

SUNY Cobleskill College Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 10, 2025

College Council Members in Attendance: Eric Stein, Anna Blinn Cole, Linda Cross, Erik Hage, Tracy Purcell, Susan Rightmyer, Daniil Usmanov, Marilyn Wyman

College Council Guests:

Cabinet Members - Marion Terenzio, Derwin Bennett, Wendy Gilman, Anne Hopkins-Gross, Gus McGiver, Darcy Medica, Anna Miarka-Grzelak, Jason Politi, John Zacharek, Cynthia Zinzow

Apologies: Martin Messner

Eric called the meeting to order at 8:28 a.m.

Linda motioned to approve the minutes from the May 07, 2025, meeting, and the motion passed.

Part I Information Sharing with On-Campus Contingencies

President's Update – *President Terenzio*

- Summer Updates President Terenzio provided a comprehensive overview of campus activities and developments over the summer. Highlights included
 - Campus Infrastructure - A comprehensive review of the campus farm was conducted
 - Branding - The campus underwent a branding refresh over the summer, culminating in the creation of a new logo. A campus-wide celebration is planned for next month to unveil the new logo and branding materials. Admissions and marketing materials will begin incorporating the new design immediately.
 - Economic Development - The college is actively expanding its partnerships

Budget Summary Report – *Laura Gross*

Laura presented the current budget status, emphasizing fiscal responsibility and strategic allocation of resources. She noted a slight increase in operational costs and discussed contingency planning. She emphasized that the campus is currently designated as a “Campus of Focus” by the SUNY Chancellor, which has triggered a deeper financial analysis and the development of a Stability Plan.

The college is facing a \$3.1 million structural deficit, down from \$3.4 million last year. Importantly, this deficit is operating-based, not cash-based,

- **Stability Plan:**
 - Developed using a SUNY-provided template
 - Focused on operational sustainability
 - Goal: Reach financial balance by 2029

- **Budget Workshop & Retreat:**
 - Plans for a budget workshop retreat over dinner to educate the Council on budget structure (“buckets of money”) and resource stewardship
 - Cynthia will reach out to the College Council members to coordinate
- **Operational Adjustments:**
 - Review of vacancies and task reassignment
 - Restructuring efforts to create a leaner operational model
- **External Pressures & Planning:**
 - UUP contract negotiations and OTPS (Other Than Personal Services) supply costs are under review
 - Awaiting SUNY system approval for certain budgetary components

Enrollment Management Plan – *Ania Miarka-Grzelak.*

Ania provided a thorough overview of current enrollment figures, trends, challenges, and strategic initiatives to improve recruitment and retention. Her report emphasized the importance of adapting to demographic shifts and expanding Cobleskill’s reach through non-traditional pathways.

- **Enrollment Figures:**
 - Target: 1,909 students
 - Current (Week 3 census): 1,891 (not final)
 - Break-even projection: Just over 2,000 students
- **Demographic Challenges:**
 - Decline in traditional-age students, especially in the Northeast
 - Fewer high school graduates expected through 2036 due to demographic shifts
- **Strategic Enrollment Planning:**
 - Focus on adult learners, online programs, and non-credit offerings
 - These areas are still being built and not yet part of the formal Stability Plan
- **International Students:**
 - 8 current international students
 - 14 in the pipeline; some delayed due to visa interview timing and restrictions
- **Retention Insights:**
 - 18 students lost so far due to withdrawal (homesickness, overwhelm)
 - Summer melt decreased from 16% (two years ago) to 11% this year
 - New Retention Task Force created to improve structure and accountability
- **Recruitment:**
 - Taskforce formed to streamline transfer processes and spring recruitment
 - Branding and messaging aligned with new logo and identity

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Update - *Derwin Bennett*

Derwin shared updates on the Unity Center and UDL. He also discussed student perceptions of safety and belonging. Noting that students generally feel supported and secure, citing strong relationships with faculty and staff. While external pressures occasionally arise, the campus remains a “happy space” for most students.

