



April 5, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

### Why Charging More Makes Less Cents

Decision-making at the system level can sometimes happen invisibly. Campuses often feel the results (or consequences) of decisions that have been in development for some time. One important consideration underway are possible tuition and fee increases for the next two-three years, which fall to the SUNY Board of Trustees to determine. I think it important for us to consider the possible impacts of increases to our students and campus.

According to *Forbes*, in an article by Preston Cooper in 2020, “published college tuition has increased in price more than any other good or service besides hospital care.” When the rising rates are considered against the net tuition recouped, the financial impacts worsen. The vast majority of the data show that net tuition is less than 40% of the published rates. In all, while advertised prices rise, real dollar cost for wages and amenities increase, worsening the financial condition for both students and institutions.

It’s a triple whammy. In a bid for transparency, higher education institutions advertise tuition and fee increases. The message of higher prices is yet more sticker shock for an already price sensitive consumer base. And, the final whammy, colleges are projected to receive less state support when increasingly net tuition revenues don’t cover the actual cost of delivery or the gap created by decreased buying power of taxpayer dollars.

Adding to our financial whiplash are the declining enrollments across SUNY, triggered by fewer high school graduates and migration patterns away from the Northeast. With all these considerations any business would ask the question: when does charging more for a surplus supply (i.e. available seats in classrooms) make sense?

Fundamentally, it’s the business model of higher education for SUNY that we must confront. Essentially, the question comes down to how much can we charge students who have experienced a multi-layered set of exigencies all profoundly exacerbated by COVID? We cannot answer this question, however, without first considering that as a public institution our ultimate goal is to deliver on the promise of a public good: education.

If we aren’t in the business of education delivery for profit, then we should ask: how much is the betterment of the state and its public worth to the taxpayer? It would seem, given the hardships felt by students and families that reside in NYS, driving them away from the very opportunities to recover by charging more while not netting enough revenue to cover costs makes little sense.

And, as families mull over their college choices, they scrutinize intensely the value proposition. Price sensitivity, then, for all publics is further problematized by this question of value: is the cost

and debt worth it? A weakened value proposition can only further compromise a business model challenged by surplus. Brand demand has to be addressed before any discussion of price increase can be entertained.

Narrowing the focus to Purchase, we see clear evidence that links price sensitivity to lower enrollments and rates of retention. Looking at data from academic year 2019-20, for instance, we see decreased enrollment of PELL eligible and first generation college students. Sliced another way, data for students not returning shows about 150 students filed formal leaves of absence. This data helps us understand that mid-degree students are being compelled more than ever before to stop out in response to COVID and other financial hardships.

If not a price increase, then what are the opportunities to sustain affordable degree attainment? For Purchase College, increasing the cost of attendance at a time when so many students are incapable of affording it is unwise. Increasing the financial burden on students abdicates our responsibility to provide the public with affordable, accessible, and much needed education and training. Our efforts must center on rethinking delivery and moving beyond the old paradigms of degree attainment to leverage one-time dollars in an effort to build greater brand confidence amongst current and future students and to improve accessibility.

I hope as we take on broader advocacy work as a campus, and within sectors of SUNY, we can hold to this perspective. Continuing to move more of the cost of attendance to students exacerbates all of the inequities we need to correct. The escalating costs are also key indicators we need to consider as we finalize our strategic plan.

## **Award Recipients of the Spring 2021**

*Please join me on congratulating your colleagues*

**Doris and Carl Kempner Distinguished Professor 2021-2023:**

[Nancy Bowen](#), A+D

**Juanita and Joseph Leff Distinguished Professor 2021-2022:**

[Jason Pine](#), FMS

**Emily and Eugene Grant Faculty Award:**

[Peter Denenberg](#), Music

[Yanine Hess](#), NSS

**Dee and Robert Topol Award:**

[Christian Bailey](#), HUM and [Simon Surowicz](#), HUM

[Michael Bell-Smith](#), FMS

## **ART+DESIGN**

**Visiting Artist Lecture Series:**

April 7	<a href="#">Yevgeniya Baras</a>
April 15	<a href="#">Edel Rodriguez</a>
April 21	<a href="#">Ilana Harris-Babou</a>
April 30	<a href="#">A.L. Steiner</a>
May 5	<a href="#">Michael Smith</a>

## **LIBRARY**

### **We want to hear from you!**

The Library is seeking your feedback on our services, resources, and more! Please complete our short (10-15 minute) survey to help us gather feedback how best to serve the Purchase College community, how we can improve, and issues that will influence our planning efforts.

The survey is open to all students, staff, and faculty, and is anonymous.

[Library Feedback Survey](#): The survey will be open for responses from March 24 - April 7.

Students who complete the survey can enter to win one of two \$20 Visa gift cards! Please encourage students to submit their name and Purchase email address at the end of the survey – this information is completely separate from the survey and is not connected to survey responses.

We look forward to receiving your feedback! Please contact [lib.director@purchase.edu](mailto:lib.director@purchase.edu) if you have any questions or concerns about the survey.

## **NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE**

### **Lecture Series:**

**April 15:** Dr. Alyson Spurgas (Sociology, Trinity College), “Diagnosing Desire: Biopolitics and Femininity into the Twenty-First Century”

**May 6 at 6pm:** [Natural and Social Sciences Student Research Symposium](#)

The symposium provides an opportunity for students to present their senior project research to peers, alumni, family, faculty, and members of the community.

## **NEUBERGER MUSEUM**

## PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

### **We Are In This Together**

Since early 2021 The PAC Lobby has been hosting Purchase College's COVID-19 Testing Center, testing over 1,300 students, faculty, and staff each week. And Director of Production Christy Havard has been spearheading efforts to make the space calming and welcoming, so that the testing experience can be as painless as possible.

There is always music playing, highlighting performances by Conservatory of Music faculty and students. The large panels in the lower lobby are being transformed into an installation showcasing the work of Art+Design students. Earlier this month, PAC Lighting Supervisor Peter Wylie added his own touch to the space, creating and donating two custom-made GOBOs\* that are now being used to project positive messages onto the walls. ([Click here to see photos](#))

While we do wish that we were inviting you to The PAC for live performances instead of for testing, for the time being, The PAC is doing what it can to lift our spirits and remind us that **we are in this together.**

*\*A GOBO is a small stenciled circular disc, used in lighting fixtures to create a projected image or pattern. The term "GOBO" is short for "Go Between Optics," describing the location where it needs to be positioned in the light path of a lighting fixture.*