



## **September 2024 COLLEGE COUNCIL MEETING**

**Date:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024

**Time:** 4:00 p.m.

**Present:** Council Members:

RoAnn Destito-Chair, William Thickstun, Keith Levatino, Mitchell Ford, and Nikki Hinman  
Administration:

Wayne Westervelt, Andrew Russell, Dan Sargent, Andrea LaGatta, Jennifer Adams,

Michele Kilburn, Mary Ellen Burdick, and Mark Montgomery

Shared Governance: Kristina Boylan

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Destito convened the Public Meeting at 4:02 p.m. and welcomed all participants to the College Council meeting.

Chair Destito commented on the recent inauguration celebrations for President Soboyejo and what a great set of events they had been. She noted the excellent attendance and the diversity of the attendees, which were a testament to our President. William Thickstun thanked Andrea LaGatta for her role in organizing the weekend of events, and Chairwoman Destito echoed his thanks, adding her appreciation for Wayne Westervelt and everyone involved in that group effort.

### **Approval of Minutes: 4:07 p.m.**

***A motion was made by William Thickstun and seconded by Mitchell Ford to approve the minutes of the April 17, 2024 meeting as presented. Approval was unanimous.***

***A motion was made by Keith Levatino and seconded by William Thickstun to approve the minutes of the July 30, 2024 special meeting as presented. Approval was unanimous.***

### **President's Report:**

Dr. Andrew Russell provided the President's Report in the absence of President Soboyejo, who was excused due to an international travel schedule conflict. Dr. Russell shared Dr. Soboyejo's regrets for having to miss the meeting, and conveyed the President's "warm greetings" to the College Council members and all present. Dr. Russell also stated that he recently had been reminded of the significant impact a strong College Council leader can have, and he stated that the SUNY Poly campus community is aware of all the work Chair Destito does for the University, and they appreciate her service. Dr. Russell also commented on the "outstanding few days" on campus recently, adding an update on an MV EDGE board meeting that was held on campus earlier in the day, which he said went well and



included an update from Michael Hayduk of the Air Force Research Laboratory in Rome, NY, on some of their activities. He concluded with thanking all the members of the College Council for their ongoing support of our campus.

Dr. Russell provided some reflections on some recent events from the start of the academic year. These included Move-In Day on ceremonial bridge crossing for new students on August 22, and the Convocation Ceremony on August 23. Dr. Francia Reed of the College of Health Sciences was an inspiring keynote speaker for the Convocation ceremony, at which she was also presented with her 2024 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Faculty Service. The University also hosted a visit from Congressman Brandon Williams on September 3, and hosted a full scheduled of events, starting with Dr. Soboyejo's inauguration ceremony, during Homecoming Weekend, September 13 – 15.

Dr. Russell presented a statistical profile of the fall 2024 incoming class of 388 new students, noting that they were an academically talented class, with an average GPA of 91%, a strong interest in athletics (14% are on a sports team), and that their top majors are in areas of high needs for our community and region (e.g., computer science, mechanical engineering tech, and nursing). Dr. Russell also commented on the University's notable success in transfer student enrollment, which would be presented in greater detail later in the President's report.

Dr. Russell reported to the group that SUNY Poly has had the pleasure of welcoming two new deans to its leadership team. Dr. Mark Kittleson, Ph.D., joined SUNY Poly as the new Dean of the College of Health Sciences on July 22; and Dr. Abdullah Eroglu, Ph.D., joined us as the new Dean of the College of Engineering on September 3.

Dr. Russell spoke to the group about how the University has been using state investments to expand its research profile, focusing on 10 new interdisciplinary research centers being established at the University for this purpose. Also, new seed grants this year are being focused on "distinctive teaching that makes an impact" by supporting innovative educational programs and initiatives. The University is also continuing its pursuit of congressional research funding, with the good news that \$5 million for a foundational modeling (AI) project has been included in the Senate Appropriations mark up. Dr. Russell clarified that this is not final confirmation of the funding, but that it does reflect the University being well positioned to be approved for this funding. The University is continuing to meet with key people to help keep this initiative moving forward, and is also creating new partnerships in academia, government, and industry, as well as with representatives of the military to support these efforts.

