



The Sentinel

UUP — Oneonta Local 2190

Special Edition: Dialogue on the Future of Higher Education

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Article 1:

Introduction to *The Sentinel's* Dialogue on the Future of Higher Education

Bill Simons, Editor



Formerly UUP Oneonta's award-winning, monthly flagship publication, *The Sentinel* appears to be morphing into a platform, perhaps less frequent and regular in distribution, with reclaimed significance. *The Sentinel* is moving in the direction of editions that focus on a single important topic while its sister publication *UUP-date* has grown more compact, ubiquitous, and general, a venue for meeting minutes and notes, announcements, timely information, and eclectic articles. While on different trajectories, *The Sentinel* and *UUP-date* complement one another, and, along with our revitalized Chapter website, they provide UUP Oneonta communications with renewed visibility. This special issue of *The Sentinel* is devoted exclusively to the future of higher education, and I am appreciative of serving as its editor.

Given the challenges facing higher education today on multiple levels, conflicting viewpoints, and mounting concerns about its future, this edition of *The Sentinel* aspires to make a significant contribution to that debate. This publication makes no claim to comprehensiveness nor closure. Nor does it purport to reflect the opinion of UUP or any of its statewide representatives. Indeed, contributors to this publication represent varied perspectives. Written by an accomplished and

engaged ensemble of commentators, the 17 original articles that follow are thoughtful and observant. They will facilitate further discourse about the future of higher education.

An interactive table of contents with author name, article title, and page number follows. Then, readers will find concise biographical contributor information. Both the table of contents and the contributor listings are sequenced by the order in which articles appear.

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Biographical Contributor Information

In [Introduction to *The Sentinel's* Dialogue on the Future of Higher Education](#), editor **Bill Simons** provides background on contributing authors and discusses the purpose of this publication. Currently UUP Oneonta Secretary and Academic Delegate, he was the Chapter's longest serving President (2003-2019). Previously, he was UUP Oneonta Vice President for Academics and editor of *The Sentinel*. Former Director of the Honors Center and emeritus faculty, Bill was Assistant, Associate, full Professor, and Chair of History (1977-2022), receiving the Chancellor's Award for both Teaching and Service. His is Co-director of The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball & American Culture, co-sponsored by SUNY Oneonta and the National Baseball Hall of Fame. His publications include newspaper columns, scholarly articles, and 12 anthologies.

In [Three Reforms that Would Transform Higher Education for Comprehensives](#), **Robert Compton**, President, UUP Oneonta, and Professor, Africana & Latinx Studies and Political Science, forwards proposals to reboot the academy. To surmount the "purgatory" of comprehensive institutions caught between the "ever confused and bifurcated identity" of "liberal arts and skills acquisition," Dr. Compton forwards a triumvirate program— national service, global-local connections, and student portfolio reflections. Author of a plethora of books, articles, and reviews, he remains enmeshed in seminal research. Currently President of UUP Oneonta, Rob was the longest serving Vice President for Academics in the chapter's history, Secretary, survey designer, Academic Delegate, legislative advocate, and *Sentinel* columnist.

In The Need to Rise Above: Public Higher Education in the 21st Century, State UUP President **Fred Kowal** acknowledges formidable problems while offering exhortation to activism: “The challenges and crises... of educating young adults in colleges and universities... seem to multiply and deepen daily. But the imperative remains: The education of the population to become true citizens of the world, skilled in both critical and creative thinking with a healthy respect for divergent perspectives and the democratic political process.” Prior to his initial election as State UUP President in 2013, Dr. Kowal served as State Membership Development Officer and for 12 years as President of the Cobleskill Chapter. Son of the Chicopee (MA) working class, he is a national AFT Vice President. A Professor of Political Science, Fred taught several innovative courses at SUNY Cobleskill and provided the impetus for a Native American studies program.

In The Higher Education of Tomorrow Will Not Look Like Yesterday's, SUNY Oneonta President **Alberto Cardelle** demonstrates that the academy has experienced a series of major transformations over the past 150 years. He previously served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Fitchburg (MA) State University. Dr. Cardelle identifies the falling birth rate, a decline in traditionally college-aged students choosing to attend college, an erosion in the public perception of the value of a college education, and the growth of non-traditional forms of instruction as major drivers transforming contemporary higher education. Dr. Cardelle envisions a higher education future “with broader credential portfolios... enrolling more adult learners... and... a greater focus on alternate learning experiences.”

In Degradation or Unionization: The Competing Futures of Public Higher Education, **Bret Benjamin**, Associate Professor of English, University at Albany, and Chief Negotiator for the 2022-26 UUP/NYS Contract, views higher education poised at a perilous crossroads: “[T]he choice we face is this: accept a hollowed out and exclusive public university or embrace a movement of mass unionization to reimagine and remake an equitable, socially responsive university.” His course offerings encompass Cultural and Postcolonial studies, Globalization, and Marxism. Dr. Benjamin’s scholarly publications include *Invested Interests: Culture, Capital and the World Bank*. Energetic and peripatetic, Bret is also State UUP convener of the Future of Public Higher Ed task force and past President of the Albany Chapter.

In Think Beyond the Grind: How Can We Future Proof Ourselves? **Michelle Hansen**, Space Management Coordinator, SUNY Oneonta, envisions a new and vibrant university, built on seven pillars—technological integration, flexible learning models, career readiness, inclusivity and diversity, sustainable practices, mental health and well-being, and community engagement. Confident in our ability to evolve collectively, she advocates a growth mindset. Prior to joining the Facilities team, she served SUNY Oneonta as Associate Director of Alumni Engagement, Coordinator of Affinity Groups & Reunion, and Residence Hall Director. Elected UUP Oneonta Vice President for Professionals in 2019, Michelle possesses the skills set to transform goals into realities. Off-campus, she is an Unadilla Community Farm and Trail Conference volunteer.

In Higher Education and the Internal Colonization Problem, **Alex Thomas**, Professor of Sociology, SUNY Oneonta, raises uncomfortable and important questions that will inevitably elicit discussion and debate. Eschewing professional-managerial class entitlement Dr. Thomas asserts “if your university is taking from a neighborhood and not giving in return, you work for an agent of internal colonization.” A prolific author of journalistic commentary and scholarly

research, Alex has many academic articles to his credit and is the author/editor of eight books, focusing on comparative environmental demography. In addition to teaching courses on urbanism, criminology, and research, he has served as Sociology Department Chair, Dean, research center Director, fundraiser, and community outreach specialist.

In SUNY Success Translates to Thriving Communities, New York State Senator **Peter Oberacker** emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between SUNY institutions and their host communities, evidenced by quality jobs and stimulus to commerce: “Vibrant SUNY schools have a ripple effect throughout their host communities. They help support and drive the local economy in so many ways.” He is a graduate of SUNY Delhi (1983) and an inductee of its Athletics Hall of Fame. A member of the Senate Higher Education Committee, his 51st district is home to SUNY Cobleskill, Delhi, Oneonta, Sullivan, and Ulster as well as domiciling SUNY Morrisville’s extension campus in Norwich. Senator Oberacker observes that “[e]ach SUNY campus is unique, and each is crucial.”

In Commodifying the Life of the Mind, **William Scheuerman** analyzes the transformative changes taking place in American higher education. Employing Aristotle, history, and contemporary phenomena, he makes a strong case that “as long as higher education is seen as just another commodity in the United States, the conflagration of the liberal arts will only continue.” Formerly, State UUP Vice President for Academics and Chief Negotiator before election as the union’s longest serving President (1993-2007), Dr. Scheuerman went on to assume the presidency of the National Labor College. On campus, Bill was Professor of Political Science at SUNY Oswego and UUP Oswego President. He is the author of numerous articles and several books, including *A New American Labor Movement* and *United University Professions*.

In Goodbye Alma Mater? **Ed Wesnofske** deftly chronicles the evolution of the university from its European origins 1000 years ago to the present—and into the future. He discusses hard truths about the potential eclipse of the liberal arts centered university by “competitive messaging of questionable value.” At SUNY Oneonta, Ed is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, a department that he chaired. He was President of SUFT, one of two associations that merged in 1973 to create UUP. For 51 years, Ed has guided and led generations of UUP activists. A former State UUP Vice President for Academics, he serves, at present, on the select State group considering direct election of State officers. He has held virtually every elected office at UUP Oneonta, including President, Vice President for Academics, Secretary, Treasurer, and currently Academic Delegate.

In Where Do We Go From Here? **Dora E. Polachek**, Visiting Associate Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures, Binghamton University, analyzes the relationship between public secondary schools and universities in her exploration of the dramatic decline in education majors. “[t]he future of education hangs in the balance,” cautions Dr. Polachek, “and that necessarily includes higher education...” her area of specialization is renaissance literature and culture, particularly early modern theater and issues relating to gender, power, and comedy. a recipient of the chancellor's award for excellence in teaching and the university award for excellence in international education, Dora’s extensive publications encompass Marguerite De Navarre, Montaigne, Brantôme, and the role of women during the French wars of religion.

In Journalistic Collaborations with Academia: Models from West Virginia University and St. Bonaventure University, **Louis Jacobson**, senior correspondent with PolitiFact, draws upon his experience as a visiting instructor of media and communications. Louis also writes on politics for Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia, and for U.S. News & World Report. He is senior author of the Almanac of American Politics 2024. His resume includes stints with such prestigious publications as The Economist and The Wall Street Journal. In these difficult times for journalism and higher education, with both menaced by canards about their relevance and authenticity, Louis finds synergism in their collaboration. Several of Louis' students have gone on to careers in journalism, and these programs "are replicable elsewhere."

In The Future of Higher Education: A Union Perspective, UUP Oneonta Acting President **Shirley Clark** examines the "monumental and multiple transformations" confronting the academy. Despite daunting challenges and the need for vigilance, Shirley remains optimistic and envisions a key and expanding role for UUP in the evolution of technology in higher education. Prior to assuming the role of Acting President, Shirley was elected UUP Oneonta Vice President for Professionals and Professional Delegate. She has captained a number of NEO (New Employee Orientations) sessions for the Chapter and led the Oneonta delegation at the Fall 2023 Delegate Assembly. Shirley is the Financial Aid Product Manager at the SICAS Center, "a SUNY-wide information system support center hosted on the SUNY Oneonta campus."

In UMASS, **Lawrence S. DiCara**, P.C, provides perspective on higher education from a neighboring state. Drawing on his service on the University of Massachusetts Board of Trustees, he proposes adjusting the infrastructure of higher education to the realities of contemporary demographics. A graduate of Boston Latin School, Harvard, and Suffolk Law School, Larry has taught at Harvard, Boston University, and the University of Massachusetts. Consultant, lobbyist, mediator, author, and public speaker, Larry was president of the City Council and Acting Mayor of Boston. An attorney, he specializes in administrative and real estate law. In addition to many articles and columns, Larry's publications include a political autobiography, *Turmoil and Transition in Boston: A Political Memoir from the Busing Era*.

