minimum standard for a quality liberal arts program.

SUNY Excels: The assumption is that the program will somehow identify campuses that are doing well by the selected metrics and provide rewards for performance. If the intent of the effort

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is to improve performance of the System, this is the wrong strategy. Perhaps the best bang for the buck comes from identifying needs and attempting to remedy problems. Rewarding on need demonstrated by the Excel metrics is not ideal.

Given all that, our questions are:

- 1.) We've asked this question before, but it bears repeating because of the ever-changing academic landscape. In this sector we are feeling the effects of demographic changes and also being impacted by mission creep and competition from other sectors. How can System help us engage in a frank conversation aimed at helping us address our concerns since we are the sector at greatest risk and we are the biggest sector? We need a plan that speaks to sustainability and offers continued support. How can System help?
- 2.) The Comprehensive Colleges are experiencing a decline in enrollment due to a variety of factors that are within our control and out of our control. So we have had to be creative and strategic in developing new programs. But the time for approval of new programs and changes in existing programs has increased. How can SUNY System work to speed up program approval?
- 3.) The rationale for SUNY Excels is that we need a performance-based funding model to attract new funds from the state. Although that practice is used in 16 other states, it still seems a slippery slope to us. Once we enact SUNY Excels, how long and in what manner will it be implemented? How will it evolve over the years? For example, once campuses have identified metrics and programs, could we eventually move to a different way of weighing performances?
- 4.) On a related level, how do campuses in a 64-unit system maintain they individual character and mission in the initiative, especially with regards to value, worth, resources and mission?