

Responses to Constituent Questions for the 5/8/2020 Senate Meeting

1. Do we have to have student evaluations this semester? This should not be happening. The faculty are killing themselves this semester, and things are rough with all the connection and technology issues. We are going to the ends of the earth for our students, and yet we will likely be evaluated negatively. Is that the reward? It goes to the morale problems we have at Buffalo State.

Even through difficult times like COVID-19 has presented, it is important to proceed with evaluations in an effort to maintain academic excellence and integrity and to assess and build remote teaching capabilities. Course evaluations help professors identify what is working in a particular course, and, perhaps even more importantly, what could use improvement especially in a remote teaching setting. This semester, in addition to school and departmental questions, the survey included questions about student's technological and learning/educational issues, as well as their concerns regarding the transition to remote learning. This information will be invaluable to faculty as they continually work to restructure and refine future iterations of their courses and to the institution in order to better meet student needs.

That being said, any full or part-time employee who taught during the Spring 2020 semester and is up for reappointment, promotion or tenure review in the future will have the option of not including student evaluations of teaching from the Spring 2020 semester in their reappointment, promotion, or continuing appointment/permanent appointment review materials. It is understood that the exclusion of such materials is justified by the extraordinary circumstances in which instruction is occurring during the Spring 2020 semester.

2. Do we have any sense about fall 2020 enrollment numbers? Fall classes are scheduled on the number of sections on the previous year and enrollment at that time. But now, now department chairs don't have a clue as to how much enrollment might drop. Chairs are trying to be as data-driven as possible but it's difficult when there is no data to work with.

Unfortunately, institutions of higher education did not think that we would have to consider a pandemic happening during this year's enrollment cycle. To that end, there are no benchmarks, playbook, or best practices that we can visit to assist with how to predict the impact of a sustained pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic we were predicting our incoming freshman number to be between 1550 and 1650. At this time, planning for the lower end of this range would be most prudent. We have also predicted that the transfer number to be 700 and the returning student number would be 4700. Again, please be mindful that these numbers are approximate and could fluctuate. We are fully aware that there will be some impact, to not only our incoming class, but to our returning student numbers. We have performed

predictive modeling to build scenarios. However, we ultimately will not know how this will turn out until after the freeze file date.

In conjunction to our predictive modeling, the Provost will lead a Fall 2020 Scenario Planning Team who will review scenarios that will consider impact on academic, student relations, campus operations and business continuity across the College. The scenarios will incorporate local health department guidance, SUNY guidance, and industry best practices. Consideration will be given to health and safety of students, faculty and staff; economic impact taking into consideration tuition liability deadlines and impact on cost containment metrics; student and employee relations; as well as community impact.

The Provost will communicate to faculty as more information is available and will provide advice on preparing the estimated number of seats given the best information available. I know these are challenging and nebulous times but please continue to make adjustments as needed.

3. The freshmen attrition rate -- meaning those entering freshmen who did not re-enroll by the following Fall term -- has steadily increased during the past six years. Last year VP Malcomb stated her intention to "drill down" into the data to find reasons why freshmen don't return to Buff State.
 - What are the reasons the administration has identified as causing the increasing freshmen attrition rates?
 - What are the sources or bases for identifying such as causing freshmen attrition?
 - Do the sources or bases for such causes meet quantitative research standards in the academic community? If not, why not?

The President's Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Retention (PACUR) will have a final report by the end of May. Among the initiatives such as student surveys including Noel Levitz, PACUR initiated reviewing data by school, major, and program cohorts to understand where there are the greatest levels of retention and attrition.

4. This is a question I have after the University Faculty Senate virtual plenary on April 17. My question is.

What plans are we making here at Buffalo State?

We were able to salvage the spring semester by moving to a remote teaching environment. Now we must ready ourselves for a fall semester defined by unknowns. We have convened a working group of faculty, staff and administrative leaders to identify and assess the practical implications of various scenarios under consideration. As we work our way through the scenarios, our goal will be to ensure that anything we do in the fall semester serves our students well and is worthy of our mission and reputation for excellence. We'll consider the findings from this group in order to make an informed

choice about which path to pursue. Once we decide on a direction, this working group and the greater campus community will work to develop an implementation plan with contingencies based on the changing environment.

What is our status given the chancellor's and provost's remarks below?

Vice President Barnum will respond to this in her budget presentation.

SUNY Chancellor:

On May 1st, we'll get an inkling of revenue and the budget. There have been budget groups formed that are looking at various things, such as regional synergies, to examine responses. I have sent budget scenarios to presidents that include:

- Base high, which means no cuts to budgets
- Base low, which means large cuts
- Base, which means some cuts

College presidents have been told not to take personnel actions until early May, so we know more about our budget and see what it means for the future. We have to position ourselves to maintain and emerge stronger.

