

OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS— PROGRESS UPDATE

Key developments, risks, and priorities

Institutional Research and Planning Committee • June 2026

ASCO MEETING – 2026

- Shared concerns about the size and quality of the applicant pool; schools are having difficulty filling classes
- New schools opening: University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, High Point
- Universal concern about the increase in requests for accommodations, exam rescheduling, and observation of holidays
- Peers have taken notice of several SUNY initiatives — Early Assurance, OAT Study, Insight to Career Capital, and the Happiness Study — as examples of forward-thinking practices

FINANCIAL AID POLICY SHIFT (FEDERAL LOANS)

- New federal policy (effective Fall 2026) caps Stafford Loans at \$50,000/year and \$200,000 lifetime
- Grad PLUS Loan program expected to sunset over 3 years (guidance pending)
- Cost of attendance creates funding gaps:
 - ~\$46K (out-of-state)
 - ~\$26K (in-state)
 - Tuition: Out-state, \$53K; In-state: 32K; Cost of living: 46K
- Students will rely on private loans after reaching federal limits

Institutional Response

- Partnership with SUNY Downstate and Upstate to identify lenders (~7 selected)
- Adoption of ELM Select platform for private loan processing
- Award letters (June) include lender comparison access

Key Risk

- Credit-based lending may disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged students
- Higher interest rates and limited access may constrain enrollment and persistence

UPSTATE (SYRACUSE) PROGRAM

- Applications opened June 25
- Ongoing coordination between admissions, marketing, and program director
 - Development of recruitment strategy, digital presence, and events (on-line Open House: 75 attendees)
- Next step: enrollment of students, provision of services, and integration of campus culture
 - **What are the elements of our campus culture that must be preserved?**

ENGAGEMENT

- Variable attendance across events; increasing RSVP/no-show rates
- “Food-driven attendance” (grab-n-go culture)
- Need to reassess event design, value proposition, and targeting

Action

- RSVP forms updated (students are reminded that attendance is expected)

Next Steps

- Conduct focus groups
- Align programming with student priorities and schedules

ADMISSIONS & STUDENT QUALITY

- Strong admissions cycle
 - Received 514 applications: highest volume in years
 - AA & TS Average: 350; Total GPA average: 3.7; Sci: 3.5
 - Yield: 69%
 - Strongest Hold list in years
- Lead measures in admissions indicate a healthy application cycle
 - EyeCare attendance (139 in-person/64 virtual)
 - CSTEP interest/attendance
- Implementation of Early Assurance program to encourage strong applicants to apply and secure spots early in the cycle
- Ongoing analysis linking admissions metrics (OAT, GPA) to academic and board outcomes
 - Monitoring distribution of OAT and implications for outcomes

STUDENT WELL-BEING

- Counselor highly trusted by students
- Expanded programming addressing overthinking and cognitive distortions
- Wellness week had a robust turnout this year, highly positive feedback on all activities
- Grant secured and three SUNY community members trained on Mental Health First Aid train-the-trainer program
- Establishment of Care Team

CAREER DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT

- Career Symposium continues to be flagship program with high attendance (employers, networking, professional exposure)
- Increased emphasis on career pathways and long-term professional development
- Establishment of Insights to Career Capital interview series on YouTube

PIPELINE & ACCESS INITIATIVES

- Continued support of CSTEP and outreach programs targeting economically disadvantaged students; **CSTEP thriving despite reduction in funding!**
- Strengthening of pathway partnerships: recently signed MOU with SUNY Poly
- Implementation of INSIGHT- Initiative for Student Immersion in Research, Clinical Care and Training in Optometry (42 applicants!)
 - Addresses early exposure gap
 - Objectives:
 - Introduce undergraduate students to vision science and optometry
 - Foster interest in optometry as a career pathway
 - Provide mentorship and hands-on laboratory experience
 - Strengthen the pathway for future applicants to SUNY College of Optometry

Next steps:

- Implement opportunities for high school students

DATA, ANALYTICS & STRATEGIC INSIGHT

- Ongoing research on admissions predictors of academic performance and NBEO outcomes
- Development of KPIs aligned with SUNY Academic Momentum goals

PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

- Monitor impact of federal loan changes on access and enrollment
- Continue to expand and strengthen applicant pool
- Strengthen early intervention systems to support retention
- Expand data-informed decision-making across Student Affairs and Enrollment
- Continue development of Upstate program and pipeline partnerships

Looking at everything on this list: where are we most exposed if things go wrong?

Given our current momentum — strong admissions metrics, a growing pipeline, expanding programs, and a strong reputation — how do we leverage that position of strength before the external pressures (loan caps, shrinking applicant pools, new competitors) begin to influence it?