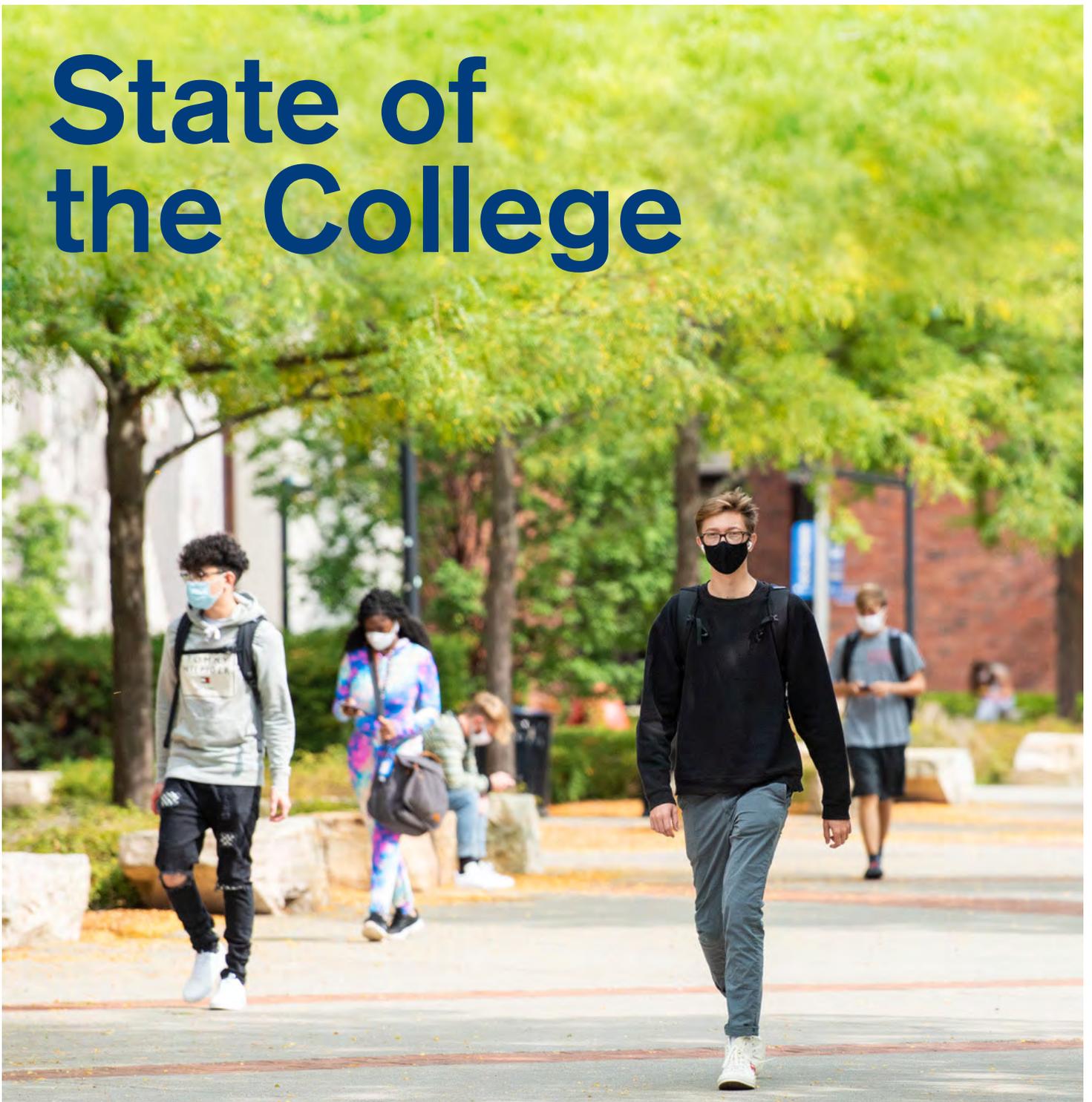


# State of the College



Donald P. Christian, President  
August 23, 2020





President Donald P. Christian

2020

# State of the College

Let's pause to remember the lives lost to the pandemic and to racial violence throughout our country.



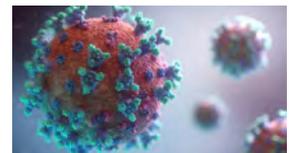
I have known for months that I would present this address virtually, instead of sharing physical space with colleagues, catching up and sharing news, and welcoming all students on campus. Launching the year this way is unsettling, but emblematic of a new world we must embrace for now.



I am sensitive to how long anyone should reasonably be expected to listen to a virtual address, so expect a shorter speech today!

## THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our work at a scale for which normal planning and governance processes are inadequate. How we keep SUNY New Paltz moving forward on a positive, upward trajectory during a pandemic, a state budget crisis, and long-delayed urgency for racial equality is our unprecedented challenge.



I turned to literature to frame our current circumstances and how we move forward. In J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," two protagonists, Frodo and the wizard Gandalf the Grey, are talking. Frodo says, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." The wizard Gandalf responds, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times." Gandalf goes on, "But that is not for them to decide.



