

# SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry

## Report of the ESF Board of Trustees Chairman, Matthew Marko

ESF Board of Trustees Annual Meeting

February 14, 2018

Gateway Center, ESF, Syracuse, NY

I would like to begin my report to you all today by thanking everyone for attending. We hosted this meeting in Gateway instead of our typical Baker location, in the hope more people would attend. I remind everyone, all Board of Trustee meetings are open, and if you go to [esf.edu/welcome/trustees](http://esf.edu/welcome/trustees), you can see much younger versions of the Board Members and our meetings on video, going back to 2008. For the last few years, these meetings have been broadcast on ESF TV. The link is a little more complicated, but entering ESF TV into any search engine will guide you there.

My report to the board focuses on a word we are all very familiar with, sustainability. Sustainability most commonly means “to maintain, support, endure.” That is the obligation of this Board, to ensure we maintain, support, and endure, as an institution. This is despite the dynamic world that changes, sometimes drastically, around us. I went back this past weekend and reviewed content from our previous board meetings from as far back as 10 years ago. We have faced some tough challenges. I have no doubt that if I went back 100 years, we would find the same. Be there no doubt, we are currently facing incredibly complex and dynamic issues. However, this institution and its people have always, and will always, rise to meet those challenges.

I want to be very clear on a few critical points today. First, our business model, which served us well in the past, has become unsustainable. Second, we face competition for students and resources like we’ve never seen before. In addition, we are well into the 21st century, and still have a 20th century approach to many of our challenges. We need to adapt. Recognizing these realities, we previously directed the President and Administration to address the need for this new business model.

Some of the changes needed are small and insignificant; some require shifting paradigms. At the December meeting I used a quote from the novel *The Leopard*. It is still relevant today.

“If you want things to remain as they are, things will have to change.”

The Leopard

My affinity for this quote rests in the desire to find a way to implement change while maintaining the best aspects of our culture at ESF. We need to work harder to address both of these important needs.

Over the last two years, the Board has also come to the realization that for ESF to survive, we must grow. Further cuts from the budget cannot be delivered without undermining the value of education or the College experience. We cannot achieve our goals for academics, infrastructure, visibility, and communications without increasing revenue. The reality is that our graduate stipends, faculty startup packages, and investments in classrooms and laboratories are leaving us uncompetitive. The first quarter of the 21st century is almost complete, yet we still have no dining hall, gymnasium, student activity center, or even our own IT system. Some of these reforms are long overdue. The Board has high expectations for this institution, and we intend to hold the Administration accountable to deliver.

To date, I do see some progress on meeting expectations. These include:

- Hiring new faculty
- Completing a national search and hiring our new Provost
- A start to diversifying administration, faculty, and staff; especially the executive leadership team
- Reorganizing and modernizing campus forums for engagement, such as Academic Council, Council of Chairs, Executive Cabinet, and Administrative Cabinet
- Creating the Leadership Council—partly in response to an idea by the Undergraduate Student Association President to improve decision-making by the Administration through more direct dialog with student leadership and other campus stakeholders
- Working to address faculty and staff salary equity by forming a working group and initiating a comprehensive comparison study, including looking at staffing levels at benchmark institutions
- Starting a process to improve competitiveness of Graduate Student stipends and packages
- Instituting a policy of term limits for department chair appointments
- Reorganizing Physical Plant and Facilities into the Department of Campus Planning and Design, and Department of Facility Operations to better address the dire needs of our capital infrastructure and to reinforce the

importance of customer service

- Creating an Energy Conservation, Development, and Controls Division to accelerate the expansion of the already successful list of substantial energy savings and accomplishments we've realized in the last few years
- Enhancing and consolidating the Chief Diversity Officer's portfolio, including the addition of Title IX coordination, and an elevated attention to sexual assault and harassment
- Taking a serious look at those areas that the College has been subsidizing, and developing new business approaches, such as developing a better "return on investment" approach with our Northern properties
- Focusing advancement, alumni, communication, and development through investments in the Development Office, and creation of a team focused on developing new approaches to fund development
- Developing a new and critically needed visibility and marketing function
- Enhancing experiential learning opportunities through the creation of the Office of Experiential Learning and Outreach, which also includes an enhanced focus on our important relationship with Sponsors for Educational Opportunity in New York City

We will hear more on some of these initiatives during reports by the President, Chief Financial Officer, and others.