- **Unity Center:**
 - Search underway for new Unity Center Director
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):**
 - Task Force expanded to include 3 additional faculty and staff
 - Focus on inclusive teaching practices and accessibility
- **Professional Development:**
 - DEIB courses launching Winter 2026 via Brightspace
 - Designed to be an ingrained part of campus culture

Academic Optimization Plan – *Darcy Medica, Provost/VP for Academic Affairs*

Darcy emphasized that the optimization process is not about cutting programs, but rather about holistically evaluating academic offerings to determine where resources can be best utilized. The plan incorporates feedback from departments and considers enrollment trends, faculty workload, facilities usage, and program viability. SUNY is conducting similar reviews system-wide, and Cobleskill is proactively moving ahead to stay ahead of the curve.

- **Purpose:**
 - Focused on optimization, not elimination
 - Holistic review of academic programs, faculty needs, and facilities
 - Align resources with areas of greatest impact and sustainability
 - Preserve hands-on learning and experiential education
 - Ensure academic offerings are mission-driven and financially viable
 - Support innovation and adaptability in curriculum design
- **Process:**
 - Departmental feedback was solicited and incorporated
 - Programs are being classified and qualified using multiple metrics
 - Evaluation includes:
 - Enrollment numbers
 - Faculty workload
 - Facility usage
 - Strategic alignment with mission
- **SUNY System Context:**
 - SUNY-wide academic reviews are underway
 - Cobleskill is proactively advancing its own plan to stay ahead
- **Faculty Involvement:**
 - Faculty are heavily engaged in the process
 - Emphasis on transparency and collaboration

Institute for Rural Vitality – *Scott Ferguson*

Scott emphasized that IRV is entering a new phase of strategic growth, with expanded programming, new partnerships, and increased funding. The institute is focused on creating alternative revenue streams, supporting neurodiverse learners, and driving regional economic development.

- **Strategic Growth & Funding:**
 - ESG: Empire State Greenhouse \$400M economic development project underway
 - Carbon-neutral facility with classroom and lab space
 - First of its kind in the U.S.
 - \$2.6M awarded for EMPOWERS initiative
 - 42 value-added products developed since January
- **Workforce Development & Training:**
 - 23-week career enhancement training program launching
 - Customized training for neurodiverse learners
 - 3 career tracks for post-high school students not attending college
 - Long-term framework with curriculum development
- **Micro Credentials & Boot Camps:**
 - Career Success 1 & 2 boot camps developed
 - HAPSP certification now allows Cobleskill to certify others (e.g., restaurants)
- **Food & Agricultural Innovation:**
 - Dairy value-added production supported by NE DBIC (managed out of Vermont)
 - Equipment investments: cheese curdler, ice cream maker
 - New food technologist hired
 - Small business workshops supporting product development
- **Community & Regional Engagement:**
 - Monthly SPARC meetings with SEEC
 - Bi-monthly meetings with county executives and town leaders
 - Collaboration with Ag Society and other regional stakeholders
 - Shared initiatives across organizations to build synergy

SUNY Cobleskill New Logo *Jason Politi*

The branding process evolved through extensive consultation, including focus groups, branding consultants. The goal was to distill SUNY Cobleskill's unique strengths into a cohesive brand that reflects its hands-on learning, purpose-built programs, and close-knit campus community. The new logo was designed by a current student, which added authenticity and pride to the process. It reimagines the rolling hills of Cobleskill with a modern twist, symbolizing growth, innovation, and connection to place. The logo has received strong support from SUNY leadership and is seen as a bold step in leaning into Cobleskill's distinctiveness.

A campus celebration is planned for next month to unveil the logo publicly. Admissions materials will begin using the new design immediately. The branding rollout is being managed carefully to ensure consistency and cost-effectiveness.

