

THE STATE UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK
STUDENT ASSEMBLY

2019-20

ADVOCACY AGENDA



The State University of New York
Student Assembly



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INCREASING THE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SUNY

Stopping the Rise of Tuition and Fees

Tuition has increased dramatically system-wide since the 2008 financial crisis. The Student Assembly President routinely votes against tuition increases, but due to flat state support and increases in operating expenses, the SUNY Board regularly votes to raise tuition by the maximum allowable amount. The Student Assembly urges the state to appropriate sufficient funding to the state to offset the need for any increases in tuition or fees.

Funding for Critical Maintenance and New Capital Projects

The Student Assembly supports a \$1.2 billion investment in SUNY infrastructure, to support critical maintenance needs on existing buildings, and the construction of new facilities. The current level of funding provided by the state for capital does not allow campuses to even keep up with scheduled repairs, let alone invest in expansion. Capital neglect can lead to unsafe conditions for students, faculty, and staff, and to buildings being taken off line from use. Additional support for capital would also allow campuses to make serious investments in the sustainability of their infrastructure.

Increase State Support for Students with Disabilities

SUNY serves 43% of self-identified college students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions in New York State. More than half of those students attend SUNY community colleges, where the disability services centers do not receive a consistent stream of state support. The Student Assembly urges the state to appropriate \$5.7 million dollars for disability services system-wide to effectively support students with disabilities across the SUNY System.

Reinstate TAP and Pell Grants for Justice-Involved Students

Prior to the 1990s, justice-involved students were eligible for federal pell grants and state TAP awards. This eligibility was eliminated, in practice dramatically cutting support for college in the prison programs. Since the cancellation of TAP for such students for example, there has been a 79% reduction in college programs for incarcerated individuals in New York State. Given the reduced rates of recidivism and public dependence associated with graduates of college prison programs, we urge the federal and state governments to reinstate eligibility for key financial aid programs to justice-involved students.

INCREASING THE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SUNY

State Support for UUP Contract

The Student Assembly calls on the state to fully cover the increased collective bargaining costs associated with United University Professions current contract. This would mean covering the remaining year of retroactive raises, and all future increases associated with the contract. While SUNY students support fair compensation for faculty and staff, students should not have to foot the bill.

Close the TAP Gap

The State of New York must close the TAP Gap, which is directly causing a dramatic loss of revenue for our campuses. Filling the gap, which is expected to rise above \$75 million this year, would help offset the need for increases in tuition and fees, and allow campuses to invest in academic programs and student support services. It would also prevent campuses from being penalized for accepting low-income students.

CREATING A NATIONAL IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Work Study Reform

Work Study is a key financial aid program that is utilized by thousands of SUNY students. Unfortunately, not all eligible students are matched with Work Study opportunities due to restrictions on the type of employment Work Study dollars can be used to support. We urge the state to reduce restrictions on private sector Work Study employment, so more students can find employment opportunities off-campus. This action would also allow more students to pursue positions related to their field of study and career goals.

Expanding and Revising the “90/10” Rule

Prospective students should be incentivized to choose low cost and high quality public institutions like those in the SUNY system. Unfortunately, many prospective students fall prey to exploitative recruitment tactics by for-profit institutions. We support protecting students and legitimate universities by strengthening the “90/10 rule” to require at least 15% of tuition costs not come from federal grants or loans. Furthermore, veterans must be shielded from exploitation by for-profit colleges by the same “90/10” rule that effectively protects other students.

Increasing Pell Grant Award Sizes and Maintaining the Pell Grant Surplus

The Pell Grant program offers millions of college students around the nation aid they depend on to afford college. We firmly oppose any attempts to steal surplus funds that are lawfully appropriated for Pell Grants. Towards this end, we support increasing the mandatory appropriation of Pell Grant funds from 17% to 60%. Pell Grants currently have the lowest purchasing power in the history of the program, down to 28% from 92% of a student’s educational expenses. The Student Assembly also supports increasing both the maximum award and the awards at each income threshold, to help minimize student debt.


CREATING A NATIONAL IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Protecting Title IX

The Student Assembly opposes the 2018 changes to federal rulemaking on Title IX announced by the Department of Education. We particularly oppose removing the ability of student survivors of sexual violence to seek a campus judicial proceeding for incidents that occur off-campus. An act of sexual violence committed by one student against another off-campus is no less traumatizing, and requires no less campus intervention, than one committed on-campus. Additionally, we oppose mediation as a means to adjudicate cases involving accusations of sexual or interpersonal violence.

Protecting Undocumented, Immigrant and International Students

The Student Assembly strongly opposes President Trump's announced intention to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Dreamers are integral members of the SUNY family, and they must feel welcome and protected. We urge Congress to guarantee legal status to DACA recipients through legislative action, eliminating the unnecessary uncertainty and fear felt by thousands of SUNY students. Additionally, we believe that changes announced by the Trump Administration to the F1 Visa application process should be reversed. This would decrease application fees and administrative hassle for international students. The Federal Government must make it clear to international students that they are welcome by decreasing restrictions on Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).