We're heading into an uncertain future as far as finances are concerned. We have to be step up our fund-raising and we also have to be very conservative on every dollar we spend.

SUNY Provost:

On the fall semester - There is a "lot of scenario planning going on." We're advising campuses to talk about capabilities, but we know we don't have to start "from zero" with experience of what was done this spring. There is no mandatory way to decide on contingency planning "if we have the ability to open on some basis, what will it look like?" The state and feds will also have an opinion about re-opening for the fall.

On the hiring freeze - Prioritize who should be hired once that is lifted. Each hire should help students.

5. This semester electronic course evaluations were deployed to students on Friday, April 24- a full two weeks before the final day of classes for the semester. Asking students to complete a course evaluation weeks before the course is completed is inappropriate and scientifically invalid. How can students accurately evaluate a course before it is over? What is the justification for deploying course evaluations before teaching has ended and what can be done to change this process?

The evaluation did not go out any earlier this semester than in prior semesters. The published schedule states that surveys are to be deployed "2 weeks from Final Day of

Regular Instruction". The committee decided on two weeks from the final day of regular instruction because the majority of the semester has been conducted and students should be able to provide feedback about the course at a time that doesn't interfere with the end of studying and semester projects.

6. How are support service monies that are not being used due to no students/ faculty/ staff on campus monitored? Can they be reallocated and prioritized?

Vice President Barnum will respond to this in her budget presentation.

7. It would be helpful to see a report on Title III retention activities on campus.

The President's Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Retention will have a final report by the end of May. This report will include Title III efforts.

8. How can we continue curriculum work over the summer? This would be essential if innovative policies are being developed.

Instructional Design and Technology in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Center will provide workshops and support throughout the summer.

9. In the April 10th meeting a 'Report to the Buffalo State College Senate' on COVID-19 Response' was delivered by the Vice President for Finance and Management and a similar report on Student Affairs Covid response. It would be helpful to see similar reports from Academic Affairs and other units as well at the May 8th meeting. There are morsels of information trickling down and there are different morsels for different units, departments, and even programs. Having a consistent answer, or even a consistent policy for communication, for academic units will be helpful.

President Conway-Turner and every member of her Cabinet are working collaboratively on communications and related initiatives during the pandemic. Twice a week, members of the Cabinet meet with staff from Marketing and Communications and Government Relations to plan out campus wide communications. Additionally, each member of the Cabinet continues to utilize traditional communication channels such as the Daily Bulletin to share updates from their areas. As we are all working in this new format, if there are unanswered questions, please don't hesitate to email your Cabinet member for clarification. We may not have all the answers, but we will do our best to address your questions.

10. An update on ongoing searches and how are these prioritized (why is faculty hiring on hold while other hires are still happening)?

11. We have been told that there is a hiring freeze and that no new positions will be considered. Departments are being told to anticipate cuts in support services at a time when students need support more than ever to navigate a new learning environment. And even professional staff who have already been approved for the fall will have to be put back on the consent agenda and be reevaluated. There is also a new position approved for Honors and posted (to be clear: this is not a hire to fill a vacancy, but a brand-new position). So why are some areas being told there is a freeze when other areas are being awarded new lines to grow their departments, even as we expect enrollment to decline?

The following announcement was posted in the Daily on May 4th and applies to both questions #9 and #10:

Statewide Hiring Freeze, Spending Controls Due to COVID-19

As we continue to anticipate significant challenges and impacts on our campus finances from the COVID-19 pandemic, I am urging all members of the campus community to review and take seriously the new spending controls that were shared via the *Daily Bulletin* on [April 24](#) and [April 30](#).

In addition, new guidance from the New York State Division of Budget released last week outlines a strict hiring freeze across all state agencies. Effective immediately, any open or previously approved personnel searches at Buffalo State College are now subject to further review and reassessment by the cabinet. All future searches are postponed indefinitely. The only exceptions to the statewide hiring freeze are positions that are essential to health or safety or are critical to the continuity of operations that directly support revenue generation.

It is absolutely imperative that we work together to strategically limit our spending in the days, weeks, and months ahead to ensure our financial sustainability during these unprecedented times. I anticipate providing an overview of the 2020–2021 budget forecast via the *Daily Bulletin* during the week of May 11.

Thank you to each and every member of our faculty and staff for your understanding, patience, and dedication to Buffalo State and our students. Be well.

12. What impact do budget cuts have on facilities (new and renovations) and how will that determination be made?

Vice President Barnum will respond to this in her budget presentation.