We have an enormous amount of work ahead of us. The Board does not take lightly that much of this change and progress can be, and is, by its very nature, disruptive. I've spent my career in the construction industry. Like any infrastructure project, whether it be fixing a water main, renovating a building, or re-envisioning I-81, it can seem painful and endless. However, we are committed to seeing this through for the good of the institution, and we are increasing our attention to project management and implementation. No excuses. We are open to constructive criticism, so long as it takes place in an atmosphere of civil discourse. We also need to realize that all decisions, including indecision, involve some risk.

Regardless of who the President of this College is, or any specific individual for that matter, we are moving this institution forward. We will and must persevere.

The Board is in receipt of the Resolution passed this past fall by Academic Governance, sent to me under cover dated December 20, 2017, with the subject: "ESF Resolution on Consultation." The Board is increasing its scrutiny over the Administration's diligence with respect to consultation with Faculty, and will elevate our dialog with SUNY Chancellor Johnson's office with respect to shared

governance issues.

Today, we ask the Administration for monthly updates, starting March 14, from the Presidential Advisory Council on Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities, which was announced shortly after the AG resolution was passed, and is co-chaired by President Wheeler and AG Executive Chair Klaus Doelle, with faculty and administration participation. We understand the intent of this Council is to make recommendations on when and how faculty should be consulted by administration, and ways communication may be improved between the two groups. The report should be sent to my attention and signed by the co-chairs.

The Board is in also receipt of the February 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution passed by the Undergraduate Student Association, entitled: *A Call for Campus-Wide Reconciliation*. The Board joins you in reaffirming its commitment to an atmosphere of respect, forgiveness, and professionalism. We agree with you on the need for improved communications, access, and visibility.

Let me clearly communicate that the Board of Trustees worked in partnership with the Administration on the decisions made in the Pursuit of Excellence Plan. We second your call for the Administration to develop a report on progress towards meeting the goals in the *Vision 2020 Update*. We share your belief that, “despite struggles with shared governance and leadership styles, the campus community will be stronger and more resilient in the coming months.” Thank you, President Ben Taylor, for your leadership on this campus, you are the best of what ESF has to offer the world, and may I add – from one engineer to another – you have a bright career ahead of you.

To the Graduate Student Association, the Board appreciates your thoughtful dialog on issues unique to graduate students, and we are taking action. President Wheeler will make a special announcement soon on how we plan to increase our competitiveness such that we continue to attract and retain world class graduate students. Thank you to President Ryan Scheel and board colleague Alex Poisson for your leadership over the past year.

I have also received numerous letters from, and spoken directly with many, concerned alumni. They all commonly express their interest in maintaining the high reputation of ESF. They are passionate. We want you to know that you have our attention; we ARE listening.

The Board has become more engaged than ever, and we have not shied away from providing constructive feedback, or strong directives, when we believe

appropriate. We must measure and report our progress, and that means giving initiatives time to work.

The Chancellor has asked that we build around her four pillars: Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Individualized Education, Sustainability, and Partnerships. In addition to these, I suggest that we also need to become more tolerant, diverse, inclusive, and welcoming. Yet, we also must learn to value conflict, and trust each other enough to disagree. Once the team makes a decision, we ALL then need to actively support it with passion. We need to become more collaborative. The most complex challenges of today require transdisciplinary solutions. ESF has the capacity to deliver.

I implore you to follow President Wheeler's welcome message to the students this Spring semester: "2018 will be a year when we all – working collaboratively at every level, including administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, the ESF College Foundation, and the Board of Trustees— position ESF for long-term success and sustainability."

Thank you.