

February 17, 2015

Dr. James Malatras
Director of State Operations
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Dr. Malatras:

We are writing to you in regard to the language in the Governor's Executive Budget bills that instructs the boards of trustees of the SUNY and CUNY systems to pass a resolution by December 31, 2015, "that students enrolled in an academic program of the [state/ city] university of New York shall be required to participate in an approved experiential or *applied* learning activity as a degree requirement." Our respective bodies—the University Faculty Senate and Faculty Council of Community Colleges of SUNY and the University Faculty Senate of CUNY—have grave concerns over this and other language in the Executive proposal that would mandate this graduation requirement. Our concerns are manifested in two ways: procedural and practical.

First, let's address the procedural issue. As you well know from your time at SUNY System Administration, faculty hold our role—as having primary responsibility for the development and implementation of curriculum—to be one of the most important of our obligations as educators. Indeed, when our boards of trustees have imposed curricular requirements on our respective institutions—such as the 1998 General Education requirement at SUNY or the more recent Pathways requirement at CUNY—without proper faculty input and oversight, there has been great resistance. But even in those cases, as problematic as they were from a faculty perspective, the initiation came from our boards, acting in what they believed to be their fiduciary responsibility. The proposal in the Executive budget—whether in the language that instructs the respective boards what they should do, or in the language elsewhere that directly ties the curricular requirement to the budget—is, in our view, a significant intrusion into the faculty's role and a direct politicization of curricular requirements. The central role of the faculty in determining the curriculum is one of the hallmarks of higher education in this country, part of what makes our system of higher education so strong. The direct imposition of executive and legislative action into this arena is simply the wrong thing to do.

The practical difficulty with implementing such a requirement was the subject of interchanges between Assemblywoman Glick and the chancellors of SUNY and CUNY during the higher education budget hearings on February 10. The chancellors pointed out some of the difficulties in implementing such a requirement. We won't repeat them in detail here, except to note that the bill would create a massive unfunded mandate that might leave few resources for our core educational mission. As of 2014, SUNY had [459,550 matriculating students](#) and CUNY had [269,000](#); the task of identifying and supervising so many out-of-classroom activities, whatever their nature, would be overwhelming. Suffice it to say, however, that had faculty governance groups been engaged in considering a proposal to make this a graduation requirement, we would have evaluated the

degree to which the notion is both academically desirable and financially feasible. Such an exercise has been conducted on some of our campuses, and certainly in many of our individual schools, majors, and courses. But it is at those levels that such a decision needs to be made, not mandated from outside the campuses or departments.

Can this situation be resolved? From our perspective, the best and most desirable way to handle this is to remove the language that calls for a mandated graduation requirement. A less desirable alternative would be to change the language from a graduation requirement to language that would ask the boards to establish policies that *opportunities* for experiential/applied learning be made available to students. Such an approach encourages applied learning while retaining curricular decisions for graduation requirements with the faculty, although it would still represent a greater intrusion into setting curriculum than we deem to be desirable or, indeed, appropriate.

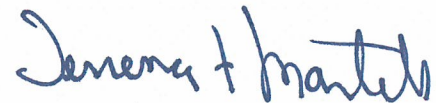
We thank you for your consideration of our concerns, and we hope that you will be willing to follow up with the Governor in this matter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Peter L.K. Knuepfer and Tina Good in black ink.

Peter L.K. Knuepfer
President
SUNY University Faculty Senate

Tina Good
President
Faculty Council of Community Colleges

Handwritten signature of Terrence F. Martell in blue ink.

Terrence F. Martell
President
CUNY University Faculty Senate