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Pledge of Labor Solidarity for SUNY Brockport Campus Workers

The following Solidarity Pledge was endorsed by a vote of the Brockport UUP Executive Committee in June.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous human suffering. First and foremost, it is a health crisis like no other in recent memory. Hundreds of thousands have already died of the disease, a figure that rises each day. We mourn with those around the world who have lost loved ones. Moreover, COVID-19 has prevented workers from working. More than 30 million people in the US have lost their jobs in a span of six weeks—a figure also likely to rise—producing levels of economic disruption also unlike anything in recent memory. The crisis we face at SUNY has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 health emergency, but not caused by it. Over the last decade our campus has struggled with austerity budgets and reduced staffing. To raise revenue the University has engaged in desperate efforts to attract and retain students to help offset a massive, decades-long public disinvestment from public higher education in New York State and across the country. The long-term solution to our current financial crisis can only be found in significant public reinvestment. In the short-term, budget cuts are likely. Though always painful, cuts can be managed in ways that are equitable, transparent, and humane.

Facing budget shortfalls, other universities and colleges across the country have begun to impose salary reductions or, worse, to furlough or lay off workers. We at SUNY are fortunate to have a strong union—United University Professions (UUP)—the benefits of which become crystal clear in moments of crisis and scarcity. We have a contract that provides considerable job security for many (though not all) of our members, and we have a statutory role in the process of shared governance. Our contract protects us from unilateral state reductions in salary or furloughs; such moves would have to be negotiated with the union. These contractual provisions, however, as strong as they are, cannot shield us entirely from the economic turmoil we are likely to face. The contract will not answer the complex questions of campus priorities that will shape our budgeting decisions; it merely provides a framework within which the deliberations occur. At the campus level it will take engaged participation from UUP members to meet the economic challenges ahead.

In the face of likely cuts, UUP members will be tasked over the coming months, in ways both large and small, to participate in the difficult process of balancing campus budgets. When engaging in this process—whether at the university-wide level, or in our smaller units—we ask members to be guided by the principles of labor solidarity, which accord fully, we believe, with the core mission of the University.

By signing this statement, the undersigned UUP members pledge that any decisions and actions we undertake to manage anticipated cuts will, to the best of our ability, be made in accordance with the following principles:

1. **No involuntary job losses:** The University's employees are its most important resource. Protecting jobs minimizes the human suffering to employees. Moreover, it maintains the foundation of the University: its capacities to teach and provide services for students, along with the institution's role in the preservation and creation of knowledge. Preserving jobs for all categories of workers must be a priority during this crisis.
2. **No loss of healthcare:** Healthcare in the US remains tied to employment. In the face of a global pandemic, we must do everything possible to prevent the loss of employee health benefits. This means not only keeping people employed, but particularly for contingent faculty and professionals, keeping them employed at levels that maintain their health coverage.
3. **Equitable budgeting:** Cuts should be distributed broadly across the campus. This is not a time to "build to strength," or foster cut-throat competition among units for scarce resources. Our University's strength is in the diversity of its programs. The range of departments and programs on campus creates our overall educational experience and impact for our students. Small units must be maintained alongside larger ones. Whether as the result of swift retrenchment or slow attrition, the loss of programs and units must be avoided at all costs.
4. **Protect the most vulnerable:** Equitable does not mean identical. Cuts should come first from those segments of the university community that are most able to withstand the losses. We should take special care to ensure the security of those who have the weakest job protections, the lowest salaries, and the most tenuous access to health benefits.
5. **Revenue sources to save jobs:** Campus management and unions should work together to identify ways to secure resources to save jobs for current employees. Avenues for voluntary adjustments that could assist the most vulnerable employees and benefit the university by maintaining its strong and diverse base of faculty and staff include use of the Voluntary Reduction in Work Schedule Program and Phased Retirement.

Solidarity Pledge, continued

UUP is ready to work with management to develop information and conduct an appeal for voluntary use of these options to help protect colleagues.

6. Transparent processes: The processes through which decisions are made, and the data on which they are based must be entirely transparent. Most pressing, this means making complete, itemized university budgets public. Any data on enrollments, revenues, growth or other relevant criteria must likewise be public. Only with full information and transparent procedures can academic and professional faculty meaningfully participate in determining budgetary priorities.

7. Shared governance: UUP and the University Senate act as the two primary bodies of shared governance on our campus. In times of crisis, it is incumbent that the University work with and through these bodies. Full consultation, not the expectation of a rubber-stamp, is the only genuinely participatory process. Academic and professional faculty must participate in planning and decision-making bodies (i.e., committees, task forces, etc.) and processes as co-equal partners with the campus administration, drawing upon the collective expertise of the campus. When the University says, “we’re all in this together,” it must live up to its word.