In The Future of Higher Education: The Academy — Resources, Students, and Public Beliefs, **Dorothy Rombo**, Associate Professor, Human Ecology, SUNY Oneonta, addresses perennial problems within a contemporary context. Dr. Rombo's focus centers on three issues threatening higher education — the decline in student enrollments and available resources, the academy's need to balance the potential and peril of technology, and public beliefs critical of the academy. While adaptation is inevitable, she asserts that the preceding problems necessitate priority attention. Her research, widely published, often focuses on "the wellbeing of vulnerable populations especially women, children and recent immigrants especially from Africa" as they encounter marriage, domestic abuse, sexual violence, death, and bereavement.

In Higher Education Faces Many Challenges as We Move through the Current Decade, **Gary Wickham**, UUP Oneonta Officer for Contingents and Veterans Services as well as Academic Delegate, poses tough questions about where we are going, particularly in regard to fiscal and demographic realities. Until recently, a longtime adjunct faculty member of the SUNY Oneonta Department of Communication and Media, Gary is a strong advocate for contingent employees. Possessed of robust common sense, wide contacts, and varied experience, he knows the campus

and the community. Over the years, multiple roles— teacher, soldier, radio station director and on-air personality, restauranter, real estate manager, political candidate, government official, and community activist—have honed his judgment.

In The Future of Higher Education and Information Access, **Nancy Simons**, SUNY Oneonta Reference Librarian Emeritus and UUP Academic Delegate, raises caveats concerning overreliance on digital information in the future of higher education. She argues that the assumption of “ubiquitous and free” digital information may prove more aspirational than actual. Moreover, she articulates perils posed by “Big Brother/Sister in the cloud.” Recipient of the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Librarianship, she is the author of numerous professional publications, including two books and a website with more than three million hits, and a leader in bringing online data to Milne Library. Nancy has also served as UUP Oneonta Secretary, representative to the NYSUT RA and AFT conventions, and *Sentinel* editor, columnist, and photographer.

Article 2:

Three Reforms that Would Transform Higher Education for Comprehensives

Rob Compton, President, UUP Oneonta



Increasingly with the adoption of the customer-based model of higher education, the rise in tuition, and the declining perception in the value of higher education, universities are under challenge. This is especially the case with institutions that are categorized as comprehensive. Comprehensives have an identity crisis. Community colleges and colleges of technology remain focused on career ready programs and transfer to traditional four-year programs. R-1 and R-2 institutions increasingly seek to attract research grants in their professionalization as the primary source of funding. Where do comprehensives fit? Is the bane of the comprehensives purgatory one of identity crisis caught between the ever confused and bifurcated identity between liberal

arts and skills acquisition? What can be done? This article examines the reality of comprehensive institutions and suggests three reforms that would help create a shared sense of vision at comprehensives: something completely lacking today.

Faculty, professionals, and students are tired of the mundane. Liberal arts, majors, minors, cognates, GPA, certificates, job ready skills, micro-credentials, badges, etc., all sound trite and dated. Many faculty at comprehensives wanted to combine teaching and research to craft a career in higher education. Unfortunately, the experience of comprehensives demonstrates a disjuncture between the type of research conducted and the skills that students need. Faculty need direction that re-envision the liberal arts.

Rather than a checklist of courses and areas of expertise, this article suggests three components that create a variegated approach for students and academics to achieve higher levels of learning. The components consist of national service, global-local connections, and student portfolio reflections.

Service

The Church of the Latter-Day Saints have it correct. Two years of service, often abroad, provides the foundation for adult life and a sense of service. The United States has increasingly fallen under a capitalist mantra that leads to narcissism and atomization where students come to share a world view that they are the center of the universe and that the rest of the world exists to serve them. This has clearly happened in higher education as institutions become more tuition finance dependent and emphasize retention and completion rates at all costs. The sense of student camaraderie and belonging becomes erased. Yet, many students tell us how students seek a sense of belonging. Belonging can be found when there is a purpose.

Students should be required to conduct national service for one year after graduating from high school. During the two summers following their first and second years, students will also engage in public service. This service should be linked to two components embraced by higher education: general liberal arts education and work experience. In lieu of a four-year program, all programs for a baccalaureate can then be reduced to three years. The second- and third-year summer programs would be six weeks in length, and in return, provide tuition discounts based on financial need to cover the third and fourth years of matriculation. Professors and students would work on complementary assignments during the summer terms.

Credit seeking approach to education needs modification. The number of dual secondary and college credits should be capped at 12. All too often, students accumulate credits as a “check off” of general education and then subsequently even their “major and minor.” Summer and winter courses would cease to exist under this model and students would graduate with 90 credits earned thereby lessening the need for 10 extra courses being taken to fulfill the requirements for a four-year degree.

What would be the impact of such an approach? Students would become more focused, develop a sense of purpose, and refine their career goals. As an illustration of this, the work experience would create a cohort experience, akin to what the US military draft did years ago. Friendships created and adversity experienced will lead to greater maturity of the students when they first

arrive on campus. Students will have a greater appreciation for the concept of work and career possibilities too.

The Closing Mind

The modern students' preoccupation with the now and immediate is evidenced by their addiction to social media as a means for interpreting the world. This article will not examine the psychosis related to such approach to daily existence. Instead, the concern for higher education is a lack of concern or even empathy for others and a drive toward narcissism and the "me only" culture.

The problems confronting this world, from inequality to global warming to conflict and human rights abuse require students to engage the world. The world is not to be a spectator sport. It requires students to engage with it. In fact, some may argue that the world is filled with trigger warnings. Welcome to the real world. For example, global warming depression must be tackled with action. Information does not set one free. Quite the contrary, it imprisons the mind unless people sense efficacy in their ability to change their existential reality.

The connections between local and global, sometimes referred to as *glocal* needs to become an integral part of the service program noted earlier. The work experience and the assignments that complement the first and second summer should link the two. It also sets the foundation for the third and final year of higher education for a standard baccalaureate degree. Requiring research papers, oral presentations, and scholarship-based projects are integral to higher education.

However, rather than writing five disparate and hurriedly done papers, students would write one research paper per semester that integrates all the courses taken during that semester based on their first- and second-year placements during the summers. This becomes another part of the student's portfolio for employment.

All papers written at the end of the semester under this program would require the integration of global perspectives regardless of whether the summer programs were completed in the United States or abroad. Such an approach allows students to become more empowered to examine issues globally and locally through juxtaposing different conditions and contexts. It also allows students to have greater empathy and understanding of different cultures, systems, and levels of analysis (i.e., personal, local, national, and international).

Conclusion

The passivity of higher education is alarming. Many students attend without direction. Comprehensive institutions are lost between the job ready skills and research. The faculty increasingly try in vain to engage disinterested students through alternative pedagogy in loosely coherent frameworks. Students and faculty have engaged in disengaged learning and teaching without a high purpose. Instead, the emphasis has become recruitment and retention and then graduation. This is a model akin to penitentiary institutionalization that hold the prisoner and the warden captive. A new approach is needed to break down narcissistic behavior within the educational enterprise.

Ninety-nine percent of the world do not know how to pronounce SUNY-Oneonta or SUNY-Oswego, much less its existence in a cacophony of the higher education landscape.

Comprehensives are fighting for their survival. The mundane solutions garnered through the annals of ACE or AAC&U depicting “best practices” developed by “educationalists” will only provide incrementalism and the ho-hum of mediocrity. It’s time to break the old paradigms if you want to survive as a student, faculty member, or institution.

Article 3:

The Need to Rise Above: Public Higher Education in the 21st Century

Fred Kowal, President, UUP Statewide



Fred Kowal: Rallying UUPers and Allies at SUNY Potsdam

Severely underfunded for well over a decade. Attacked from various perspectives for its alleged political bias. Seen as unnecessary for an economically productive and comfortable adult life. Restricted in terms of pursuing aggressive recruitment of students to address longstanding racial inequities in admissions. Having to deal with students who are less prepared for the rigors of college level work than ever before. Working in an environment that depends more and more on contingent labor. Increased tension and hostility among the student body and between various sectors of the professoriate. And on and on....

The challenges and crises those of us engaged in the crucial role of educating young adults in colleges and universities in the U.S. seem to multiply and deepen daily. But the imperative remains: The education of the population to become true citizens of the world, skilled in both critical and creative thinking with a healthy respect for divergent perspectives and the democratic political process. The question is: will this imperative remain given the hostility towards higher education today? Much rides on the answer to that salient question.

There is no question that higher education – specifically but not solely public higher education - is at a crossroads. The arrival at this crucial juncture, one which will, to a large extent, determine what success institutions of higher education will have in remaining not only relevant in

American society, but more importantly, determinative in the survival of a democracy, has been driven by policies pursued by Democrats and Republicans nationally and at the state level.

In New York, former Gov. Andrew Cuomo left no doubt about his hostility to public higher education by proposing and maintaining what amounted to almost 15 years of flat budgets. Though there were slight increases in state spending on SUNY, it did not keep pace with inflation. As a result, SUNY institutions became disproportionately dependent on tuition, fees, and payments for housing and meals. This brought about the dangerous situation where any decline in enrollment would throw colleges into a financial crisis. As of the start of the 2023-24 fiscal year, 19 state-operated campuses in SUNY showed structural deficits.

With deficits, there has come further pressure to increase enrollment which far too often translates into lowering admission standards, while also cutting long term investment in the education enterprise. That means fewer full-time faculty, less professional staff to undergird the institutions, and students facing higher costs. Irrationally, though predictably, it has meant that the state has begun to fund food pantries to help students who cannot afford the meal plans, and support for students who are homeless because they can't afford the housing costs.

Meanwhile, the right-wing has doubled down on its long tradition of attacking colleges and universities as being hotbeds of left-wing indoctrination. This has led to a collapse in political support for and identification with college education for an overwhelming percentage of self-identified Republicans.

What does this mean for the future of higher education--and specifically public higher education? It all comes down to what we as a society want the future to be. Though higher education has seen falling interest and support in the past decade, I remain hopeful that with far-sighted policy, innovative administration at the campus level, and the resources any public good must have, we who are the ones who make education happen in higher education will produce the thoughtful, engaged, productive citizens of the world we desperately need.

First, there must be funding. We must return to the time of the Cold War when higher education was funded out of a concern for national security. Though such an approach also had terrible impacts both on universities and the world at large through the militarization of foreign policy, the silencing of voices in academia who challenged the colonialist foreign policy of the U.S., and the global expansion of U.S. military involvement, at present we would be wise to consider our security and how higher education can and must facilitate its development. Whether it is the worsening climate crisis and its impact on so many areas of our lives and society, or in the deterioration of democratic values across society, public higher education must be invested in to protect our society from the internal threats and environmental threats we've fostered.

Second, we must chart a move to make college education free at public institutions. The fastest route to this goal in New York is to simply expand the excellent TAP program to cover all fees and living costs (housing and food), albeit with a means test that ensures those who have given up on college due to its costs are the first ones to be brought into our institutions. This will increase public support for our institutions, when more families see the value in what we do.

We must also encourage those who have given up on college because of the imagined leftist dominance in our institutions. That will require that all who are engaged in the work of our institutions welcome a true diversity of perspectives in our academic institutions.

Third, college campuses must become central to the communities where we live. As UUP has proposed, public higher education institutions should create the means by which any resident in the localities where such colleges are located have the chance to take one course per year for free, but only with online courses. While there would have to be a cap for such offerings, this initiative would connect our work to the people who often see us as outsiders. Additionally, another UUP proposal would create micro-grids for our communities. Solar or wind energy generated by householders would be stored by the campus and utilized to take care of higher demand periods while also providing that 100% of solar and wind energy generated would be used by the community.

