As I thought about the competencies/skills important for the next UAlbany president to possess, I reflect upon a statement on Inclusive Excellence made by a former university president.

“Unlike others, we shall be measured by how much value we add in enabling the success of our students, not by how many students we exclude. We shall be measured by the collaborative impact that we create for each other and for our common future, not by the barriers we erect between our communities and ourselves. And we shall be measured by the integration of our disciplines as applied in solving the problems of today, not by their isolation.”

I can envision that this is just the kind of statement we want to be made by the next president of the University at Albany. But more than just speaking these words, we need a person committed to making sure that the words don’t ring hollow. We need a person who does the work. Especially in a climate where the country is divided, we have to have a leader committed to making sure that all persons at the University at Albany have the opportunity for success, are treated fairly and respected, have equal access to opportunities and resources and can contribute fully.

Before you begin the process of reviewing presidential applicant packages, you will determine what criteria are necessary for the next president. What skills and competencies are needed in the next president as he or she continues to move UAlbany toward its quest for excellence - excellence in learning, teaching, student development, research, institutional functioning, and engagement in local and global communities. EXCELLENCE for all faculty, staff, and students.

We need a person who has diversity and inclusion as a priority in their thinking and actions and who understands that diversity and inclusion create a university that is cohesive, collaborative, innovative and creative. A university that is excellent.

To date, UAlbany has made great strides in the journey to excellence, especially in diversity and inclusion. Just last month the U.S. Department of Education mentioned the work we are doing in diversity and inclusion. The report, Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices,” cited the University’s success in promoting diversity as rooted in its Strategic Plan, which states the University will “… enhance the quality of undergraduate education at UAlbany and attract and serve a highly qualified and diverse group of students.”

We are thankful for this acknowledgment of our efforts, but much work remains and doing this work requires being able to sometimes stand up and proclaim diversity and inclusion even when it may not be popular. We’ve made great strides in the past couple of years, we’ve also had our challenges, but we remain committed to respect and support for all.

So, it’s critical that the next president of UAlbany has a demonstrated track record in the area of Inclusive Excellence. Inclusive Excellence is a planning process intended to help the institution establish a comprehensive and well-coordinated set of systemic actions that focus specifically on fostering greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability at every level of university life. The central premise of Inclusive Excellence holds that colleges and universities
need to intentionally integrate their diversity efforts into the core aspects of their institutions - including their academic priorities, leadership, quality improvement initiatives, decision-making, day-to-day operations and organizational cultures in order to maximize success for ALL students.

According to Associate of American Colleges and Universities, Inclusive Excellence consists of four primary elements.

- Number one, a focus on student intellectual and social development. Academically, this means offering the best possible course of study in the context in which the education is offered. The best means the provision of qualified instructors and sufficient resources—including learners—and a sequence of study that is coherent and challenging and one that comprehensively addresses the student learning goals of the particular institution.
- Number two, a purposeful development and use of organizational resources to enhance student learning. Organizationally, it means establishing an environment that challenges each student to achieve academically at high levels and each member of the campus to contribute to learning and knowledge development.
- Number three, attention to the cultural differences learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise. Cultural differences include race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity plus expression, religion, national origin, first language, physical and learning ability and learning style.
- And fourth, a welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning.

With these as the goal, the question then becomes, what will you look for in a presidential candidate’s background to determine whether or not they have demonstrated experience and thus a commitment to Inclusive Excellence? Part of that screening might include finding candidates who:

- Have the skills that show they can meet the ever-emerging and complex needs of the students, the state, and society, now and in the future. The world is changing. Generational turnover, cultural evolution, widespread immigration, emerging markets and advancing technologies all mean things are fluid. As such, we need a leader who understands this shift and is able to use these changes as opportunities to move forward.
- Have the ability to articulate his or her efforts to institutionalize equity and diversity. That is, how he or she has encouraged its use to inform campus decision-making, educational practices, and policy making. And at a time where there is some push-back to diversity and inclusion, we need a leader willing to continue to support these efforts not just because it’s the right thing to do, but because of the economic, innovative, and environmental benefits to the university.
- Have the willingness/ability to articulate the importance of:
  - a compositional and equitable representation of diversity among faculty, students, staff, and other university personnel;
  - steady and significant rates of retention and upward mobility for faculty and staff who are members of underrepresented populations, and
  - steady and significant increases in the retention and graduation rates for all UAlbany students.
- And have a commitment to the importance of an improved campus climate that provides a strong, sense of belonging and community for all UAlbany faculty, students and staff.
In summary, the action of making excellence inclusive requires that we uncover inequities in student success, identify effective educational practices, and build such practices organically for sustained institutional change. Inclusive Excellence re-envisions both quality and diversity. It reflects a striving for excellence in higher education that has been made more inclusive by decades of work to infuse diversity into recruiting, admissions, and hiring; into curriculum and co-curriculum; and into administrative structures and practices. It also embraces newer forms of excellence and expanded ways to measure excellence, that takes into account research on learning and brain functioning, the assessment movement, and more nuanced accountability structures. Likewise, diversity and inclusion efforts must move beyond numbers of students or numbers of programs as end goals. Instead, they are multilayered processes through which we achieve excellence in learning; research and teaching; student development; local and global community engagement; workforce development; and more. Our new leader has to understand all of this and see Inclusive Excellence as a way of doing business and will accept nothing less from all campus members.

This post-Michigan era and environment are one where educational leaders, particularly presidents, must envision Inclusive Excellence as a way of moving beyond mere compliance to one of reaffirming diversity and inclusion as core elements of the learning enterprise and essential to academic excellence.

In conclusion, I go back to the original quote I started with. The next president of the University at Albany must enable the success of our students, collaboratively break down barriers to success and integrate disciplines in such a manner that we are solving today’s problems.

This is what’s needed for our next president. I know you have a yeoman’s job and I know you will find what’s needed in a leader to continue our journey toward inclusive excellence.

Thank you.