All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

That exchange surely captures that there are things we can control and things we cannot during this historic time.

“... to decide what to do with the time that is given to us.”

That phrase helps us move beyond loss and despair to a sense of hope, commitment, and purpose to guide us through the coming year. It builds on the resilience this community demonstrated so well this spring and as we planned for a fall semester unlike any we have seen or would want. That resilience and dedication of this community will be called upon as we continue to provide high-quality education for our students, sustain the sense of community we value so much, and continue our public mission – all in a changed world.



## RACISM IN AMERICA

Beyond COVID-19, white America has belatedly awakened to the racism, white supremacy, and racial injustice and violence that has been a regular and routine part of life among black and brown Americans for centuries. We recognize the pain from the delay in that recognition. To borrow from the title of a recent article by Ibram Kendi, “this may be the end of denial.” Racism has been long embedded in our society and institutions, including colleges and universities like ours.

How do we use the time that is given us to delve deeply into how position, privilege, and tradition drive how we function? How do we act with a new sense of urgency to becoming the inclusive institution that we aspire to be? This summer, we listened to students, alumni, and employees talk about their experiences and their ideas for change, and we shared our commitment and efforts toward this work. Our students are returning with clear expectations for change, and this work will be a dominant theme in our institutional life. In the words of another college president, this is a movement, not a moment. That movement will require our attention and collective energy. We must continue to listen – and we must also act. I will speak more about this work shortly.



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How do we use the time that is given us to delve deeply into how position, privilege, and tradition drive how we function?

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEW COLLEAGUES



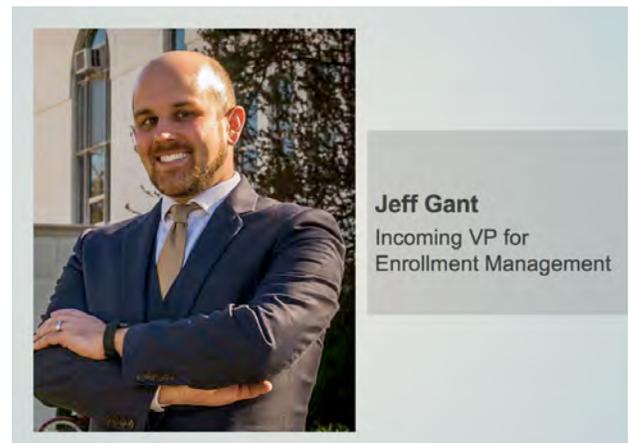
I enjoyed meeting our new faculty and staff virtually this week, and again want to welcome you to our community. We are exploring ways to introduce our new colleagues virtually, even as we wish we could do so in person as in normal years. Know that we value all that you will bring to our students and our community.

I'll make some administrative introductions. Dr. Rene Antrop-Gonzalez joined us in June as Dean of the School of Education, coming from Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he was Dean of the School of Urban Education. His academic background is in Spanish, Teaching English as a Second Language, and Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Bilingual Education. Welcome, Rene!

Jeffrey Gant will join us on January 1 as our new Vice President for Enrollment Management. Jeffrey is currently director of undergraduate admissions at Montclair State University in New Jersey. We delayed this transition in the hope that we will resume some sense of normalcy before the spring semester starts.



**René Antrop-Gonzalez**  
Dean of Education



**Jeff Gant**  
Incoming VP for  
Enrollment Management

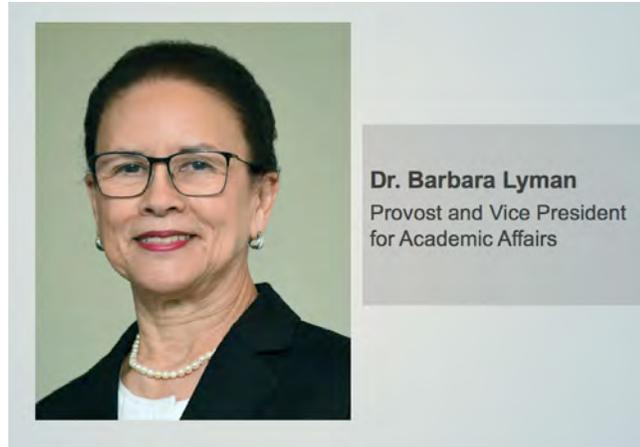
I remain deeply grateful to Vice President David Eaton and Associate Vice President of Student Affairs Linda Eaton, who agreed to delay their retirements for six months. Their experience and institutional wisdom have been such assets in our preparation for this unusual year. I am grateful to others who I know postponed retirement to help the campus and our students through these times.



Three longstanding Student Affairs leaders have moved – or will soon – into positions of new or increased responsibility. Robin Cohen-La Valle is now Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students, with overarching responsibility for student wellness. Michelle Combs is Director of Student Conduct, and on January 1 Michael Patterson will become Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, overseeing student engagement, belongingness, orientation, residence life, and other programming areas.



