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# Alumni Lobby for Funding

*UB and its defenders are recognizing that, to get their fair share of state budget dollars, they need to fight all year long. But the school needs your help.*

**A**s *UB Law Forum* went to press, the state's 1993-94 budget passed with an \$11.8 million decrease for SUNY — and roughly a \$1.8 million decrease for UB. This latest hit comes on top of \$30 million in reductions UB has suffered over the last few years.

An unprecedented effort to argue SUNY's case before the governor and state legislators is aimed at restoring the budget money lost to these recession-era cuts.

At stake, organizers of the effort say, is nothing less than the future of the state university system, the university — and UB Law School.

And they want you, the alumni, to join the crusade.

"I consider the alumni the strength of our advocacy effort," says Molly McKeown, who was hired by UB this past year as its director of state relations. "They're voters, and that makes a difference.

"Obviously, the Law School alumni are extremely articulate and knowledgeable about the way government works and the regulatory process. The Law School certainly can be right out in the forefront of our advocacy effort for UB."

But lobbying for UB isn't just a seasonal chore — it has become a year-round fact of life. From the central offices in Albany of the State University of New York, to individual campuses, to their component schools, the advocacy effort is seeking strength in numbers. Alumni can play a crucial role.

"We're concerned about the value of our degrees," says Judith A. Schwendler, a 1982 graduate of UB Law School and an assistant director of the General Alumni Association. Schwendler chairs UB's 15-person Alumni Legislative Action Committee, a cross section of university alumni who have been writing letters, lobbying local legislators and planning action on a larger scale.



Sen. Dale M. Volker '66



Assemblyman Richard R. Anderson '83

"If the Law School were to eliminate courses because of a lack of funding, or had to cut back on the quantity or quality of its professors, that would affect the quality of my degree," Schwendler says.

"And as alumni, we're concerned about the students, because they're future alumni. If it takes them longer to graduate, or they get closed out of classes, that affects them as alumni."

So what can Law School alumni do to help? For starters, organizers say, keep the school in mind wherever you go.

"A lot of Law School alumni know their assemblyman or state senator through social contacts. Ask yourself: What can I do to influence these lawmakers, and make them understand how important this is?" says Jean Powers '79, a partner in the Buffalo law firm of Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel and chair of the Legislation Committee, the advocacy group at UB Law School.

"You can write the governor, your assemblyman, your state senator. Call them, drop them a postcard, send them a letter, let them know that this is important to you. In the past they haven't heard from us. But if they don't hear from us now, we're going to jeopardize SUNY funds. And let them know: Not only do we care, but we vote."

Powers says legislators may need to be reminded of the economic impact of money allocated to UB. Money for salaries, plant maintenance, purchasing — it's all spent locally, and strengthens the Western New York economy. Indeed, UB is among the region's Top 10 employers.

And also, she says, it's a matter of holding Gov. Mario Cuomo to his word.

At UB President William Greiner's inauguration on Sept. 18, the governor said: "The state is determined to see to it that the University at Buffalo remains a school of high excellence, accessible to all students who are capable of profiting from it. Indeed, the state is determined to see the university's status not simply maintained but strengthened in the years ahead. ...

"We must sustain SUNY's standards

by avoiding cuts that force destructive compromise with excellence. We will avoid serious cuts next year."

The words fall short of an ironclad promise, but organizers of SUNY's advocacy effort see them as a positive sign.

Still, the evidence persists that higher education is threatened by the state's fiscal constraints. Gov. Cuomo, for example, proposed to reduce Tuition Assistance Program funding in the 1993-94 budget. Happily, funds for graduate TAP were fully restored by the legislature.

But do a few letters and phone calls really change anyone's mind in Albany? You'd be surprised. Two UB Law alumni now serving as legislators say the power of personal contact can't be overestimated.

"Strong lobbying efforts can help, especially for people on the fringe — people who might not be so inclined to support higher education," says Sen. Dale M. Volcker '66. He said it's important not to pit public institutions against private schools that also receive state tax money: "They don't help themselves by attacking private aid."

"If leaders are getting these thousands of letters from across the state, that certainly helps when we tell them this is a priority for us," says Assemblyman Richard R. Anderson '83, who serves on the Assembly's Higher Education Committee. "I think individual efforts are very helpful."

"And I think lobbyists are very helpful. Those people who are intricately involved in education certainly know the impact of what the budget does to their operation. Although I think I'm close to the SUNY budget process and what their needs are, a lot of members aren't. The education that can take place can really make a difference."

One person who knows the budget-making process intimately is UB Law student Francisco Duarte, who worked for three years for the Assembly's Ways and Means Committee. For two of those years he was the budget analyst for higher education — studying SUNY's

budget request and recommending to the committee what level of funding was necessary.

"We try to provide a budget that will meet the goals of the university at the least possible expense," Duarte says. "For instance, can some programs be streamlined or consolidated? Often that's very possible."

In that job, Duarte says, he and other staff members "met all the time with various people who had interests in the budget. It's important because the staff are the people who do the actual detail work. It's important to familiarize the staff people as well as the members of the Assembly and Senate."

That's the sort of professional advocacy that McKeown and others on the university payroll bring. But what about the alumnus with a pen in hand: Is it worth his or her time to plead SUNY's

case to legislators?

"I think it does work," Duarte says. "When you educate people on particular problems, people in Albany will try to respond to them."

"People generally like to know what's good, and once they know the Law School is a quality institution, they begin to care for it and actually take ownership of the Law School."

In the end, this advocacy effort is about more than money. "We want legislators to feel really good about the SUNY system," says McKeown, whose daughter, Marin Gibson, is a 1993 graduate of UB Law. "We want them to know that we're here to serve them — one state agency helping another."

"The budget is a critical piece, but it's not the only important piece." ■

*Ready to raise your voice, but unsure what to say? Pointing out these hard facts can help persuade lawmakers that SUNY, UB, and the Law School in particular deserve their very best efforts. Here's some ammunition:*

*\* SUNY's 1993-94 budget request would maintain the university's current work force, which is 2,000 persons less than in 1989-90.*

*\* The bare-bones 1992-93 allocation meant a \$75 million tuition increase, \$60 million in campus and program cuts, an estimated 30 academic programs eliminated, bigger classes, 550 fewer class sections each semester, and a diminution of career counseling services.*

*\* In the past four years the SUNY budget has been cut 10 times. In those years, the system has absorbed nearly \$49 million in one-time cuts and \$283 million in permanent cuts.*

*\* New York ranks 47th among the states in the percentage of tax revenues allocated to public higher education.*

*\* Such states as Florida, California, Michigan, North Carolina and Texas spend 10 to 17 percent of their total budget on public higher education. In New York, it's 6.3 percent.*

*\* All New Yorkers have an interest in maintaining the quality of SUNY. It's short-sighted for the state to focus on K-through-12 education at the expense of higher education. The compelling question is, what higher educational opportunities will be affordable after secondary schooling? ■*