

MEETING MINUTES | DECEMBER 11, 2019

The Rockefeller Institute of Government



COUNCIL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

James Lytle, Colleen West Hay, Donna Luh, John Maggiore, Shelia Poole, Roberta Reardon, Molly Reilly, Patricia Salkin via telephone, Mark Schroeder

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Jim Malatras, Tai Arnold, Mary Caroline Powers, Anastasia Pratt

I. COUNCIL BUSINESS

Following a short reception and the presentation of certificates of appreciation to Tony Esposito, Daniel Wall, and Linda Weiss for their many years of service to the College Council, Mr. Lytle asked those gathered to introduce themselves.

Mr. Lytle then asked if there were any persons wishing to make statements during the public comment period preceding the meeting. Hearing none, he called the formal meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

He asked for approval of the minutes of the September 2019 meeting. Donna Luh made a motion to accept the minutes as presented in the briefing packet. Colleen West Hay seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously by voice vote.

II. REPORT OF THE SENATE CHAIR — CHAIRWOMAN ANASTASIA PRATT

Dr. Pratt explained that one of the more important and recent issues of business taken up by members of the Senate was the proposal to establish Latin honors for students, something she described as a “big move” for the college.

(The traditional Latin Honor designation is in three categories, each with its own minimum GPA requirement: Summa Cum Laude (With Highest Honor) — 3.9000 GPA; Magna Cum Laude (With Great Honor) — 3.7000 GPA; Cum Laude (With Honor) — 3.5000 GPA.)

The work of crafting a policy to offer Latin honors is underway, she said. Thus, the college has moved from a “no grades” policy to a formalized GPA system with a dean’s list, the adoption of which the college Senate recently approved.

Additionally she added that the Senate has undertaken the analysis of a variety of new academic programs proposals and recently approved new academic concentrations in substance abuse and opioid addiction treatment, public history, and information technology.

III. REVIEW OF MIDDLE STATES REACCREDITATION PROCESS — DR. TAI ARNOLD

Chairman Lytle drew the attention of council members to the documents in the briefing packet, particularly the Middle States Standard VII on governance, leadership, and administration, and the SUNY Board of Trustees document titled “Code of Ethical Conduct” that applies to all College Councils in the SUNY system. He added that while the councils play important roles, their sphere of influence tends to focus closer to home, and as a result their roles are somewhat limited, yet council members provide important consultative roles, especially with regard to the identification and selection of candidates for college presidencies and in the accreditation process.

He asked that the members sign the SUNY Board of Trustees Code of Honor document in the packet that includes as an addenda the New York State Public Officers Law. The signed documents will reside in the documents room for review by the Middle States Accreditation Team during their visit to the college in April.

Mr. Lytle also noted the ACT (Association of Council Members and College Trustees of SUNY) booklet and recommended it as a good document to familiarize new council members with their duties. He added that the ACT organization presents excellent opportunities for networking with members of other college councils across the SUNY system, and help keeps council members informed.

Mr. Lytle then introduced Dr. Tai Arnold, interim vice provost for student success, who undertook an explanation of the reaccreditation process for council members. She explained that the college has been involved in two years of preparation for the reaccreditation process, the success of which is critical because without accreditation the college cannot distribute Title IV federal financial aid funding to its students.

(Title IV funds include the Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loan, Direct Graduate PLUS Loan, Direct PLUS Loan, Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), and Federal Perkins Loan.)

Dr. Arnold continued to explain the process, which will include having peer reviewers visit the college and review all the documents we provide including the self-study report. She said the accreditation team is guided by seven standards, and Standard VII deals specifically with governance and the relationship of the College Council and the administration.

She said she believes Middle States takes less of a “bean counter” approach and is more oriented toward encouraging the improvement and growth of an institution. She noted that Middle States has moved into an eight-year cycle of reaccreditation reviews, in place of the previous 10-year cycle.

Following the visit and deliberation by members of the team, reviewers can affirm the college’s accreditation, with or without stipulations; find non-compliance, which could take the form of a warning, probation, or issuance of a show-cause directive, all requiring follow-up on specific elements of certain Middle States’ standards or lack of compliance with federal regulations; or, issue a finding of adverse action, which results in either the denial of accreditation or withdrawal of accreditation status.

Ms. Reilly asked if there were other accrediting bodies and if any of them were regional. Dr. Arnold said there are, for specific academic programs such as nursing and accounting, but Middle States accredits the entire institution. She also said the New York State Board of Regents used to do accrediting regionally but no longer does so.

Ms. Poole asked about the college's previous experience with accreditation process and Dr. Arnold noted that the last accreditation garnered one recommendation from the reviewer, which stated that SUNY should more fairly allocate funding for Empire State College.

IV. REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT — JIM MALATRAS

Dr. Malatras underscored the importance of the Middle State accreditation process, saying it is largely one of self-reflection.

He then reviewed some of the materials in the briefing packet assembled for College Council members, including the prospectus, created for use during the presidential search process. It portrays the college he came to in July 2019. The document was quickly rendered out of date because his administration has been moving rapidly to encourage a variety of operational changes and put permanent leadership staff in place. He cited the appointment of Meg Benke, who has been with the college 25-plus years, and is now the permanent provost, overseeing the academic side of the institution. And soon to join the staff as executive vice president for administration is Beth Berlin, former interim Commissioner of Education for the state of New York, who will oversee all operational functions. Additionally, Aaron Gladd is serving as chief of staff, handling many of the day-to-day challenges.

The first-ever, upcoming winter commencement is an example of a change made. All College Council members are invited to attend and participate as members of the platform party. The ceremony is set for 1 p.m., Sunday, December 15, at the Empire State Convention Center.