As I shared recently, Barbara Lyman has agreed to continue leading our academic enterprise for an additional two years, through June 2022. I have been pleased and impressed with her calm, wise, and firm leadership, and have heard the positive assessments of her support and respect for faculty and for our academic mission. I look forward to continuing our work together. We will delay the national search for a Provost so that we can ensure full participation by faculty in selecting our academic leader.



## THE COMING YEAR

Looking to the year ahead, I will first speak about our unprecedented financial challenges, which I wish were not happening in our time. We need to steel ourselves for tough times ahead. We have had budget cuts and run structural deficits before, but

this promises to be on a scale that will not leave us unscathed.

New York State is facing a serious budget shortfall estimated at \$16 billion. Economic recovery will be slow and tax revenues will lag. As a result, SUNY's direct taxpayer support will likely be cut substantially this year. The potential or significant federal stimulus funding for higher education is a giant question mark, and the federal CARES Act funding we received covers only a portion of our financial losses to date. These losses and uncertainties led SUNY to institute a hiring freeze and severe spending limits. We are developing our own expenditure plans to guide decisions on campus.

In addition, our residence hall budget took a big hit last spring when we refunded students who moved out mid-semester. The residence hall budget supports roughly 100 employees, in Residence Life and several other units. Because of social distancing and decisions by many students not to live on campus this fall, our residence hall revenue will decline again this year. Our enrollment for fall and the resulting tuition revenue - as of now - will be down less than we had feared - a good outcome.

## CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION

- New York State budget shortfall (est. \$16 billion)
- Taxpayer support likely to be limited
- Federal Stimulus funding for higher education (???)
- Hiring freeze, limits on expenditures
- Residence Hall budget
- Enrollment and tuition revenue

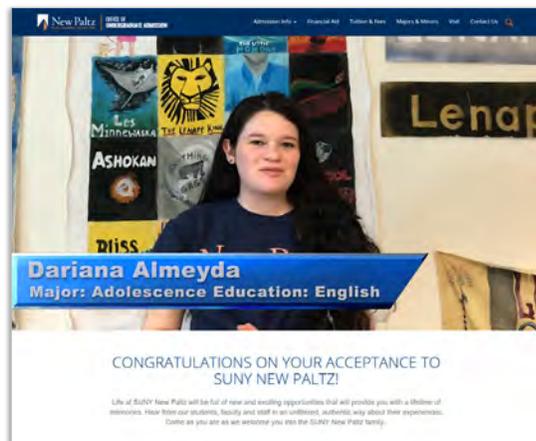


This reality will demand hard decisions. We will re-activate the budget committee that Vice President Halstead and Provost Lyman lead. We will solicit your input and keep you informed of our decisions, enlisting the process we were praised for by Middle States in 2011, the year of our previous reaccreditation review. That year, we managed a \$6 million budget cut on top of a \$6 million cut two years earlier. We are planning a budget forum in October, when we believe we will have greater clarity on the budget.

We may have to ask things of each other we haven't before, to bridge this difficult time until a better picture post pandemic. I am committed to bringing us through this storm, with your help. Our priority must be on safeguarding all that we have built over the years to make New Paltz a top-tier institution. Our task in the coming year will require sacrifice by all, perseverance, and ingenuity.

## STUDENT RECRUITMENT

A successful fall semester is essential both for our students' experience and learning, and the importance of retaining and recruiting students to sustain enrollment and tuition revenue in the spring and beyond.



I thank everyone who worked so diligently this summer to create new ways of reaching our incoming students through virtual videos and meetups. This work contributed importantly to our healthy enrollment picture.



Thanks also to everyone who developed compelling virtual ways to reach prospective students and parents to support future enrollment.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to those whose responsibilities required them to work on campus while others worked remotely. Many employees put in heroic effort to calculate and distribute refunds during spring, and then to distribute financial support from the CARES Act to help students and families.

**WE, NOT ME PLEDGE**

The top priority of our planning for this year is the health and safety of all. We must depend on each other and act responsibly to protect our own health and that of others by monitoring our health, staying away from campus if we experience symptoms, wearing a mask, maintaining social distance, and frequent handwashing. Think We Not Me.

We have asked students to sign a pledge to honor these principles as a condition of on-campus presence.



# PROTECT NEW PALTZ

## A PLEDGE TO STOP THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Being a part of the SUNY New Paltz community means that each of us must take extraordinary steps to stay well and protect each other—on campus and in the community. Accountable together, I pledge to take responsibility for my own health, the protection of others, and help keep the New Paltz community safe from the spread of COVID-19 and other infections as identified and instructed by the College.