Public higher education can have a bright future and play a crucial role in our society. But change is coming, and we must drive it in the direction of creating more access for members of our society. It would serve as a resource for our communities and society at large and be seen as a public good – which it is! Without such an ambitious direction, we will instead see higher education serve a shrinking pool of students and lose whatever public support it still has. The future is ours to forge, but time is not on our side. Action is urgently needed. I remain hopeful that it will happen.

Article 4:

The Higher Education of Tomorrow will not look like Yesterday's

Alberto Cardelle, President, SUNY Oneonta



In the same year the Oneonta Normal School was founded, 1889, Charles Elliot, the president at Harvard University, said, "...higher education is in a state of flux, grappling with the challenges of modernization and the changing needs of society." Also that year, William Rainey Harper,

who would later become the first president of the University of Chicago, said, "Colleges and universities are in desperate need of reform. The curriculum is too narrow and outdated, and the teaching methods are too rigid. We must adapt to the demands of the modern age."

One must admit that it wouldn't be hard to imagine these opinions being shared today, or, for that matter, during other periods of transition and crisis, including the Great Depression, the post-war surge, the Great Society and civil rights movement, or the 2008 financial crisis.

I bring this up to point out that higher education has always been under constant pressure to transform and evolve along with the changing social context that, in turn, impacts academic interests, learning styles, and social expectations. While higher education continues to grapple with some of the same concerns that it faced over 134 years ago, it is also true the first students who attended Oneonta Normal School would not recognize the educational experiences offered at SUNY Oneonta today. So, in terms of the future, the most certain thing that can be said is that tomorrow will not look like yesterday.

We must also remember that how we experience the future of higher education will depend upon where we "sit." The future will not be homogenous. It will also not be linear. There are a series of common factors that will shape the entire sector; however, the impact of those factors will be highly dependent upon where one teaches, serves, and studies.

Let's look closer at these common factors.

First and foremost is the steady decline in birth rates nationwide and the population loss in certain regions. In our state of New York, the demographers estimate that between 2020 and 2037, the number of high school graduates will have declined by over 35,000 students. ⁱ

Second, in addition to the decline in the number of students, there is a decline in the rate of traditionally college-aged students choosing to attend college. Between 2009 and 2020, the number of college-aged students choosing to enroll at a college or university declined from 70% to 53%. ⁱⁱ

These declines reflect a steady erosion in the public perception of the value of a college education. Since the financial crisis of 2008, when public funding for higher education dropped, students now have to pay a greater portion of the price tag for a college degree out of pocket, ⁱⁱⁱ and the average student loan debt increased from \$20,000 in 2009 to \$37,000 in 2022. This all has led to a steady questioning of the worth of higher education. As a result, the number of young adults who said that a college degree is very important fell to 41% from 74% between 2009 and 2020. ^{iv} Currently, only about 30% of Americans express confidence in higher education across the board. ^v Almost half of American parents (46%) say they'd prefer that their children *not* enroll in a four-year college. ^{vi}

Finally, there is a growth of non-traditional forms of instruction and ways people can pursue various credentials that now compete with traditional offerings of bachelor's and master's degrees. According to the nonprofit group Credential Engine, colleges and universities dominated the national educational credential market in 2018. ^{vii} But just a few years later,

according to a new analysis, of the 1,076,358 micro-credentials identified, more than 50% are now offered by non-traditional education providers, such as businesses and professional organizations. ^{viii}

It is not difficult to imagine how the combination of these factors will critically threaten enrollment at many colleges and universities.

The second part of the equation is where an institution falls in terms of the higher education sector and geography because the impact of the factors listed above will not be equal. For example, models predict that between 2012 and 2029, enrollment at the top 50 universities in the U.S. will actually increase by 14%, while all other four-year institutions will lose 13% of undergraduate enrollment and two-year institutions will lose 14%. ^{ix} The higher education data firm Higher Ed Dive has highlighted that out of the four-year institutions, the most vulnerable are small private colleges (with enrollment of fewer than 2,000 students) that are located in rural areas, because slight shifts in enrollment have a greater impact on their budgets, and they typically don't have large endowments to cushion the blow. ^x Since March 2020, 27 private nonprofit schools or campuses have closed or announced planned closures (all with fewer than 3,000 students), and 18 publics have planned mergers with other campuses. Population migration away from the north to the south has also influenced enrollment, with schools in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Midwest seeing the largest decline in enrollment, in contrast to schools in the South and Southwest where stable or growing enrollment is the norm. ^{xi}

The question is, what are the institutions that are stable and/or growing and are not the top elite institutions or located in areas with high inward migration doing to maintain stability and/or growth?

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in the fall of 2021, of the five institutions with the highest enrollment, four were major online providers: Western Governor's University, Southern New Hampshire University, Grand Canyon University, and Liberty University. ^{xii} These institutions also predominantly focused on working adults as their student populations.

Other institutions have also expanded their portfolios of programs and credentials to attract students beyond the traditional 18-24-year-old. In 2021, Ruffalo Noel Levitz reported that 89% of colleges and universities were focused on growing online graduate enrollment, with 44% looking for growth in professional education and micro-credentials. ^{xiii} The Center for Education and the Workforce reports that the combined number of certificates and associate degrees awarded by colleges each year is similar to the number of bachelor's degrees awarded (two million, with certificates and associate degrees each accounting for about one million.) ^{xiv} Other institutions, far fewer than those expanding, have gone in the opposite direction and narrowed their focus to distinguish themselves from other institutions or have grown unique programs. Institutions with once traditional offerings in the liberal arts now limit their degree programs to very specific professional areas, with the most common focus areas being healthcare and engineering. Others have focused on unique experiences, internships, undergraduate research, service learning, study abroad, and other alternate learning opportunities.

So, we can deduce that the future of higher education will see a landscape with fewer private institutions, smaller public systems (because of mergers), a greater supply of online programs, and altered educational missions. There will be more institutions with broader credential portfolios (including micro-credentials and graduate degrees) and enrolling more adult learners, there will be more specialty schools in healthcare and engineering, and there will be a greater focus on alternate learning experiences.

In a nutshell, the next ten years will not resemble the last ten.

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- i <https://www.wiche.edu/>
 - ii <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-REB-24723> and https://www.reporter.net/indiana/news/will-indianas-economy-fall-off-higher-education-enrollment-cliff/article_4c3a5478-7a57-11ed-859c-0b952287642f.html
 - iii https://www.nea.org/he_funding_report
 - iv <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/05/magazine/college-worth-price.html>
 - v <https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx>
 - vi <https://hechingerreport.org/poll-nearly-half-of-parents-dont-want-their-kids-to-go-to-a-four-year-college/>
 - vii <https://credentialengine.org/resources/counting-u-s-secondary-and-postsecondary-credentials-april-2018-report/>
 - viii [Final-CountingCredentials_2022.pdf \(credentialengine.org\)](#)
 - ix <https://hechingerreport.org/college-students-predicted-to-fall-by-more-than-15-after-the-year-2025/>
 - x <https://www.highereddive.com/news/college-closings-next-year-how-many/690293/>
 - xi <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/closed-colleges-list-statistics-major-closures/>
 - xii <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=74>
 - xiii <https://www.ruffalonl.com/blog/enrollment/using-market-penetration-strategies-growing-graduate-enrollment/>
 - xiv <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/subba/>
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Article 5:
Degradation or Unionization: The Competing Futures of Public Higher Education

Bret Benjamin, Associate Professor of English, University at Albany, and Chief Negotiator for the 2022-26 UUP/NYS Contract



Any concrete discussion of the future of public higher education in the United States must begin with an analysis of the past. Briefly, then, in response to a decades-long period of so-called “secular stagnation” beginning in the early 1970s, a broad bi-partisan turn to fiscal austerity emerged, rung in by the Reagan GOP in the early 1980s, and accelerated by Clinton Democrats in the 1990s. The consequences for public higher education have been dire. Severe reductions in state funding—exactd in wealthy states as well as poor, red states as well as blue—have pressed public universities and colleges into a reactive mode of cost-cutting and the desperate scramble for revenue generation. Most notably, public higher ed institutions have balanced their budgets in three ways: 1) raising tuition and pushing the costs of higher education onto students and families, creating both campus-level dependency on enrollment-driven tuition dollars and previously unimagined levels of student indebtedness, 2) decreasing labor costs by reducing the number and percentage of tenure-line faculty and increasingly relying on underpaid and highly precarious part-time and contingent faculty to provide instruction and support for students, and 3) increasing revenue streams from private sources or public grant funding, restructuring universities to prioritize applied and career-based curricula.

Each of these three responses is regressive, corrosive, and exploitative. Collectively, they have left contemporary public higher education in a state of crisis. Today we stand at what appears to be an inflection point. Either we reverse this half-century of dismantling, or we give up on the promise of affordable, accessible higher education of the highest possible quality.

To put it more starkly, the choice we face is this: accept a hollowed out and exclusive public university or embrace a movement of mass unionization to reimagine and remake an equitable, socially responsive university. Public higher education’s future will either be *degradation or unionization*.

In the one future, then, we face a higher-ed landscape in which the cost of education means that only the wealthiest and most socially privileged have access to higher education. Those who can attend will likely encounter a narrower, more instrumental, and lower quality of education. Consider a university in which the vast majority of courses are taught by contingent faculty who are underpaid, overworked, and structurally prevented from providing the time and care necessary for teaching and research. This will be a university in which the need for student support grows while resources perpetually shrink. Students will find a university in which whole fields of study in the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Basic Sciences have been eliminated or fundamentally restructured, since study in these areas is not associated with a direct career path—a social necessity for students who leave university carrying life-altering debt. Those disciplines that are left will in many cases be appendages to industry, where the costs of job training can be off-loaded from the private sector to the state, and where the curriculum will increasingly be driven by the needs of profit. Where universities include essential public services such as our SUNY hospitals, those services will likely be cut to the bone and distorted by impossible standards of profitability. I do not want to fall prey to an idealized conception of the university as an unequivocal bastion of social progress—it has always reflected the entrenched social hierarchies, prejudices, and inequities of its day. However, it has historically preserved and created fields of knowledge that provide a social good even if they cannot be easily quantified in market value. And the public university in particular has made real if uneven progress in equalizing access to higher education. It is distressing to see these valuable social functions eroding so rapidly—to see the *universe* of human knowledge that has historically been the basis of the *university* narrowed to an instrumentalized role of career preparation, and to see access to higher education restricted to those who can pay or be willing to accommodate themselves to a lifetime of indebtedness.

