



# THE STATE UNIVERSITY of NEW YORK

**James R. Van Voorst**  
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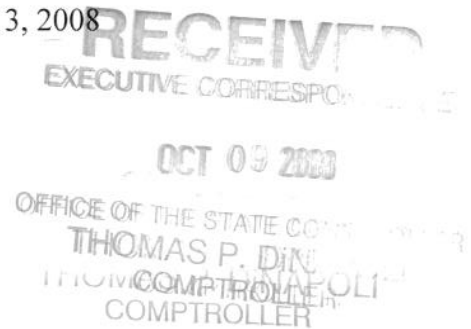
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Honorable Thomas DiNapoli  
Comptroller  
110 State Street  
Albany, New York 12236

Dear Mr. DiNapoli:

October 3, 2008



In accordance with Section 170 of the Executive Law, this is our 90-day response showing the actions taken to address the recommendations contained in the State Comptroller's Audit Report on the Educational Opportunity Program (2007-S-99). Our specific comments to the recommendations follow.

Recommendation 1: Follow-up on the ineligible EOP expenditures as detailed in this report and request the campuses to refund amounts, as appropriate, to the EOP for future allocation.

Response: Partially Implemented. The Office of Opportunity Programs has followed up with the campuses at Albany, Buffalo, and Oswego, each of which has taken corrective action to help ensure funds are only used for EOP. At the System Administration level, the Office of Opportunity Programs will be working with the University Controller's Office to recover funds determined to have been expended in a manner contrary to Educational Opportunity Program guidelines and program intent. It should also be noted that an erroneous payment of \$5,532 to a graduate assistant in the computer science department at SUNY Buffalo was reimbursed during the auditors' visit to the campus.

Recommendation 2: Remind campuses that funds designated for specific EOP purposes can only be used for said purposes (i.e., counseling funds must only be used for counselors, etc.).

Response: Implemented. In addition to the extensive attention given to this issue in the training retreat held in April, individual follow-up meetings have been held with administrators at the campuses audited and correspondence highlighting pertinent sections of the program guidelines has been sent to all participating campuses.

Recommendation 3: Determine if the recruitment counselor's position in New York City, currently funded through the EOP at the University at Albany, is genuinely needed. If so, determine if the counselor should be paid through allocations to the University at Albany or System Administration funding.

Response: Implemented. Based upon enrollment trends and recent changes in program administration at SUNY Albany, the Office of Opportunity Programs and the campus have agreed to discontinue the recruitment initiative. However, the Office of Opportunity Programs continues to believe that recruitment and outreach both for individual campuses and for the program in general remains an important aspect of access. As recommended, careful consideration will be given to the most appropriate vehicle and structure for the continuation of such activities.

Recommendation 4: Determine whether the counselor on the University at Albany's payroll worked the hours reported by the EOP Director and take appropriate action. Take steps to recover any overpayments identified.

Response: Implemented. As mentioned in the response to the draft audit report, the Office of Opportunity Programs obtained statements from a number of schools and community organizations that have received services through the recruitment initiative. While the hours reported on the timesheets cannot be agreed to specific recruitment activities, these statements are indicative of the level of effort and the hours worked by the counselor. It should also be noted that recruitment responsibilities include preparation work (e.g. development of materials, planning, etc.) as well as specific appointments and presentations. Nonetheless, the Office of Opportunity Programs is aware of the need for counselors and recruiters to keep more detailed records of their activities. These requirements were put in place for the final months of the recruitment initiative and have been communicated to campus EOP Directors.

Recommendation 5: Conduct a formal and thorough investigation and assessment of the actions of the EOP Director at the University at Albany regarding the improper preparation and signature of time sheets for the New York City-based recruitment counselor, as detailed in this report. As appropriate, take actions with all personnel involved in this matter.

Response: Implemented. SUNY Albany officials met with the EOP Director in connection with the issues identified and instructed him as to the proper handling of timesheets. He has since retired and the recruitment initiative is no longer in operation.

Recommendation 6: Recover direct aid funds to the 349 former students who had open accounts at Oswego's bookstore. Distribute those funds, as appropriate, and/or ensure that they are used for EOP-intended purposes.

Response: Partially Implemented. SUNY Oswego has returned a total of \$19,064 to individual students who had balances at the bookstore and has applied another \$1,459 of such balances to students' outstanding accounts. Efforts to reach the

remaining students continue. Funds remaining at the end of this process will be used for approved EOP purposes.

Recommendation 7: Work with officials at the College at Oswego to revise their system of distributing book aid to students.

Response: Implemented. SUNY Oswego has discontinued the use of bookstore accounts for EOP students as of the fall 2008 semester. Funds for the purchase of textbooks are now distributed directly to students.

Recommendation 8: Reiterate to campuses the need for prior approval from the Office to grant direct aid to students past the standard limit of ten semesters.

Response: Implemented. This requirement was reinforced in the training retreat held in April and was further emphasized in a written communication to campus personnel.

Recommendation 9: Remind campuses to maintain accurate and updated EOP rosters.

Response: Implemented. Campuses have been instructed to reconcile enrollment figures reported to the Office of Opportunity Programs, program rosters, and listings of students maintained in campus institutional research offices to ensure accuracy and consistency both in number and specific students identified.

Recommendation 10: Advise campuses (including non-EOP personnel) of the requirements to retain all necessary EOP-related documentation (especially documents pertaining to student eligibility) for the files of active EOP students.

Response: Implemented. Documentation requirements have been reviewed with EOP Directors. These requirements have also been provided to campus administrators and personnel involved in the creation, maintenance, and storage of student files. Though all documentation requirements have been available through the University's online policy manual for several years, the Office of Opportunity Programs has now produced and distributed a hard copy booklet to personnel at participating campuses.

Recommendation 11: Formally monitor selected major transactions with EOP accounts at the campus level on a regular basis to help ensure that funds are being spent appropriately.

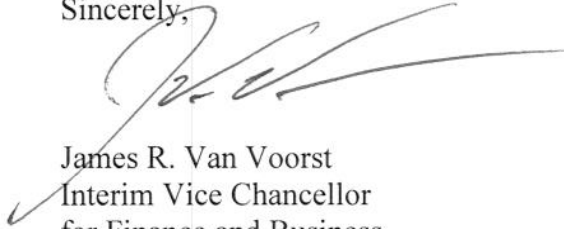
Response: Implemented. Having gained greater access to campus account detail, the Office of Opportunity Programs has begun reviews of selected expenditures as part of the overall fiscal monitoring of EOP activities.

Recommendation 12: Based on risk and the availability of resources, conduct audits of EOP to help ensure compliance with pertinent financial and program requirements.

Response: Implemented. The Office of the University Auditor will continue to conduct an annual risk assessment, the results of which will take into account available resources and other external audit activities. While the EOP was not identified for audit as part of the 2008-09 audit plan, it will be considered for future audits.

If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please contact me at 518-443-5105.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Van Voorst', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James R. Van Voorst  
Interim Vice Chancellor  
for Finance and Business

Copy: Dr. Clark  
Dr. Palm