### PROTECT MYSELF



- Monitor for the symptoms of COVID-19 and report to Student Health Service (students) at x3400 or your medical provider (employees) if I experience fever of 100°F (38°C) or higher, dry cough, difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat or loss of taste or smell, congestion and runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea (check the CDC website for current symptoms)
- Wash my hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Get vaccinated for the flu in the fall

### PROTECT OTHERS



- Practice appropriate social distancing and maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others with whom you are not living
- Wear a mask or other face covering in most indoor spaces, including restrooms and all classrooms, residence halls, common spaces, labs, elevators, studios and offices when multiple people congregate and/or the ability to social distance is limited
- Stay home if I feel ill or after exposure to someone who is ill or has tested positive for COVID-19
- Be positive, attentive and helpful to anyone around who may be in need of support

### PROTECT OUR NEW PALTZ COMMUNITY



- As advised by medical professionals, participate in testing and contact tracing to preserve the wellness of the community
- Wash my hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Keep my clothing, belongings, personal spaces and shared common spaces clean
- Carefully observe instructional signs and follow directions

## HYBRID LEARNING

We have created opportunities for faculty to teach on campus, and honored the requests of others to teach remotely. The outcome approximates what we had hoped: most courses are remote to reduce human presence and density on campus, but our offerings include face-to-face labs, studios, and equipment-intensive courses. We have also included in our on-campus offerings courses typically taken by first-year students, and others that will support progress in the major for upper-division students. We know that many students have chosen to study remotely, and it is heartening that many faculty discovered new skills, talent, and excellent outcomes in remote instruction.



In these ways, we will be able to provide at least some students with a live campus experience, albeit not what we might wish for them. But some innovations born of COVID-19 necessity may open our eyes to new ways of doing things. Our outdoor, informal processional to welcome new students was



creative, fun, and extremely well received. It may better reflect our community's strengths than the formal event in the gym, and maybe we won't go back to the old way. Let's be attuned during these times for innovations like this.

As the semester begins, we know we must be adaptive, and we will hold a virtual forum on September 2 to check in with each other about successes and challenges.

Of course, we must be prepared to pivot quickly to totally remote instruction if there is a resurgence of the pandemic. SUNY, the Governor and health officials will guide that decision.

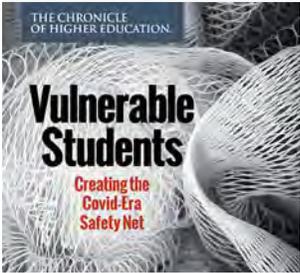
## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

I am grateful for the efforts of faculty and professionals during the spring to support our students and I call on you to do so again this fall. Most if not all students will bring some trauma with them. Some have been especially impacted: lower income students,



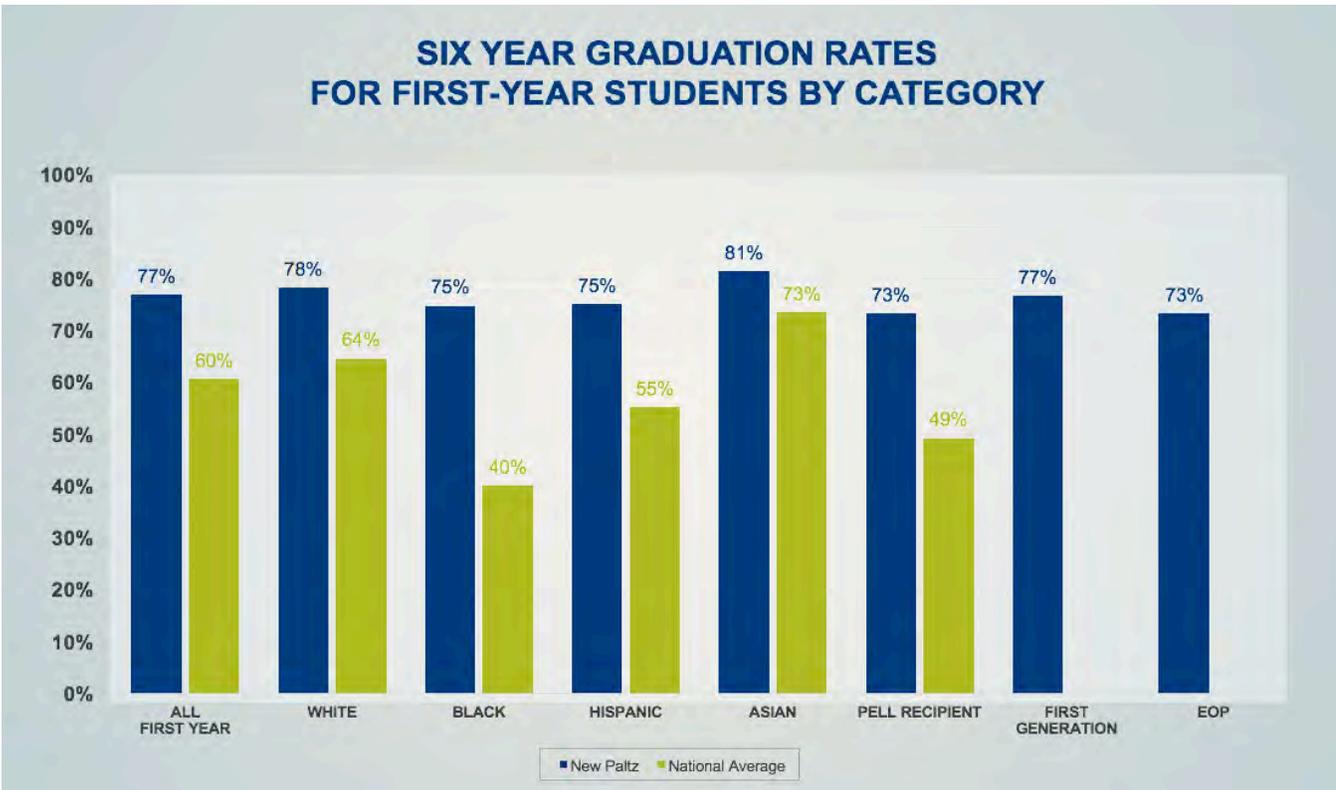
Black and Latinx students whose families and communities were hit especially hard by COVID-19, and students of Asian descent who have been treated with suspicion. Some of our students have lost family members and friends, and many families are reeling