Is there a less apocalyptic future for those of us who care deeply about public education? I believe so. And given the current landscape of higher education, I see only one pathway to securing that future: *mass unionization across the entirety of the higher ed sector*. I say this because unions have been the only institutions capable of at least moderating the trends outlined above. And, as unionization in the higher education sector has shown recent signs of growth, diversification, and militancy, we are seeing the first glimmers of hope that the declines of the past half-century might be reversed. Unions (including UUP) have begun to achieve wins in increasing state support for public services. Unions (including UUP) are achieving wins in compensation and job security that begin to establish the necessary preconditions for ending the over-reliance on contingent labor. Unions (including UUP) have begun to fight back over tuition increases and join with social movement forces to abolish student debt and imagine tuition-free higher education that is fully funded by the state. Unions (with UUP leading the way nationally) have begun to see the shared interests that unify all higher-ed workers, whether they are academics, professionals, or health care workers. Finally, unions (including UUP) have begun to push back against the instrumentalized restructuring of education. In all these areas higher education unions have achieved gains that dwarf those achieved by non-union actors such as professional associations, shared governance bodies, educational non-profits, etc., (as important as they are). At present these wins are partial, insufficient, and will be fleeting unless protected and expanded. We must never cease to sharpen our critique and build more power. But these wins are a sign that public higher education as we know it and as we would like to know it may have a future.

There are no guarantees here. The specter of decline seems to me as likely (on dark days, *more* likely) than the prospect of union-led regeneration. I know, however, on which side I will stand. If public higher education is to have any kind of future with which I would want to be associated, higher-ed unions—the collective struggle of higher-ed workers aligned with and for students and communities—will be the driving force behind its preservation and remaking.

Article 6:

Think Beyond the Grind: how can we future proof ourselves?

Michelle Hansen, Space Management Coordinator, SUNY Oneonta



As we stand at the intersection of tradition and innovation, the landscape of higher education is undergoing a transformative shift; driven by technological advancements, societal changes, and the lessons learned from recent global challenges. The future promises opportunities for innovation and growth, and from where I sit, it is imperative for institutions including our regional, public - SUNY Oneonta to anticipate and adapt to these changes to ensure a thriving academic community. Having the opportunity to attend many of the strategic visioning sessions this semester, I can summarize the main pillars of discussion into seven different categories.

1. Technological Integration

The future of higher education is intricately tied to technology. As we move forward, classrooms will evolve into dynamic hubs of technological integration. Virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and interactive platforms will play pivotal roles in transforming the traditional lecture format. SUNY Oneonta must invest in cutting-edge technologies to enhance the learning experience, providing students with the skills and knowledge needed for the rapidly

evolving job market. More so, learn to adapt with technology and not be reactionary to it. Help our employees learn and advance just as much as we expect our students to do so.

2. Flexible Learning Models: Beyond Brick and Mortar

The future will witness a departure from rigid academic structures. SUNY Oneonta can embrace flexible learning models that go beyond the confines of traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. Hybrid learning, online courses, and collaborative projects with global institutions can provide students with a more diverse and adaptable educational experience. This flexibility not only caters to the needs of a diverse student body but also prepares graduates for a world where remote collaboration is increasingly becoming the norm. And while we are helping to build our students to be a part of an integrated, hybrid workforce – why can't we also be one? Why is telecommuting a secret word? Why can't we structure our weeks that play best to our individual productivity, helping us be better not only when “in” the office but in all our other roles in life that keep us happy and healthy.

3. Focus on Career Readiness

In the future, the success of higher education institutions will be measured not only by academic achievements but also by the employability of their graduates. SUNY Oneonta can take a proactive approach by strengthening partnerships with industries, expanding, and marketing our experiential learning opportunities, and integrating real-world applications into the curriculum. This ensures that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop the practical skills required to excel in their chosen fields. And I may sound like a broken record at this point, but why can't we continue to invest in our employees in this same way? Conferences, readings, brown bag lunches, but also support to learn something out of “department” to enhance skills to make everyone “career ready” and I would suspect that this could help in retaining employees.

4. Inclusivity and Diversity

The future of higher education demands a commitment to inclusivity and diversity. SUNY Oneonta must continue its efforts to create an environment where students from all backgrounds feel welcomed and supported. This includes diversifying faculty, revising curriculum to incorporate diverse perspectives, and implementing inclusive policies. An inclusive campus not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. How do we diversify our employees here at SUNY Oneonta? If I had an answer to this, I feel as though I could be a successful consultant. Many reasons from downtown/local area not having the “it” factor, to not having a proper place to cut one's hair, the drive into Oneonta showing images of hate speech and anti-LGBTQI, to not enough non-student housing. This is where I suggest that it takes a collective village to help our new and prospective employees to find the corners and niche communities in which they can thrive because yes on first glance our town is not exactly the biggest welcome wagon.

5. Sustainable Practices

As global awareness of environmental issues grows, institutions like SUNY Oneonta have a role to play in fostering sustainable practices. The future of higher education is intertwined with a commitment to environmental stewardship. The university can take the lead in implementing sustainable initiatives, from eco-friendly campus infrastructure to curriculum components that emphasize environmental responsibility. This not only aligns with societal expectations but also

instills a sense of responsibility and awareness in the student body. Our students and the future generations are looking (begging really) for us all to be more active in creating hands on experiences to improve sustainability globally, but can we start here? Our campus is poised to be a great living laboratory that we all can learn from.

6. Mental Health and Well-being: A Holistic Approach to Education

The future calls for a holistic approach to education, recognizing the importance of mental health and well-being. SUNY Oneonta must prioritize the mental health of its students and staff, providing resources and support services that address the unique challenges they face. Integrating mental health education into the curriculum and creating a stigma-free environment for seeking help fosters a community that values the overall well-being of its members. Our students are ready for this shift, and I challenge us to also be louder about what we need as employees for mental health. How can we serve our students from empty plates? If this is the first time you are reading the term – emotional intelligence, I am recommending you take a moment to search/google some of the leaders on the subject and become more aware of your own mental health, how it affects others and you.

7. Community Engagement: Beyond the Campus Borders

The future of higher education extends beyond the campus borders. SUNY Oneonta has the opportunity to deepen its connection with the local community and beyond. Collaborative projects, community outreach programs, and partnerships with local businesses can create a symbiotic relationship that benefits both the institution and the surrounding community. This not only enhances the university's impact but also provides students with valuable real-world experiences. We certainly have seen quite an uptick of these lately, and I would love to see more. Let's look at more local industry, more boards of directors, and more ways to integrate SUNY Oneonta into the greater community.

In conclusion, the future of higher education holds both challenges and exciting possibilities. SUNY Oneonta, with its rich history and commitment to excellence, is poised to be a trailblazer in navigating these changes. I think my last bit of thought here is for each of us, professional or academic, classified staff, police, nursing, dining hall or even administrator – no matter the title or rank, is to shift that mentality to being of a growth mindset, how can we evolve collectively as a university and not as an individual department or group – I think that future looks more promising.

Article 7:

Higher Education and the Internal Colonization Problem

Alex Thomas, Professor, Sociology, SUNY Oneonta



Asked about future challenges to higher education, I contemplate the contradictoriness of our being. For individuals in our charge, higher education can be a transformative bulwark against poverty and a ticket to a middle-class life. At the level of society at large, we benefit from escalating levels of credentialism that accelerate social inequality, a dynamic first described by Randall Collins in *The Credential Society* (1982). One aspect of the contradiction of our existence is our relationship to internal colonization.

Internal colonization is the domination and exploitation of resources and people in less developed areas of a nation-state. Within the United States, this concept has been applied to the racially segregated areas of inner cities where people of color disproportionately serve as a reserve pool of labor stabilizing the wage structure. It has also been applied to the urban power structure of a state displacing thousands of residents of rural communities so their valleys can be flooded and the expropriated water sent to distant cities. Internal colonization requires institutional agents to act on behalf of the “system” to spread dominant ideologies, and very often universities are part of this equation.

When I was in graduate school, the local Marxist rag *Mission Hill News* would report weekly on Harvard Medical School’s encroachment and demolition of chunks of the predominantly Black neighborhood for the use of the university and its supporting corporations. While doing fieldwork less than a mile from Joslin Diabetes Center, an affable woman the homeless men with whom I worked called “Ma” died on the sidewalk of Huntington Avenue for lack of proper diabetes care. Of course, people in Otsego do not have access to that kind of world class care either, but the point is this: if your university is taking from a neighborhood and not giving in return, you work for an agent of internal colonization.

When reserve funds are low and a campus needs to increase revenues, the expansion of enrollment without an increase in housing enables the university to meet its financial goals, but the impact on the local population in terms of housing availability and cost can be devastating. This was a significant issue at UC Berkeley just last year, but California is hardly alone in being

home to universities that expand without regard to the impact on affordable housing, particularly when it hits the poorest among us so much harder than the professionals.

On the topic of the professionals and the staff, consider the use of the local population. When it is time to hire a new administrator or faculty member, a rigorous national search, sometimes paying thousands to specialized search firms dedicated to bringing you the best possible candidate, is conducted. When it comes time to cook breakfast or sweep the floors, any local will do. Faced with such a structural challenge, one should question whether replacing red and blue parking permits with purple is any more than a symbolic gimmick.

In contrast, we should consider our own positions relative to others in our community. To the administration's credit, they are raising the floor for each rank so that the minimum salary for an assistant professor will be \$60,000, which is the 62nd percentile for individual income ([Income Percentile Calculator for the United States in 2022 \(dqydj.com\)](https://dqydj.com/income-percentile-calculator/)). Of course, my own starting salary in 2000 is worth 67,000 in 2023 dollars, so there is still work to be done. This is certainly disappointing for people who have earned a doctorate, a degree held by less than 5 percent of the American population, but we should note the difference between one being underpaid relative to peers elsewhere and being poor. According to the American Community Survey, in 2020 the Median Household Income in the United States was \$64,994, compared to \$56,171 in Otsego County, \$55,565 in the City of Oneonta, and \$51,713 in the Town of Oneonta. These are not apples to oranges comparisons, of course, because households often contain more than one earner and most of them work fifty weeks or more to get that income (that's *normal*).

The problem for higher education is that while we are being deskilled and generally deprofessionalized as a class, most of the workforce experienced our plight a hundred years ago or more. To the extent that academia is seen as an agent of internal colonization, we cannot garner much support from the majority who are worse off than us and, indeed, our advocacy for our favorite causes may even drive others to the "other side" because we are the messengers. It is thus in our interest to find ways to make universities relevant and responsive to the communities in which they are located. If we are to grow a student body, some discussion of where to house them should be part of the equation. If we are to conduct research, perhaps some of it can address regional issues in such areas as social policy, environmental sustainability, and economic development. A university that seeks to be a positive force in its community than a site for Professional-Managerial Class entitlement can not only make a positive impact in its region, it can protect its own interests as well.

Article 8:

SUNY Success Translates to Thriving Communities

New York State Senator Peter Oberacker



I am proud to represent several State University of New York (SUNY) schools and public community colleges throughout the 51st district. SUNY Cobleskill, Delhi, Oneonta, Sullivan, and Ulster are all located within my state senate district. Additionally, SUNY Morrisville has an extension campus in Norwich and both SUNY Broome and Binghamton University reside just outside the district borders. All told, it is safe to say I represent more SUNY campuses than any other state legislator.

Along with representing a high number of SUNY schools, I am also a product of our state university system and know firsthand the value of a SUNY degree. As a proud graduate of SUNY Delhi, class of 1983 with an associate degree in Food Sale and Distribution, I put my education to the test in the “real world” for a number of years. I can say with great affirmation that the lessons I learned served me well and helped me take on a variety of challenges enroute to establishing my own international food ingredient and research development company.

Our campuses have continued to grow over the years and are considered among the finest educational institutions in America. Students leave with a first-class education, extraordinary job skills, and a keen perspective on life.

