

Select Accomplishments and Example Future Initiatives: SUNY ESF Administration

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This is an outline of some accomplishments at ESF occurring during the past couple of years, and a few examples of planned future initiatives. These build on years of excellence in research, teaching, and service at the College. The accomplishments and initiatives described here reaffirm for me that we are headed in a very positive direction and making substantial gains. The successes noted, and others not captured in this document, are the result of the dedicated work of many people at ESF. My deep appreciation is extended to all within our community who are achieving great things every day for the College.

The accomplishments do not suggest our work is done. In addition to closing our budget gap, I want to increase our focus on improving the well-being of our people, and provide for the direly needed investments in our facilities and equipment. I strongly encourage anyone who has questions or concerns to reach-out to me or any member of the College Administration. It is very important to gain as much information as possible as you consider the future of ESF.

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Closing the Gap: Stabilize, Invest, and Grow

A Focus on Efficiency and Increasing Revenue:

A serious structural budget deficit exists with roots in the 2008 economic downturn. Financial resources from SUNY were not going to recover to pre-2008 levels, and by the time I arrived in January 2014, we had for the past several years been dipping into our reserve funds to make up the gap between tuition and state aid revenue, and operating costs. **If the situation were left unchecked, by the spring of 2015, we would have begun to experience difficulty meeting payroll, and by the spring of 2017, we would have become insolvent.** Through aggressive cost management, additional support from the ESF College Foundation, energy savings, and a range of other steps including a hiring slow-down, we set out to stabilize this problem in order to create some breathing room so that we could put into place permanent solutions. As a result, **in just two years we reduced the 2015-16 projected deficit from \$1.8 million to about \$162,000.**

We curtailed the expenditure of College reserves, are successfully rebuilding them, and have instituted plans that will not only permanently close the structural budget gap, but begin to grow our fiscal resources in order to make long overdue investments in people, infrastructure, and operations. By minimizing the use of reserves for day-to-day operating costs, these funds then become available for strategic investments that increase the College's visibility or otherwise strengthen short- and mid-term positions. With reserves restored, we have now begun the investment phase of our plan, including hiring six faculty and also essential staff such as positions in the areas of diversity, fundraising, information technologies, and physical plant and facilities. We've held many briefing sessions across campus about the *Close the Gap Plan*, will continue to do so, and will make information available about that plan on our website and directly with you. We continue to receive creative ideas from the College community that we are incorporating into our planning.

The Executive Cabinet has been fully engaged in a systematic review of all sources of revenue and expenditures. In addition, a College-wide leadership retreat this summer, which included Academic Council members, Academic Governance leadership, administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders, identified additional institutional priority initiatives that will further increase revenues and improve efficiencies. In brief, here are a few examples of how we are achieving new efficiencies and making strategic investments to increase revenues:

1. Out-of-State Students

Because we realize twice as much tuition income from out-of-state students than we do from in-state students, we are actively working to transition the demographics of the student body by increasing out-of-state enrollments. We will also enhance the diversity of the student body with this strategy. Our out-of-state student numbers have increased from 22 to 28% this year, and we are on track to meet our SUNY-supported five-year goal of 40%. This alone will significantly contribute to closing the budget gap permanently, and contribute to flexible income growth.

The Department of Paper and Bioprocess Engineering is taking the lead on implementing an international model new to ESF. In collaboration with the Beijing University of Chemical Technology (BUCT), approximately fifty students now enrolled in an ESF-designed curriculum in Beijing will complete their senior year in residence on the ESF campus (beginning in fall 2018). If this model is as successful as it promises to be, we may wish to consider replicating it with other partners and in other fields of study.

2. Advancement (Development) and Philanthropic Giving

While major gift philanthropy is critically important and remains a key fund development strategy for the College, this is not the immediate priority of the *Close the Gap* financial strategy. Major gift funding is usually restricted by the donor toward distinct projects and very rarely can be used for operational purposes. The College's dire need is for discretionary funding at a consistent level annually, and as such, our primary strategy for the short- to mid-term is not on major gifts but rather on unrestricted and flexible scholarship funds. We currently use about \$3 million of our State funding per year to fund student aid. We will work to shift that expense to new funds generated by the ESF College Foundation. This single change of funding source can close the gap and build resources by offering us new access to the more discretionary State funding.

