Dear NJASCU Colleagues/Friends:

Welcome to this week’s edition of NJASCU’s "Noteworthy" compilation of a feature story, advocacy report, and news item(s), reflecting the interests and happenings among New Jersey’s senior public colleges and universities. Some of our news articles are reprinted in full; most are summaries with the full article accessible by clicking on the headline.

We would love your feedback and suggestions. Please keep sending press releases, many of which will be included in our "Noteworthy" compilation.

Thank you,

Pamela Hersh
Director, Communications & Public Affairs
NJ Association of State Colleges & Universities
150 West State Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08608
609-989-1100 office
609-256-8256 direct
pjhersh@njascu.org

Commencement News

Ramapo College Celebrates Graduate Commencement

Ramapo College celebrated its Graduate Programs Commencement during a separate ceremony in the Bill Bradley Center on campus on May 23.

Hundreds of family members and friends packed the Arena to cheer on the 246 graduates, including five veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, who received their master’s degree in the College’s seven graduate programs. Perliza D. Emde carried the Master’s
Ms. Perliza, a registered nurse in both New Jersey and New York, received her Master in Family Nurse Practice (FNP) and was instrumental in getting the College's FNP program accredited.

In his address, President Mercer remarked, "Cast your mind back and ask yourself whether 15 years ago you would have imagined sitting here today. Yet you are - through a combination of skill, drive, adaptability and serendipity, you took advantage of what came your way. And you will do so again, aided by a Ramapo education that has given you formidable skills that enable you to analyze and solve problems across a broad societal range. You should be confidently hopeful as you gaze forward."

The Honorable Loretta Weinberg, Senate Majority Leader District 37, was presented with an honorary degree.

"You all are coming of age when we understand that our goals and aspirations shouldn't take a back seat to anything," Senator Weinberg began. "Today you are the gifted and the educated. Take a moment to appreciate how truly privileged and fortunate you are to receive an advanced degree from Ramapo College, a renowned liberal arts college that fosters international education and intercultural understanding."

"Take a moment to reflect on the hard work you put in to get here. Despite all the odds and whatever life threw your way, you made it. You have become a greater version of yourself."

**NJASCU Profile**

**William Paterson University Board Trustee Fred Gruel Makes the Grade as a Passionate Public Higher Education Advocate**

One of several items worth celebrating on the morning of May 15, 2019, was that Fred Gruel, the retired president and CEO of AAA New Jersey Automobile Club, was honored with the receipt of the William Paterson University (WPU) President's Medal. The disappointing news was that Mr. Gruel, a member of WPU’s Board of Trustees for nearly 27 years, delivered no acceptance speech. If he had done so, the 2,300 graduates and their friends and families at the WPU 2019 undergraduate commencement ceremony would have been treated to a memorable stand-up comic routine.

Searching "Humorous Speeches at Awards Celebrations" on YouTube, one will find a video of Mr. Gruel giving a laugh-out-loud commentary, when he accepted a different WPU award - the Legacy Award at the 19th Annual William Paterson University Foundation Legacy Award Gala in 2009. This video pops up just before the video of Will Ferrell's 2017 USC Commencement speech.

Mr. Gruel, a member of the WPU Foundation for 20 years, talked about his many significant accomplishments that led to the award. For example, he set his hair on fire with a candle when he was an altar boy, after being distracted by a cute young lady in the third row of the pews; he learned from this experience that hair burns really quickly and emits a terrible odor. At his daughter's wedding, he told the groom that there would be "no returns without a receipt." And when he served in the U.S. Army in 1968, he took...
credit for the fact that there was not a single Russian invasion of the United States during his time as a soldier.

The reasons, however, for WPU honoring Mr. Gruel in 2009 and again at the WPU commencement in 2019 were far more serious and profound than Mr. Gruel himself ever would acknowledge. WPU's President Richard Helldobler and Mr. Gruel's fellow WPU Board colleagues at the 196th commencement ceremony had no problem articulating the reasons for honoring Fred Gruel, known for having one of the biggest hearts on WPU’s campus. President Helldobler presented Mr. Gruel the president’s medallion - the highest honor to be bestowed at William Paterson - "awarded to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the University community, and who provide a positive role model through their outstanding service."