Vibrant SUNY schools have a ripple effect throughout their host communities. They help support and drive the local economy in so many ways. In many cases the campuses are the community’s top employer, providing thousands with quality, good paying jobs. Campus employees and students also help support local commerce. Restaurants, bookstores, and clothing outlets are just some of the businesses that survive on the SUNY dollar.

The town-gown relationship has been on a significant growth curve in recent years throughout the state. One prime example is the Center for Social Responsibility and Community at SUNY Oneonta. The initiatives developed by the CSRC are helping foster strong relationships between

students, faculty, and the surrounding community. All involved reap the benefits of this connection that helps reshape attitudes on both sides of the coin.

Our SUNY schools have a strong reputation for excellence, and as we work to move our campuses forward and compete with other universities and colleges, there are a few priorities that we must keep working toward. Growing our educational offerings, enhancing our facilities, and ensuring that we continue to employ the best professors and staff.

As a member of the Senate Higher Education Committee, I have pushed back against cuts that will gut our SUNY system and I will continue to press for fair distribution of state resources. Each SUNY campus is unique, and each is crucial.

One of the reasons the SUNY system is successful is because of the diverse programs offered at campuses across the state. We must make certain that each school receives the support needed to grow and succeed. Allocating funding to the campuses that need it the most is definitely a concern that I share with many. Put simply, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link and there is no reason why any one SUNY campus should be undercut to benefit another.

Moving forward, I will continue to have conversations with SUNY presidents, professors, and students to learn what is important to all campus contingencies. This is the knowledge I need to effectively advocate for our shared concerns when the new legislative session begins in Albany. Budget concerns and policy issues will be front and center and I will be working to protect our SUNY schools and ensure that each campus is able to flourish – the benefits permeate throughout our host communities and the entire state.

Article 9:

Commodifying the Life of the Mind

William Scheuerman, Past President, UUP and Professor Emeritus, SUNY Oswego



As a long-time leader in higher ed unionism, I was recently asked to comment on the transformative changes taking place in American higher education. To answer, I reflected on my nearly sixty years in higher education. I was a working-class kid from New York City who went to CCNY, where tuition was free. Yes, free. Free or low-cost tuition was the norm in American public colleges and universities in the 1960s. My expectations of college were probably typical of my generation. I expected to get a good job when I graduated, but college was also an intellectual adventure, a new experience for me. I was exposed to big ideas that changed my life and made learning for learning's sake a value.

Millennia ago, Aristotle posed two kinds of value. The first and most basic he called use value, a product – abstract or concrete – made to fill a need. In other words, a use value is a good produced solely for use. For example, the use value of a coat is to provide protection against the elements. Making the coat is an end in itself. The second kind of value Aristotle called exchange value. Exchange values are products – abstract or concrete – made to be exchanged for something of even more value or benefit. A corporation may make coats, and coats are useful, but the purpose of making them is to make a profit by selling coats above the cost of production. The product, in this case a coat, is a means toward the end of gaining profit. Using these Aristotelian criteria, education is a use value. In strict Aristotelian terms, the purpose of higher education is education itself, but in the real world education has always had exchange value as well. People of my generation could pursue both values: the life of the mind and a job.

In the three decades of post-WWII economic prosperity, higher education was mostly treated as a use value for students that brought significant additional advantages to society. Consider the G.I. Bill that sent the Greatest Generation to college, shortly followed by the expansion of higher learning institutions to meet the influx of Boomers, particularly public colleges and universities with government funding subsidizing free or low tuition costs. That was then, when all levels of government – federal, state, and local – viewed an educated populace as an investment in a future work force not only of teachers, doctors, and engineers, but artists, writers, musicians, and even philosophers.

To understand where higher ed is today and where it's heading, just look at what's happening in my home state, New York. SUNY Potsdam faces a nine-million-dollar budget gap because state legislators with other funding priorities have slowly turned the spigot off funding public higher education, and bearable tuition hikes are insufficient to cover the shortfall. Potsdam's president recently announced retrenchments in fourteen programs, including the prestigious Crane School of Music, because they didn't have sufficient enrollment to pay for themselves. But SUNY isn't alone in cutting programs in the liberal arts. A recent *New York Times* article suggests that most policy makers, educators, and students no longer believe a liberal arts degree is worth the cost and points to the retrenchment of arts and humanities programs in institutions, both public and private, across the United States.

As government funding falls and tuition increases and then increases even more, students faced with rising loan debt understandably come to view college as vocational training, not intellectual exploration. To policy makers, college administrators, students, and employers, education is no longer a value in itself. Vocational programs such as computer science, business, nursing, and communications are rapidly replacing the arts and humanities. The emphasis on job training

rather than intellectual exploration doesn't nurture students' ability to think critically about the world we live in and, instead, intensifies the one-dimensional society Herbert Marcuse wrote about in the 1960s. As the Provost of Miami University of Ohio exclaimed as she put foreign languages, American Studies, Art History and other programs in the arts on the chopping block, "There's so much pressure about return on investment." This focus on ROI is equivalent to that scene in *Barton Fink* where the John Goodman character screams, "I'll show you the life of the mind! I'll show you the life of the mind!" as he burns the building down.

Reliance on exchange value criteria places a premium on accounting standards as the yardstick to determine educational policies. A good example is class size. In terms of exchange value, a lecture hall holding hundreds of students is significantly more productive than a class of a dozen students. The question of which environment is more conducive to learning is irrelevant once exchange value becomes the measure of productivity. In this context, policies leading to large class sizes, the abolition of under-enrolled courses in the humanities, arts and foreign languages, the use of part-time adjuncts to replace tenured faculty, and the rise of on-line learning become understandable.

Also understandable is why students have come to view themselves as consumers. In my student days, every college required a slew of foundation courses in natural and social sciences, language, and the humanities. For many students facing mounting loan debt, the main purpose of attending college now is to get a degree, not an education, so they shop around for programs that provide the most direct route to credentials and a job. This college has a language requirement? I'm going somewhere else, thank you. Similarly, if today's students find new interests in college, they can't easily afford to change majors at the expense of additional time and tuition. And, not surprisingly, in their role as consumers, students often view grades as just one more commodity: I paid, so I'm entitled to that A.

This swing from viewing education as a use value to an exchange value reflects larger changes in America's political and economic structures over the last forty-plus years, including the outsourcing of the nation's manufacturing base, the decline of unions, the subsequent shrinking of the middle class, and the unprecedented rise of economic inequality. In New York state, for instance, where legislators once spent lavishly to build the SUNY and CUNY systems, they've now allocated even more millions into building prisons even as the tax base shrank and told campus administrators to tighten their belts.

This commodification of higher education will not only continue but become more extreme, at least in public institutions. Elite colleges and flagship state universities with huge endowments can afford to focus on education as a value, but the shift from education to training will only accelerate at most public campuses. English departments are fast becoming primarily service programs. Theater, music, and Classics departments are becoming unaffordable luxuries. This trend isn't inevitable. Just look at European countries where learning is still valued and public higher education is, for the most part, still free. But as long as higher education is seen as just another commodity in the United States, the conflagration of the liberal arts will only continue.

Article 10:**Goodbye Alma Mater?***Edward Wesnofske, Academic Delegate***Ed Wesnofske receives 50-year award for service to UUP at Fall 2023 DA**

The road for higher education evolution is about 1000 years long if dated from the first universities in Europe. In those first few centuries of development, simpler cultural and technological factors shaped these institutions as they evolved their modes of organization, operations and value system. Scholars with esoteric learning and students seeking that learning, mostly by personal choice, associated into 'academic communities' often with special privileges of self-regulation granted by the ecclesiastical or secular authorities governing the places where they were to be found.

Technological innovations through the centuries brought modest changes to a model of learning that embraced pursuit of reasoned knowledge and the academic freedom of inquiry into established thought and institutions. The printing press provided wider access to the once esoteric knowledge for students and changed the status of the university master. Economic transformation with the industrial revolution invited the minds of primarily natural scientists to attach themselves to the interests of those organizing the economic machinery of the age, whether the age of peace or war. Yet the ivory tower model of a world of learning and research on a campus relatively distinct and apart from society (town and gown) persisted through these and other social changes.

Today the higher learning in the United States is the focus of national debate in a time of dramatic and fast paced social change. National news media parade an endless number of stories about the curricula, financing and benefits of higher education. With curricula content, the humanities, covering art, literature, languages, philosophy, language and more, are dismissed by critics as impractical and not of benefit to students in their future careers while proponents argue for their role in preparing the person to bring reflection, creativity, alternative perspectives, and personal expression to life's challenges. Critics attack programs and courses with gender, ethnic and racial themes as political or 'woke' indoctrination and demand their end while defenders argue for their validity and a historic balancing of the scales of rightful attention.

With higher education financing discussions, the introduction of large-scale student borrowing as a motivational mechanism to fill classrooms and pay for residential campus facilities is now questioned. Student debt is now \$1.6 trillion. Some debt is incurred by the 30% or so of borrowers who do not finish programs. Debts for 50% of student borrowers in the period 2010-2019 are now greater than the amount originally borrowed. Student loans are seen by some as the initial step on the debt slavery path of modern society: car loans, education loans, credit card consumer debt and mortgages for family homes. Americans seem to doubt the college wage premium from a degree now in greater numbers than ever before and show greater reluctance to pursue the higher learning.

In large measure, these chronic debates, particularly for public institutions, are placed within the framework of instrumental and consumer valuations. Of what benefit is a certain curriculum to the individual and pursuit of life's satisfactions? To the availability of a certain workforce for industry? To the competition of the United States with other international powers? There are no certain answers to these questions. Nor is there any certainty to what may be of educational value for the functioning of democratic institutions or cultural creative expression in American society.

For the future, it will be newer technological, economic and cultural factors changing the individual experience of higher education. Elite institutions, serving affluent and establishment consumers, may be more immune to changes in the residential model of higher education because of social class interests in personal connections, established career pathways and prestige accumulation.

Some straws in the winds of change are to be found in the altered experience of office work as a consequence of the pandemic emergency and the video conference technology that was quickly and somewhat clumsily adapted to provide an alternative work and productive experience. The changed work experience has led to re-evaluation of lifestyle priorities by individuals, increased work from home without the identity reaffirming bonds of peer and supervisory colleagues, and the vacating of office buildings and other costly real estate.

The parallel phenomena for higher education is the re-evaluation of college going by individuals, increased educational consumption away from campuses, less identity reaffirmation through peer bonds and personal academic connections, and the vacating of classrooms and residential resources associated with traditional campus life. The "alma mater" experience, the foundation of alumni loyalty, would shrink in effect.

The new technological factors affecting higher learning will focus on artificial intelligence machinery and modes of media stimulation. This in turn will affect the packaging of content and the organization of the learning enterprise. Traditional definitions of academic specialties will weaken. Interspersed in the process of change will be questions of the appropriate use of synthetic and simulated information and media in providing the proper educational outcomes. “False”, “fake”, “fraud”, “plagiarized” and “copyright violation” will be terms more frequently bandied about in the learning enterprise.

The erosion of economic support for higher education, particularly in the public sector, is coupled with political themes. Student loan relief, workforce needs, and issues of civic equity continue to produce disputes over public funding for education and are not likely to disappear soon. The consequent tuition increases substituting for declining public support and the cost of board will reduce the student numbers and time spent in one residential campus setting away from home locations.