Dr. Russell also reported that the University is establishing new partnerships to form regional consortia in support of research and workforce development in three key areas: quantum research, life sciences and biomedical engineering, and advanced manufacturing and materials. Through its diverse partnerships, the University is creating new opportunities for students when they enroll here, such as new internships and mentorship programs.

Similarly, the University is expanding its partnerships and collaborative activities with local and regional K-12 school districts. The "Spotlight" series of youth camps and events has hosted STEM, athletics, and



other types of on-campus camps and exploratory programs. In October, the University will host a breakfast and meeting for all regional school district superintendents, which is being facilitated through its ongoing partnership with regional BOCES districts.

Dr. Russell updated the Council members on the “Path to Poly” initiative, which is supported through the SUNY Transformation Fund. The Path to Poly initiative builds on some existing relationships the University had in place to make transfer processes more seamless. These efforts have already yielded positive results. The University achieved a 37% increase in transfer enrollment in the fall 2024 semester, after spring 2024 efforts focused on transfer infrastructure, partnerships with transfer feeder institutions, and on targeted marketing.

Dr. Russell also provided updates on projects being conducted across campus to improve facilities and infrastructure. He reported that the renovation of the Campus Center building is well underway, and that the road construction and lighting project on Technology Drive had been completed. Chair Destito commented that the new lighting is noticeable and is a good improvement.

Chair Destito also asked about efforts to provide students with better transportation access to downtown Utica, specifically if any conversations had taken place with Centro to promote the idea of expanding their bus service between the campus and downtown. Dr. Russell answered that some discussions had taken place with Centro, and that the University had also invested in the purchase of a new passenger van, and that the purchase of another such van was planned, and that these resources could help address this transportation concern. Chief of Staff, Wayne Westervelt, added that the University is also talking with some of its industry partners to see if they could help support a resolution to the transportation question. Chair Destito stated that she had spoken with the chair of Centro about this situation and that she would like to see the University follow up with them to continue the discussions that have been started. VP for Finance and Administration, Mary Ellen Burdick, also added that some discussions had also taken place with MVCC, which has better Centro service and access than SUNY Poly, and with Utica University, which has its own shuttle service for its students, to see what opportunities there might be for partnering with them on a solution to the situation on our campus. She also reported that SUNY Poly Athletics is also looking to purchase two vans, and that the Student Government may also be set up to purchase a van as well.

### **Middle States/Reaccreditation Update:**

Dr. Russell reported that things were “heating up” in regard to the University’s self-study and reaccreditation process. He said the self-study draft is due to Middle States on October 1, and he acknowledged the work of Dr. Carlie Phipps and Dr. Michael Carpenter as co-chairs for the completion of that comprehensive document, and also Sarah Elacqua for her role in compiling that report as well. Dr. Russell provided the group with some upcoming key dates to be aware of. On October 16 and 18, the University will take part in mock practice review visits with a team from the SUNY Council on Assessment, in order to prepare for the actual visits from the Middle States team that are coming. These practice runs will focus on two of the Middle States standards in particular: Standard 5, Educational Effectiveness Assessment; and Standard 6, Planning, Resources, and Institutional



Improvement. On November 14, the leader of the Middle States review team, Dr. Arnold, will make a preliminary visit to campus to go over the review process with the SUNY Poly committees that are carrying out these efforts. Dr. Russell said that this visit would also include time for members of the College Council to meet with Dr. Arnold, and that he would work with the Executive Assistant, Dan Sargent, to confirm College Council volunteers for that meeting. The actual review team visit would take place March 16-19, 2025.

## **Enrollment Update:**

Dr. Russell reported that, overall, there had been modest change in enrollment numbers from the 2023-2024 academic year, a 0.6% increase overall. Also, there were 16 fewer first-time, first-year students enrolled this fall than in the fall 2023 semester. However, there were 83 more transfer students enrolled this fall than there the previous fall. Dr. Russell stated that the University was confident looking ahead to 2025. Chair Destito thanked him for his presentations.