Dr. Malatras noted several recent agreements the college has established with various educational institutions including the following partnerships with:

- SUNY Cobleskill that allows eligible bachelor's degree students at Cobleskill to earn their master's degree online through SUNY Empire in as little as one year with accelerated pathways and cross-registration;
- SUNY Broome Community College, the first of its kind in the state, that provides guaranteed admission for eligible students in Broome's Dental Hygiene, Health Information Technology, Medical Assistant, Physical Therapy Assistant, and Radiologic Technology associate degree programs into SUNY Empire's Bachelor of Science in Allied Health program;
- Hillsborough Community College in Florida, which has five distinct campuses and 47,000 enrollees, who will be guaranteed admission to SUNY Empire, if qualified;
- Bergen County Community College in northeastern New Jersey, with three campuses and 17,000 students, who will be guaranteed admission to SUNY Empire, if qualified.

Agreements with private entities have included partnerships with:

- CVS Health, directed at CVS Health's nearly 500 store managers across New York state as a path to a bachelor's degree at a reduced cost by awarding them 32 college credits — the equivalent of more than a year of full-time study — for store manager training provided and paid for by CVS Health and thoroughly reviewed by SUNY Empire. The agreement also offers eligibility for tuition assistance through CVS Health's Education Assistance Program and the waiver of application and orientation fees by SUNY Empire.
- Camelot of Staten Island, a community-based human services agency, founded to combat drug addiction in the 1970s, whose employees can now earn degrees in the field of addiction studies through SUNY Empire's Bachelor of Science in Addiction Studies program, which is designed to prepare students to become addiction treatment specialists while helping them advance toward becoming a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) in New York state. The new agreement helps lower the cost and time needed to complete a degree by awarding college credit for employees' prior professional learning, especially their work at Camelot.

The college also has worked with county agencies, such as the Erie County Department of Social Services, to offer degree programs to its employees, and with the state Department of Labor and Commissioner Roberta Reardon to create the Empire State Career Connector, a program to connect individuals to growing jobs sectors and the education they'll need to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Dr. Malatras told council members he wanted to tap into their expertise regarding possible future partnerships, such as the one with DOL, emphasizing the desire on the part of the college to connect with the current workforce in the state.

To that end, the college has just announced a strategic partnership between Northland Workforce Training Center in Buffalo and SUNY Empire's Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies that will build on the center's training model and provide long-term ways to best recruit, train, and educate Western New York's future workforce and find jobs for them that best meets the needs of local industry.

Dr. Malatras said the Northland Training Center partnership could serve as a model that could be replicated across the state with other colleges and collaborators.

With regard to students, he said that one fifth of all our SUNY Empire's students are in the 18 to 24 year old age cohort, thus the term "nontraditional" does not always apply, nor does he like to use it. He hears student saying they want a version of the traditional college experience but on their own terms. He has heard a lot about the desire to institute Latin honors. He said the response to the idea of a winter commencement was very positive and now the college is looking at instituting study abroad opportunities, not for a full term but for one to two weeks.

On the topic of finances, a budget deficit was discovered, initially identified as \$5 million but it was quickly discovered that the deficit was closer to \$11 million. Now, it is nearly closed. Some of the deficit is related to declining enrollment. The college enrollment is down about 26 percent since 2010 but with a lot of effort the decline is flattening out with the fall enrollments.

Dr. Malatras then discussed the importance of “place” for the college and how important it is. He said some of the locations are college-owned and others are leased, and the rental fees are a financial drain, so work is underway to identify alternate locations, renegotiate some of the leases, and improve locations that need it. He added that he wants our spaces to be used to engage the communities we serve.

Ms. Hay commented on what a good idea it was to designate the Rochester location as both a place for early voting and a location where people can complete their online census forms. She said using the state of the art computer labs there for this purpose made great sense.

Dr. Malatras said another way to bring in members of the community that has proven successful is art events, such as the one held the previous week at the college’s building at 111 West Avenue in Saratoga Springs, which drew approximately 300 people.

Ms. Luh commented that she felt the college’s location in Cheektowaga is underplayed in terms of public use. Dr. Malatras said it is separated from where our students are, located in the back of a strip mall and is being reevaluated by the college.

Ms. Reardon said the whole model for the college is meeting people where they are and suggested that the college should promote the notion that, “We are the community, that we are part of the fabric of your community.”

Dr. Malatras said he thought that this is the model for higher education. He also suggested that rather than the college co-locating on community college campuses, we should consider doing the reverse and have community colleges co-locate some of their academic activities at SUNY Empire locations.

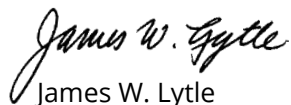
Mr. Schroeder then raised the subject of Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s initiatives, with which many of the new members of the College Council are dealing. He said he felt many, if not all, of these initiatives could in one way or another fit into the work SUNY Empire does.

He mentioned as an example the severe shortage in the state of auto mechanics and the need for new educational and training programs that are keeping pace with the changes in the industry and how Suffolk County Community College has met the need by creating one of the best auto mechanic programs in the country. He said that the Department of Labor and the Department of Corrections, in addition to the Department of Motor Vehicles, were pulled into the planning. He suggested that by working together the council could help figure out what role the college could play in realizing some of the governor’s initiatives.

Mr. Lytle then asked if there was any other business, and Ms. Hay made a motion to go into executive session to discuss two personnel matters related to former employees of the college. The motion was passed by voice vote and the meeting entered executive session.

Following the executive session, the meeting was officially adjourned at approximately 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



James W. Lytle
Chairman



Mary Caroline Powers
Liaison to the College Council