financially. Many will bring to campus heightened anger, hurt and pain of racial inequity and injustice, along with great worry about what the future holds – at a time that they also are seeking normalcy as college students.



There is concern across the nation that the educational futures of students from historically underrepresented groups are especially at risk at this time. As a public university, we are especially committed to serving all students well, and we do. Consider these graduation statistics for different groups at New Paltz -- our statistics in blue bars, national averages in green. It's a true mark of distinction that our graduation rates are well above

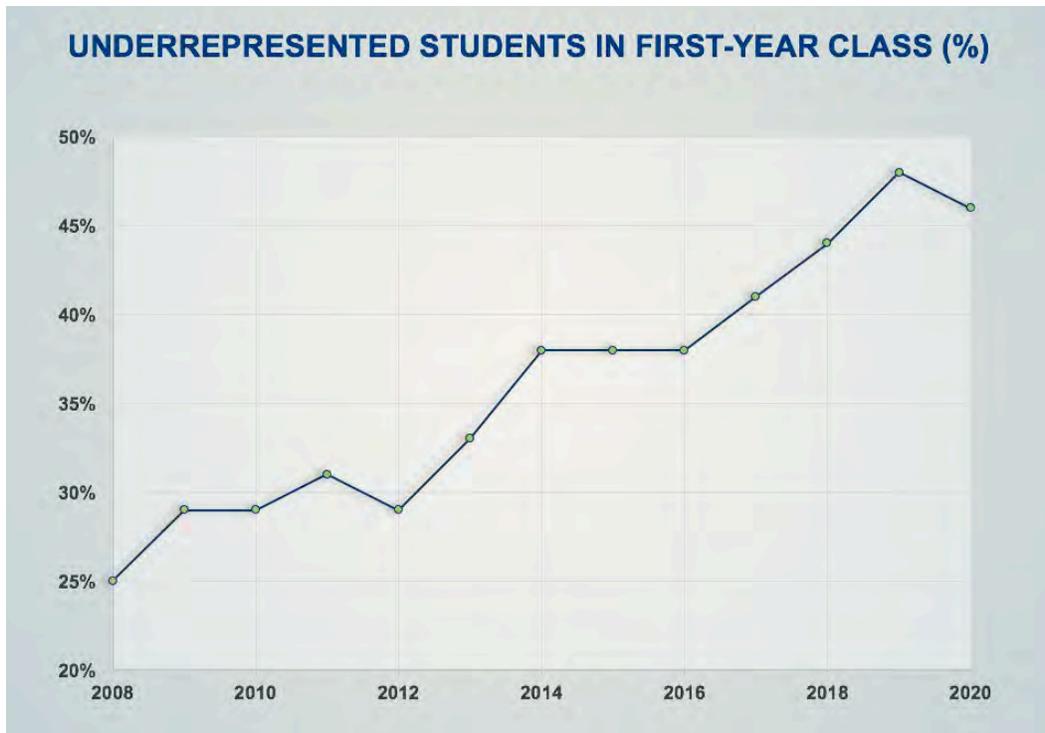
national averages, and that achievement gaps are far smaller than national averages – for underrepresented minority groups, low income, first generation students, and students in our Educational Opportunity Program.



The underrepresented students in our Scholars Mentorship Program have graduation rates above 80% - vastly above state and national averages. We're pleased to have moved the Scholar's Mentorship Program into newly renovated and centrally located space next to the Educational Opportunity Program in the Student Union.



We want to support and sustain such student success, doubling down on our support for all students at this difficult time, with particular attention to students who may come to us with special vulnerabilities. It's worth noting that 46% of students in our incoming first-year class are from historically underrepresented groups. That is down only slightly from last year's record 48%, belying national predictions that these students would disproportionately not pursue higher education.