## **Student Affairs/Student Activities Updates:**

Vice President for Student Affairs, Jennifer Adams, provided updates for her office, as there currently is no Student Government representative to the College Council in place. Jennifer presented a slide to bring Council members up to date on the duties covered by the three Assistant Deans of Students in her department: Brittany Morawiec oversees Residential Life, Community Standards, and Student Affairs Technology; Jennifer George oversees the CARE team/services, Student Involvement, and Orientation; and Melissa Prest oversees Multicultural Affairs, EOP, and CSTEP.

Jennifer reported that Student Government was going through a “reset” to get itself organized for the new academic year. She provided dates for upcoming Student Government elections, the results of which were expected on September 26, which would allow them to hold their first business meeting of the year on October 3. Chair Destito this schedule would allow there to be a Student Government representative to the College Council in place in time for the December meeting, which would be good.

Jennifer updated the group on some activities organized by Student Affairs. Under the heading of Civil Discourse and the Elections, a keynote address by Utica pollster John Zogby has been scheduled for October 10. On October 17, Professor Steven Schneider will present a session for students in regard to Artificial Intelligence. And the new Multicultural Center was opened in the Cayan Library, which the students are really excited about. The aim of the Center is to provide a “welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students, staff, faculty, and community partners to both host and attend events highlighting multicultural awareness and appreciation.”

Jennifer reminded the group that meeting students’ basic needs, including addressing food insecurity, is among SUNY Chancellor King’s priorities for the 2024-2025 academic year. She reported that Diana DiPrimo, who manages the University’s campus food pantry for students, The Poly Pantry, wrote a successful application for funding under a SUNY Food Locker pilot program that will allow the campus



to acquire a new refrigerated food locker that will provide students with 24/7 access to frozen food items.

Jennifer reported that a focus of the Director of Student Accessibility Services, Katie DiCastro, is on destigmatizing students' access/accommodation needs. She has developed a new form in the University's Slate CRM system that allows students to disclose accessibility needs before they arrive on campus for the start of the academic year. Jennifer reported that 42 students used the Slate form prior to the start of classes this year to disclose accessibility needs. Overall, 171 students had been accommodated with accessibility plans, which is an increase from 157 students that were accommodated in the spring semester.

Jennifer reviewed dates for events being organized by the Office of Career Services, noting in particular a site visit to a GM plant in Rochester scheduled for September 20 that had about 13 students signed up. The group will receive a tour of the plant and participate in an information session with GM engineers and managers. They are being hosted by SUNY Poly alumnus Christopher Darby. Jennifer reported that most of the students who signed up are in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers Club on campus, and that four of the students who signed up are CSTEP students.

Jennifer reported that Athletics is launching its own website, which will reflect SUNY Poly's new membership in the Empire 8 athletic conference. Jennifer also noted that SUNY Poly Esports' Rocket League Team won its first championship title in the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) last year. The new Esports Arena on campus is currently coupled with the 24-Hour Lab opened last spring and features gaming stations funded by the Student Government at Utica (SGU).

Jennifer also updated the Council members on the activities of the CARE Team. A number of groups have received trainings since August 15, including: Resident Assistants, Office Assistants, new faculty members, families and supporters, and all new students. Jennifer reported that there has been an increase in referrals to the CARE Team, which is a strong indication that students understand and recognize the CARE Team as a good resource for them to access. Jennifer also noted that Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Michele Kilburn, and Assistant Dean of Students Jennifer George both agreed to complete Threat Assessment Certification training.

### **Shared Governance/Faculty Update:**

Due to Dr. Adam McLain being unavailable to take part in the meeting, Dr. Kristina Boylan agreed to take his place. Dr. Boylan stated that she had not been provided with an update to present to the College Council, but that she would be happy to accept any questions from the College Council members, and that she would take her notes from the meeting back to Dr. McLain. There were no questions from the group.

Chair Destito thanked Dr. Boylan for the role she played in the recent inauguration ceremony.

No executive session was called during this meeting.



**Adjournment**

***Chair Destito requested a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by William Thickstun and was seconded by Keith Levatino. The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.***

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Sargent