

Proudly serving Fort Drum and Northern  
New York since 1985



The Quality of SUNY...  
the Variety of Six Colleges!

# The SUNY North Country Consortium

## Executive Summary:

Since 1985 the State University of New York (SUNY) North Country Consortium and its partner institutions have actively served military and veteran students in the vicinity of Fort Drum and Watertown. Comprised of campuses near the largest military installation in New York State, the Consortium has a long history of innovating services for military and veteran students and developing best practices before other institutions, both SUNY and non-SUNY, began addressing the unique needs of these students.

## Overview / History:

The SUNY North Country Consortium, a partnership of SUNY institutions, was formed in 1985 to meet the rapidly growing educational needs of Fort Drum and the surrounding community as the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division was reactivated and stationed at Fort Drum. As the only military base in New York State, Fort Drum initially met with SUNY representatives in 1984 to discuss the need for broadening higher educational opportunities in the Watertown/Fort Drum area. Realizing that the establishment of a new four-year campus was not feasible, the representatives decided that the educational needs of the area could best be met through the creation of a consortium of colleges. This approach allows the responsibility for course and program delivery to be shared among member colleges without overburdening any one particular campus. This method of organization also ensured unity of effort while providing the Fort Drum Education Services Officer a single point of contact with whom to coordinate.

### Fort Drum Population

1985: < 1,000

1987: > 3,500

2017: >18,000 military & civilian employees  
15,000 family members



*Early consortium representatives from SUNY campuses, circa 1986.*

Today the organization consists of six SUNY campuses working collaboratively to offer a broad variety of programs that include 14 undergraduate and career certificates, 37 associate degrees, 28 bachelor's degrees, 33 graduate certificates, and 24 master's degrees that can be completed locally. As consortium members, colleges agree not to replicate one another's course offerings and to support each other's programs whenever possible.

## Organization:

### Member Institutions:

Membership in the consortium has varied as SUNY campuses have become more or less active in serving Fort Drum and the North Country. Current campus partners are:

- SUNY Jefferson
- SUNY Canton
- SUNY Empire State College
- SUNY Oswego
- SUNY Potsdam
- SUNY Upstate Medical University

At various times, other members have included:

- SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
- SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome
- SUNY Plattsburgh

### Locations:

The consortium office opened at the Fort Drum Education Center in 1985. Space included administrative offices, advising offices for member campuses, and classrooms. Fort Drum invested in an expanded and more modern Education Center in 2000, and then expanded further into an Annex in 2012. After changes to Department of Defense rules, Fort Drum could not offer office space to partner campuses that did not offer full degree programs on post, and in 2016, the Director's office relocated to SUNY Jefferson's Higher Education Center (JHEC). As a result, today the consortium operates three office sites – one at the Education Center at Fort Drum, a second office at the Education Center Annex, and a third at the JHEC.



*The McEwen Library and Education Complex, Fort Drum*

## Governance:

Governance of the organization is provided through a Board of Directors comprised of representatives appointed by the presidents of the member institutions. The full board meets four times per year on various member campuses.

## Staffing:

Resourcing from SUNY includes two FTE, the Director and the Secretary. These positions have been in place since the consortium was established. The Executive Director handles the day-to-day coordination of the consortium and is responsible for program planning, classroom coordination and logistical support, marketing and public relations. In addition to serving as liaison between SUNY and the U.S. Army at Fort Drum, the Director also participates in critical local organizations and efforts, such as the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization, the Workforce Development Board, and the Veterans Service Network. Out of its annual budget, the consortium also funds a second Office Assistant for the Annex, as well as a part-time (0.5 FTE) receptionist for the Jefferson Higher Education Center to provide support to the JHEC and to partner college programming there. On-site faculty coordinator/advisors from member campuses provide student advisement.