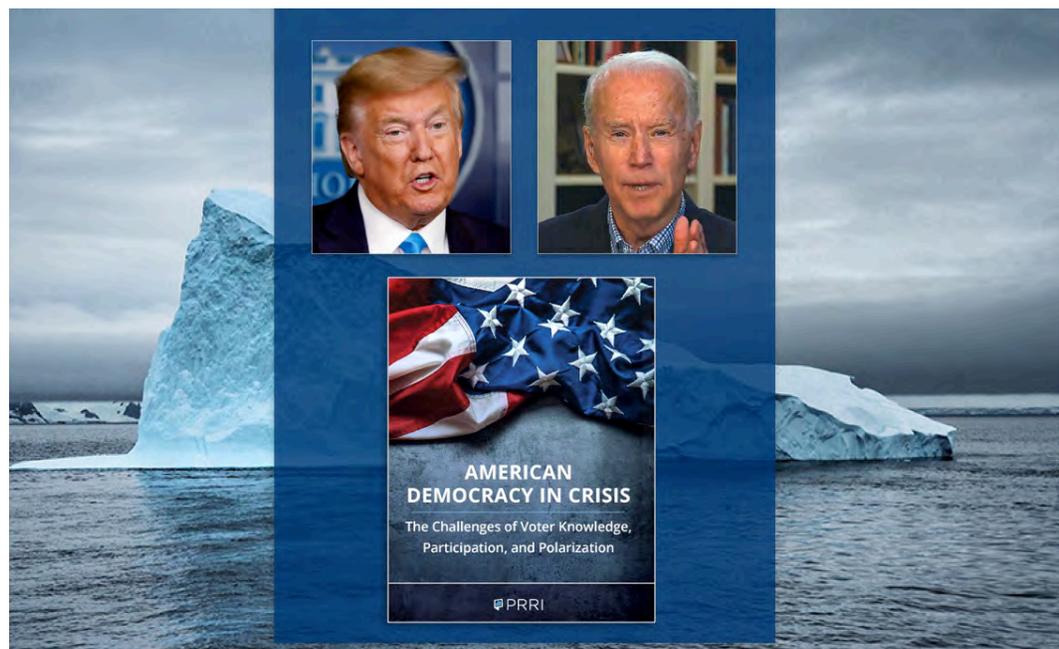


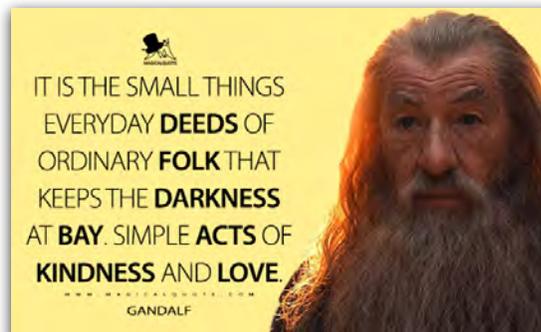


These are also times for us to be especially patient and supportive of colleagues and coworkers. Many are working under stressful circumstances:

- Doing their work AND caring for elderly parents or children who may not be in school or whose regular daycare may be disrupted.
- Serving as teachers to their own children while working full time.
- Dealing with financial challenges because a spouse or partner has lost employment.
- Supporting family members with compromised health while also exercising good self-care.

Underlying these sources of anxiety for many members of our community are grave concerns about a deeply divided America, the limited action to address burgeoning climate change, an upcoming and particularly contentious presidential election, and the future of our nation as a democracy. These certainly weigh heavily on me.





We can draw on another piece of Gandalf wisdom to reinforce the importance of kindness and generosity at this time – both for our students and colleagues: “It is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay, simple acts of love and kindness.”

## AN ANTI-RACIST CAMPUS

A major priority this year will be to advance our efforts to become an anti-racist campus, recognizing both the urgency to make progress and the complexities that mean this is not an overnight task. I will briefly highlight progress on several initiatives.

We are finalizing the purpose and structure of a bias response and support network and assembling its members. We want students and employees to have a clear path to seek support and redress when they have experienced bias, and to educate community members about the impact of these incidents on others.

The Provost has asked faculty governance leadership to review our curricular offerings and pedagogy to:

- Better highlight current offerings about race, racism and inequity in America so that we educate our students more effectively on these issues;
- Determine any significant gaps in those offerings;
- Review the diversity requirement and qualifying courses, so that all students learn the most critical, often discomfoting, topics in this realm;
- And explore instructional practices that enhance equity in educational outcomes.

The Provost and I both respect that the curriculum is under the primary purview of faculty.

We are broadening the structure of our diversity and inclusion work by creating a Working Group in each school that will coordinate with the College-wide Diversity and Inclusion Council. This will expand involvement, spur broader conversation, and build avenues for integrating this work into the curriculum, departments and schools.

The University Police Department has stated its intention to become an anti-racist law-enforcement organization. We are rethinking how we over-rely on UPD and are developing other ways to intervene with behavioral and mental health issues. For example, we are establishing a new after-hours protocol for students with mental health issues so that they can receive triage services without having to call UPD. To be clear,

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A major priority this year will be to advance our efforts to become an anti-racist campus...

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anyone observing a student in immediate danger of harm to self or others should call UPD. Our officers are trained to respond in such instances. We are grateful to UPD for their ongoing commitment to implicit bias training and for being first responders who consistently protect our community.