We just hired one, and will be hiring two more development positions to accelerate fund development. Each of these will have a focused portfolio of responsibilities. The newly hired director of donor relations will provide strategic and comprehensive management of the development program. The primary responsibility of this person will be to develop and execute a plan that will enhance our annual fund program, increase donations for flexible scholarships, build a pipeline of donors between annual giving and major giving, increase development support to the academic departments, and organize our major gift program around institutional priorities. The director of donor relations will have the ability to hire at least two additional staff to help execute new development plans.

The enhancement of development operations is one piece of a comprehensive "advancement model" that will allow us to combine resources and align efforts of our offices of alumni, communications (and marketing), development (and ESF College Foundation), and government affairs. This advancement approach will allow us to build on our strengths and begin to infuse a culture of philanthropy throughout the College.

In the longer term, we will take the College's collective ideas to cultivate individual and foundation sources of new funds and design a capital campaign built on a combination of inspiring, transformative ideas, and a strengthening of our core. Development of major individual prospective donors involves relationships that are cultivated over time. In the academic world, such prospect cultivation routinely takes as much as five years. For ESF, this means valuing existing and long-standing relationships, and cultivating new relationships. The College has, and continues to pursue, activities to widen our circle of prospects. For instance, the Development Office and I have developed new relationships with the Camp Fire Club of America,

the Boone and Crockett Club, the Theodore Roosevelt Association, the E.O. Wilson Foundation, and key members of the Planet Forward Board of Directors.

Breaking into major foundation philanthropy also involves high profile national visibility—visibility the College needs to increase. As noted later in this document, the College’s leadership team is establishing the foundation for the kind of national visibility that gets the College on the radar of both foundations and philanthropists outside the region and state. Building national visibility is key to expanding existing revenue streams.

Ultimately, funds to support the College should come from diverse sources, such as SUNY and New York State Legislature appropriations; New York State agency partnerships; private philanthropists, foundations, corporate partners; competitive grants, including multi-institutional contracts; and online courses and certificates; among others.

The NYSUNY 2020 \$3.5 million award for biomimicry continues to create a buzz in New York State. I witnessed this at the recent Governor’s Sustainability Conference in Lake Placid where I keynoted and talked about many College initiatives, including biomimicry, the New Forest Economy, and more. The Governor’s Office, in particular, is very interested in all these initiatives. In the national and international biomimicry world, ESF is being positioned to play a leading role in this emerging economic engine and sustainability driver. As an example, internationally- and nationally-renowned biomimicry experts and scientists will visit ESF later this month for a series of meetings and events. Also, I was invited by the E.O. Wilson foundation to develop a section of a proposal, now under review, focused on species exploration and biomimicry with a dollar request of \$7.3 million. In addition, the College’s recent performance improvement grant is the first step in creating the *ESF Open Academy* that will expand the reach and visibility of ESF’s academic and public science education efforts.

3. Energy Management

Energy efficiency holds great promise for substantial annual savings. Our focus is on energy efficiency first, and the development of new energy sources second (although both work hand-in-hand). To that end, we have hired an energy manager who has already identified projects that will significantly save both energy and money, including the Gateway Combined Heat and Power System, which will be fully functional for this heating season.

We also have an active College-wide Sustainability Committee that was launched this summer, which I expect will lead us to a greener future. That committee’s Energy, Materials, and other working groups are already moving forward with important efforts. Related to the work of the Sustainability Committee, I have authorized the purchase of a new building management system from Lucid Technologies after an exhaustive, nearly 12-month review process including faculty, staff, students, and external partners. We are confident that Lucid—used by many other academic institutions—will have a rapid return on investment, will provide new opportunities for research and scholarship, and will help us manage our energy, water, and waste much more effectively. Also, in large part due to student

leadership, we are now one of only a few select campuses to have started a unique, Green Revolving Fund (created this summer) to fund sustainability and energy projects.

