

State of the University Address 2024

Darrel P. Wheeler, President

Aug. 23, 2024

Good morning and welcome to the SUNY New Paltz 2024 State of the University address. Before I go into the substantive portion of this session, let me speak first to the affective and deeply personal elements that have deeply occupied my thinking and actions for these past 3 to 4 months. Let me open as I have in the 13 listening and sharing sessions this summer: the end of the 2024 academic year was without doubt the most difficult I have ever experienced in my 32 years in higher education. The experiences leading up to and after May 2 were of a nature that I would never wish for any academic leader, friend or foe, and that includes me going forward. The turmoil and emotional taxation for me, and so many others, I am sure, were only pieces of a larger set of experiences that have definitely and profoundly framed my personal and professional journeys for the past 3 months. Through this time, getting comfortable with two key facts have been anchoring for me. First, wish as I might, I have never and will never have the power to turn the hands of time backward. Time always wins and moves forward. And secondly, accepting that humanity and being able to see the humanness in all things and all people is hard, but striving to do it is so worth every bit of the effort.

As an academic leader, it is imperative that I, from the outset, state that I am confident in saying that I am committed to fostering and supporting an inclusive culture—one where civil discourse is not just a value recited but a shared set of behaviors and practices we express; and strive to lean into my leading to make this campus one of actions assuring safety for all as paramount as we share and embrace our diverse, and at times disagreeing views, without being disagreeable. I must in leading and fostering this environment, I must seek for and guide toward options and solutions that make bringing the police to the campus a last resort. We, SUNY New Paltz, can and should be the solutions we have been waiting for. This is not going to be easy as we will be challenged every step of the way by internal and external influences that do not have SUNY New Paltz's longevity and best interest as its daily mission. True though this may be, we can go beyond our own walls of fear, isolation and cancel culture orientations, to embrace the deeper questions, to seek common ground to make SUNY New Paltz the beacon among public higher education institutions.

Over these months and after 13 listening sessions with more than 100 colleagues from across the campus who signed up to give their time, their thoughts and their energies, I have more knowledge of the diverse views, commitments to the university community, and ways to connect and link with our campus community.

Note the lead slide and the emphasis on Together!!!

These things stated, let me return to the topic – state of the university, and return to the many expressions of gratitude I want extend to our academic and professional faculty, the many teams in the classified and support areas, our auxiliary colleagues in CAS and Sodexo and so many others. Thank you for your great work and continued commitment to this special place. And of course, to our VPs, AVPs, Deans and M/C, staff, my sincere thanks for your work and leadership. No matter the role, your work matters and helps our students' success in this mission.

Now, on to the state of our university.

Division of Enrollment Management:

Fall 2024 registration in all enrollment categories is strong. We are welcoming more than 2,400 new students, and there are positive trends for future enrollment. Many thanks to the wonderful faculty and staff engagement during our open houses, other yield events and orientation.

A few fast, fun facts:

- Fall open house attendance up by 18%
- Accepted student open house attendance up by 14%
- Fall 24 applications -17,000 (up by 1,000)
- Fall 24 FY acceptances – 10,500 (up by 1,000)
- Out of state deposits up by 27%
- We have seen strong growth in Ulster County and NYC enrollment
- Our summer melt rate is trending slightly lower than 2023 and 2022
- Graduate enrollment is up significantly

Our strong enrollments have put a significant strain, as many of you are aware, on campus resources, most notably on the residence halls. Many students are in triple occupancy rooms. This has created stress for our new students and more creativity and planning by our staff.

Enrollment Management has also deployed resources to support and grow student retention. In spring 2024, we launched ACE, which is Advancing Completion through Engagement, to increase retention and graduation rates by reducing financial and

academic barriers for students. We anticipate 175 students enrolling this fall. The Center for Student Success expanded services for peer mentoring, coaching and embedded tutoring. In fall 23, satellite services were offered in the Athletic and Wellness Center with the Center seeing more than a 50% increase in student visits last year, and positive GPA impact from embedded tutoring. Starting Fall 24, an additional satellite will be added for students in the Sojourner Truth Library.

