

SUNY Faculty Council of Community Colleges and University Faculty Senate  
Joint Statement on the Search for the SUNY Chancellor

The imminent departure of Chancellor Kristina Johnson offers the State University of New York Board of Trustees a rare opportunity to engage the entire SUNY System and its multiple and diverse perspectives. At a time of unprecedented physical and fiscal challenges and stresses facing higher education, the Board's process for selecting Chancellor Johnson's successor must be open and transparent and serve as a model for shared governance across the System. Such a process will not only let SUNY identify the best possible candidates, but also give the next Chancellor a greater chance to succeed in our shared mission of educating nearly one half million students. A search overseen by a committee that represents the interests and experiences of the entire spectrum of stakeholders within and outside SUNY is required.

The previous search committee for the SUNY Chancellor had 22 members, composed of eight Trustees (including the two faculty trustees and the student trustee), five presidents of SUNY institutions (representing the full range of types of campuses in the system), and nine members of the general public, including prominent alumni and academic, business, and political leaders. The committee reached strong consensus on final candidates. Those candidates held stellar publication records, rich research portfolios, private sector experience, and leadership at prestigious universities and systems of higher education.

Secrecy has increasingly become the modus operandi of search committees, particularly for senior leadership. This is anathema to our philosophy of inclusive shared governance for SUNY as an institution. Conversely, when a final group of candidates has been identified by the search committee, it is important that candidates be vetted beyond the search committee so that a broader cross-section of parties can offer their own insights of the finalists. More eyes may see something about candidates that may not have been clear to the search committee, which is why inclusivity of the process is vital. We believe that the incoming Chancellor would be in a stronger position following a search that adheres to principles of shared governance, with the full confidence of faculty, staff, students, and campus leadership.

In September 2015, the SUNY Board passed a landmark resolution on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which promises a commitment to the recruitment, hiring, and professional development of administrators, faculty, and staff of color and other identities. Particularly during a national climate of racial unrest, it is a time for SUNY to renew and follow through on this commitment to diversity and inclusion. A broad-based national search provides the mechanism to honor this commitment. To bypass this in a process that excludes participation and engagement is exactly contrary to the reasons the Diversity Resolution was approved. We have urged our sixty-four campuses and SUNY System Administration to abide by these principles in recruitment, hiring, and development in order to grow a system that looks like our richly diverse student body.

Therefore, the two SUNY faculty governance bodies, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges and the University Faculty Senate, urge the SUNY Board of Trustees to move forward with a national search for the next Chancellor, overseen by a broadly based search committee. We look forward to working with the Board to ensure SUNY's commitment to shared governance and equity/inclusion, and SUNY's continued status as a national leader in higher education.