4. Extended Campuses and Forest Properties

We are increasing our engagement with faculty and others to network our valuable northern properties into an "observatory" of ecology, biodiversity, and climate change that can create additional revenues, increase College visibility, support New York State objectives, and build broader support for our lands by pressing them into greater service to the State and country. This concept will incorporate lessons from, and activities of our faculty with, the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON). I discussed this idea at the recent New York State Governor's Conference on Sustainability in Lake Placid, and it resonated with both the Governor's Office and leadership of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). As such, we are pursuing the idea with both.

One recent example that strengthens our related capabilities is my approval to establish a New York State Mesonet weather monitoring station at our Newcomb Campus, which was just installed this last week. This is a Governor's priority and is managed by SUNY Albany. It is one of 125 high-tech stations installed throughout the state to predict extreme weather events, and even factors such as radiation. Leadership of our Newcomb Campus and I are confident this new capability will create new opportunities for us.

We will continue to stress the multiple values of our forests; this is where we have strength when compared to other institutions. This includes continuing to use our properties for multi-use/multi-benefit, such as for outreach, education, research, revenue generation, demonstration, wildlife management, recreation/tourism, carbon accounting, etc. This builds on the international recognition ESF has generated for acid rain research. Other related initiatives we will build upon include the very successful Great South Woods project recently recognized by the DEC, numerous biomass/biorefinery opportunities with the State of New York and the federal government, and many more. This all recognizes that ESF has depth and experience connecting biology with management, and with valuing conservation and preservation. These are the questions ESF has been asking and putting forth for more than 100 years.

5. ESF Open Academy and Developing a Strategy for Online Offerings

Increasing revenue also includes increasing our online presence. With leadership from a number of faculty and staff, and ideas generated by a campus digital futures study, we have begun to build ESF's capacity for using digital tools to create new tuition revenue, expand our impact on the world, increase our visibility, and generate new resources to allow ESF faculty and staff to do their jobs better. We will continue to engage faculty and staff as we further construct this very important strategic initiative.

6. Residence and Dining Halls

We are working with the ESF College Foundation to move forward with feasibility studies for the infrastructure needed to accommodate expanded enrollment. These new facilities would also be revenue generators for the College. We are in discussions with Syracuse University about a potential land swap to allow us to build in a location directly across the street from the current Centennial Hall.

Improving Infrastructure

I recognize that we have a great need for additional capital (building) and infrastructure improvements, such as major interior renovations; campus-wide classrooms, lecture hall, studio, and laboratory renovations; office space and campus site improvements, including roadways, sidewalks, plantings; and very importantly, improved accessibility. These needs have existed for many years now. Between now and 2018, we have received nearly \$90 million in capital funding. Recent and ongoing capital projects include the Academic Research Building (ARB) for which we break ground in spring 2017, improvements to roofs and skylights for Marshall and Bray, a soils lab currently being renovated, counseling and student support service office space, and a modernized electrical distribution system on campus. For the first time, we also have established a College-wide Capital Planning Committee of faculty, staff, and students that will help set priorities for capital projects. I have asked our Physical Plant and Facilities team that we at all times have projects in the pipeline that are addressing needs in teaching spaces, faculty laboratories, sustainability, accessibility, and improving the appearance and functionality of campus.

We are working on a legislative agenda this year that, if funded, will catapult ESF forward as the flagship sustainability campus in the SUNY system. The intent is that this would help address needed critical maintenance, accessibility, and infrastructure improvements. Other funding initiatives include the previously mentioned Green Revolving Fund, targeted fund development efforts, and other government affairs activities that could help with specific improvements.

Enhanced ESF – Syracuse University Relationship

Our relationship with Syracuse University (SU) is very positive. I work closely with SU Chancellor Kent Syverud, and a great relationship exists between many other members of both the SU and ESF leadership teams as well. Our partnership is strong and growing. It is important to note that ESF is not separating from SU. Rather, the changes noted below will result in an enhanced level of service to the ESF community as well as better positioning us for future success.

We successfully negotiated an historic reset of our relationship, and now have a new favorable five-year services agreement that is fair and mutually beneficial to both institutions. With a five-year agreement in place, we are beginning to build our own IT infrastructure (e.g., the Banner student information system) and venture into new online opportunities.

