



Letter from the President

Dear SUNY Empire Alumni and Friends,

I am so very grateful to have the opportunity to be the sixth president of SUNY Empire State. I began my job on July 1, 2022, and what a whirlwind it has been! I would like to thank everyone who has spent time with me and shared ideas about where we are and where we can go.

I have had the chance to interact with alumni, community partners, and members of our Foundation Board, Alumni Board, and College Council over the past couple of months. These conversations have been extraordinary for the warmth and hope people express about the past, present, and future of SUNY Empire.

The more I learn about SUNY Empire, the more grateful I am to be leading the institution at this time of challenge and change.

In July, I attended our Alumni Day at the Races. Not only was it my first meeting with alumni, it also was my first time at a race course. (It also was the hottest day on record in human history in upstate New York!) This was a great opportunity to connect with alumni and to hear your stories.

In the coming months, we will be doing important foundational work together as we engage in a strategic planning process. Our intention is to have a strategic plan ready by March 2023. We anticipate a focused, inclusive, and dynamic process, and I encourage you to provide feedback and participate as the process unfolds.

We also are exploring the opportunity — along with 10 other SUNY colleges — to seek university status. Nationally, research shows that the change to university status can elevate reputation, increase



Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.

status among other universities, and help an institution yield a higher percentage of applicants every year. This name change is consistent with the statutory amendments that went into effect in January 2022, whereby institutions with three or more graduate programs are eligible to be designated universities. SUNY Empire has more than 20 master's degree programs and one Ed.D. program, and we serve an increasing number of graduate students year over year. Our conversations within the college and with our sister SUNY colleges have been informative and helpful as we consider this opportunity.

As you can see, I have a lot of exciting news to share, but I also want to hear from you. How did this institution change your life? What did earning a SUNY Empire degree do for you and your family? Please follow SUNY Empire and me on Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to share your SUNY Empire story or email it to alumni@esc.edu!

Warmly,

Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.
President

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Alumni Day at the Races

On August 4, we held our 26th Alumni Day at the Races. Nearly 90 alumni and guests attended the event which had been on hiatus since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event began with a reception at the college's 2 Union Avenue location, which included a continental breakfast, door prizes, photos with SUNY Empire's mascot Blue, and tours of Alumni House. The gathering featured welcome remarks from President Lisa Vollendorf and handicapping tips from Foundation Board Member and "Master Handicapper" Scott Johnson. Guests then headed to the historic Saratoga Race Course, the oldest sporting venue in North America, to watch the races. Many alumni expressed how happy they were to get together in person once again.



SUNY Empire Alumni Meet Virtually

"Conversations Over Coffee" is a virtual midday coffee break that started during the pandemic. Each conversation features new speakers and a new topic. All speakers are part of the SUNY Empire community — alumni, faculty, staff, and students. Topics include alumni stories, current events, career advice, faculty research, interesting hobbies, music, and more. Join us in December as presenter Michell

Wright Jump '06, 2022 New York State Senate Outstanding Librarian Award recipient, will discuss her important work, its impact on her community, and what led to her appearance on the TODAY Show.

To learn about "Conversations Over Coffee" and other upcoming events, please visit the alumni website www.esc.edu/alumni.



Getting to Know... Kimberly Neher, Director of Alumni Engagement

Kimberly Neher has served as the director of alumni engagement since August 2021. In this role, she oversees all alumni programming and events, manages the Connections alumni magazine, provides support to the Alumni Federation Board of Directors, and is the liaison between SUNY Empire alumni and other offices at the college.

She has held various roles since starting at the college in 2006, including associate director of alumni and student relations. Kim is the "go-to" person for many offices across the college, and is a resource for recruiting alumni volunteers, identifying individuals to highlight in college publications and as guest speakers, and she is a wealth of institutional knowledge.

In addition to her current responsibilities, she is an experienced event planner and has managed hundreds of college events throughout her tenure and with other nonprofit organizations. She has a bachelor's degree in communications from Franklin Pierce University and previously served as vice president of their Alumni Board.

"I am so excited to be planning and hosting in-person alumni events again," Kim said. "I've missed seeing our alumni and look forward to meeting and engaging with you in person this year!"

If you have an idea for an alumni event in your area, please contact alumni@esc.edu.

10 MINUTES with President Lisa Vollendorf

**SPEED
ROUND**
(Short Answer)



What attracted you to the presidency at SUNY Empire?

I believe that the United States can and must do better in public higher education. We leave too many people behind, and we create barriers that block many people from successfully navigating the higher-education experience. At SUNY Empire, we have a long and proud history of serving diverse students and recognizing the strength of their life experiences. This powerful commitment to meeting students where they are drew me to SUNY Empire.

Tell us about your first couple of months at SUNY Empire.