The sum of these trends will be to provide for a less powerful shaping of the person and the portion of their identity allotted to their educational career. The trend toward a shallower educational identity forming experience and toward more superficial bonds in the educational environment raises inevitable questions about the impact of the education offered. The mental health concerns for the student experience are likely to increase.

The processing of information, ideas and values by the individual in contemporary society is increasingly without roots and community bonds. It is the age when “likes”, “views” and “followers” speak for the authority of information and of what is perceived. “Influencers” in social media and celebrity and sports icons of mass media have sway in credentialing thought and values. The immediacy of digital messaging and the imperative to respond habituates the person toward non-reflective thought. The power of reasoned thought, of time to reflect and of knowledge possessed, arguably once the purpose of the embrace of the student by “alma mater”, is becoming eclipsed by the presence of competitive messaging of questionable value.

The cultural tide carrying knowledge, reason and values for American society is flowing to lift other institutions and sectors and ebbing away from the university experience.

Article 11:

Where Do We Go from Here?

Dora E. Polachek, Visiting Associate Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures, Binghamton University



It would be an understatement to say that these are challenging times for higher education. Long before the 2020 pandemic destabilized the status quo even more radically, those of us in the SUNY system saw the direction institutions were moving. For someone like me, who teaches French in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Binghamton University, the first major shock came with the October 2010 headlines announcing that SUNY Albany would be cutting five of its academic offerings, with plans that included phasing out its language programs in French, Italian and Russian, as well as its classics and theater program. In close proximity to West Virginia's announcement of a \$45 million dollar deficit and the resulting plan to eliminate 28 programs (which included world languages), came good news and bad news from SUNY Potsdam. The good news? According to the campus website, actively enrolled students as of September 19, 2023 would be able to complete their degrees before what was to come would take place. The bad news? Because of a \$9 million dollar deficit, SUNY Potsdam was planning to eliminate 14 academic programs—including its bachelor's degrees in Spanish and French. The others that were slated to be phased out over a three-to-four-year period would include bachelor's degrees in art history, arts management, biochemistry, dance, philosophy, public health and theater, plus two bachelor's degrees (B.A. and B.S.) in chemistry and master's degrees in music performance and public health.

There is no doubt about it: the value of the liberal arts in a college education is under the gun. There are many factors causing their demise, but one important dimension that is crucial in any discussion of the future of higher education must involve what we are seeing going on in the public schools that are the primary pipelines for our enrollments in humanities and liberal arts courses. As for those choosing to go into the teaching profession, the numbers speak for themselves. The Pew Center for Research, using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), reported that between 1970 to 2020, bachelor's degrees in education conferred by all postsecondary institutions declined from 176,307 to 85,057. Between 1970-1971 education was the most popular degree for U.S. undergraduates, representing 21% of all degrees conferred. By 2019-2020 (the most recent data available), education degrees represented just 4% of all degrees conferred. It is also interesting to compare the decline in women's interest in obtaining an education degree. As for women's undergraduate degrees in

that year, 36% were in education. Compare that to the 6% that represented education degrees awarded to women in 2019-2020.

How does that translate into what is going on in the public schools? The shortages are dramatic. Music and art teachers often need to commute to several schools as part of their full-time employment requirements. As for world languages, the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified teachers results in some startling hiring practices. This was true even before the pandemic. A personal anecdote that I shared with friends in administrative positions in a variety of public schools came as no surprise to them. It is an incident that has stayed with me ever since it occurred more than 15 years ago. An MAT student in French was about to do her student teaching at a local high school. A few weeks before the student teaching component of the MAT program was to begin, I received a call from the school's assistant principal, informing me that the student had applied to replace another language teacher who had an unexpected emergency necessitating her absence for the rest of the six months remaining in the school year. Unbeknownst to me, my student had listed me as a reference for the position, and so the assistant principal reached out to see if I would recommend the student. I clearly stated that the student would be very good as a student teacher supervised by a certified teacher, but under no circumstance was this student qualified to take over a teacher's position. Can you guess the outcome? The administrator needed to fill the position, and since no other qualified teacher could be found as a replacement, the student teacher got the job.

Shortages have gotten worse since the pandemic, with many teachers choosing to retire. Budget cuts have caused the elimination of many programs in the public schools, including in world languages and the arts. If these students comprise a large portion of our applicants, how can we expect the numbers to grow in these majors? Given the increasing number of students – and parents – who want what they consider “marketable” skills, as well as the politicization of curricula, the banning of books, the questioning by parents of teachers' capacities to educate their children, the future of education hangs in the balance, and that necessarily includes higher education as we know it.

Article 12:

Journalistic collaborations with academia: Models from West Virginia University and St. Bonaventure University

Louis Jacobson, Senior Correspondent with PolitiFact



As a full-time journalist, I cannot speak to the future of higher education with the insights of a long academic career behind me. But I can speak about a way that journalism can partner with higher education in a constructive way — because that’s what I’ve sought to do for the past five years.

Full-time, I am a senior correspondent at PolitiFact, the Pulitzer Prize-winning website that fact-checks statements in politics. I have been with PolitiFact since 2009, writing fact-checks on a wide variety of topics, from economics to the law to military affairs.

However, one of my pursuits for PolitiFact has been to partner with college journalism students — since 2018 with West Virginia University’s Reed College of Media and since 2020 with St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communications. For both universities, I teach undergraduates how to write articles for PolitiFact. Then we publish them on the PolitiFact West Virginia and PolitiFact New York verticals.

The WVU class dates back to PolitiFact’s receipt of a grant after the 2016 presidential elections that enabled us to reach out to people living in red states, where the idea of fact-checking, and the media, are often held in low regard. Some of us went to Oklahoma and some to Alabama, while a colleague and I went to West Virginia. There, we met with officials from WVU and were impressed by the Reed College’s new Media Innovation Center, and especially with their desire to provide their students with real-world journalism experience. We ended up striking a deal by which I would teach a semester-long class through a combination of in-person and virtual instruction.

Typically, our semester begins in late summer, with a class-length “boot camp” in which I explain how the reporting, writing, and editing process works at PolitiFact. I demonstrate what types of claims are good ones for fact-checks, and why. Then, the students help find claims to check; the claim needs to have a connection to West Virginia, either through the speaker, the subject matter, or the location where the claim was made.

I generally spend about four days on campus in late summer to meet the students face to face. Once we have enough claims in hand, I assign them and sit down with the students individually to provide advice on how to check the claim — how to do preliminary research on the internet, which sources to contact, how to write an effective query email, and how persistent to be if sources don't answer the inquiry immediately. As the reporting and writing process continues over several weeks, I regularly address the class remotely and stay in contact with the students via email as they have questions.

Eventually, the students write their fact-check. Once their draft has been sufficiently edited for PolitiFact format and style, I visit the class via Zoom and every student reads their peers' fact-check in preparation for a "chamber" — PolitiFact's signature process in which we determine a rating.

Members of the class read the text, suggest changes to questionable wording and typography, and then vote privately on what they think rating should be, on our six-point scale from True to Pants on Fire. My co-professor — associate professor of journalism Bob Britten — tallies up the class' totals, we all discuss what we think that rating should be.

Once a final editor from PolitiFact national's staff reviews the story, we publish it on the PolitiFact site under the West Virginia tab.

So far this semester, we have published 19 West Virginia-related fact checks — at least one by each of the 18 students in an undergraduate class.

This year, our crop of fact checks included statements for and about Gov. Jim Justice, Senators. Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito, and Reps. Carol Miller and Alex Mooney. Notably, this year, the class fact-checked six statements either from WVU's administration, including President Gordon E. Gee, or the faculty senate, which approved a vote of no confidence of Gee following heavy budget cuts that made national news.

The St. Bonaventure class, which trades off semesters with WVU in the spring, is structured in a largely similar way, though this operates more like an honors seminar, and students can take it for more than one year in a row.

These classes provide a series of interlocking benefits. They provide training in journalism, and particularly the subspecialty of fact-checking, for the next generation of reporters and editors. Students get to see their work published in a national media outlet, and one that can be read by the public for free. And a state like West Virginia with a declining corps of local reporters gets a shot of accountability journalism. (We have sought to share our reporting for free with media outlets in the state, though these have waxed and waned.)

PolitiFact — and its parent, the St. Petersburg, Fla.-based Poynter Institute for Media Studies — allows me to spend part of my time on the job teaching these classes, the university gets my expertise for a small stipend and some travel expenses. This gives it an outsized impact for a small monetary investment. Several of our students have gone on to careers in journalism,

including Douglas Soule of the Tallahassee Democrat, Patrick Orsagos of the Associated Press, and Duncan Slade of West Virginia's Mountain State Spotlight.

Both of the programs I teach are small, but they are replicable elsewhere. And if they can be followed in other places, they could help both journalism and academia survive in difficult times.

Article 13:

The Future of Higher Education: A Union Perspective

Shirley Clark, Acting President, UUP Oneonta



At the most recent United University Professions (UUP) Delegate Assembly, our union celebrated its 50th anniversary. It is mind blowing to think about how the world and our work has changed over the past 50 years, which causes one to think: how will the next 50 years change our world and our work? How best can we, our higher ed institutions, and our union adapt to the coming changes and ensure success in the next 50 years?

It is clear that the future of higher education is going through a period of monumental and multiple transformations. For example, we have seen some of the effects through the closure of several long-standing institutions of higher education. Over the years in New York, we have witnessed the closing of many private colleges, some that shocked and shattered communities, others that were foreshadowing. Here is just a partial list of colleges over 2 decades: Globe Institute of Technology, Dowling, Briarcliffe, College of New Rochelle, Cazenovia, Medaille University, and now The College of Saint Rose. Within the State University of New York (SUNY), it has just been announced that SUNY Potsdam and Fredonia will cut several academic programs. I shudder to think about what the city and town of Oneonta would look like without SUNY Oneonta. It is clear that we all need to consider what the future of higher education could look like in order to best position SUNY Oneonta and our union for the years of transformation to come.

In these uncertain times, SUNY and UUP must remain vigilant. Remember, we have engaged in monumental and instantaneous change in our recent memory. Faculty and staff were able to adapt, on a moment's notice, to the changes presented during the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to on-line learning. We may be forced to make similar sweeping changes to our work in the coming years. The rapidly emerging Artificial Intelligence (AI) boom in the nation presents some challenges and opportunities. UUP and other unions will do everything in their power to ensure that employers will not use this emerging technology to replace human resources, causing massive job loss, but that is a legitimate fear. However, we cannot operate in a fearful manner. UUP and other unions must look for opportunity as AI inevitably changes the world around us.