A strong advocate for public higher education, Mr. Gruel and his wife Susan made a "generous" contribution to William Paterson to create an endowed scholarship supporting full time, first-generation college students who demonstrate academic excellence and financial need. More than 800 graduates, accounting for 42 percent of the William Paterson Class of 2019, were the first in their families to receive a college diploma.

The gift reflects Mr. Gruel's passion for and commitment to the value of affordable, accessible, and quality education in today’s society particularly for first-generation college students. "I did not graduate from WPU but am in total sync with its mission and the role it plays in its accessibility to and success of first-generation college students. I was the first in my family to graduate from college (Fordham University, BA, Florida State University (MBA)), and I truly understand the transformative effect of a college degree on one’s life," he said.

He was asked to join the WPU board in 1992, after gaining the reputation in New Jersey as a prominent business leader who used his leadership pulpit to support and praise the core principles of public higher education.

After he received his bachelor's degree and served in the U.S. Army, the native New Yorker returned home to a job in the budget office at City University of New York. "This was the beginning of open admissions for City University, I had an opportunity to see first hand the importance of and need for a college education that was affordable and accessible to all no matter what the student's financial situation and status in the community. I also saw how it changed lives as it changed mine. I was no exception - there were countless others like me. The dedication and passion exhibited by the faculty and staff really fueled the success of the students," said Mr. Gruel.

He then went on to work for the Department of Higher Education under the leadership of Ralph Duncan and again "I saw the social significance of enabling students to further their education. Once I became part of the higher education community and understood the profound ramifications of higher education on society, the passion to work on behalf of public higher education never left me - even though professionally I went on to work in a leadership role at AAA. When I was nominated by Governor Florio to be on the WPU board, I was honored and very excited - to be able to continue working on behalf of public higher education in New Jersey," he said.

Even though Mr. Gruel is no longer chair of the WPU board, he “is not going anyplace,” said Mr. Gruel who also is a member of the NJ Association of State Colleges and Universities.
"There are so many things I admire about WPU - its mission, great faculty and particularly its commitment to educating those first-in-the-family-to-go-to-college students. Whatever I can do to further the cause of WPU, I will do it," he said. And that is no joke.

William Paterson University of New Jersey is a public institution that offers an outstanding and affordable education to a diverse traditional and nontraditional student body through baccalaureate, graduate and continuing education programs. The university's distinguished teachers, scholars and professionals actively challenge students to high levels of intellectual and professional accomplishment and personal growth in preparation for careers, advanced studies and productive citizenship. Faculty and staff use innovative approaches to research, learning and student support to expand students' awareness of what they can accomplish. The university's graduates embody a profound sense of responsibility to their communities, commitment to a sustainable environment and active involvement in a multicultural world.

NJASCU Features

Stockton Celebrates Its Moody's Investor Service Report Issued May 23, 2019

NJASCU QuickTakes

Stockton University's (Baa1/positive outlook) improving credit profile incorporates the university's growing prominence within the state as a mid-sized regional public institution with diversifying programmatic offerings and broadening demographic reach.

Stabilizing financial operations, limited near-term capital financing needs, active fiscal oversight and increasing donor support highlight the improving strategic position consistent with its well-defined long-term strategic approach. These credit strengths are offset by the university's high overall leverage driven by both the substantial facility investment recent undertaken as well as rising retiree benefit liabilities.

With this elevated debt burden, the ability to successfully balance growth strategies with fiscal stewardship will be an important determinant of Stockton's credit trajectory. Operating margins have been managed at or near breakeven levels which, when combined with general stagnant available reserves and liquidity, provide modest financial flexibility to counter any future adverse financial conditions.

On May 23, 2019, Moody's revised the university's outlook to positive from negative reflecting successful completion of the Atlantic City (AC) expansion and attainment of revenue and enrollment projections during this period of substantial investment and growth.