- **Core Brand Themes:**
 - Hands-on learning
 - Purpose-built programs
 - Small size and high engagement
 - Strong sense of place and identity
 - Farm on campus as a decision-making differentiator
- **Logo Design:**
 - Created by a current SUNY Cobleskill student
 - Reimagines Cobleskill's rolling hills with a modern aesthetic
 - Designed to be distinctive, memorable, and mission-aligned
 - Supported by SUNY system leadership
- **Rollout Plan:**
 - Campus celebration scheduled for next month
 - Introductory guidebook to accompany launch
 - Admissions and marketing materials updated
- **Strategic Impact:**
 - Strengthens institutional identity
 - Enhances recruitment and visibility
 - Aligns with broader strategic and enrollment goals

Faculty Governance Update – Erik Hage

Erik provided a candid and forward-looking update on faculty governance, focusing on the evolving structure, shared governance principles, and the need for greater administrative collaboration. The college is undergoing a governance restructuring aimed at rebalancing roles and responsibilities. The goal is to create a more agile and collaborative model that allows for quicker, better-informed decision-making while preserving faculty input and representation.

- **Governance Restructuring:**
 - New model aims to restore administrative leadership while maintaining faculty input
 - Focus on agility and quicker decision-making
 - Governance structure being revised
 - Concerns about consultation and transparency addressed through structured communication
- **Shared Governance Principles:**
 - Faculty will choose their own representatives
 - Email used for consultation and feedback loops
 - Emphasis on keeping faculty educated and engaged
- **Policy Areas Under Review:**
 - Curriculum
 - Academic policy

- Student well-being
- Fiscal affairs

Advancement, Foundation, and Alumni Updates - *John Zacharek*

John shared a dynamic update on Advancement activities, highlighting record-breaking fundraising, alumni engagement, and strategic investments in campus development. His report reflected strong momentum and a deepening connection between SUNY Cobleskill and its alumni and donor communities.

- **Team Expansion:**
 - Two new hires added to Advancement
 - Niko Zatse (Ag Engineering alumnus) praised for energy and campus insight
 - Athletics Fundraiser
- **Fundraising Success:**
 - \$500K gift received from Key Bank
 - \$3.2M secured in donations
 - \$3.4M in active donor pipeline
- **IMPACT Program:**
 - 100% participation by College Council members
 - \$1K donation level with 85% NYS tax credit
 - 17 individuals are currently interested

Student Government Update – *Daniil Usmanov*

Daniil provided an update on student engagement, event tracking, and new initiatives aimed at improving student life and participation. His report emphasized innovation, inclusivity, and data-informed programming.

- **Coby Engage Platform:**
 - QR code scanning system for event check-ins
 - Enables real-time attendance tracking
 - Improves data collection and engagement analysis
- **Event Participation (First 15 Days):**
 - Total attendees: 195
 - First-year students: 38
 - Returning students: 137
 - Graduate students: 23
- **Event Categorization:**
 - SEA (Student Engagement & Activities)
 - CBE (Campus-Based Events)
 - Helps students identify and select events more easily

Part II – Council Reports, Discussion and/or Actions

Eric highlighted the upcoming Association of College Councils and Trustees (ACT) Conference, scheduled for October 17–18, 2025, at the Albany Marriott. He encouraged Council members to attend, noting that the conference provides valuable networking opportunities and includes student scholarship awards.

- **ACT Conference:**
 - Dates: October 17–18, 2025
 - Location: Albany Marriott
 - Includes student scholarship presentations
 - SUNY Cobleskill students among recipients
 - Ag Tech School will receive two scholarships (confirmed during meeting)
- **College Council Budget Workshop & Dinner:**
 - Will include a budget workshop and a strategic discussion
 - Focus on understanding budget structure and stewardship
 - Cynthia will coordinate
- **Campus Tours:**
 - Coby Farm tour planned after next Council meeting – Cynthia will coordinate
 - Council members invited to suggest other locations of interest
- **New Logo Materials for College Council Members:**
 - Eric proposed providing each College Council member with a name tag featuring the new SUNY Cobleskill logo and a branded mug, to reinforce Council visibility, pride, and alignment with the College’s refreshed identity.

Linda made a motion to end the meeting. Tracy seconded, and the meeting ended at 10:09.