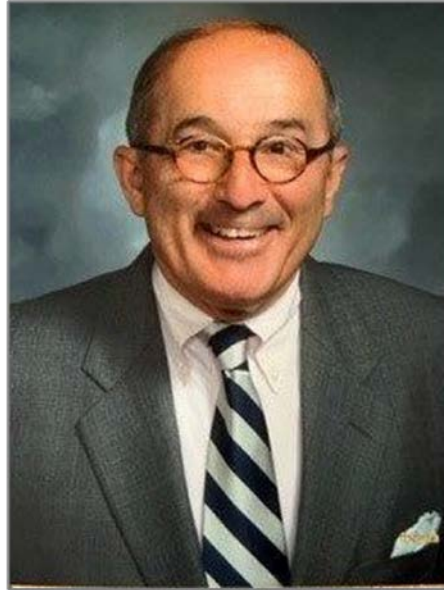
As a UUP member, I am fortunate to be part of the largest higher education union in the nation. However, unions also must remain vigilant and understand the challenges that come with new technologies, continue to look for ways to embrace them, and harness them for continued growth. I believe we have the resources and talent to expand our union. Our ability to communicate with each other, and thereby support each other, has never been greater. There was some discussion at the recent UUP Delegate Assembly about establishing new affiliations. From my perspective, UUP already has powerful and beneficial affiliations. From NYSUT at the state level to our AFT and NEA national education affiliates, all the way through to the AFL-CIO, union of unions. I don't see how we can improve by adding new relationships, rather we should seek to strengthen existing relationships to better support each other. On our campus, we are starting to see the fruits of our affiliate relationships as well as our adaptation to new technologies. UUP statewide has set up a membership database and begun training chapter officials on the software. I have been fortunate to receive this training myself. Our chapter has been working closely with our UUP Organizer Lydia Brassard, Membership Specialist David Banks, and NYSUT Labor Relations Specialist Chris Sielaff to coordinate efforts and outreach to campus employees within our bargaining unit. As we expand our reach, there are exciting new technologies, such as Union Builder, Action Network, and Hustle, that we may utilize to ensure that our contact with union members will be more consistent, meaningful, and secure.

With all of that said, no technology will ever replace the most important part of our union: our members. UUP simply cannot continue to exist without members who are actively engaged in union affairs. If you are interested in the future of your job, your UUP collective bargaining agreement, and simply your union, you **MUST** get involved. I started as a Professional Delegate, then assumed the role of Vice President for Professionals this past June. When I started, I didn't know much about UUP or how unions operate. Fortunately, there is a team of supportive and experienced leaders within our Chapter who have helped me learn and grow into these roles, like our past President and current Secretary Bill Simons. I encourage you to contact a chapter leader today and find out how you can become more involved. You are all invited to our monthly membership meetings and Executive Board meetings; they are open to any interested member who wishes to attend. We have tons of other tasks and functions which members can get involved with and support. I am still learning and invite you all to learn with me as we grow our union and take UUP to the next level.

One thing is clear and certain: unions and higher ed institutions must embrace the changes coming our way in order to ensure opportunities for future generations. If we all work together in this direction, we will be ready to succeed in the coming 50 years and beyond.

Article 14:**UMASS**

Lawrence S. DiCara, Attorney and Former Trustee, University of Massachusetts



Greetings from Massachusetts, where our primary exports are brains and cranberries. In Massachusetts higher education is an important economic engine, perhaps more than in any other state. Boston alone welcomes 150,000 students each fall. Most Americans know about Harvard and MIT and Boston College and other schools which beckon and welcome the children of the rich and the powerful.

The real economic engine, however, is the University of Massachusetts (“UMASS”), on whose Board of Trustees I served a generation ago. Although I cannot prove it, I think it is fair to say that UMASS is the largest employer in Worcester County, Bristol County, Franklin County and Hampshire County; those last two are relatively small. Prior to serving on the Board, I was familiar with the important role that UMASS played, given that I served as an adjunct professor of history and government at the Boston campus.

The original land grant university was the Amherst campus - it was the “A” for Agricultural, just as MIT was the “M” for Mechanical. It was a small school until after World War II when emerging Democratic working-class majorities in the House and Senate in Massachusetts started spending money on the campus.

The Boston campus was created in the 1960s. The medical school campus was created a decade or so later, in part because of the refusal of existing private medical schools to enroll additional students who were Massachusetts residents. The first case I studied at the Kennedy School almost 50 years ago was on the creation of the medical school.

One of the proudest accomplishments of my tenure on the Board of Trustees was our expansion to five campuses. UMASS now is alive and well and thriving in Lowell in the northern part of the state and in Dartmouth on the South Coast. We are truly a statewide university.

This economic boost is not only about the jobs of academics and support staff, but also about the research generated on all five campuses. The most important fact, however, is that the graduates of UMASS, unlike those of the other institutions mentioned earlier in this essay, tend to stay in Massachusetts. They buy houses, raise families, coach Little League, etc.

Massachusetts is lucky to have so many institutions of higher learning and we are especially fortunate to have a great state university. Sadly, UMASS does not receive the kind of public support that some other states provide their state university, in part because of history. Furthermore, given the rapidly reducing number of high school graduates, it may be time for higher education in Massachusetts to revisit which campuses are needed and should be fed and which campuses are relics of a prior era.

Article 15:

The Future of Higher Education: The Academy- Resources, Students, and Public Beliefs

Dorothy Rombo, Associate Professor, Human Ecology, SUNY Oneonta



If you are reading this and think that I am not qualified to write this piece you are probably right. I am not steeped into the literature regarding higher education. I do not regularly read *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or any such writing. Some of things that have piqued my interest are the anti-higher education sentiments coming from political figures, comedians, and various media outlets. I group the issues challenging higher education under three headings: 1) incoming resources and students, 2) the internal machinations of the academy, and 3) public beliefs and

attitudes. With resolve to adapt smartly, the academy is centrally placed to perform its role of producing human resource capital to sustenance humanity.

Students and resources

While attrition after enrollment in college is a longstanding problem nationally, it is a more recent phenomenon in New York State. It is estimated that 62% percent of high school graduates enroll in college, but only about 35% manage to complete their bachelor's degrees. The traditional college student population is projected to drop. This has implications for resources, including a reduction in government funding. The impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated the propensity to drop out of college more so among minority students. According to a 2023 Gallup poll based on 2022 data, remaining enrolled in college has grown more problematic for students. Hispanic students struggle to stay in college more than others. Fifty percent of Hispanic students found it "very difficult" or "difficult" to remain enrolled in their program as compared to 40% of Blacks and 37% of Whites.

The academy

The academy is faced with the challenge of attracting, enrolling, and preventing attrition with limited resources while figuring out how to secure funding from the government. Colleges and universities must also create a futuristic curriculum to meet employability demands. The place of technology in pedagogy offers both opportunities and challenges. First, there is need for faculty to keep acquiring skills applicable to an ever-evolving technology. Moreover, institutions are faced with the dilemma of effectively and ethically incorporating technological developments. Some of the technologies have shifting capabilities like Artificial Intelligence. Resources including time are required to facilitate faculty in keeping up with skills. Faculty need incentives to create the interest in learning new skills and adopting them in the classroom. The academy must be aware of what the public, politics, employers, and other stakeholders are saying and/or demanding to respond appropriately.

The process of teaching and learning is also limited from within. A professor of 40 years observed that there has been a gradual shift from rigid scheduling for teaching and learning as students purport not to have time for regular attendance due to other commitments with jobs, employment interviews, medical appointments obligations to families, friends, and pets. When in class, attention is often paid to cell phones, including leaving the classroom to make or take calls. Also, students appear to take more bathroom breaks.

Politics and higher education

On one hand, a college education is hailed for the opportunities it prepares the learners to take, but there are also dissenting voices who discourage college attendance. Currently, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) needs vigilance to protect quality education from political onslaught. Florida, Texas, Ohio, and Tennessee are using legislation to prohibit content by limiting freedom to learn, teach, and conduct research. What goes around comes around, and New York is therefore vulnerable to such political endeavors. Recently, after groups of Harvard students signed memorandums regarding the Israel-Hamas war, Bill Maher presented a 9-minute response in a new rule segment titled "Don't go to college". He berated institutions, especially elite universities, for allegedly doing a disservice to students through indoctrination.

Analysis

I will apply the two principles of human ecology to examine how the academy is achieving its goals based on what happens externally. First, consider the interdependency between the academy and the external factors that facilitate higher education. Entering students and adequate funding are essential, even as the political environment impacting higher education is increasingly hostile. The question for the academy is how to address and achieve enrollment and secure funding for the foreseeable future. The academy must also respond to the politics of higher education, especially the dissenting voices. This has implications for enrollment as well as the daily mandate of the academy.

The second principle is the adaptability of higher education in response to changes both within as well as outside the academy. The questions of relevance and sustenance pose challenges for the academy, but there are also great opportunities for growth.

What can the academy do?

A higher dropout rate for non-Asian and non-white students from higher education institutions has been a long-term phenomenon, but recent data also shows an anticipated drop among traditional students. The academy should invest in retaining those who are likely to drop out. How? By first establishing the profile and reasons for dropping out and then investing in finding lasting solutions, thereby increasing the enrollment that is diverse, inclusive, and reflective of population.

To remain competitive as we seek to meet the desires of students, we must not lose sight of the worthiness of the pursuit of learning and engagement at the altar of expediency.

Equity and fairness should be centered on addressing challenges as they might just be the solution to sustaining higher education. Equity and fairness in higher education have multiple mandates — increase enrollment, provide students with a quality education, compensate faculty and staff fairly, distribute resources based on need and merit, demonstrate concern and sensitivity to needs of all components of the academy. The preceding are ethically and pragmatically needed.

Conclusion

The challenges that the academy face reflect present realities. Adaptation by the academy is inevitable, but, for sustenance's sake, reform needs to proceed in ways that address new and perennial problems.

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Article 16:**Higher Education Faces Many Challenges as We Move through the Current Decade**

Gary Wickham, UUP Oneonta Officer for Contingents and Veterans Services



Higher education faces many challenges as we move through the current decade, and one of the most prevalent is financial. We only need to look to our nearby private colleges to see the extent of this challenge. Cazenovia College, a little better than 200 years old, survived fires, the Great Depression and world wars. In the end the small school lacked the endowment needed to go on and closed its doors following the May commencement. In 2021, Wells College in nearby Aurora faced similar problems, and was placed on probation by Middle States (accrediting agency) mainly on the basis of financial instability. Hartwick, Keuka and Elmira Colleges all face the same financial problems.

Several years ago, Mt Ida College in Massachusetts closed. U Mass Amherst took over the campus for future use and Mt Ida students were guaranteed a slot at U Mass Dartmouth. While the Amherst Campus is close by Mt Ida, U Mass Dartmouth is not. Could SUNY employ a similar plan? A SUNY education is certainly a bargain by comparison to local private colleges.

Factors brought about by the recession and the Covid 19 pandemic have resulted in enrollment problems in many of our sister SUNY Colleges. Looking at several SUNY schools, including Geneseo and Potsdam, we see this. Decreases in enrollment at these schools are resulting in cuts to majors and other programs. How these schools survive is anybody's guess. Cuts in majors and programs will likely result in elimination of employees. The fallout goes far beyond the campuses and affects the local economy as well. This is not unlike closing a military facility, where jobs are eliminated, and entire economies collapse. Here in New York, we can look to the closings of Air Force bases at Plattsburgh and Rome. It took many years for these areas to recover.

SUNY schools need to provide good value in education. The measure of this is how many find employment in their field of study after graduation.