Related to this, we have a new agreement with Crouse Medical Practice to deliver high quality health services to our students, and have established, for the first time, on-campus mental health counseling services. The student services provided through our new agreements with SU and Crouse, along with our new on-campus counseling services, will provide a more customized and higher quality bundle of services for our students **while costing \$122,000 (annual) less than what we paid SU last year for the same services** (this figure incorporates our new costs for on-site services).

I am working with Chancellor Syverud to address several additional challenges, and, as the Chancellor announced at the fall new student convocation this year, we are moving forward with major partnerships that will expand teaching, research, and other scholarship opportunities. Last week, the Chancellor announced this to the SU community, and as he noted, he has appointed a high-level advisor to help him move this initiative forward. I will be doing the same in the coming days, and we will involve faculty from both institutions in the planning for these new strategic endeavors—efforts that will lead to new scholarship, student services and experiential learning, and research. This partnership will help with fund development opportunities through the leveraging of strengths from both institutions.

Collaborative Leadership, Shared Decision-Making, and Shared Governance

I am a strong believer in collaborative leadership—a style of leadership that results in much better decision-making. Collaborative leadership, shared decision-making, and shared governance are foundational pieces of my administration. I have worked to transition the Executive Cabinet and other committees and task forces on campus into more effective collaborative, shared decision-making and shared governance teams. We are not fully there yet, but we have made great strides in just a couple of years. This includes my expansion and diversification of the Executive and Full Cabinets, and, in particular, in the case of the Executive Cabinet, an increase in gender diversity. I rely on the Executive Cabinet to help inform nearly all major College decisions.

I bring to ESF lessons in collaborative leadership that I learned at the National Science Foundation and Arizona State University, and I am continually learning from people here as well. My experiences teach me that such a collaborative model results in higher quality decisions with fewer unintended consequences. This is a dramatic shift from a traditional hierarchical structure, and requires a shared vision, trust, and the willingness to share both power and individual recognition. My administration exists to make possible the important teaching, research, and outreach that you do.

Input by Academic Governance and other faculty, staff, and students continually and directly informs decisions and priorities made by me and by the Executive Cabinet. Examples include:

Presidential Advisory Groups:

- Building on suggestions from faculty, staff, and student leaders, and as discussed in a communication to campus in June 2016, I formed a new *College Leadership Council*. This group currently includes the Academic Governance Executive Chair and has additional representatives from the College Board of Trustees, the Executive Cabinet, and GSA and USA student leaders. It has met four times this fall and will continue to meet weekly. Representatives from other classified and non-classified staff groups will be added soon. The group is directly advising me and my leadership team on issues of importance to the College.
- Responding to a recommendation from faculty members, I created a group focused on *Needs and Opportunities for Online Content*, and we are moving forward with their suggestions.
- I am in the process of forming a group to work on the *Roosevelt Naming Opportunity* to take advantage of the honor to more closely associate the College with the vision and memory of Theodore Roosevelt.
- Like many of you, I am very concerned about issues of *Tolerance, Respect, Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Speech*. Those of us in academia have incredible intellectual freedom to pursue topics about which we are curious and passionate. With that comes a responsibility to respect one another's individual perspectives. We all are responsible to create an atmosphere on campus in which diverse views are not only tolerated, but embraced; in which we engage in discourse over divergent ideas with respect; and in which we can enjoy our rights to academic freedom and freedom of speech. To that end, I am in the early stages of appointing a group to propose an ESF statement on such freedoms, analogous to that developed by the University of Chicago and elsewhere.

College-wide Committees and Task Forces:

- *Campus Planning Committee*: For the first time, the College has a group representing all stakeholders on campus to better guide campus infrastructure development and capital needs.
- *Committee on Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (IDE)*: Students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders are actively engaged on this committee and are currently working on a related strategic plan.
- *Sustainability Committee*: This committee is very active with working groups on Bicycles/Transportation, Energy, Food, Land, Materials, Water, and Communication/Outreach. Recommendations from the committee have already been implemented, such as how to communicate the STARS ranking to the College community, creation of a Green Revolving Fund, purchase of a new building management system (Lucid), and others.
- *Strengthening our Community Task Force*: This group managed the recent campus climate survey and will be making recommendations targeted toward helping our community.
- *Strategic Planning*: This group successfully completed an update to our Strategic Plan, which was approved by more than 60% of the Academic Governance membership, and endorsed unanimously by the College Board of Trustees. This document will be the foundation of our institutional action priorities over the

next two years.

