
The Understory - President Kolison's Update to Faculty and Staff, July 14, 2022

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State University of New York at Fredonia

The Understory



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



The Understory is President Kolison's update to the faculty and staff at SUNY Fredonia. The term "understory" is used in forestry to refer to the undergrowth of a forest below the canopy. The understory of the forest, which consists of new growth and other matter, is, to a large extent, the future of the forest.

July 14, 2022
Fredonia, NY

I hope your summer is going well. I am writing to provide information on a few things that I believe will be of interest to you, including the budget outlook for the new fiscal year (July 2022-June 2023) and some changes occurring in the Williams Center that will benefit our students.

Budget Outlook

First, I want you to know that we ended the past fiscal year (July 2021-June 2022) in a good financial position, notwithstanding our challenging structural deficit. As you may know, a structural deficit occurs when the financial planning revenue is lower than total expenditure over an extended period. Specifically, our total salaries (payroll) exceed our financial planning revenues (tuition plus state support for operations) by 12 to 13 percent. So, ending the year in a positive place was possible only because of the

sacrifices that everyone made to cut back on expenditures and to do without certain things, including not filling some vacancies. I know that the decisions made to achieve this have impacted morale in some areas of the university. I appreciate and am grateful for all you did and continue to do under the circumstances. Thank you for your commitment, patience, and work toward getting us out of this financial situation.

Going into this new fiscal year, I am happy to share with you that, by working with the Cabinet and leaders across the campus, we arrived at a preliminary 2022-2023 budget that protects our core mission and every current employee at the university. In our many debates regarding the budget, we sought to make employees, instruction, and students priorities as we dealt with other variables impacting the budget. We also sought to avoid acquiring any loan from SUNY given the implications for that – receivership and losing a significant amount of autonomy. We made investments in efforts to address our enrollment decline (our most significant challenge), add new faculty, and develop new academic programs that will help attract additional students to the university. I am also aware of the need to find additional resources to facilitate travel for activities that support professional development, scholarship and creative activities. I will work with the Cabinet before the beginning of the academic year to look for additional funds to help with that.

You may be aware that the New York State Legislature appropriated for SUNY institutions \$53 million for adding new faculty, and \$60 million to support operations. We do not yet know the amount of funding that we will receive from SUNY regarding those funds. However, we know that the funds will come with restrictions when allocated. I will let you know what we receive and the restrictions as soon as SUNY releases the funds.

You may recall that I discussed with the campus last year that our biggest challenge remains declining enrollment. This decline is impacting our financial position significantly. I also said to you that I do not believe that we have done everything we could to arrest and reverse this trend. Executive Vice President and Provost Starrett will update the campus community in the fall about some of the specific things we have initiated and other things we are planning, all aimed at addressing our enrollment challenge. Also, while certain offices are explicitly tasked with recruiting and retaining students, I believe these efforts need the total involvement of our entire community. Each of us, in various ways, can help attract and retain students to our outstanding university. Hence, I am pleased to acknowledge that many of you are engaged in these efforts. Thank you for what you do to get students interested in SUNY Fredonia and to remain here at Fredonia for the duration of their studies once they get here.

In a few months, Vice President Metzger will provide a more detailed update on the financial outlook of the university and information on our planning for the next two to three years. As we plan for future budget years, we must:

- Continue to find efficiencies where we can;
- Invest in areas that will lead to growth and reputation enhancement;
- Generate new resources;
- Leverage technology strategically;
- Divest from efforts that no longer hold promise for the future;
- Strategically fill vacant positions; and
- Treat each other with empathy, dignity, integrity, grace, and compassion.

Fredonia has been an institution of higher learning for 196 years and will soon celebrate its bicentennial. What a legacy! I am sure those who came before had their own challenges and opportunities, and they rose to the occasion. This is our moment. Let's work together to overcome our challenges and take full advantage of all opportunities that benefit SUNY Fredonia.

Developments in the Williams Center

You might have observed some construction underway in the Williams Center. I will address this development in an update I am preparing for the students. It will go out shortly, and I hope you will have a chance to read about these exciting improvements that our students can look forward to this fall. I believe that the enhancements being made in the Williams Center will help with our efforts to retain students at the university.

I wish you the very best for the remainder of the summer.



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