



2014-2015
Executive Budget Testimony

Lori Mould, SUNY Empire State College;
Bryant Barksdale, University at Albany;
Jesse Hicks, SUNY New Paltz

Joint Legislative Public Hearing
New York State Assembly Committees on Ways & Means and Higher Education
New York State Senate Committees on Finances and Higher Education
February 6, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. First and foremost, I want to thank Chairperson John DeFrancisco, Chairperson Denny Farrell, Chairperson Ken Lavallo, and Chairperson Deborah Glick, members of the Senate and Assembly, and legislative staff for allowing us this opportunity to speak today. It is a privilege to be before you today on behalf of the 463,000 students of the State University of New York to comment on the 2014-2015 Executive Budget.

My name is Lori Mould, and I am currently a student at SUNY Empire State College, an alumna of Genesee Community College and a member of the Executive Committee of the Student Assembly of the State University of New York. Our President, Tremayne Price, apologizes for being unable to be here for this hearing; however, I am pleased to be joined by fellow students Bryant Barksdale from the University at Albany and Jesse Hicks from SUNY New Paltz.

Together, we will specifically address SUNY students, the legislative priorities of their Student Assembly and, with your support, ways in which we can work together to continue to enhance the services provided to our students to ensure their continued success.

STUDENT ASSEMBLY AND SUNY STUDENTS

It is the mission of the Student Assembly of the State University of New York to empower the students of SUNY—through advocacy—to seek continued access to quality, affordable higher education; to support the goals and initiatives identified by the students of SUNY as paramount to their success; and to represent SUNY students at the state and national level.

As the largest comprehensive system of higher education in the nation, the SUNY system serves almost 463,000 students.

- Community college students make up close to 53 percent of SUNY's total enrollment, and we expect that that percentage will only continue to grow.

- This includes over 120,000 students of color, accounting for approximately 26 percent of our total student population.
- SUNY enrolls over 1.8 million continuing education students, putting its total student enrollment at over 2.3 million.

It is also important to note that SUNY—along with CUNY—helps to educate the majority of minority students in New York State, as well as the largest percentage of low income students. SUNY continues to play a large role in providing access to higher education for many in New York State.

With that being said, SUNY is responsible for providing students with various services and supports that are directly responsible for ensuring our students access, completion, and ultimately success throughout their educational endeavor. We are aware that New York State is facing a challenging time financially; however, we are here to bring attention to the following areas of concern for students:

- Support for SUNY Child Care Centers
- Tuition assistance for graduate students and increased access for undergraduates
- Support for the Educational Opportunity Program
- In-state tuition for veterans
- Increasing Community College base aid

SUPPORT FOR SUNY CHILD CARE CENTERS

As you are aware, SUNY has 55 child care centers throughout the system where we provide a service for over 5,000 children and approximately one-third of those children served have parents who are SUNY students. Despite potentially serving two generations of SUNY students simultaneously, operating funds for child care centers have remained stagnant over the course of the past five years. During that same time frame, the Child Care and Development Block Grant which provides tuition support to student parents have seen a reduction of approximately \$800,000 at state-operated campuses and approximately \$900,000 at community colleges.

In collaboration with the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, the SUNY Student Assembly is advocating for the restoration of the \$653,000 for community college child care that was cut in the Governor's Executive Budget as well as increased operating funds for all SUNY's child care centers because the research on child care shows that graduation, retention, persistence, and success rates of students receiving child care assistance is higher than their counterparts and is critical to their decision to enroll in college. We are also joining with the FCCC to continue to advocate for increased funding for the Child Care & Development Block Grants to provide more need-based tuition support to student parents. If the child care centers do not have the funds necessary to operate, there will be no need for the tuition support as there will be no child care centers.

I will now yield to Bryant Barksdale, graduate student at the University at Albany.

Thank you. Prior to being a graduate student, I received an associate's degree from Fulton-Montgomery Community College and a bachelor's degree from the University at Albany. In addition, I am a proud graduate and current recipient of the support provided through the Educational Opportunity Program. I also wish to speak with you today about tuition assistance for graduate students.

TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is one of the most preeminent ways our State supports New Yorkers who wish to better themselves and our state by pursuing a two- or four-year higher education program. Effective 2010-11 academic year, graduate TAP was eliminated leaving many graduate students without additional aid for college. This elimination of need-based aid creates a financial burden on those seeking to attain an advanced degree.