## PROGRESS ON ANTI-RACIST ACTIONS

- Establish a Bias Response and Support Network
- Faculty Governance: Curriculum Reform
- Diversity & Inclusion Council Re-Design
- University Police Department (UPD)
- Support for Black Studies Department
- Diversify Faculty, Staff and Students

We take pride in having one of the oldest Black Studies departments in the nation, established more than 50 years ago. We continue our commitment to strengthening the Department through support of its routine five-year program review this year, prioritizing the hiring of faculty in the department, and continued exploration of options for alternative space.

Our faculty recruitment this past year led to one-third of new faculty hires from historically underrepresented groups. We are heartened that search committee members found the training we began last year meaningful, and we will continue that work. Certainly the outcomes are what we want. Now we must welcome and retain our new colleagues.

PRODiG aims to inspire underrepresented students by increasing the diversity of SUNY faculty across the system.

**PRODiG:**  
Promoting Recruitment, Opportunity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Growth

We have submitted our proposal for the next round of funding through the SUNY PRODiG program - which provides support for new underrepresented faculty and for diversity and inclusion programming.

The national dialogue about race and racism continues to call attention to historic figures memorialized by statues or building names, the causes or ideas they



represent, and whether we use time and space to remember different, long ignored “heroes.” We recently completed a process that resulted in the removal of slaveholder names on six campus buildings.

## PEREGRINE COMPLEX BUILDING NAMES



I am speaking to you from land that is the traditional territory of people of the Munsee, Esopus, and Lenape tribes. We acknowledge their careful stewardship of this land for many generations. They and the enslaved Africans, early European immigrants, and subsequent waves of diverse immigrants all shaped the community and the

College we know today. We are planning a contemplative space that acknowledges and teaches about this more fulsome history and these diverse contributions.

## CONTEMPLATIVE SPACE



And we have commissioned a sculpture of Sojourner Truth at age 29, when she emancipated herself, to stand in front of the Library that bears her name. She is a national hero with Ulster County roots whose contributions to the anti-slavery and suffrage movements are worthy of further recognition on our campus. We are raising private funds for this project.

We recognize that statues and names are symbolic changes that do not replace the structural change we must advance.



**SOARING HIGHER CAMPAIGN**

Another of this year’s goals is completing the College’s first-ever major fund-raising campaign. Soaring Higher – The Campaign for SUNY New Paltz seeks to raise at least \$23 million. We ended last fiscal year at 95% of our overall goal, and with funds raised this year we are now less than \$1 million from our goal. Last spring we raised more than \$64,000 in just six weeks for the Student Crisis Fund, which qualified for a \$54,000 match from SUNY.

The Office of Student Affairs has distributed more than \$37,000 since the fund began in 2018, including more than \$32,000 to 40 students since March. The stories of these students are compelling testimony for the value of this support. We are grateful for everyone’s generosity.

A top fund-raising priority this year is financial aid and scholarship support, especially for low-income and underrepresented students. Our Crossing the Finish Line Fund supports juniors and seniors when emergency financial challenges threaten degree completion. Every gift to this fund – up to \$100,000 – will be matched by two anonymous donors.

The image shows a screenshot of a news article from New Paltz NEWS. The article title is "SUNY New Paltz alumna establishes \$100,000 'Crossing the Finish Line Fund'" and it was posted on April 4, 2012. Below the article is a graphic for a "\$100,000 Matching-gift Challenge". The graphic features a photo of graduates in blue gowns and text stating: "EVERY NEW DOLLAR CONTRIBUTED BY DECEMBER 31, 2020 WILL EARN A DOLLAR-FOR-DOLLAR MATCH—ESSENTIALLY DOUBLING YOUR GIFT."

## PROGRESSING ON REACCREDITATION

We are progressing well on the self-study for this year’s reaccreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. I am grateful for Provost Lyman’s overall guidance of this project and the great work of Laurel Garrick Duhaney and Ken Goldstein as Steering Committee Co-Chairs. I want also to thank other members of the Steering Committee for their work and their leadership of the working groups for each of the seven standards. I thank the many others who served on those working groups, and on the Editorial Committee. The self-study has been reviewed by Cabinet members and will be shared with the campus soon, before it is sent to the Middle States review team in advance of our spring 2021 review, which is almost certain to be virtual.

The image shows the MSCHE (Middle States Commission on Higher Education) Self-Study logo and two lists of committee members. The Steering Committee includes Laurel M. Garrick Duhaney, Deb Gould, Anne Deutsch, Jason Wrench, Heather Morrison, Ken Goldstein, Dante Cantu, Robin Cohen La Valle, Shuguang Liu, Jennifer Waldo, Julie Walsh, Isidoro Janeiro, Anne Balant, Simin Mozayeni, and Lucy Walker. The Editorial Committee includes Anne Balant, Laurel M. Garrick Duhaney, Ken Goldstein, Laura Kniffen, Valerie McAllister, Thomas Olsen, Wendy Vierow, and Lucy Walker.