What a whirlwind! Since July 1, I have had the privilege of meeting students, faculty, staff, alumni, board members, and community members who are deeply committed to SUNY Empire. It has been a time of learning and listening, and these conversations have helped me understand that the sky is the limit for our institution. We have the potential to have broader and greater impacts across New York, the region, and the world. I am energized to undertake this work in collaboration with our faculty, staff, and students and external stakeholders who can tell us how we can better serve them.

You bring a fresh set of eyes to the SUNY Empire community. From your perspective, what challenges and opportunities do we have in front of us?

We have so much going for us at SUNY Empire. We have a long-established culture of assessing prior learning and prior experience to help students achieve their educational goals. We also have a proud tradition of serving students through outstanding mentoring and advising. Our challenges, however, need to be met head-on. The pandemic fundamentally changed the higher education landscape, and we face new competition for enrollments in online, hybrid, and adult education. With few exceptions, institutions seek to offer more online programs and serve students of all ages. Moreover, students of all ages want programs that provide a clear pathway to career advancement, and they are asking how much this will cost them and how long it will take to complete. We have to articulate the structure and cost of our programs in a way that makes it clear to prospective students and employers that we offer high-quality educational experiences that meet student and workforce needs.

In your experience, what is the role of alumni, friends, and donors in a thriving college community? As president, how do you plan to engage these critical audiences?

I have had many joyful conversations with alumni, friends, and donors, all of whom are grateful to SUNY Empire for the role we play in giving working people the opportunity to further their learning and earn a degree. Our reputation and future success depend on the support of these individuals, who in turn can help us recruit students, enhance our fundraising efforts, and elevate our reputation. I look forward to strategically engaging our board members, alumni, donors, and business partners toward the urgent task of improving our visibility, balancing our budget, diversifying our revenues, and growing our enrollments.

How do you enjoy spending time when you're not working?

I was raised in the Rocky Mountains, and I love outdoor activities, including swimming, jogging, walking, hiking, and, most of all, backpacking with my husband. I also love the arts, and I am grateful to once again be attending concerts, plays, and other performances. I also love wine. And spending time with family and friends. And meeting new people. I just love being on the planet and making the most of every day.

Q: What book is on your nightstand right now?

A: "How Beautiful We Were" by Imbolo Mbue and "The Hudson Valley: The First 250 Million Years" by David Levine.

Q: Best vacation you've ever taken?

A: A Sierra Club backpack trip in the Arctic Circle. Gorgeous!

Q: What is one of your favorite memories?

A: Seeing my parents' awe as they approached Michelangelo's statue of David in Florence, Italy.

Q: What tops your bucket list?

A: I have always wanted to go to Prague, so I am excited for my upcoming fall visit with our international partners in that beautiful city.

Q: I can't start my day without...

A: I can't start my day without thanking my lucky stars for my health, my family and friends, and the opportunity to help make public higher education better for all.



Your Gifts at Work



*Karen Ferrari '21
Susan and Bill Dake
Graduate Scholarship*

After restructuring caused her to lose her job of 25 years as a sales market manager, Karen Ferrari '21 struggled to find employment. Realizing that not having a bachelor's degree was limiting her options, she decided to return to school. Karen achieved her goal of earning her bachelor's degree in June of 2021, and in looking back she said, "That was one of the greatest accomplishments of my life! I loved every minute, even when I went totally crazy with homework. Instead of stopping, I applied for graduate school." Karen is currently enrolled in SUNY Empire's MBA in Business Management program and a recipient of the Susan and Bill Dake Graduate Scholarship. She says, "Empire State College has given me my life back. My mind is so full and I have had such wonderful professors and mentors! I truly feel blessed and I am even contemplating going on to get my doctorate after I graduate. This scholarship means the world to us!"

In addition to helping students like Karen, your gift to the Fund also supports student programs like the Empire State Opportunity Program (ESOP). Thanks to the generosity of our donors, this program is underwritten by the SUNY Empire Foundation. Participants in opportunity programs receive enhanced academic support services through extra help from professional tutors, financial grants for tuition expenses, early degree planning, mentorship and coaching to advise students year-round, an extensive orientation program, and use of a college-owned laptop throughout the duration of their studies. The first cohort of ESOP students was so successful that the college is broadening the program to make this resource available to even more students to help them achieve their academic goals.

At SUNY Empire we are grateful to all of our donors. Whether you choose to support our students through a scholarship, or you make your gift to the Fund for SUNY Empire and provide opportunities for students through programs like the ESOP, you are changing the lives of our students through your generosity. I invite you to join the hundreds of other alumni who choose to pay it forward with a gift to the Fund for SUNY Empire. You can make your gift today by scanning the QR code below, visiting www.esc.edu/SupportESC or using the enclosed envelope.



Lydia Smith '21, ESOP student



**Scan the QR Code to make your gift
to the Fund for SUNY Empire today.**