Governance and management: successful delivery on key strategic priorities enhances operating position.

Stockton's strong leadership team has a cohesive and well-coordinated forward agenda that, along with a demonstrated record of managing large and complex initiatives with the state, provides a solid foundation for continued growth. The successful completion of the Atlantic City campus and sizable investment at the Galloway campus underscores leadership's actively managed long-term planning approach. Development of strong budgetary policies and centralized financial monitoring has allowed the university to maintain stable fiscal operations throughout the recent expansionary project. Leadership has well-defined strategic priorities that include expanding enrollment and access, strengthening intergovernmental collaboration and resources, improving academic outcomes, and enhancing reporting and board engagement for greater fiscal and operating oversight.
Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis, along with her colleague Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) Executive Director David Socolow, is embarking upon the Garden State Graduation Tour to promote the new State Plan for Higher Education and the Governor’s recommended budget investments in higher education. The tour will consist of a series of campus visits and events focused around college affordability and student success.

Affordability and success are key themes of the recently released higher education plan, "Where Opportunity Meets Innovation: A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education." Governor Phil Murphy’s FY 2020 budget supports the State Plan by funding a statewide tuition free-tuition community college program, the first across-the-board increase in funding to public four-year colleges in more than a decade, and boosts in support for the state’s highly effective Education Opportunity Fund and Tuition Aid Grant programs.

"New Jersey’s colleges and universities strengthen our communities and drive innovation," said Governor Phil Murphy. "We need to redouble our commitment to ensuring that New Jersey’s students can enroll with confidence in their ability to afford a college education and navigate all the way to a college degree. Students need that assurance, and so do their families, their communities, and their future employers."

Secretary Smith Ellis will visit campuses across the state to lead conversations with students and other higher education stakeholders about strategies to make college more affordable, including the Community College Opportunity Grant and the recently released higher education state plan. The tour will also include roundtable discussions and questions-and-answer sessions. The student-driven tour agenda mirrors the student-centered approach of the state plan for higher education.

"Higher education is where opportunity meets innovation, and New Jersey must offer opportunities that spark innovation," said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis. "The best ideas for strengthening opportunity will come from the people I will meet on this tour - college leaders, faculty business owners, community activists, and most of all the students themselves. Educating them on the State Plan and listening to their feedback is pivotal to achieving the state’s goal of postsecondary success for all New Jerseyans."

David Socolow, the executive director of HESAA, will join Secretary Smith Ellis at several stops of the tour. "HESAA’s mission is to help New Jersey families pay for postsecondary education by providing both financial resources and information, and we look forward to hearing from students and discussing new policy options that can make college more affordable," said Mr. Socolow. "In support of the vision for higher education set forth by the Governor and the Secretary of Higher Education, HESAA is redoubling our commitment to helping students succeed."

**Noteworthy: New Jersey Issues**

**Sweeney Proposes Benefits Referendum to Force Murphy's Hand**
The state Legislature’s top elected official formally rolled out long-awaited draft legislation for over two dozen bills collectively termed the “Path to Progress” proposals - aimed at cutting property taxes and reducing the state’s pension and health care liabilities.

The Thursday, May 16 move by Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-3rd District, just as budget talks pick up, could set up yet another political shutdown with the Murphy administration, which has remained frosty on the proposals. Read full article.

As Coffers Swell, Lawmakers Resist Millionaire’s Tax
www.NJSpotlight.com

Many lawmakers are questioning the need for Gov. Phil Murphy’s proposed true millionaire’s tax, as an improving revenue outlook takes pressure off New Jersey’s finances. But the governor is holding firm. State Treasurer Elizabeth Maher Muoio detailed the latest news on state revenues for lawmakers on May 14th, including a tax-collection forecast for the final weeks of the current fiscal year that’s now upgraded by $377 million over revisions made just a few weeks ago. Budget reserves are also being padded as a result of the state’s improving finances, and $240 million has been added to the revenue forecast for the fiscal year that begins July 1, she said. There may even be grounds for canceling a gas-tax increase that many feared was looming later this year. But Ms. Muoio tempered her message with a number of warnings as she pivoted to making the case for Murphy’s call to establish a higher income-tax rate on earnings between $1 million and $5 million. Costs continue to rise while some sources of this year’s tax-collection surge aren’t likely to repeat in the coming fiscal year, she said, making the millionaire’s tax a necessity to maintain long-term stability.

