

SUNY: ENGINE OF THE EMPIRE STATE

By **NANCY L. ZIMPHER**
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SUNY must be part of any smart strategic economic plan for the state.

I woke up this morning with about 439,694 students. How's that for a teacher?

Challenging to say the least. Daunting for sure. Most of all, it's exhilarating: Today is my first day as chancellor of the State University of New York – the nation's largest comprehensive public-university system.

Our students come from all over New York and the world. They attend classes from Stony Brook and Farmingdale on eastern Long Island, into Manhattan, due north through Albany to the Canadian border and then west to Buffalo and Jamestown.

They study everything from history, English and business to medicine, nanoeconomics and genomics. They leave with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the world, which they certainly do.

SUNY's 2.4 million alumni are corporate executives, research scientists, doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists, government leaders, community and civic leaders, good mothers and fathers and more.

While growing up and working in the Midwest, I was always aware of SUNY's strong reputation. But my education has intensified in the last few months as I prepared to become chancellor. Here are some early reflections:

* SUNY is an educational and economic engine that you couldn't build today if you tried. One of Nelson Rockefeller's big ideas, it's bringing high-quality, high-value public higher education to more New Yorkers than ever. Every dollar going into SUNY generates \$8 in economic activity for New York state and localities.

* Demand for SUNY has never been greater. Enrollment rose 20 percent in the last decade. Applications rose again this year. Binghamton had 29,000 applications for 2,000 freshman slots. New Paltz had 15,244 applications for

1,100 seats, while Albany received 22,168 applications for 2,250 spots. We need to be able to say yes to more deserving students while ensuring a high-quality education.

* SUNY seeds New York's future. More than four out of five SUNY students stay in New York after graduation. Our faculty, administrators, staff and students live in every region. And our research is helping to create jobs of all sorts from Suffolk County to Buffalo. SUNY must be part of any smart strategic economic plan for the state.

* With 2,800 buildings on 20,000 acres and 80,000 employees at 64 campuses, SUNY is like a Fortune 200 enterprise. We are fourth in research expenditures among US universities and the 18th largest patent producer.

* Our tremendous faculty includes Nobel, Grammy and Pulitzer Prize winners, Fulbright scholars and MacArthur and Guggenheim fellows.

We also have challenges. The current economy has increased demand for SUNY and made state support harder to come by. Albany can help with resources, but also by giving our campuses flexibility so they can become more entrepreneurial and better compete.

But I am confident we can achieve great things as we work with CUNY, New York's great private schools and universities across the nation. The public education continuum – from pre-K through college and beyond – is the door to opportunity for our kids and our communities.

Our work starts today. This week I will embark on a summer tour of all 64 SUNY campuses – community colleges, research universities, four-year colleges and specialty schools like Fashion Institute of Technology and the College of Optometry in Manhattan.

This tour will lead to a strategic plan for SUNY that will reflect the contributions and views of a great many – a collaboration that will help us figure out what we need to do to make SUNY a model for the nation and the world. Then we'll do it.

Nancy L. Zimpher is the chancellor of the State University of New York