- I have worked closely and in a timely manner with Academic Governance leadership to form many search committees, including for the Provost/Executive Vice President, and Vice President for Research. In the case of the research position, I supported a recommendation from faculty members that this position be elevated from its current status as a Vice Provost to a Vice President, directly reporting to the President.
- The Executive Cabinet and I worked with Academic Governance leadership to develop a new “populating committees” procedure.

These are not simply “committees for the sake of committees.” The work of each one of these groups continues to directly and substantially impact College-level decisions. I am gratified to see that for all the College-wide committees proposed, **we have had more faculty, staff, and students willingly volunteer than we had positions available.** This tells me our community wants to participate in decision-making, and I applaud that, and am grateful for it.

Other Shared Decision-Making Examples:

- *Administrative Unit Priorities:* This includes priorities generated at leadership retreats.
- *Academic Research Building (ARB):* Faculty, staff, and students are actively engaged in facility planning.
- *ESF/DEC Strategy:* In January, I hosted a collaborative meeting with 19 faculty members and engaged more after that meeting to inform a planning meeting with the new DEC Commissioner in Albany. Ten ESF faculty and administrative representatives (including two Academic Department Chairs) later attended the DEC meeting. This resulted in a follow-up meeting this month where many action items of joint engagement were put into play.
- *Fossil Fuel Divestment:* A team consisting of leaders from the Administration, College Foundation, and DivestESF (a student group) worked on this.
- *Middle States Assessment:* Numerous faculty and staff worked to prepare for a Middle States visit last year and prepare for the recent submission of our required reporting.
- *Biomimicry:* I am working with a number of faculty, staff, and students to implement this initiative, which includes some major events being held the week of October 23, 2016 where we’ll have a number of internationally-renowned biomimicry experts on campus.
- *New Internal Budget Work Group:* The Interim Provost/Executive Vice President and Vice President for Administration formed this group of key staff and administrators to help better characterize, analyze, manage, and project the College’s financial picture. The College Leadership Council will be engaged in this effort now that it has been established.
- *Numerous Sustainability Initiatives* (including STARS and national rankings—see below): As noted already, this is involving many faculty, staff, and students.
- *NYS REV Campus Challenge:* The student Sustainable Energy Club worked with other students, staff, administrators, faculty, and community partners on this initiative—a priority of the Governor.
- *Recognition of the Onondaga Nation:* Our Center for Native Peoples and the Environment guided and advised me as we made our historic statement last fall.

- *SUNY Excels*: Academic Council and Academic Governance were engaged.
- *Syracuse University Partnership*: Suggestions and brainstorming focused on solutions by staff, administrators, faculty, and College Foundation representatives helped inform successful strategies that have resulted in the new five-year agreement and a cost-savings over the expected cost.
- *Collaborative and Shared Governance Training*: I co-hosted with the Academic Governance Executive Committee (AGEC) a mini-retreat for the AGEC and Executive Cabinet to learn more about how to further implement associated shared governance principles. We are now implementing some of the ideas generated from this session.
- Information gleaned from my routine attendance at Academic Governance College-wide and Executive Committee meetings helps directly inform my decision-making.

These are just a few examples, and it does not mean that there isn't room to do better. We continue to look at shared-decision making/shared governance models at other academic institutions, such as the SUNY Shared Governance Award-winner SUNY at Fredonia, with the intent that ESF collectively (with Academic Governance, student leadership, the Board of Trustees, and other staff organizations) will develop new and improved ways to share in management, leadership, and direction-setting at ESF.

I look forward to working with the College Leadership Council to take the next steps towards even more effective shared governance, including a review of where we can do better in the future. I'm committed to have ESF be a standard-bearer institution when it comes to shared governance. I appreciate the efforts that so many of you have made towards this collaborative environment.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (IDE)

Shifting demographics mean that it is imperative that everyone interested in the environment and sustainability finds a welcoming and inclusive community at ESF. We are all the richer for it. Women are well represented among students (49% of this year's entering class), but not among faculty. And our current 14% entering students of color is not acceptable to me.