This year, we will launch, under Provost Lyman’s leadership, the initial stages of an academic master plan. This plan needs to focus on matters such as diversity in the curriculum, program mix, the best combination of modes of instructional delivery, including how we expand online offerings while sustaining our strength as a residential campus, responding to changing workforce needs while sustaining our liberal education core, and improving our curriculum review processes to reduce bottlenecks.



### OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

We will not abandon our values and how we see ourselves. At the same time, we must recognize that we face a new world changed by the pandemic and by shifting societal expectations for higher education. We may need to re-think how these values translate into action now and after COVID-19. Other priorities may need to supplement or supplant some of these if we are to continue thriving as a top-tier public university in a changed world.

## OUR VALUES

 <p>A Personalized, Residential Campus</p>	 <p>A Spirit of Exploration, Discovery, and Artistry</p>
 <p>Rigorous Academics</p>	 <p>Educating Each Student as a Whole Person</p>
 <p>Open, Inclusive, and Equitable Community</p>	 <p>Intellectual and Cultural Resource in the Region</p>

Our strategic plan has guided our work for the past several years, and will continue to do so – coupled with the U. N. Sustainable Development Goals – even as we recognize that the coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally changed the context in which we work.

## STRATEGIC PLAN ESSENTIAL INITIATIVES

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>I.</b> Nurture Innovation and the Learning Environment      | <b>V.</b> Market New Paltz Internally and Externally             |
| <b>II.</b> Establish an Engaged Living and Learning Community  | <b>VI.</b> Improve Internal Processes and Institutional Capacity |
| <b>III.</b> Strengthen Philanthropic Relationships and Success | <b>VII.</b> Strengthen Regional and Community Engagement         |
| <b>IV.</b> Engaging Alumni in the Life of the College          |  |



The fall semester will undoubtedly bring unanticipated challenges that will demand our immediate attention. Also, we must plan for a spring semester and the next academic year under conditions that remain uncertain. Essential initiatives of our strategic plan may receive less attention while they still guide us.

### FACING CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Our immediate and short term planning needs and our top priorities – in the time given us this year – are: supporting student success, adjusting our budget, sustaining and growing enrollment, and dedicating time and attention to anti-racist action, all while keeping health and safety an overarching priority.



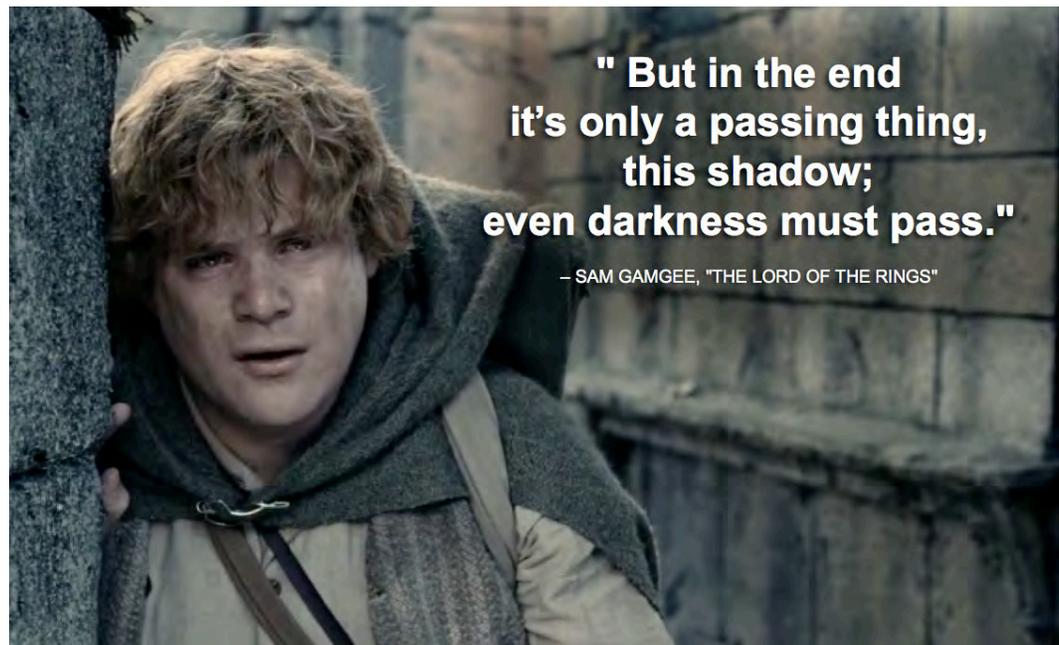
- Support Student Success
- Adjust Budget
- Sustain and Grow Enrollment
- Anti-Racist Action
- Health and Safety

This will not be easy. We have weathered difficult times before, like hurricanes that caused damage and disrupted our work. We bring to these challenges a set of core strengths and achievements that few other institutions enjoy. In the words of another

*Damages from hurricane Sandy*



protagonist in “The Lord of the Rings,” Sam Gamgee: “But in the end it’s only a passing thing, this shadow; even darkness must pass.”



We will support each other through these difficult times until the darkness passes.

Thank you for listening, have an excellent year, and be safe and well.



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We will support each other  
through these difficult times  
until the darkness passes.

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