SUNY Erie
Strategic Realignment Study

Draft Date: April 28, 2022

The final report is being prepared by rpk Group and will be made available on the SUNY Erie website when finalized.

rpk GROUP
from mission to market

Executive Summary

Project Background

rpk GROUP (rpk) engaged with SUNY Erie beginning in December 2021 to complete a comprehensive review of academic offerings and administrative services, with the goal of identifying opportunities for SUNY Erie to strategically and sustainably realign the institution in a way that better reflects current student and community needs. Like many institutions of higher education, SUNY Erie has experienced significant enrollment declines over the past decade, but the operations, infrastructure, staff, and faculty has not adjusted proportionally to reflect the institution's new reality of serving a smaller student population.

The project was led by a SUNY Erie team that included David Balkin, Bill Reuter, Adiam Tsegai, Katherine Callesto, Erikson Neilans, and Christopher Musialowski.

rpk GROUP

from mission to market

Analysis Details

- Over the course of this project, rpk utilized data from SUNY BI, SUNY Erie Office of Institutional Research, SUNY Erie Human Resources, and other sources to assess enrollment trends, credit hours, faculty teaching efforts, and organizational structure.

- The years of analysis for the study were academic years 2018-2021. In the cases of enrollment trends – both for headcount and student credit hours – the trends were assessed as a three-year change from 2018-2020 and the 2020 data was not impacted by CV-19 due to the timing of the data extract as well as the pandemic (happening so late in the spring 2020 semester as not to significantly impact 2020 data). Data for 2021 was provided for information, but not utilized in developing academic recommendations.

rpk GROUP
from mission to market

Key Findings

- The analysis conducted by rpk GROUP revealed the following about SUNY Erie:

  - Enrollment is declining – both headcount and total student credit hours – but the institution has not sufficiently right-sized faculty, staff, course offerings or facilities to reflect the smaller population

  - SUNY Erie, in most cases, operates as three separate campuses which results in duplication of effort and unnecessary administrative and academic structures that perpetuate overstaffing

  - The College has significant opportunity to adjust operations to align with student needs, which should support institutional priorities of improved student outcomes

rpk GROUP

from mission to market

High-Level Recommendations

- Detailed analysis and recommendations are provided throughout this report, but at a high-level, SUNY Erie should act upon the following:

  - **Unify and Right-Size the Institution:** Move away from the multi-campus model and unify under a 'one college' model with staffing and faculty distributed based on student needs, which includes eliminating programs that fail to attract students

  - **Reduce the Physical Footprint:** Discontinue using South Campus as a 'home' for any academic or administrative department or offering and utilize industry and community resources to continue a presence in the South Towns

  - **Focus on Student Success:** Enrollment is unlikely to rebound to earlier peaks, but SUNY Erie has significant opportunity to focus on student outcomes (retention, completion) as ways to improve the overall institutional financial picture

rpk GROUP
from mission to market

Specific Recommendations – Academic

- Eliminate programs with fewer than 30 students enrolled (3-yr average), declining or single digit growth (3-yr average) and degree production below 10 (3-yr average)

- Monitor programs that are new (since 2018), have fewer than 60 student enrolled, have declining or single digit growth (3-yr average), and have degree production below 20 (3-yr average)

- Restructure the academic offerings of SUNY Erie under a 'One College' model that assigns every department to one 'home' location, consolidates departments and departmental leadership to reduce the number of departments, and removes all instances of duplicative departmental leadership structures. Do not use South campus as a 'home' for any academic department.

rpk GROUP
from mission to market

Specific Recommendations – Administration & Staff

- Move all central office 'homes' to City or North

- Reduce or reallocate staffing at South campus in specific functions to reflect the reduction of student and operational activity at that campus

- Redesign Dean of Students role

- Adopt shared service models for academic and student support functions as well as non-academic administrative support roles

- Distribute staff across physical campuses based on student need and activity:
  - Create one stop shops on City and North campus for direct student services, such as Admissions, Bursar, Financial Aid, Registration and Advising
  - Included in this recommendation is a need to move as many student services online (self-service) or on-demand via virtual engagement as possible to best meet student needs

- All position vacancies should be evaluated to determine opportunity for potential reallocations or position closure

*Shared services models are the consolidation of administrative activity performed by unit-based staff into single delivery point

rpk GROUP

from mission to market

Steps to Support Action on Recommendations:

1. Implementing the recommendations will result in significant personnel changes. As roles are shifted and redefined, develop new job descriptions and fill those roles based upon demonstrated experience and expertise that meets the job requirements.

2. Assign or hire a small team to support change management and implementation for the recommendations SUNY Erie ultimately accepts. This team should also develop reporting metrics to track the outcomes of decisions and actions, including a dashboard to more closely assess the health of academic programs.

3. Establish more specific workload policies for faculty in order to reduce the level of workload disparities currently seen across disciplines.

rpk GROUP

from mission to market