

Testimony before the New York State Division of the Budget

Christopher C. Dahl
President, SUNY Geneseo

November 17, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present testimony on the budgetary needs of SUNY generally, and SUNY Geneseo, in particular. I commend Governor Spitzer and Director of the Budget Paul Francis for directing that these hearings be held, for I believe that investment in SUNY at this time is essential to advancing New York State and improving the upstate economy. Strengthening public higher education will pay great dividends to the Empire State and its citizens and propel us to greatness in the twenty-first century. Making strategic investment in SUNY a high priority for this state is one of the best ways I know of “achieving balance through prioritization.” It is prudent, it is sound, it is effective—and especially so in difficult economic times.

SUNY System Administration has identified a number of priorities for the 2008-09 fiscal year. Briefly, among these priorities are:

- the need to hire 1,000 new faculty over the next three years;
- Equipment replacement and investment in new technology;
- Mandatory base funding including, collective-bargaining, energy, inflation, and enrollment; and
- Capital funding for critical maintenance to address the \$3.2 billion backlog in critical maintenance projects.

Not surprisingly, Geneseo’s priorities are very closely aligned with these System priorities. In the area of *faculty*, Geneseo needs \$2.6 million annually for 50 new faculty positions in order to bring our student/faculty

ratio to 15:1 – a ratio commensurate with that of our peer, nationally ranked, public liberal arts colleges. Geneseo also requires \$1.2 million annually in catch-up funds to bring our faculty salaries to the national average for public colleges and universities. Even in bad budget years, Geneseo has held the line by keeping full-time faculty in the classroom for our students. Eighty-eight (88) percent of our credit hours are taught by full-time faculty. This excellent record has led to the highest retention and graduation rates in the system. A modest and appropriate investment in SUNY faculty will pay big dividends.

Geneseo also has a critical need for increased *equipment replacement funding*. A minimum of \$350,000 is required just to replace computers and other academic and non-academic equipment that is beyond its useful life. Beyond this, there is a compelling need to increase the annual provision for equipment replacement to enable the establishment of systematic equipment replacement programs that will protect and enhance our competitiveness.

Additional funding for the acquisition of new state-of-the-art scientific, and other technologically advanced, equipment is needed as well. Investing in this equipment will give our students and New York State a competitive advantage in the future high-tech economy and enhance the research capabilities of our faculty and students, enabling Geneseo to attract new research grants and continue its economic development efforts in the Greater Rochester region. With the tightening of Federal earmark funding, it is imperative that New York State assume greater responsibility in this area.

Geneseo needs, at a minimum, *inflation indexed* OTPS (Other Than Personal Service) support. The cost of virtually every product the College purchases has been increasing at rates in excess of inflation. Paper products are up 13 percent; building materials are up across-the-board with increases

ranging from 12 to 88 percent; postage is up 7.7 percent; memberships, advertising and printing are up 5 percent. *Library serial and Electronic Database* costs have increased 6 percent and our campus library has compiled requests totaling over \$100,000 for new/updated electronic databases. Over the past 15 years, the College has systematically reduced OTPS allocations when it was forced to absorb reductions in funding, rather than reduce sections or otherwise damage its instructional programs. This trend must be reversed.

Like all campuses in the system, Geneseo desperately needs *critical maintenance* funding to protect and preserve our capital assets. The College has over 2.3 million square feet of building space, most of it decades old and showing its age. If the backlog of critical maintenance needs is not addressed by an accelerated and systematic capital plan it will continue to grow and our capital assets will deteriorate beyond the point of no return.

Geneseo is keenly aware of all the demands on the State budget and we do not make these requests lightly. We have been, and will continue to be, good stewards of State tax and tuition dollars. We continually seek opportunities to control our costs and save scarce resources. Through the strategic use of performance contracts and energy management systems, the College realizes savings of nearly \$400,000 per year for energy. We have installed variable speed motors, dual capacity boilers and upgraded pumps and chillers to list just a few initiatives and we started undertaking these programs long before most other institutions. Last year we entered into a centralized campus-wide lease for copy machines saving more than \$500,000 over the five-year term of the agreement. At Geneseo, no initiative is viewed as being too small or inconsequential. We realize that we must do

our part and manage our resources effectively and efficiently for the good of all and we will continue to do so.

One tool that would be extremely helpful in managing our resources is provision for variable, campus-based tuition, which would allow us to maximize efficiencies and provide the extra margin required to achieve excellence for our students and the citizens of the State of New York. Indeed, we need to unshackle SUNY from excessive regulation and bureaucratic red-tape so that the system can achieve its full potential as a powerhouse for economic and civic development throughout the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to outline our needs. The future of New York State is linked inextricably to that of the State University of New York. We know there are many competing demands on State resources but we respectfully request your support. Our future depends on it.