Our data shows that students who do not have a declared major in the first year have a lower retention rate when compared to those that are declared. Yet, some students, even after their first year, have not decided on the academic path they wish to pursue. In spring 2024, we announced the launch of the Exploratory Program for undeclared students. These students are enrolled in a school/college of interest without a selected major. We worked with faculty to help create programming to assist students' progress while also learning about opportunities, majors and programming in the academic schools/college. We now have 366 students enrolled in these programs starting in Fall 24.

In June 2024, Graduate Admissions moved from Graduate, Professional and Interdisciplinary Studies (GPIS) back into the Division of Enrollment Management. Alana Matuszewski, Director of Graduate Admissions, will join the Undergraduate Admission and International Admission teams lead by Executive Director of Admission Andrew Mantell. Many thanks to all who have made this a smooth transition.

In July 2024, we piloted a fully residential, week-long Summer Honors Program for rising high school seniors. We accepted 29 high-achieving students who were nominated by the high school guidance counselors to attend SUNY New Paltz. Students enjoyed honors programming and extra-curricular activities while having a truly New Paltz University experience. Many thanks to the faculty, student activities leaders, residence hall director and especially Lisa Jones and Patricia Sullivan for making this program a huge success this summer. All students attending received early conditional acceptance to New Paltz. We hope they will join us as first-year students next fall.

We are sad to announce that Jason Gilliland, Director of OVMS, has moved on to new opportunities beyond New Paltz. For the past 10 years, Jason has provided significant support, guidance and programming to our military-affiliated students. He will be dearly missed.

Office of Development & Alumni Relations

The most recent fiscal year (ending June 30, 2024), proved to be a banner year of philanthropic giving via the SUNY New Paltz Foundation. In total, more than \$11.3

million was raised for the University—a record for the most money ever raised in a single year—with these funds impacting and transforming two University initiatives in particular.

First, more than \$7 million of this funding established the Science of Reading Center, providing citizens of New York and beyond with the training and tools to transform literacy rates locally and nationally through:

- the development of a microcredential program with over 8,000 already enrolled (mostly at this point) New York teachers and educators;
- expansion of this program to the State of Maryland, where we have been asked to offer 27,000 teacher licenses for the microcredential, and;
- establishment of the Science of Reading Center to conduct cutting-edge research and curriculum development.

Let me pause here and thank everyone who has worked on the Science of Reading Microcredential over the past year. Your tireless effort, commitment, innovativeness and laser focus on the goal of eliminating literacy gaps has led to successes we could not have imagined 15-months ago!!!!!!

Second, buoyed by data that suggests Foundation scholarship recipients are retained and graduate at a rate 15 to 20 points higher than average New Paltz students, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) received a gift of \$1 million. This extraordinary gift by the Advertising Checking Bureau, Inc., on behalf of the McShane family, including Dennis McShane '77. Another \$500,000 for EOP has been promised in FY25 by Philip M. Berkowitz '75 and Mary Ann Quinn. Both of these transformational gifts will impact the lifelong success of our EOP students, helping to relieve their financial burdens and assisting them in graduating debt-free.

All of these gifts are now part of our new five-year comprehensive campaign, which is currently in a “silent phase”—which by definition is probably not so silent now that I’ve said it – and will launch in the near future. Ten alumni and supporters have agreed to serve as campaign leaders, including Co-Chairs Eli B. Basch, Fitzarnaz Drummond '06, Myra R. Kressner '76, and Ira Schreck '74, and Honorary Co-Chairs Everton H. Henriques '78 '83g '22 HON & Jeannie Irvine '78, Robert Kyncl '95 '23 HON & Luz E. Kyncl '96, Hernan Rincon '76, and Tamah Wiegand. A full Campaign Cabinet is in formation and will be announced soon.

