

SUNY proposals would keep more students on track for graduation

By Daniel S. Wells
January 31, 2017

SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher delivered her eighth and final State of the University Address January 23, outlining proposals she says will benefit both current students and recent graduates.

Those proposals include being more proactive in encouraging all students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms and to locate recent dropouts in hopes of getting them back to the classroom.

“Access plus completion equals success,” Zimpher repeated throughout the 40-minute speech at the Swyer Theater at the Empire State Plaza.

The FAFSA Outreach program would target the 62 percent of New York students – an estimated 300,000 students – who do not fill out the financial aid application forms, leaving approximately \$174 million in federal aid on the table every year. The goal of the program is to get every SUNY student to complete the FAFSA forms and see if they qualify for aid.

“Together we will move that FAFSA completion dial to 100 percent,” the chancellor said.

Zimpher also spoke about the Re-enroll to Complete program, a successful 17-campus pilot program, led by SUNY Plattsburgh, that is designed to reach out to recently withdrawn students with student loans and at-

tempt to get them back to school to complete their degree to avoid loan defaults.

“At Brockport more than half the students contacted returned to campus,” Zimpher said. “This year 29 SUNY campuses will participate.”

Zimpher also announced the creation of the SUNY Impact Foundation which will seek out private-sector investment to help maintain affordability, support degree completion, and prepare students for success in college and their careers. This foundation would serve the university system as a whole as opposed to the numerous foundations that currently serve individual campuses.

“We’ve filed the papers, we’ve hired the experts, we are recruiting our board members, and yes we are already soliciting investment,” Zimpher said.

Zimpher announced that SUNY will also create a new center to study the data for programs and policies within the SUNY system. This will allow for continuous improvement in the SUNY system while setting a higher standard for other education systems. The center will be housed at the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

“To this end, today I am announcing the formation of the SUNY Center for Systems Change – the embodiment of our aspiration to be the best at getting better.”

Currently, more than 96,000 students are graduating from SUNY schools every year. Zimpher hopes that by the year 2025, that

number will increase to 150,000 degrees each year.

“It is our collective work—hard work—that has made our university system

more ready, more productive, cohesive, and adaptable,” Zimpher said. “We are more prepared than ever to take on the challenges and changes we will face in the years to come.”