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Contact: Spencer Jenkins (801) 999-0202 | twitter.com/higheredutah | facebook.com/uheaa

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Commissioner Sederburg: My top-ten Utah higher education events for 2009

Utah Commissioner of Higher Education, William Sederburg, announced his top-ten events in Utah Higher Education for 2009 today.

"I thought it might be helpful to summarize the past year. I am always amazed that at any one point in time it doesn't seem like much is happening, but upon reflection a lot has changed and a lot has been accomplished. Here are the top ten highlights of 2009, from my perspective."

Sederburg's list is as follows:

1. Student enrollment increases

USHE's colleges and universities have responded to an [unprecedented increase](#) of more than 24,000 students in enrollment since Fall 2008 while (a) keeping tuition rates as some of the most affordable in the country and (b) not hurting services to students. The biggest increases in headcount was the 23% headcount increase at Dixie State College, particularly in four-year programs, and the 15% increase at Snow College.

2. College of Eastern Utah (CEU) affiliation with Utah State University (USU)

Strong leadership from the Regents, Interim President Mike King (CEU) and President Stan Albrecht (USU), Mike Petersen (Executive Directory, Utah Education Network), Cory Duckworth (Vice President of Student Affairs at Utah Valley University) and others have helped pave the way to affiliating CEU as a comprehensive campus of USU. This affiliation will improve the higher education opportunities in the Southeast region of the state as well as assume some cost-efficiencies for CEU and USU. The recent approval of the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) is a significant step forward.

3. Advocacy

Increased advocacy for higher education was evident in 2009. The emergence of the [Friends of Higher Education](#) has made higher education a top priority among business and state leaders. The highlight came on Nov. 13 when the Board, Presidents, and several business leaders collectively made our case to the public (and the Governor).

4. Economic development

Regents approved three strategic goals at the beginning of 2009: participation, completion and economic development. The effort of Presidents Mike Young at the University of Utah and Stan Albrecht at USU in promoting USTAR (Utah Science, Technology and Research Initiative) was important with state leaders in dedicating federal stimulus funds for critical economic programs such as [USTAR](#) and the [Engineering Initiative](#). Presidents Ann Millner (Weber State University), Cynthia Bioteau (Salt Lake Community College) and Matt Holland (Utah Valley University), along with Cameron Martin from the Commissioner's Office have been instrumental in implementing the [Cluster Acceleration Program](#) - an initiative that

expands the USTAR model to more closely connect local business and industry with regional colleges and universities.

5. State budget

Despite the challenges in implementing some of the most drastic budget cuts in state history, universities and colleges have been able to maintain quality services at affordable rates for students. Chair Jed H. Pitcher and Vice Chair Bonnie Jean Beesley, of the Utah State Board of Regents, recently released a [statement in support of Governor Herbert's FY 2011 budget proposals](#) to preserve fy2010 funding for higher education instead of the larger 17% base cut approved by the 2009 Legislature.

6. K-16 Alliance building

The state's K-16 Alliance continued its work in developing common student numbering, concurrent enrollment standards, coordinating advising, etc. A particular highlight was the rollout of [UtahFutures.org](#) – a new education and career planning collaboration between K-12 administrators, Workforce Services and USHE. The tool will be used by all students that complete a *Student Educational and Occupational Plan (SEOP)*, plans that are compiled with real-time workforce and postsecondary education information. There was also a maturation of regional K-16 Alliances at Utah Valley University and Utah State University.

7. Academic collaboration

Seldom recognized, Utah leads the country in coordinating our academic content. Utah has a common course numbering system that facilitates easy transfer of credits, and we lead the nation in concurrent enrollment courses. In 2009, Utah was one of three states awarded a grant from the [Lumina Foundation](#) to participate in [Tuning USA](#), a faculty-led pilot project designed to define what students must know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completing a degree in a specific field.

Also in 2009, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, through the initiative [Liberal Education and America's Promise](#), identified Utah as one of five pilot states for aligning educational courses with the needs of industry.

8. New Century and Regents' Scholarships

2009 saw considerable controversy over the (a) the large increase in the number of eligible scholarship recipients, (b) inadequate state funding, (c) our failure to adequately inform recipients of funding shortfalls and (d) the political power of students who faced cuts in financial aid. Governor Herbert and other leaders have committed to fund both the [New Century and Regents' scholarships](#) for the 2009-10 academic year. Funding will be a major issue in FY 2011. Of particular note is the Regents' Scholarship, it is already having a positive impact on better aligning high school courses with college-readiness standards.

9. UESP/UHEAA Growth

The [Utah Educational Savings Program](#) (UESP) is nearing \$3 billion in total assets. Over the past five years, the program has grown three-fold. It is consistently recognized as one of the top college savings plans in the country. The success of UESP is helpful in promoting higher education throughout Utah.

The [Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority](#) (UHEAA) continues to provide loans for every eligible student despite dealing with the most challenging fiscal environment in the agency's history including a 40% increase in loan volume during 2009-2010. With this, UHEAA still maintains the lowest borrower default rate in the country.

10. Utah College of Applied Technology

USHE was legislatively successful in protecting governance for granting credit for college work. In addition, service regions were better-defined, enabling the [Salt Lake Community College](#) to more effectively serve Salt Lake County and surrounding areas.

"With these events, 2010 will assuredly be another exciting year for higher education and the state." Sederburg concluded, "We will continue working with business leader to align our institutions to economic priorities, we hope to maintain a high level of efficient services to students, and we look forward to continuing our collaborative progress with K-12 education leaders in helping build the state's talent pipeline."

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