$10M in Grants to Many Nonprofit Organizations Including Montclair and Stockton to Improve Jersey's Natural Beauty in Barnegat Bay
www.NJ1015.com

The state Department of Environmental Protection is handing out $10 million in grants for water quality improvement projects in the Barnegat Bay watershed - a natural resource that drives billions in tourism and recreation dollars through the Garden State.

Several nonprofit organizations, local governments and state colleges and universities will use the money to help reduce the impact of stormwater runoff, which carries pollutants such as animal waste, fertilizers and chemicals into waterways.

A study by the nonprofit Barnegat Bay Partnership found the water, natural resources and ecosystems in the watershed contribute between $2 billion and $4 billion a year in economic value to the state.

The DEP’s water quality restoration grants are made possible through funding from the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s Clear Water Act program, as well as damage settlements secured from polluters and the state’s Corporate Business Tax. Read full article. You can contact reporter David Matthau at David.Matthau@townsquaremedia.com.
Murphy Administration Poised to Make First Deposit in Rainy Day Fund Since Great Recession Dried It Up More Than a Decade Ago
www.state.nj.us/treasury/news/2019/05132019a.shtml

State Treasurer Elizabeth Maher Muoio announced that the Murphy administration is poised to make a deposit in New Jersey’s Surplus Revenue Fund (SRF) for the first time in more than a decade. The Surplus Revenue Fund more commonly referred to as the "rainy day fund," has sat dry since late 2008, just after the Great Recession hit.

As Governor Murphy noted, revenues for FY 2019 are coming in ahead of target, which has also increased projections for FY 2020. This means the state is not only looking at healthier surplus balances for both fiscal years, but it also triggers the statutory requirement to deposit excess funds in the SRF, which is viewed as a "lock box" because of the stringent statutory provisions governing the emergency use of the funds.

Big Contract Win for Part-Time Faculty at Rutgers
www.NJSpotlight.com
May 15, 2019

Part-time faculty at Rutgers University seemed in danger of being left behind after full-time professors and the institution recently agreed a contract. But the part-timers - on whom Rutgers depends to teach about 30 percent of all courses - have made their own deal. It took more than a year of negotiations, threats of a strike, and an unusual amount of solidarity between different union groups, but the Rutgers faculty - including part-time lecturers - seems to have settled four-year contracts with the university. Carly Sitrin has the story today.

The negotiations had become particularly tense, given that the faculty had been working almost a year without a contract. And after joining the Big 10 conference in 2014, there’s a yardstick against which Rutgers can be measured. That was a sticking point for the part-time lecturers, who could point to other Big 10 schools paying around 30 percent more per class. And although the university didn’t agree to the $7,250 that the PTLs were seeking, the lecturers got at least some of what they were looking for.

The university hasn’t revealed its estimate of the new contract’s cost. But a representative of the AAUP-AFT pegged the additional monies as adding about $17 million a year to the budget. That did not include the PTL settlement (reached late Monday), which is likely to be a fraction of that.

Noteworthy: National Issues

Op-Ed: Diversity Not the Problem but Dropout Rate is
NYTimes.com

At .... Less elite colleges, the problem isn’t diversity. The problem tends to be performance. The dropout rate is often above 40 percent. Many students leave with the miserable combination of student debt but no degree.
Yesterday, my colleague Shail Chinoy and I published an interactive project examining the graduation rate at a few hundred of the country’s biggest colleges.

