

THE GAZETTE

Chancellor focuses on 'systemness' in last State of SUNY address

Zimpher retiring this summer

By Zachary Matson

January 23, 2017

Focusing on the State University of New York's "systemness," Chancellor Nancy Zimpher announced a new foundation for private donations and a data-focused center for replicating successful programs on Monday.

Zimpher, in her final State of the University address before she retires this summer, said SUNY plans to expand the Rockefeller Institute of Government and establish a new SUNY Center for Systems Change at the Albany-based policy institute.

[<Read the transcript here>](#)

While Zimpher offered few details about what the mission of the new center would be or how it would function, she said it would focus on systemwide continuous improvement. The center would focus on improving SUNY's use of data to identify the most effective programs at schools throughout the system and find ways to replicate and expand them. The center would also be used to help train employees of SUNY schools in constantly evaluating and improving programs and strategies.

"No single system of public higher education has launched a training program to touch every campus in a collective effort to get better at getting better," Zimpher said during the speech.

The state university system has also formed the new SUNY Impact Foundation,

which will solicit private donations and foster public partnerships aimed at scaling up programs that effectively address issues of affordability, college completion and preparing students for future careers.

Zimpher said SUNY officials had filed the paperwork to set up the new foundation – which will focus on systemwide investments – and had started to speak with potential donors and partners.

SUNY is also planning to expand its "Re-Enroll to Complete" program from a 17-campus pilot to nearly 30 campuses across the state. The program focuses on identifying and contacting students who have recently withdrawn from school and encouraging them to continue toward degree completion.

The state will also work on increasing the number of families that fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. With a completion rate of 62 percent of graduating seniors, Zimpher said New York families leave over \$150 million of potential federal aid on the table.

Zimpher lent her support to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposal to make SUNY tuition free for students from families that make \$125,000 or less a year, while highlighting decreases in the average debt-load of SUNY students. Half of SUNY students already attend college tuition-free, she said.

But the speech also served as a chance for Zimpher to reflect on her eight years manning the helm of the country's largest public university system.

“We do better together than we can on our own,” she said. “I’m often asked, ‘How do you run 64 campuses?’ And I always respond, ‘I don’t do it; we do it.’”