

University Faculty Senate Winter Plenary Jan 19-21, Old Westbury – Carlie Phipps. Also attending from SUNY Poly: Mike Carpenter and Ron Sarner

Resolutions were passed regarding Sanctuary Campuses, Transgender Health Care Education, Contact Hours, and Assessment Practices. In particular, the sanctuary campus resolution asks for each faculty and staff members at SUNY campuses to evaluate the petition individually. The Senate also endorsed statements on civil discourse and campus climate, supporting DACA, and on tolerance.

The overarching topic of conversation was the governor’s recent announcement regarding free tuition. It was clarified that there are several components to the initiative:

1. The amount granted is granted as “last dollar”, meaning that campuses will still be expected to give scholarships, and the amount granted will be whatever is left over after federal and campus aid. So if a college offers a 5k scholarship, the student still ends up with only tuition paid from the scholarship plus the state picking up the leftover; the scholarship wouldn’t be applied to room and board instead.
2. Students will have to complete 15 credit hours per semester and complete in 4 years in order to keep the scholarship. [A story in the news since the plenary indicates that the total will not be tallied by semester, which would alleviate some of the big concerns voiced at the plenary about students losing the scholarship for having a single 12-credit semester. See: <https://buffalonews.com/2017/01/24/suny-head-unable-answer-key-questions-free-tuition-plan/>]
3. This would be for in-state students only, and only apply to public colleges and universities.
4. If a student fails to meet the eligibility requirements, they lose the scholarship permanently. It was not discussed how a fluctuating family income would be counted – if a student’s family meets the threshold one year, makes more than the limit the next, but back under after that, it sounds as if they might not get it back.
5. Whether SUNY campuses can handle the extra load this might cause is uncertain. Many campuses are operating under full capacity, but some could not take on a significant number of extra students. Chancellor Zimpher stated that she is in favor of this idea, that the specifics will be worked out as it is developed, and that this is a good step in supporting public higher education.

During the Chancellor’s address, we were able to ask questions more specific to our needs. One of our questions to Chancellor Zimpher was: What is your/SUNY’s vision for what SUNY Poly will look like in the future, and what support will the state and SUNY provide in support of achieving that goal?

Answer: She is optimistic about the evolution of Poly as a campus and thankful for the people who have engaged in service to that effort, especially Dr. Sammakia for acting as interim president and Binghamton for allowing him the leave to do so. At the moment, her fondest wish is that Poly grows into what they originally wanted at the time of the merger and that it be a fully functioning campus. It isn’t fully functioning yet, but the SUNY position is that it becomes one, with Dr. Sammakia leading the way. For now. What becomes of the Albany facility will evolve, and she would like to see it become accessible to other campuses in the system. [This is as close to a transcript of the answer as I could get while taking notes; the meeting was recorded and the audio should be available soon on the UFS website to hear her exact wording.]

Presentations were given by Grace Wang, the new head of SUNY Research and Economic Development, Ricardo Azziz, in the new position of head of the Office of Academic Health and Hospital Affairs, Eileen McLoughlin for the SUNY budget report, and Alex Cartwright for the Provost report.

UFS is also trying to increase avenues of communication. To that end, there is now a Facebook page at SUNYUFS, and a twitter account at @SUNYUFS. A presentation was given by Phil Glick of UBuffalo on the use of social media for professional interaction.

More information from the plenary, including all of the powerpoint presentations made and all of the statements and resolutions discussed, can be found on the UFS plenary page at:

<http://www.system.suny.edu/facultysenate/plenary-meetings/>