Working with experts at the Urban Institute, we first calculated an expected graduation rate for each college, based on the graduation rate at colleges that enrolled demographically similar students. We then compared this expected rate to a college’s actual graduation.

There is much cause for worry in our findings. Among the many colleges with distressingly high dropout rates were multiple campuses in the Indiana University system; the University of Nebraska, Omaha; the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and many colleges across Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

But there are also many colleges that deserve praise. They’re some of the most impressive schools in the country, because they enroll a diverse mix of students and graduate them in greater numbers than peer schools do. These standouts include public colleges like Towson, in Maryland; Troy University, in Alabama; and colleges across Pennsylvania, North Carolina and the Pacific Northwest. They also include private colleges like Bethel University in Tennessee and the University of La Verne, in Southern California.

Why does all this matter? "A bachelor’s degree is the simple most influential determinant in multigenerational change and ending the cycle of poverty," Catherine Suitor, an administrator at Alliance, a network of Los Angeles high schools, told me. Jasmine Pachnanda, another Alliance administrator, had this to say about high-school graduates: "We need to make sure we are guiding them toward colleges where they are going to be successful."

I hope you’ll read the piece - or play around with the graphics. And if you have suggestions for future higher education work we should do, we’re all ears. Drop me a line at leonhardt@nytimes.com.

NY Times Op-Ed Columnist Questions Whether Universal Debt Forgiveness is the Best Use of Taxpayer Dollars
www.NYTimes.com

"This could be the start of what's known in Econ as a 'natural experiment,'" Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted Sunday, referring to the announcement that a billionaire would wipe out the student debt of every graduating senior at Morehouse College this year. "Follow these students and compare their life choices [with] their peers over the next 10-15 years."

It’s a great point. Ocasio-Cortez supports ideas like free four-year college and universal debt forgiveness. Other people (including me) are more skeptical, arguing that such plans disproportionately benefit the affluent.

But much of the debate is unavoidably theoretical. No one knows exactly how a universal debt forgiveness program would really play out. Maybe it would be a big handout to future financiers, lawyers and software engineers and wouldn’t have much influence on the careers that college graduates chose. Or maybe it would free many more people to enter professions that they would prefer, if only they didn’t have to pay off their loans. Likewise, no one knows how much student debt affects other decisions, like retirement...
SAT’s New 'Adversity Score' Will Take Student' Hardships Into Account
www.NYTimes.com

The College Board, the company that administers the SAT exam taken by about two million students a year, will for the first time assess students not just on their math and verbal skills, but also on their educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, entering a fraught battle over the fairness of high-stakes testing.

The company announced on Thursday that it will include a new rating, which is widely being referred to as an "adversity score," of between 1 and 100 on students' test results. An average score is 50, and higher numbers mean more disadvantage. The score will be calculated using 15 factors, including the relative quality of the student’s high school and the crime rate and poverty level of the student’s neighborhood.

The rating will not affect students' test scores, and will be reported only to college admissions officials as part of a larger package of data on each test taker.

The new measurement brings the College Board squarely into the raging national debate over fairness and merit in college admissions, one fueled by enduring court clashes on affirmative action, a federal investigation into a sprawling admissions cheating ring and a booming college preparatory industry that promises results to those who can pay.

Common Hang-Ups in Higher Ed Public-Private Partnerships
www.EducationDive.com

Editor's Note: Chad Hardaway is the deputy director of the Office of Economic Engagement at the University of South Carolina and the executive director of the USC/Columbia Technology Incubator

In recent years, colleges and universities have experienced diminishing levels of federal and state research funding, simultaneous with ever increasing innovation demands. As a result, many institutions are turning to new funding sources, such as industry, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits and philanthropic groups to fill the gap.

Over the last 15 years, I have worked in academia to build lasting partnerships between universities and private businesses. Along the way, I’ve seen examples of what to do and what not to do. A successful partnership brings critical investments into a university, creates opportunities for hands-on student training, and builds a pipeline of future talent for the company partner. But it's not all easy wins. Successful partnerships require strong relationships and strategic coordination.