*Consortium and partner college staff members in 2009 with the signed flag they received as a memento of thanks for “adopting” a deployed platoon.*

## Directors:

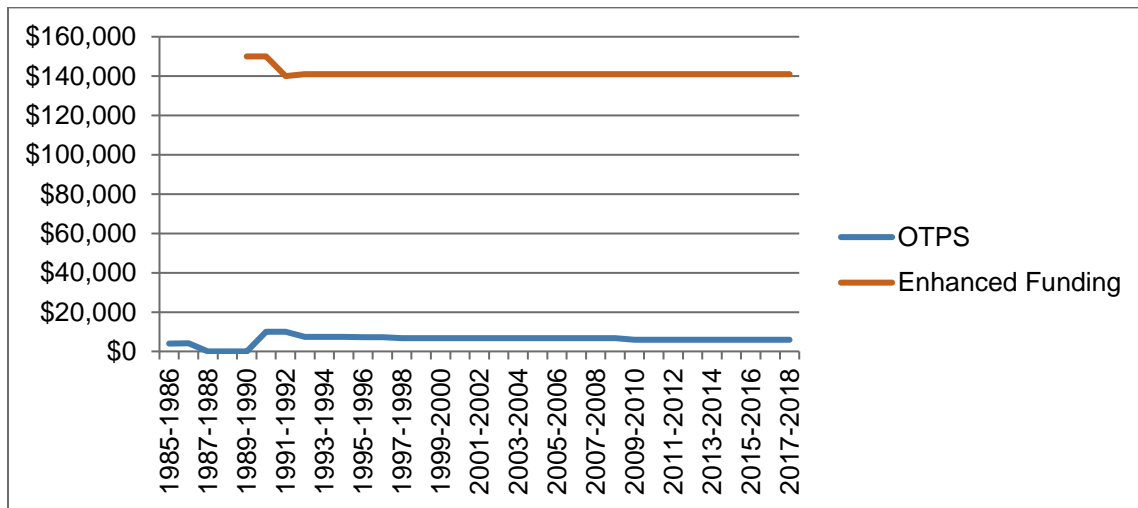
Throughout its history, the consortium has sought to employ leaders who have relevant experience in higher education, as well as a good understanding of the military (both the dynamics of operating in a military environment and serving the unique needs of military students). Each of the Directors have brought valuable perspectives to the table:

- 1985 – 1987: Alice Dieli, a former Army Captain at Fort Drum served as the consortium’s first Director. Ms. Dieli earned her B.A. from SUNY Oswego and a M.S.Ed. from SUNY Potsdam, and now serves as Instructional Development Coordinator at American River College in Sacramento, CA.
- 1987 – 1988: Donna Wagner came to the consortium with extensive experience in adult education. After serving as the Director, she served as Dean of Continuing Education at SUNY Jefferson.
- 1988 – 2006: Wanda Lancaster was a trained educator and a military spouse, married to a career Army officer who retired at the rank of Colonel.
- 2007 – present: In addition to bringing over 18 years of experience in higher education, Miyako Schanely has served in the U.S. Army for over 32 years, including both active and reserve service. In September 2017, she became the Army’s first female in the Engineer Regiment to achieve the rank of Major General (2-star).

## Funding:

Funding resources include Enhanced Funding (currently \$141,000 per year) and OTPS routed through SUNY Oswego's Division of Extended Learning (currently \$6,000 per year), for a total annual budget of \$147,000. This annual budget has not increased since 1991 and funds the following:

- the operations of the three office locations
- marketing efforts to advertise the launch of new programs, build awareness of offerings, and promote registration periods
- travel expenses to local, regional and national-level meetings to present or to remain current on requirements and best practices
- 1.5 additional FTE (PSR) to provide administrative support to the offices
- a portion of the salaries and travel expenses for the staff from member campuses who actively serve Fort Drum students



## In-Kind Support to the Consortium:

Since the consortium was established in 1985, SUNY Oswego has provided administrative support to the organization. SUNY Funding is routed through SUNY Oswego, and Oswego staff provide human resources, payroll, and purchasing support. Due to the proximity to the campus of SUNY Jefferson, JCC provides the consortium's IT support.

