

H. CARL McCALL
STATE COMPTROLLER



A.E. SMITH STATE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12236

STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

March 21, 2000

Mr. Robert King
Chancellor
State University of New York
State University Plaza
Albany, NY 12246

Re: Report 99-F-39

Dear Mr. King:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by officials of the State University of New York (SUNY), as of March 9, 2000, to implement the recommendations contained in our audit report, *Teaching Workload* (Report 96-S-55). Our report, which was issued on April 22, 1998, compared the teaching workload at selected SUNY campuses to the teaching workload at other public colleges and universities and addressed whether actions taken by SUNY System Administration and selected campuses ensured that the most effective teaching workloads were attained.

Background

The State University of New York (SUNY) includes four university centers, 13 arts and sciences colleges, five technical colleges, five specialized colleges, two statutory colleges, and two independent health science centers. SUNY receives annually about \$1.6 billion in State support. For the 1998-99 academic year, SUNY had an enrollment of about 155,000 full-time equivalent students who were taught by about 9,400 full-time equivalent faculty. The annual personal service cost for the faculty workforce is about \$500 million, not including fringe benefits.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, college costs nationwide increased at a faster rate than the increase in the general cost of living. Although the increase in college costs has been greater at private institutions, the increase in costs at public institutions has outpaced the inflation rate as well. In light of the increased cost of higher education, colleges have been called upon to increase their productivity. In December 1995, the SUNY Board of Trustees published *Rethinking SUNY* which was a broad outline of policies to be pursued to make SUNY more cost-effective in general. This report proposed a number of initiatives, including those related to teaching productivity. The Board concluded that SUNY can achieve efficiencies in instructional delivery while preserving affordable education for SUNY students.

Summary Conclusions

In our prior audit, we found that in most, but not all respects, the teaching productivity of the 16 SUNY schools we audited compared favorably to the teaching productivity of other public colleges and universities. We also found that a number of appropriate actions had been taken by SUNY System Administration and campuses to address the teaching workload of faculty. However, we noted that further actions could be taken to ensure additional efficiencies are realized.

In our follow-up review, we found that SUNY has taken action to address the matters identified in our prior report.

Summary of Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Of the three prior audit recommendations, SUNY officials have implemented two recommendations and partially implemented one recommendation.

Follow-up Observations

Recommendation 1

Continue to work with campuses to seek agreement on the elimination of programs that meet the criteria of high cost, low enrollment and unnecessary duplication among campuses.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - In April 1998, the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs undertook a project called the System-wide Mission Review Initiative, which was designed to clarify, differentiate, and strengthen the individual missions of the campuses. The intent of this campus-by-campus review was to establish campus-specific strategies, which would be aggregated into a System-wide academic strategic plan. As part of this Initiative, the campuses were asked to identify those programs they wished to concentrate on or reallocate resources to and which they planned to de-emphasize. Campus officials were further asked during the mission review to describe how they monitor programs and their related costs. SUNY officials told us that about 9 programs have been discontinued so far.

Recommendation 2

Continue with plans for using such innovations as distance learning and the SUNY Learning Network to achieve desired efficiencies. Foster the utilization of these techniques, as appropriate, throughout SUNY.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - According to the 1998-99 Annual Report of the Office of the Provost, SUNY Learning Network on-line course offerings were increased from 200 courses in 1997-98 to 500 courses in 1998-99. In addition, more than 6,000 students were enrolled in on-line courses in 1998-99, compared to about 2,000 students in the previous year. The Annual Report indicates that future plans include the addition of voice and video capabilities and the expansion of efforts to maximize the use of the Internet in the traditional classroom through the Course Management Systems program. This campus-based program will allow faculty to use the Internet as a resource for course materials and on-line discussion as a complement to regular classroom instruction. The Annual Report further notes that the continued growth of the annual Conference on Instructional Technologies is also assisting SUNY's efforts to keep pace with advances in learning environments. In June 1999, over 500 faculty from at least 50 campuses gathered at the Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome to increase their knowledge and skills in using technology for instruction. The Report referred to this event as a showcase for SUNY faculty to demonstrate and evaluate new technology products and to address the pedagogical impact of technology.

Recommendation 3

Encourage campuses to adopt faculty courseload requirements and class size standards as part of formal campus planning to achieve desired efficiencies.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - As part of its Mission Review Initiative, SUNY has required the campuses to track faculty/student ratios and trends, and use these measures as factors in faculty performance evaluations. However, while SUNY System Administration collects and disseminates faculty courseload and class size data, it has not encouraged campuses to adopt either faculty courseload requirements or class size standards as part of formal campus planning.

Major contributors to this report were Bill Nealon, Karen Bogucki and Jerry Steigman.

We would appreciate your written response to this report within 30 days, indicating any actions planned or taken to address the one unresolved matter discussed in this report. We also thank the management and staff of the State University of New York for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this review.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Barber
Audit Director

cc: Charles Conaway