The SUNY New Paltz Foundation Board, a group of dedicated and philanthropic leaders, added two new directors—[Dr. Vilicia Cade '88](#) and [Sean Foote '96](#), are two of our newest board members and they will bring expertise and knowledge in the fields of education and finance respectively.

The Office of Alumni Relations looks forward to welcoming its new Director Janet Rossbach, as Chris Brown, moves to the Office of Development as the Program Director of Donor Engagement.

Division of Student Affairs

During the past academic year, the Career Resource Center and Student Affairs leadership was awarded \$325,700 to expand the offerings of the department and enhance student internship opportunities. The Career Resource Center successfully launched three internship initiatives to promote student success, access and ability. The Living Internship Stipend – the first of these – allowed for students to pursue internships that may not have been an option due to financial needs. The second was the Applied Learning Travel Grant, which allows students to travel and be reimbursed for the travel to internships that would be outside of the range they can afford to commute to. The final development was the First Year Internship Program to allow first-year students to experience quality internship opportunities. The Career Resource Center launched these initiatives so successfully that SUNY has already invited us to request additional funding and is reviewing our application for ongoing investment to further enhance and expand the aforementioned programs. SUNY also launched initiatives for EOP expansion, the Empire State Service Corps and Empire AI – all valuable resources and opportunities to support our students.

Disability Resource Center's success in innovation included the addition of Learning Support Specialists, the launching of an art therapy room, development of a sensory friendly space, and the launching of Jobs for Juniors, an initiative aimed to provide an inclusive employment readiness opportunity for neurodivergent students.

Men's and Women's Basketball teams both won their SUNYAC Championships. Go Hawks! SUNY New Paltz Athletics continue to exemplify excellence and success among our students and staff. Our Athletics department had 5 conference champions, 5 Coaches of the Year, 55 All-Conference athletes, 20 All Region athletes, 5 Players of the Year, and 6 All-Americans. This impressive feat is all the more impressive when we consider that 60% of the athletes have a 3.4 GPA or higher, and the average GPA in Fall 2023 for our student athletes was a 3.33. SUNY New Paltz has been accepted into the New Jersey Athletic Conference and is in the first year of a two-year transition process. Look forward to even bigger and equally exciting news about our Student-Athletes!

The Division of Administration and Finance

This includes grounds and maintenance. And if you had to walk here you know there is a lot going on around campus.

This past spring, Administration and Finance began rolling out the Incentive Based Modeling approach to campus budgeting. There was training provided in January, with official kickoff activities beginning in February. A budget calendar, introduction to Incentive Based budgeting and other helpful budget documents were uploaded to my.newpaltz.edu/budget information center for campus review.

Directors, chairs, deans and AVPs were invited to submit proposals for new funding to division leaders who then ranked proposals received and submitted them for cabinet review, ranking and approval. All proposals demonstrated clear ties to the pillars of our mission, student success and/or being a value-add to the community. In June the cabinet deliberated over all proposals and approved \$500,000 for the 2024-25 budget.

The state budget process yielded additional financial wins for SUNY at large and for New Paltz, specifically. SUNY New Paltz received salary support of \$2.1M, \$128k for internship support, \$150k to support the Benjamin Center and \$1M for the Science of Reading Microcredential program.

In April, I was joined by Vice President Halstead, Vice President Turk and Provost McClure to present our campus's financial stability plan to the Chancellor and his executive team. This plan was required of several SUNY campuses to demonstrate a clear plan to financial stability. The plan includes several initiatives, including revenue generation and expenditure reductions, that will lead the campus to achieve a required balanced budget by the fall of 2027. The presentation was well received and was met with the promise of support from our colleagues in Albany to ensure we reach this goal. Our assigned reduction is about \$3 million. I saw data for our SUNY counterparts whose needed reduction is closer to \$20 million.

