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State University of New York College of
Environmental Science and Forestry

A Message to Alumni from the College President

As our spring semester picks up steam, ESF is continuing down the path toward increased excellence, national prominence, and financial stability. These objectives are framed by input from our alumni, faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders; fine-tuned by analysis and an exchange of scholarly thought; and then formally established through the actions of our leadership team.

Our world has fundamentally changed during the past 20 years. Environmental problems are more numerous and complex, requiring a transition to multidisciplinary teams. We must develop sustainable alternatives to meet society's needs. At the same time, government support for higher education has retracted and is not likely to be increased. We must generate more revenues on our own, including through tuition.

The current College budget cannot support the investments required for our people and our infrastructure. ESF depends substantially more on state aid as a percentage of total revenue than any other SUNY institution. In this era of reduced state funding, this dependence has been the primary cause of our fiscal challenges. Consequently, we need to increase our other major source of revenue, tuition, by increasing enrollment. An increase in tuition revenue is not the only fund development strategy we are pursuing, but it is the most important at this time.

We are receiving numerous questions about the plans to increase enrollment, which includes a goal of having 40 percent of our students come from out of state. I want to assure you that growing our enrollment will be done with the greatest care, and with the overall goal of strengthening the College. We expect in 2018-19 our enrollment will grow by 100 to 200 undergraduate students. We will accomplish this growth in a number of ways. Fifty international students are arriving via a longstanding agreement with Beijing University of Chemical Technology in China. These students will study in our Department of Paper and Bioprocess Engineering. Another 50 or more students will be a combination of first-year and transfer students. Our plan is to admit these students in programs that have existing capacity so we do not lose our desirable low student to faculty ratio, while continuing to retain the high academic standards that are among the hallmarks of an ESF education. We are in the process of hiring new faculty and will continue to do so as enrollment grows.

Further, we are developing online content that will engage students who will not physically be on campus. We are also exploring other ideas, such as the feasibility of programs that would be based and delivered at international locations.

Our recent decision to implement a system of rotating department chairs, and the associated removal of three longtime chairs, has resulted in concerns from some alumni, students, faculty and staff. In keeping with a practice common across leading institutions of higher education, we have established term limits for chairs. The usual appointment will be for a three-year term, renewable once. I see ESF academic chairs as more than department leaders; they are integral members of the senior leadership team and we need them to shape, influence, support and implement decisions made by the administration. In the coming weeks, we will address the questions and concerns that have arisen. Those who are raising questions are passionately interested in ESF's future, and that says a lot about how much our community cares about this wonderful institution.

This is a clear departure from our past practice, in which chairs might serve for a decade or more. The three chairs immediately impacted by this decision were the ones who had been serving longest in the positions. The changes were conceptualized and put in place by members of the College leadership team in consultation with the ESF Board of Trustees. We hope this change will bring new ideas to our leadership and the College, and provide new career opportunities for our faculty.

I am aware there are rumors that we removed these three chairs to silence them, based on past disagreements. This is not true. Each of these chairs remain as highly regarded faculty in their departments, and have been offered important, new leadership opportunities to help the College move forward.

Many people are asking about the timing of this move. There is no easy time to institute a new system of this kind. Although appearing abrupt, we phased in this rotation of chairs at the start of a semester so we could connect quickly with students, faculty and staff regarding the changes. And we needed the faculty on campus for consultation regarding the selection of new chairs. Interim chairs are already in place.

We must offer a vision for ESF that goes beyond simply promoting our current excellence and uniqueness. It must hold the promise of transformative impacts on the world. I think that is at the heart of ESF. By working together, and sharing our best ideas, we can and will meet these challenges, and create a bright and prosperous future for the College.

Questions?

If you have questions or concerns, please e-mail them to:
alumnioffice@esf.edu

Responses from College Administration will be posted on
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