This leaves the student with large amounts of debt in finishing a graduate degree. The SUNY Student Assembly realizes that it is vital to lessen this financial burden on students by expanding access to TAP to graduate students. With the changes in the needs of the 21st century workforce, graduate degrees are becoming more necessary for our students to be successful.

The SUNY Student Assembly is advocating that need-based aid for graduates, through the TAP program, be reinstated. These additional financial supports will continue to provide incentive for New Yorkers to attain a graduate degree.

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) combines access, academic support and supplemental financial assistance to make higher education possible for students who have the potential to succeed, despite under-preparation and limited financial resources. EOP provides these students with summer programming, counseling, tutoring, workshops and other services in order to ensure that these students are successful. In addition, the funding for EOP also goes towards helping these students financially with funds for textbooks, transportation, and other personal costs that they might not be able to afford on their own.

It is estimated that the loss of the \$632,400 reflected in the Executive Budget for next year would necessitate an enrollment reduction of at least 200 students effectively eliminating spring enrollments and transfers, a reduction in aid per student of \$60+, or some combination of aid and enrollment reduction. The Student Assembly urges you to take this into consideration. Programs such as EOP are essential to help SUNY and New York State continue to uphold SUNY's mission of access to quality, affordable higher education.

I will now yield to Jesse Hicks, student at SUNY New Paltz.

Thank you. Senators and Members of the Assembly, it is my pleasure to appear before you today to speak on behalf of the students of the State University of New York. Currently, I am a student at SUNY New Paltz, however, I also received an associate's degree from Ulster County Community College. In addition to support for community colleges, today we will also discuss the Student Assembly's desire for allowing in-state tuition for veterans.

IN-STATE TUITION FOR VETERANS

Many former New York State residents, upon leaving active duty, return to New York to continue their lives. Often, returning veterans choose to attend college to attain a degree or certificate, but are forced to pay out-of-state tuition. This is due to recent changes in the Post 9/11 GI Bill that only covers the net price of in-state tuition for our nation's veterans. The difference in tuition for these men and women is approximately \$10,000.

The students of the State University of New York realize that this is an unnecessary burden for these individuals; individuals who have willingly chosen to protect and serve all citizens of this country including those of our state. That is why we are advocating for the amendment of the NYS Education Law to make any veteran eligible for in-state tuition rates.

INCREASING COMMUNITY COLLEGE BASE AID

According to New York State Education Law: New York has an obligation to pay up to 40% of a community college's Net Operating Cost (NOC) or a flat rate per FTE (base aid), whichever is less. Several years before 2011, there were a lot of cuts and flat budgets. In 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years, The State Legislature passed increases of \$150 per FTE in the budget. Since these increases, the average base aid per FTE is \$2,382 (an average 25.6% of Net Operating Cost; 27.2% when excluding FIT) with a range of \$2,240 - \$2,908. Without more support from the State, the burden of making up the difference financially ultimately falls on the backs of the students. We request that the Legislature provide our community colleges with the state support they are entitled to by law.

The Rational Aid approach remains a top priority for SUNY's students. We sincerely thank the New York State Legislature for allowing a \$150 per FTE increase in this year's budget. However, we are continuing to request that the costs of educating and kick-starting New York's economy increasingly shift from students to the State and counties. Community Colleges play a tremendous role in the New York State economy. Not only do they educate, but also serve as hubs for tremendous economic and workforce development for their communities. Governor Cuomo spoke of reimagining our community colleges in his State of the State address; increasing the government's share of community college costs is a great way to start.

That said, I will leave those issues there and yield back to Ms. Mould.

CONCLUSION

SUNY students fully understand that the State of New York and the legislature are facing difficult financial times; however, we believe that the investment into the future of our students is also a secure investment for the State of New York's future. SUNY students are not only thriving within our world class system but we are also striving to lead the way in cutting edge technology and innovations within the US and the world. With the launch of Open SUNY, the sky is the limit as the State University of New York seeks to increase the dream of an affordable and coveted SUNY education to current and future SUNY students by providing a system-wide online education with the stroke of a fingertip.

The students of SUNY are ready to make a difference but we need your help...please continue stand with us by helping to provide an affordable education for our veterans and graduate students, reducing the financial burden on students with children, improve access and retention for low-income and educationally disadvantaged students, and by providing our community colleges with the state support that they are entitled to receive.

We, the students of SUNY, ask that you continue to stand and partner with us so that we can continue to provide the best education to the diverse group of students within the SUNY-system which is approximately 463,000 strong!

Thank you again for providing my fellow students and myself with the opportunity to speak with you today!