Facilities Design and Construction teamed up with the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York and campus partners in Residence Life and IT Services to successfully reopen Awosting Hall in Spring 2024. The "gut renovation" transformed this 56-year-old residence hall into a contemporary, comfortable and fun space for our students to sleep, study and socialize.

Great attention to the smallest of details was paid during the renovation process. Creating spaces where students thrive in their home away from home contributes greatly to their academic success, mental well-being and overall satisfaction.

In addition to this major accomplishment, Facilities Management has had a very busy summer. Some projects that that you definitely see as the summer work continues are:

- The north turf field
- A new concourse between the Dorsky Museum and the Library
- Several roofing/façade projects

SUNY New Paltz has an aggressive capital plan in progress, one that will take several years to complete and impact almost every aspect of campus. The “big three” that will begin next year using state capital bonds are College/Shango Hall, Peregrine Dining Hall and the Elting Gym/Pool. These projects come with a lot of moving pieces and will require considerable planning and patience as we seek to relocate affected faculty, staff and students. Facilities Management will be reaching out – so please don’t hang up when they call! - to the various stakeholders to secure the best possible solutions for temporary accommodations and Campus Auxiliary Services & Sodexo will be moving fast and furiously with plans to meet student dining needs while our dining hall is out of service.

These projects wouldn’t be successful without the array of talented procurement and finance teams that secure, pay for the projects and manage finances for these projects that currently total more than \$200million. And we can’t forget the amazing staff in IT Services. For every project or office move, ITS is there to be sure everyone is connected. They partner with Facilities to ensure the IT infrastructure that lives behind the walls is not only adequate for today’s needs, but that anticipates campus IT needs for the foreseeable future. Not an easy task!

Office of Communication & Marketing

The Office of Communication & Marketing (OCM), in consultation with other campus divisions, developed a robust and sustainable model for communicating with parents, families and guardians of new and current students with the goal of supporting retention and completion. Parent communication has been a gap in SUNY New Paltz’s overall communication strategy. We – as an institution – have lagged behind many peer institutions who have more robust and strategic systems for engaging with this critical stakeholder group.

A planning and implementation team, led by OCM with representatives from Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, Information Technology Services (ITS), Academic Affairs and Alumni Relations, engaged in benchmarking; developed plans for sustainable contact list management, centralized the editorial process; developed an editorial calendar; and considered the viewpoints of a diverse group of family audience members. The team determined that messaging will emphasize parents and guardians empowering their students to succeed by nudging the nudgers. The team identified and implemented an online tool, the SUNY New Paltz Family Network, which creates customized newsletters and emails for participating family members based on their specific interests. Since its launch in February, parents have received more than 80,000 emails, roughly 11 per family, and they have told us in an onboarding survey that the topics of most interest to them are financial aid and scholarships, health and safety, career development, and campus life, including housing.

The OCM team's digital advertising campaign doubled the pool of prospective graduate students across our graduate offerings for this fall, contributing to the 20% increase in graduate enrollment. With these outcomes, OCM will continue to leverage their Slate CRM and digital advertising to support lead generation for graduate enrollment and yield for undergraduate enrollment in partnership with Enrollment Management.

Thanks to the OCM team for their excellent work.

Office of Human Resources, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

The team in HRDI, has been hard at work on many of our backbone issues that include assessing staffing, including beginning a salary/compensation study and software to ensure that we are optimizing processes and people in delivery of services such as recruitment, onboarding and leave management and assuring, most importantly, adherence and compliance in many critical areas including Title IX and Title VI.

Collaborating with divisional leaders and SUNY on designing and delivering education and training that helps students and employees with framing and tools that empower these audiences to more fully realize their work and the University (keeping the University safe and protected, in terms of compliance to skills development). The HRDI team is continuously seeking ways to enhance it people services and I thank them for their great work and service to our community.