8. Collaborative advocacy for SUNY funding: The entire campus community is needed to fully engage in efforts to advocate for federal resources to assist New York State. UUP is working with other unions and community groups to educate the public and press legislators to provide the financial support SUNY needs to provide medical care and accessible public education for the residents of our state. A campus community united around this continuous advocacy effort is a critical component for success.

9. Safety and well-being of the community: Regardless of the model used for re-opening of the campus for the fall semester, the health and safety of all members of the college/university community must be protected. This requires that the employer provide and arrange for the necessary testing, Personal Protective Equipment, safety and cleaning protocols, and quarantine arrangements in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 cases anywhere in the campus community. There must also be arrangements established to protect members of the community who are vulnerable to the virus, and their families.

10. Maintenance of academic quality: Decisions about the use of remote and online learning should be determined by the faculty, in consultation with professional staff and relevant administration. Recognizing that not all campuses are the same, decisions should be tailored to the needs and conditions of local campuses and the needs of the students they serve. The current crisis should not be used to accelerate the transition to online programs, recognizing that online education is not optimal in many situations and, when inappropriately used, can disadvantage students and erode the quality of education and the academic reputation of SUNY.

11. Protection of Academic Freedom and intellectual property: Protecting Academic Freedom and faculty intellectual property must remain central to the policies, programs, and life of the university.

12. Protect against privatization of public education: As a necessary public good, we will press to ensure that local agreements and state policies reject any and all institutional closures or privatization schemes including, for example, the outsourcing of student services, the creation and expansion of privatized units on campus (such as the Research Foundation), or the increasingly many contracts with private entities to provide educational services (including online learning tools) to campus. All partnerships with the private sector must be fully transparent, including contract terms, costs, conditions for service, etc.

13. Collaboration and shared responsibility: In order for the campus to function in a healthy, productive and safe manner, all elements of the community must be a part of the work of building a safe and productive learning and living environment for all. All members of the community bear responsibility for the safety of everyone in the community and, thus, must be party to discussions and deliberations on steps taken to ensure that the campus emerges from this crisis healthy, financially strong, and a place where an affordable, high-quality education is available for all who seek it.

President's Message

Alissa Karl, President
Brockport Chapter UUP



For Our Health, and for the People of New York: Bail Out Higher Ed Now!

I've talked with many friends about the things we did just before the Covid lockdown began in mid-March—our last “before” days. Looking back it occurs to me that my last weekend was very well spent. I attended a conference on the [fight against austerity in public higher ed](#) at SUNY New Paltz. There, faculty, staff and students from SUNY, CUNY and many other public universities in the Northeast and Canada gathered to discuss the decades-long emaciation of higher education and its broad-ranging social and economic effects. The pall of the pandemic was starting to set in over that weekend, and the creeping crisis of underfunding and neglect of our public higher ed institutions was already merging with the seemingly sudden realization that this pandemic could be a massive disruption to our work and our lives.

It has become clear over the past few months that these crises go hand in hand, that weathering the pandemic and protecting ourselves throughout it require confronting the anti-public logics of austerity. A [recent article](#) in the *New York Times* reported the deep concern of many college faculty across the country about returning to in-person instruction in the Fall. This discomfort, of course, applies not only to faculty but to all workers on college campuses. The *Times*, however, fails to treat the real issues of the “back to campus” dilemma: the fact that higher education, and public higher ed in our case, are being left to fend for themselves in the middle of an historic health and economic crisis. The real issue is not faculty and staff reticence about this or that campus plan for the Fall. It is the starvation of public higher ed under an ideology that treats us as an ephemeral product for sale rather than the abiding, vital public good that we are.

Any plan that a SUNY campus devises for work in the Fall is driven by the financial neglect of higher ed in New York. Brockport and other campuses - within SUNY and beyond - are planning in-person classes in the Fall because we fear a substantial drop in enrollments if we do not offer face-to-face teaching. I know that some among us prefer to teach in person, and would like to have the option to do so, while others are apprehensive at best about returning to campus. Regardless of how one feels about the campus re-opening to students, it is clear that we are doing it, quite simply, because *we need the money*. And we are not, at present, planning widespread testing of all people entering campus to receive a baseline picture of infection--because we *(apparently) don't have the money*.

