A regularly scheduled meeting of the University Council was held on October 20, 2017, at the University at Albany, University Hall, Room 306.

Council members present included: Michael Castellana, Chair; Robert Balachandran; Nancy Burton; Patricia Caldwell; Mark Eagan; John Fallon (via teleconference); James Jackson; Abner JeanPierre; Brian Fessler (Alumni Representative) James Mower (Faculty Representative); Alondra Berroa (Elected Student) and Ankush Sharma (Graduate Student Representative).

Also present were President Havidán Rodríguez; Provost and Senior Vice President James Stellar, Vice Presidents Joseph Brennan; James Van Voorst; Fardin Sanai; Simeon Ananou; Michael Christakis; and James Dias. In addition, Bruce Szelest, Chief of Staff; Mark Benson, Athletic Director; John Reilly & Janet Thayer, University Counsel; Sheila Seery, Government & Community Relations; Alice Oldfather, President’s Office and Howard Architzel, SEFCU.

Mr. Hyde confirmed that the membership present constituted a quorum and Chairman Castellana called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The Chair requested a motion to approve the consent agenda items, Fessler moved the motion and Caldwell seconded. With no discussion on the consent agenda items, the Chair both welcomed and introduced new members to the Council: Ankush Sharma, Alondra Berroa and James Mower.

The Chair then turned the meeting over to President Rodríguez for his report to the Council. The President thanked members of the Council for their dedication throughout the search process and the current leadership team for their work through the transition. He then went on to detail his assessment of the University’s strengths, weaknesses and areas of opportunities as expressed by various constituents (community, campus units, donors, politicians, students) he has visited thus far during his listening tour.

Re-occurring themes included identity, mission and vision of the institution. The President indicated he would also focus upon critically important issues such as student success; research excellence; globalization; public engagement and diversity and inclusion. The President also briefly highlighted the alignment of three concurrent initiatives: strategic planning, the branding initiative and the comprehensive capital campaign. Upon completion, the Chair opened the floor to questions. Discussion and well wishes (Balachandran, Berroa).

Chairman Castellana then introduced Sheila Seery, Associate Vice President for Government and Community Relations. Sheila discussed the University’s legislative priorities for 2017-2018 and talked about ways the University can engage the Council membership to assist in positioning the institution to be successful in that pursuit. Priorities include funding for the Mesonet program, capital funding for CEHC, and a
Center of Excellence in Atmospherics. Discussion ensued among the group on each of these topics.

Chairman Castellana again introduced the President to discuss the realignment of the University’s strategic planning process. The President emphasized his desire to be more inclusive and engaging, including the importance of the Council’s guidance throughout the process. He introduced the new co-chairs as Provost Stellar and Vice President Christakis and indicated that this will be a 5-year plan. The tentative timeline is to create a draft by January 2018, finalize by March and charge a team to coordinate and assess the implementation. Discussion about intersection of the branding initiative, capital campaign and strategic plan (Castellana, Rodríguez, Balachandran, Caldwell, Eagan, Ankush, Stellar and Christakis).

With no additional questions, the Chair introduced Fardin Sanai, Vice President for University Development, who provided the Council with a brief Development update including the status of the capital campaign. Fardin introduced two resolutions: The first was a comprehensive list of naming opportunities in the new Campus Center expansion. A motion was called by Eagan and seconded by Balachandran to proceed with the resolution. After the Chair read the resolution, a vote was taken and passed unanimously.

The Chair then excused himself from the room for the second resolution, which involved the naming of a hospitality area within the SEFCU Arena. The Chair designated Balachandran, to carry the resolution. Fessler called for a motion to proceed, which was seconded by Burton. The vote carried unanimously with one abstention – the Chair who was not present.

The Chair then re-entered the conference room. There was some discussion among the membership about free speech on college campuses. At that time, seeing no further new business a motion was called (Caldwell) to adjourn, which JeanPierre seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

James D. Hyde
Liaison to the University Council