We need to look at student success beyond graduation. Are we preparing students for the real working world? One of the greatest rewards of my teaching career was to hear from students who actually found enjoyable work in the media. We find ourselves in competition not just with traditional programs, but now with vocational programs as well. Nearby SUNY Delhi regularly turns out registered nurses, plumbers, electricians etc. These program graduates are all but guaranteed decent to high paying jobs.

So how does this translate to the future for contingent academics? As full-time courses fail to fill at registration, full time academics will be allowed to “bump” contingents. This is uncharted territory. A conversation last week with a contingent indicated this is already happening. While the new contract certainly provides for increased adjunct pay over its length, one can only wonder if these same adjuncts will keep the classes they’ve taught for many years or will be “bumped” to fill someone else’s schedule.

For many years I witnessed adjuncts teaching at Oneonta, and then heading to Delhi and/or Cobleskill to teach several other courses just to make ends meet. Are we headed there again? We’ll know soon.

Article 17:

The Future of Higher Education and Information Access

Nancy Simons, UUP Oneonta Academic Delegate and SUNY Oneonta Reference Librarian Emeritus



The ability to readily access information remains key to the future of higher education. The World Economic Forum (WEF) views its mission as "improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas". In February 2022, the WEF predicted four trends they foresee will shape the future of higher education. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/four-trends-that-will-shape-the-future-of-higher-education/>

The WEF assumes digital information will be "ubiquitous and free." Scholarly, peer-reviewed digital information suitable for college level research is neither ubiquitous nor free. SUNY Oneonta pays substantial fees to offer students and faculty access to databases such as *JSTOR*, *Academic Search Complete*, and *ScienceDirect*. The "free" scholarship originates with the academic faculty who research and write for their own satisfaction as well as to meet the criteria for tenure and promotion. Faculty often do research and writing without compensation beyond their salaries. The preliminary articles go through the process of peer-review by generally unpaid academic specialists in the field. The articles, compiled into journals, then databases, are purchased by libraries. This is not to imply there are no "free" databases of books and journals provided by libraries and other institutions (although someone generally pays salaries, hardware and software costs, etc.) Examples include *Digital Public Library of America*, *Project Gutenberg*, *Open Library* as well as open access journals and databases such as *arXiv.org* and *Directory of Open Access Journals*. The WEF asserts that digital information will be "ubiquitous and free"; paradoxically, the cost for a company to send a delegate to the annual WEF meeting in Davos, Switzerland is about \$120,000.

Prior to the widespread implementation of the internet, CD-ROMs supplied access to scholarly library databases. For archival purposes, solid gold CDs offered what seemed at the time a permanent storage solution. Who has the hardware to read a CD now, or in 50 years? Can we assume that the digital formats of today will be accessible tomorrow? Will data be encrypted or compressed and require specialized software? Will the zettabytes of junk clogging the internet make finding research materials to supplement that found in library databases the equivalent of finding the proverbial needle in a haystack? Decades in the past librarians carefully constructed searches on databases such as *Chemical Abstracts* prior to connecting to the internet since the vendors charged by the minute (just like the old-fashioned telephone). Will expensive internet connections only accessible to those with deep pockets return? In the Wild West of the internet, which is constantly bombarded by viruses, spam, and malware, it is not inconceivable that IT will make cyberattacks so efficient and undetectable that the internet we in the US know today may disappear and be replaced by curated sites and domains only available within a bubble.

Another trend foreseen by those at the WEF is "Learning from Everywhere". Most models of the future of higher education rest on the assumption that our forthcoming world will be able to deliver high speed, dependable, reasonably priced internet connections for all. Currently, upstate New York is a digital desert in rural areas that lack internet and cell phone service. In a rosy view of the future, satellite services such as *Starlink* will encompass the world and fill the internet service gaps. Yet, a *Starlink* satellite only has a lifespan of about 5 years before it burns up upon reentry to the atmosphere. According to a recent report by the FAA, "with the thousands of satellites expected to reenter, even a small amount of debris can impose a significant risk over

time.” A geomagnetic storm in 2022 fried more than 3 dozen *Starlink* satellites. Satellites supply much more than internet connectivity, and include GPS services, military reconnaissance, and broadcasting. Elon Musk allegedly ordered his engineers to turn off his *Starlink* satellite network over Crimea last year to prevent a Ukrainian drone attack on Russia’s naval fleet due to his concerns about triggering WWIII. Russia (and other entities) also have the technology to disrupt satellites. Who is in control? What if someone perceives us as the “bad guys”?

As we enter a cycle of increased solar activity, we in upstate New York might observe stunning Northern Lights. Yet, an upsurge in solar activity also increases the risk for solar storms. In 2012, a massive CME (coronal mass ejection) just missed the earth. The power grid, satellites, fiber optic cables with copper sheaths, and GPS signals remain vulnerable. Catastrophists venture that a rare CME such as the 1859 Carrington Event could disrupt the electrical grid for years. Dr. Peter Becker, a scientist working on a CME prediction model which would allow time to prepare, predicts there is about a 10% chance over the next decade "something really large is going to happen that could potentially wipe out the internet."

Most of us are vaguely aware that Big Brother/Sister in the cloud may be watching us. For example, Google runs a massive data mining operation. Amazon’s Alexa smart speakers can pose a threat to privacy due to their always-on listening feature which can record conversations without the user’s knowledge or consent. And anyone using New York State equipment (for example, an office computer) for anything other than work should be aware that New York State administrators retain the authority to access a New York State owned computer without the faculty members knowledge or consent (yes, it has happened).

As soon as these words are sucked into the universe of bytes, the digits will be reprocessed and spit out by software such as Google, ChatGPT and their successors; unless, of course, a natural or unnatural event disrupts the flow.

Addendum. I wish to acknowledge the student tuition dollars and taxpayers of the State of New York (including the approximate 20 percent of NYS tax revenues generated by Wall Street bonuses) who supplied the funding for my retirement which delivers the income for me to author this article for free.

Epilogue:

Bill Simons, Editor

The founding of Harvard in 1636, under religious impetus, marked the genesis of American higher education. Across the centuries, competing visions about the core mission of higher education emerged. Disputants have debated the primacy of civics, liberal arts, research, and utilitarianism. The Cold War linkage between science and national security, the imprint of Western civilization in pluralistic education, and now managing AI has also elicited conflicting projections about the academy’s future.

Diversity, both demographic and ideological, animates contemporary dialogue. Both disciplinary curriculum and campus climate have sparked recent controversies. This is particularly apparent in the Ivy League, evidenced by the Congressional testimony of three university presidents who hesitated to term advocacy of annihilating Jews as hate speech. Adversarial debate between proponents of unfettered expression and tolerance ensued. As *Sentinel* contributors remind us, however, the future of higher education necessitates examination of a myriad of issues.

Our commentators have significantly advanced discussion about the future of higher education. While their conclusions are divergent, preliminary, and incomplete, they present important, ambitious, and thought-provoking interpretations. The future of higher education is a moving target, not subject to closure. The key element is informed engagement, a quality that these essays share and encourage. UUP Oneonta, committed to remaining part of this evolving dialogue, thanks its contributors.

Perhaps a future issue of *The Sentinel* will focus on accessibility of health care, dental service, and housing in our region. UUP Oneonta and Management have had an initial discussion about collaborating on a survey related to these areas. These availabilities, or lack thereof, influence the ability of SUNY Oneonta to attract and retain talented employees, and that in turn impact the strength of our programs and their appeal to students. Moreover, the accessibility of such services, basic to the quality of life, underlines the relationship between campus and community conditions.

UUP Oneonta welcomes comments and reactions from readers about the future of higher education as well as ideas about subsequent *Sentinel* explorations.

UUP Disclaimer:

Statements made in UUP Oneonta publications do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UUP or any of its statewide representatives. To go to the UUP Oneonta Chapter website, go to the following link at <http://www.oneontauup.org/> The UUP Oneonta Chapter website is constantly updating, evolving, and expanding. It contains information about member benefits and many other important topics. Contact us at oneonta@uupmail.org

The State UUP website is located at <https://www.uupinfo.org>



UUP Oneonta Chapter- Executive Board Contact List:

Executive Board Officers:

Shirley Clark- Acting President and Vice President for Professionals
clarksa12@gmail.com Campus Ext. 2029

Robert Compton- President- on leave Spring 2024 **robert.compton@oneonta.edu**
Campus Ext. 3048

Mark Ferrara- Vice President for Academics **mark.ferrara@oneonta.edu**
Campus Ext. 2427

William Simons- Secretary **william.simons@oneonta.edu**

Richard Tyler- Treasurer **richard.tyler@oneonta.edu**

Gary Wickham- Officer for Contingents and Veterans Services' Officer
gary.wickham@oneonta.edu

Lorraine Tyler- UUP Chapter Officer for Retirees
loraine.tyler@oneonta.edu

Labor Relations: Chris Sielaff- NYSUT Labor Relations Specialist Assigned to UUP Oneonta **chris.sielaff@nysut.org**

Grievance Officer: Geoff O'Shea- Appointed Grievance Officer
Geoffrey.oshea@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3257

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer: Penina Kamina- Appointed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer **Campus Ext. 3894**

Health and Safety Officer: Ron Bishop- Appointed Health and Safety Officer
Ron.Bishop@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3198

Disabilities Officer: Dawn Hamlin- Disabilities Officer
Dawn.Hamlin@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3554

Membership Development Officers: **Matthew Unangst**
Matthew.Unangst@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3490; **Rachel Germain**
rachel.germain@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 2158

Academic Delegates:

Lorraine Tyler- Academic Delegate loraine.tyler@oneonta.edu

Richard Tyler- Academic Delegate richard.tyler@oneonta.edu

Nancy Simons- Academic Delegate cannonns@yahoo.com

William Simons- Academic Delegate william.simons@oneonta.edu

Ed Wesnofske- Academic Delegate wesnofer@oneonta.edu

Michael McAvoy- Academic Delegate michael.mcavoy@oneonta.edu
Campus Ext. 3533

Penina Kamina- Academic Delegate penina.kamina@oneonta.edu
Campus Ext. 3894

Gary Wickham- Academic Delegate gary.wickham@oneonta.edu

Joseph Baldwin- Academic Delegate baldwjc@oneonta.edu

Achim Koeddermann- Academic Delegate achim.koeddermann@oneonta.edu
Campus Ext. 3082

Professional Delegates:

Jeri Anne Jerminario- Professional Delegate jerianne.jerminario@oneonta.edu

Shirley Clark- Professional Delegate clarksa12@gmail.com

College Review Panel: **Scott Segar- Chair- College Review Panel**
Scott.Segar@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3414 **Aimee Swan- College Review**
Panel Aimee.Swan@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 2029

Penina Kamina- Member of the following UUP Statewide Committees: Black Latina Faculty and Staff Legislative Concerns, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Future of Public Higher Education penina.kamina@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3894

Linda Drake- Director of Community Service Linda.Drake@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 2633

Dawn Hamlin- Disabilities Officer Dawn.Hamlin@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 3554

Paul Bischoff- Teacher Ed Task Force Paul.Bischoff@oneonta.edu Campus Ext. 2613

UUP Oneonta- 2024 Spring Semester Chapter Office Hours:

Chapter Assistant: Teresa DeSantis

Office Hours: Monday through Thursday, 11:45 AM-4:00 PM

Office: IRC 105

Phone: 436-2135

Email: oneonta@uupmail.org