We're gambling public health and safety because the State has yet to make a commitment to backstop public higher ed during this public health and economic crisis. At the time of writing, Governor Cuomo is sitting on CARES Act money that could be released to campuses to fill financial gaps or provide for widespread testing. But it's a bigger question than just the allocation of Federal funds. The State has yet to make a commitment to sustaining public higher ed, leaving us to scrape for enrollments instead.

The austerity conditions and dilemmas that we face are not inevitable. Administrators from campus to SUNY to the Governor's Office will tell us that there simply is no other way than to cut employment, enforce more austerity, and lure enrollments by exposing faculty, staff and students to illness. (President Macpherson has noted that salaries account for the vast bulk of the College's budget. Of course they do. Our skills and talents and commitment *are* Brockport. Faculty and staff *are* the College, not liabilities on its balance sheets, and we should not allow administrative rhetoric to cast us as such).

Yet we know that the Covid crisis has been exacerbated by skeletal public health infrastructures in most places in the US - the result of cuts to public, collectively-held goods that everyone needs. When we look at the big picture, we see that higher ed is another public good that has been and remains on the chopping block. As in public health, the “solution” to this crisis is not less, but more, public higher ed. The SUNY system is the very public good that will see New York through these times: with the research, education and training that the State will need to shore up our public health and economic infrastructures and to adapt to our changed circumstances.

In a [recent Op-Ed](#) about the CUNY system, the respective Chairs of the State Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees argued that we must tax the ultra-rich to support public higher ed and all public services. Specifically, we need more faculty and staff to properly support and deliver remote learning, not fewer. These political allies understand that we must reverse our austerity program if we are to fight the broadening social and economic damage of the pandemic.

The lessons that began to suggest themselves in my last weekend “before” - that the pandemic is implicated in, and exacerbated by, public sector austerity - have become all too apparent. Public [higher ed needs a bailout](#), not cuts paired with an intensified enrollment hustle.

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Petition to SUNY for Open Hearing on Reopening

As UUP continues to push for a reopening of campuses that is as safe as possible for all in our campus communities, it has become clear that SUNY needs to hear from all of us. Our voices and concerns must be heard by the leaders of the system, and we must be partners to ensure that SUNY opens with the best practices for health and safety protections.

To express our concerns, UUP has developed a [petition](#) calling on SUNY to convene a virtual public hearing as soon as possible in July 2020 to discuss the need for clear, consistent, comprehensive guidance for reopening SUNY campuses.

Please add your name to the petition and join us in calling upon SUNY to provide the leadership needed to ensure that no campus communities will be at greater risk than others due to the lack of consistent, system-wide standards for reopening. We will keep this petition active until July 15 and then deliver it to SUNY.

Thank you for standing with your colleagues and adding your name to this important call to action.

A Call for Grassroots Action



As I write there is a lot of uncertainty and many concerns amongst our colleagues and within our communities. The status of SUNY directly addressing our concerns surrounding our health and safety, SUNY's financial stability, and our work environment remain largely unanswered. While we collectively continue to pursue answers and demand that SUNY hold a virtual public hearing to hear directly from all of us, we must also be prepared to amplify our voices through our next action. SUNY employees across the state are making plans to be heard.

To that end, I am asking you to commit to participating in a demonstration to demand our voices be heard. Protecting our health, safety, and jobs - protects the members of our communities and our local economy. We cannot just wait, we must commit to joining in a grassroots demonstration and help determine what kind of action will have the biggest impact for change.

Register and share your ideas by clicking [HERE](#).

I will provide updates as I hear from our colleagues and community allies. I am excited to build this next step to fight back and join our voices together.

Please remember:

1. Many of our colleagues and students work, live and shop in this community;
2. Many of the businesses in this community employ our students;
3. Many of the parents of our students live in a SUNY community; and
4. Many of the business owners in this community were once SUNY students.

So, please share this registration link and invitation widely because our SUNY roots run deep and SUNY funding and health crises will be felt by our entire community. Let's make sure New York State knows that our community demands respect.



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UUP celebrates end of ICE rules targeting international students

UUP is hailing the reversal of Immigration and Customs Enforcement rules, initially issued on July 6, that would have required international students taking only online classes to leave the United States.

UUP joined with unions including the Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU), which represents graduate student workers in SUNY, to swiftly oppose this rule change. The change faced legal challenges from numerous universities and 17 states attorneys general, including the AG for New York.

About 22,000 international students attend SUNY schools. The rule change would have presented international students and colleges and universities with awful dilemma: hold in-person classes where it may not have been safe to do so, or see international students deported. UUP Statewide President Fred Kowal said: "International students provide crucial cultural, academic and financial resources to SUNY campuses across the state. They should be supported during this crisis, not demonized."

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