While we have so much more to do, positive progress has been made in moving ESF toward being an inclusive and equitable community for all. Inclusion also means that all voices are encouraged and considered, with none excluded. From recognizing that our campus stands on Haudenosaunee ancestral lands, and reestablishing the Student Diversity and Inclusion (formerly Multicultural Affairs) function within the Division of Student Affairs last fall, to the establishment of the College-wide IDE Committee this past spring, our important engagements with the Baobab Society and ESF Alumni of Color group, and expanding our work in high schools and with Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) in New York City, our community is moving in the right direction.

IDE is gathering feedback to help inform the development of the College's first Diversity Strategic Plan. Following the completion of the Plan, we will focus on

recruiting and hiring the College's first full-time Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Bringing on a CDO is the right thing to do, but it is also mandated by SUNY.

Equity also means recognizing we have a workforce – faculty and staff alike – that in many cases have excessive workloads. Salary equity is also an essential objective we need to focus on; thus, I am committed to addressing these important issues through our *Close the Gap* planning.

We will work with the new plan, the CDO, and other groups on campus with the goal to improve our diversity (throughout all cohorts), be a more inclusive campus, and provide equity for all.

National Visibility

A survey of the ESF community completed before my arrival identified elevating ESF's national visibility as an important goal for the new president. As such, this has been among my top priorities, as I'm confident it is essential to ESF's long-term success. This type of visibility will attract the best students nationwide at a time when the college-aged student population is declining in the Northeast, and competition for the programs we offer is increasing. This, in turn, gives us the ability to choose the appropriate geographic diversity of students on campus and use that choice to regulate our tuition income. National visibility also opens doors to foundations and private philanthropists who share our priorities and aspirations for a sustainable future. Because of the kinds of science, engineering, design, management, and scholarship that we engage in, we have natural allies among individuals and foundations across the country concerned about natural and built environments and about creating a sustainable future.

To achieve national visibility, I believe our greatest assets include the existing work of our faculty, whose stories of research and scholarship need to be told more expansively. It also includes our students and alumni, who can be some of our greatest marketers.

Directly related to this, we have renewed our efforts to make ESF a sustainability leader within SUNY and across the country, and the results are coming in. While it is most important for the environment and our school to be as sustainable as possible, these visible rankings are critical to our future growth strategy, and are designed in part to raise ESF's profile through earned and un-earned (very valuable) presence in national media and other national organizations. Recent and very noteworthy examples include:

- We recently received a **number two ranking** in *Princeton Review's* "Top 50 Green Schools Guide"—**up from 33 the year before**—and we are the first school on the list to have an exclusive feature by Princeton (only the College of the Atlantic is ahead of us).
- We also have a **number two ranking** in the *Sierra Magazine's* "Cool Schools" issue—**up from 104 the year before** (200 hundred schools are on the list; again, the College of the Atlantic is listed first; Syracuse University is number 200).
- ESF is **one of 21 institutions** of higher-education listed on *Princeton Review's*

“Green Honor Roll Schools” (Cornell is the only other New York State school listed).

- This summer, we achieved a STARS sustainability rating system **Gold Rating for the first time**, putting ESF in the top-tier of institutions in the country who participate in this important rating system, and we have plans underway to become only the second Platinum-ranked campus in the country.
- We are listed in the American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) guide to green schools for the College’s efforts with diversity, inclusion, and equity as it relates to our recognition of the College siting on the ancestral lands of the Haudenosaunee, for the work our Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, and in recognition of our research portfolio.
- We convinced the EPA to hold a major event here focused on Citizen Science and Microplastics in Waterways, and we are using this event to leverage potential new resources to the College, and more importantly, help accelerate attention to these two issues nationally through the EPA.
- The College is one of nineteen founding members of *The Conversation*, which is an online “collaboration between editors and academics to provide informed news analysis and commentary that’s free to read and republish” and this gives ESF an inside track to the fastest growing digital media news outlet. ESF is fortunate that a handful of its faculty have already taken advantage of this media outlet, and we’ve already had nearly 60,000 reads of articles written by ESF faculty.
- I was invited to serve on the board of Planet Forward, and I am the only academic leader on that board. Planet Forward is led by George Washington University and Frank Sesno, a highly-regarded CNN anchor, NPR host, and media expert. It is a consortium of institutions – including ESF as one of the few primary academic partners – that supports students to tell sustainability stories through videos and new media. This also makes connections for ESF and its students with high-ranking federal government officials.