ENSURING NEW YORK STATE'S COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Building on the Excelsior Scholarship Program

New York State can build on the promise of the Excelsior Scholarship by easing certain eligibility criteria, which could open the program to more students. By streamlining the application process, guaranteeing fair treatment for students with disabilities, and offering more flexibility to transfer students during the credit verification process, more students would be able to take advantage of this important scholarship.

Year Round TAP

Currently, students can only utilize TAP awards during the Fall and Spring academic semesters. Students can use pell grants throughout the year however, creating a disconnect between what the state and federal governments allow. Allowing students to utilize their TAP awards during Winter and Summer sessions would allow New York students to complete their academic programs faster, and with less debt. The Student Assembly supports creating eligibility for TAP during all academic sessions.

State Support for Community Colleges

SUNY's community colleges are funded by a combination of direct state support, appropriations from their sponsor counties, and tuition and fees. The state support piece is directly tied to enrollment, with colleges receiving a flat amount per full time equivalent student. This means that cyclical changes in enrollment can have dramatic effects on a college's level of state support. We urge the state to institute a funding floor, equal to the 2019-2020 appropriation to each community college, and enshrine that funding floor in state law. This would allow community colleges a greater degree of financial predictability, and reduce the need for increases in tuition and fees on students.

Increasing Graduate Student Wages

All graduate student assistants deserve to be compensated at a living wage based on their community of residence. Limiting graduate level study to those who have the means to support themselves financially throughout their course of study is unjust. Campuses must increase stipends and overall compensation packages to ensure that the best talent can be attracted to our institutions while maintaining equitable access.

Support for SUNY's Hospitals and Health Science Centers

SUNY's three hospitals and health science centers treat approximately 1.3 million patients annually, educate 12,500 students each year, generate over \$5 billion in economic activity, and support almost 26,000 jobs. The Student Assembly encourages the State to restart its commitment to the longterm fiscal health of our hospitals by restoring the state subsidy and providing the full state match owed to the SUNY Hospitals through the Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) program.

STRENGTHENING CAMPUS COMMUNITIES

On - Campus Childcare Centers

SUNY's childcare centers help thousands of students, faculty, and staff to study and work while raising families. We support increasing the state appropriation for these centers back to its peak level of \$3,980,000, as allocated in 2010. Such investment will help SUNY's 48 childcare centers, 26 of which are situated on community college campuses, to meet the needs of our campus communities and allow campuses to develop childcare centers that do not already have them.

Educational Opportunity Program

The Student Assembly urges the state to protect the Educational Opportunity Program, which helps SUNY students from low-income families afford college. Additional funding for EOP would allow campuses to open more spots in the program to eligible students, expand the Foster Youth College Success Initiative, and offer increased student support services.

Educational Opportunity Centers

SUNY Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) offer a second chance at a higher education to thousands across the state. EOCs offer academic remediation, vocational training, and certification programs at no cost in various communities around the state. The Student Assembly strongly believes it is essential that state funding for the EOCs be protected and strengthened.

Provide Free Menstrual Hygiene Products Across SUNY

The Student Assembly supports free and equal access to menstrual hygiene products across the SUNY system. These products should be provided free of cost to students who require their use in all bathrooms across the system. We estimate that providing menstrual hygiene products would cost \$4 million system-wide- a cost that should not be born by students.

ENHANCING UNIVERSITY-WIDE PROGRAMMING

Combating Food Insecurity

The Student Assembly supports Governor Cuomo's mandate that all campuses maintain an open access food pantry for student use. The state can build on its commitment to combatting food insecurity by appropriating \$1 million to support the operation of food pantries across the SUNY system. These funds could be used to better supply and staff the pantries, expanding their impact for students in need.

Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) provide free educational resources to students across the SUNY System. Academic use of OER helps limit the cost of textbooks and other materials for students. We urge the state to increase its investment in OER from \$4 million, which it has appropriated the past three years, to \$5 million for FY 20/21. This additional investment would allow for more students to benefit from the use of OER.

Student Emergency Fund

Several campuses currently operate student emergency funds, which offer small grants to students who face unforeseen financial challenges. These grants can sometimes make all the difference for students who would otherwise have to leave school. The campuses that currently operate emergency funds, do so with private dollars. We urge the state to take the benefits of maintaining student emergency funds to scale, by appropriating \$4.5 million for a SUNY-wide emergency fund.

Mental Health Resources

The Student Assembly seeks a comprehensive investment in the mental well-being of students. It is essential that student psychiatric and counseling needs both be met. Towards these ends, we support expanding SUNY's mental health telecounseling initiative, which currently offers psychiatric care to students on eight campuses. We also support additional funding to ensure that all campuses have at least one full-time mental health professional for every 1,500 students. Lastly, we support the creation of a SUNY-wide hotline for students with pressing needs, where students can seek counseling care 24/7.



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