Division of Academic Affairs

The Provost prepares a very detailed update and offers monthly highlights. Here I will just point to a few and thank him for his leadership. Last year Academic Affairs announced an expansive hiring initiative that has resulted in 37 new full-time faculty, newly appointed in 20 departments in all five schools and colleges. This is the largest cohort of entering faculty in at least a dozen years and is a sign that we are truly past COVID and are moving to build and rebuild many academic programs. Thirty of these young scholars are new to New Paltz, and young means new to us. While seven have worked at the University in temporary positions and are now in lecturer or professorial titles.

We begin this academic year with 11 newly tenured and promoted Associate Professors and four newly promoted full Professors. We want to recognize Nancy Kassop and Eugene Heath, new Distinguished Professors in Political Science and Philosophy, respectively. Similarly, we want to recognize Anne Roschelle, Professor in Sociology, and our most recent recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship & Creative Activities, and Andrew Evans, Associate Professor in History, and our most

recent recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. (They join New Paltz's two other Chancellor Award winners – Karl Goneman, Excellence in Classified Service, and Richard Winters ('08), Excellence in Professional Service.)

During the summer, we onboarded and are glad to have with us, Rene Parmar, who joined New Paltz as the new Dean of the School of Education. Rene is an accomplished scholar, teacher, and higher education administrator and school district partner with more than four decades of experience across P-12 and higher education.

The decision to bring Academic Advising into Academic Affairs, also brought with it Jonathan Raskin, long-serving chair of the Department of Psychology. He joined the Provost's Office as Interim Associate Provost for Academic Advising. He is already developing a comprehensive review of how we do student advising across the University.

Finally, the business of Academic Affairs continues. In the last year, we opened a new MS in Business Analytics, a new MAT in Visual Arts Education, and a new Advanced Certificate in Bilingual Education. Our job at SUNY New Paltz is to give our students the best education possible. We do that by constantly developing our people and our programs.

Speaking of development, Academic Affairs is proud to host Stew Friedman, who will be giving a reprise of his workshop Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life on September 5. Please check the all-fs and SUNY Digest announcements for more details.

In May we celebrated 2,000 graduates and certificate recipients and I want to thank you, Provost McClure, for your outstanding service in supporting this celebration of our graduates.

As you can see, SUNY New Paltz has been active on many fronts, and yet we know there is much to do and to achieve. In the coming year I have asked that our Vice Presidents and Academic Leaders (Deans) focus on three priorities, all in service to the two pillars of SUNY New Paltz's institutional mission:

- **to provide an excellent education to our students that prepares them for lifelong learning and success; and**
- **to be a clear value to the citizens of New York and beyond**

The priorities are: Here I lay out the broad strokes for each of these areas and they are not in any specific order.

- **Fiscal Sustainability** – As I described earlier, by 2027-28, we must achieve a balanced budget through either a reduction in expenditures, new resource acquisition or both. Our focus on fiscal sustainability is bolstered by the changing landscape in higher education:
 - On average every two weeks in the United States, a college/university closes or files for exigency.
 - Increasing public concern about the escalating cost and related debt for a college education, that itself is coming under question for its value and return on investment.
 - SUNY – in a report in January – also concluded that without efficiencies, collaboration, and other actions, it, SUNY, would face a \$1.1 billion annual shortfall by 2033-34.
- Given these and other factors, fiscal sustainability must be a priority for SUNY New Paltz.
- The second critical area is **Campus Culture and Climate**. Let me say again that the end of the past academic year was very difficult for so many reasons, and I understand without a doubt how important it is for the strength and health of this institution that we address, on many levels, the elements of our campus culture and climate that should be celebrated and enhanced and those that will benefit from collective work and change. As the president, I must lead by example and have committed myself to doing all I can to contribute to this vision for a stronger and healthier campus climate. Earlier this year I joined the College Presidents for Civic Preparedness as one personal resource for advancing my ability to grow in this area.
 - It will be essential that we assure a safe working and learning space. We are working to evaluate our current policies in this area to make sure they are current, relevant, accessible and internally consistent. The policies and practices that flow from them must support inclusion of diverse viewpoints and experiences and create a space where all are welcomed and supported.
 - Assessing and building on our strengths, confronting our challenges and advancing our skills for effectively building a strong and cohesive campus culture and climate. Our campus climate survey, led by the HRDI team, will help us establish a baseline for this and hopefully point to areas that will guide us as we move forward.
 - We'll need to develop resources in this area – identifying and sharing resources we already have, such as our IDMH team, led by Dr. Amy Nitza; our Psychological Counseling Center team and many others across the campus with content and/or practice expertise in civil discourse, restorative justice and communicating on difficult issues is accessible and