Differentiation:

Why should a student or donor choose ESF over any of hundreds of other environmental science and sustainability programs and institutions (and the list of our competitors is growing)? We can only give them the answer by differentiating ESF, and this is directly tied to our need for increased national visibility. We must rise above our competition and be the visible best choice. We are working now to refine our differentiated message, and we will continue to engage the College community on this effort. This includes building on the strong, historic portfolio of faculty research and our faculty’s powerful work related to building a more sustainable society.

We must help our College rise above a cluttered field, differentiating ourselves from the hundreds of environmental science programs in the country, and number that is increasing, even within SUNY. Our high-ranking sustainable campus is one differentiator, but we need more. As I consider the possibilities, I ask myself what ESF can do uniquely or uniquely well. It is our past and current strengths that rise to answer that question. I also look for niches and gaps in the capabilities of other institutions to identify opportunities to step up in important and differentiated ways.

Audacious, Inspiring, and Transformative Ideas:

In order to attract major philanthropic donors nationally who may not have ties to ESF, we must offer ideas that are so big, compelling, and potentially transformative that they entice donors to partner with us. This includes programs that have existed here for years as developed by creative faculty, staff, and students, as well as new initiatives that position us in new niche areas. Backing a handful of such ideas will attract entirely new sources of funding, increase our overall budget, and free up existing funds to better support current programs. This is not an either/or strategy, but instead one with the potential to increase the bottom line so that other existing programs and our people prosper too.

In addition to the diversified fund strategy already outlined above, it is true that a great untapped source for new funds lies in individual and foundation philanthropists, with no direct connections to ESF, who are inspired by bold and potentially transformative ideas and want to be part of making them real. This involves stretching ourselves to imagine what can be and taking risks. Given widespread concerns over natural and built environments and the sustainability of our civilization, we are in a position to be at the leading edge of potentially transformative ideas. One obvious example is the American Chestnut restoration project for which our first crowd-sourced fund raising campaign was a success. More recently, the E. O. Wilson Foundation, inspired by my ideas about species exploration and biomimicry, invited me to submit a \$7.3 million section of a \$100 million proposal to the MacArthur Foundation. I hope this is funded, however the relationships that have been developed through proposal development offer us new possibilities in the future with both foundations. Such ideas drive new revenue sources, and it is important to recognize this strategy is one that should result in a "rising tide that lifts all boats."

A shift toward transdisciplinary approaches to science has been underway for more than twenty years. This paradigm shift toward more holistic solutions for complex scientific challenges is now well-established among leading institutions. It does not mean that all individual faculty programs or courses must be integrated, or that we stray from the solid STEM focus of many of our programs, but that our College, as a whole, encourages and supports transdisciplinary work and learning where it is appropriate. This also includes enhancing existing, and developing new partnerships such as those recently initiated by faculty with China, Chile, India, Mexico, Russia (Siberia), and other countries in South America and Africa, as well as many other areas of the world.

We are, and will continue to invest in important new and existing transdisciplinary initiatives, such as those in Chemistry and Paper and Bioprocess Engineering surrounding renewable and bio-materials; environmental health and environmental justice; water; and a renewed and elevated focus on urban areas, systems, infrastructure, and design, such those led by Landscape Architecture and Environmental Resources Engineering. These and many more initiatives exemplify that ESF will continue to grow as a transdisciplinary institution. The degree to which individual faculty members engage in transdisciplinary teams is entirely at their discretion and dictated by the projects they elect to pursue.

Conclusion

I am confident that we are headed in the right direction and making spectacular progress. We are pursuing parallel tracks any one of which or a combination of initiatives could permanently close the budget gap. We are shifting ESF toward more collaborative leadership and shared decision-making and governance. We are acting on my commitment to make ESF more diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to everyone. And we are making progress increasing ESF's national visibility, such as our stellar sustainable campus rankings and engagements with new national-level partners. I will continue to focus on these positive issues of critical importance to the future of ESF. Imagine how much we can accomplish and how much faster we can accomplish it if we work together, and share our constructive feedback and best ideas.