available to all. We have to build a data-base of resources, practices and tools that is readily available to our faculty, staff and students on these and other topics.

- Communications is a critical area for us. The theme of communications, and/or the lack of effective communications, was one of the most common themes in all of the 13 listening sessions and in many 1:1 conversations. I heard colleagues over the past 5 months convey this passionately. How we communicate with one another, the ways in which we demonstrate our passions and uphold the humanity of our campus colleagues is essential to the success of the institution and its ability to deliver on the promise of an outstanding, student-centered community. In this year, as one of my personal initiatives, I will launch the President's Listening-Learning Community. This group will consist of 15 SUNY New Paltz faculty and staff (tenure/track, non-tenure track, part-time faculty, UUP professionals, CSEA staff and at least one M/C staff.). We will meet 6-9 times over the academic year to continue the listening and learning that has proven so valuable this summer. This will be totally voluntary and uncompensated, except for the food we'll provide. Please look for an invitation to self-nominate in the next two weeks.
- Continuation and revitalization of our work to support civic and civil engagement – as we anticipate the continued polarization of political discourse, let us mobilize resources to support our students, faculty and staff to fully engage in the electoral process. On our campus we have Civic Engagement and Voter Mobilization Committee, and SUNY has voter education and mobilization initiatives. These are not partisan but intended to advance access. Let us leverage these and make them a unifying force on our campus.
- And the third major priority is **Strategic Planning**. It seems to me that at this moment of critical institutional self-reflection and attention to our campus culture, climate and fiscal well-being is an ideal point to build our next strategic plan. A plan for what we want to be – not just who we want to be like – and a path for getting there has to be part of the strategic initiative. This plan must be a SUNY New Paltz-centric plan for building on our core principles, setting strategic goals that support our programming, fiscal and human resources. In this planning, communications on all levels will be essential. We postponed this process last year, but I believe now is clearly the time for us to take up this critical task. We are awaiting final procurement authorizations for the selected consulting group, and then we will introduce them to the community. My hope is that everyone will find a way to contribute to this planning process and to the successful launch and ultimately implementation of the plan itself.

These three priorities will require collaboration, communication and coordination. I have asked the academic leaders to make these goals a part of their year's priorities. I have asked that as desired, I am invited to units to listen and learn, collaborate and work with you, to work together to do this important work!

This is an opportunity to build upon our passions and talents; to share and commune with our SUNY New Paltz community members. Together as we gather today to officially launch the 2024-25 Academic Year, let me restate my sincere desire to work actively with and for the SUNY New Paltz community, its students, alums, staff and faculty. To be in active listening and learning, to let the enthusiasm that I have for this institution be the thing that guides me. It should be my daily mantra.

Call to Action – So I ask you, my colleagues, to join together as we embark on this academic year to assure excellence, to lead, to learn and be open to supporting one another in new ways. Let us not be led off course to see division as the solution, but recognize division for what it is, a tool to keep us from our true collective strength. We can stay focused on the goal of lifting our shared commitments to SUNY New Paltz that brings us together and still manifest and share our unique gifts, talents and aspirations. Thank you.