*Consortium board members and Fort Drum officials celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Consortium in 2005.*

*[l to r: Pauline Graveline, SUNY Canton; Robert L. King, SUNY Chancellor; Yvonne Petrella, SUNY Oswego; COL David Clark, Fort Drum Garrison Commander; Paul Grover, SUNY Upstate; Barry Jennison, SUNY Jefferson]*



## Serving Military and Veteran Students:

The SUNY North Country Consortium and its member campuses have a long history of serving the unique needs of military and veteran students. They established best practices long before “Military Friendly” became popular.

- *Flexibility around military requirements:* Since campuses began offering courses at Fort Drum in 1985, both instructors and school staff have accommodated the unique challenges of military students’ schedules, including field exercises, relocations and deployments.
- *Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP):* In order to improve military student success, and to assist them in increasing their GT/ASVAB scores, SUNY Jefferson provided BSEP classes at the request of the Fort Drum Education Services Officer.
- *Testing:* An important tool for military students in achieving their academic goals is the use of standardized testing to earn college credit for prior learning. This includes the College Board’s College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the Defense Activity for NonTraditional Education Service (DANTES) Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs).
- *Credit banking:* Enlisted Army Soldiers can earn points toward their next promotion through by earning college credits. SUNY Jefferson offers Soldiers an opportunity to convert their Army training transcript into an academic transcript for the purposes of promotion.
- *Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC):* Originally formed under the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), SOC formulated criteria for institutional policies and practices that were fair, equitable, and effective in recognizing the special and often limiting conditions faced by military students. SOC also created networks of degree programs that guarantee transferability, protect students from changes to degree requirements, require minimum residency, offer a variety of delivery modes for coursework, and provide flexible policies regarding withdrawals for military reasons. All members of the SUNY Consortium were members of SOC.
- *eArmyU:* The Army implemented eArmyU in 2005 to facilitate Soldiers using their Tuition Assistance benefits to complete degrees online. This program continued until 2012, when online/distance education had clearly been firmly established as a common method of accessing higher education. Two member campuses, SUNY Jefferson and SUNY Empire, were two of the 45 institutions from across the country included in this initiative, as the Army limited participation to college partners with proven ability to serve the unique needs of military students.
- *Tuition Benefits:* Member campuses have long been adept in assisting students in utilizing their various tuition benefits, to include VA Educational Benefits and My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) for military spouses. This proficiency has helped students to navigate the various requirements of these funding sources so they can focus on their studies.
- *Warrior Transition Unit:* Because of its location on Fort Drum, in the fall of 2007 the consortium became involved serving the new Wounded Warrior unit, which later became known as the Warrior Transition Unit. As the unit stood up, higher education was one of the critical vocational activities upon which Soldiers could focus as they healed or prepared to transition from the Army. Based on its pioneering efforts in this area, at the 2008 Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) Annual Symposium, the consortium presented the first ever panel on serving Wounded Warrior students.

**In Fiscal Year 2017, Fort Drum supported the enrollments of 2,132 Soldiers in approximately 5,800 courses with a success rate of 69%. \$1.3M of the \$3.7M of Tuition Assistance spent was paid to on-post college partners.**

- *Financial Aid / FAFSA workshops:* SUNY Jefferson offers Financial Aid/FAFSA workshops for its students on Fort Drum. JCC generously welcomes other Fort Drum students as well, even though they may attend other schools.
- *Career Services for Military Students:* The consortium has filled a vital role as an education partner for Fort Drum's career services for Soldiers and Family Members.
  - *Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program, formerly known as Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP):* This office at Fort Drum serves soldiers who are in the process of transitioning from active duty to civilian life (due to retirement, separation or expiration of enlistment), assisting them with all aspects of career preparation, to include resume writing, job search, interviewing, career planning, and certifications. The consortium has participated actively in quarterly career fairs. Additionally, from 2012 through 2014, the consortium was one of a handful of education partners helping with an Education Seminar (panel of representatives from different types of schools) for soldiers considering pursuing higher education in order to advance their career goals.
  - *Employment Readiness Program:* This office at Fort Drum assists spouses and family members of soldiers to prepare themselves for and find employment. The consortium has participated actively in career fairs, briefings and informational sessions.
- *Fort Drum Graduation Recognition:* Realizing that Fort Drum did not have a graduation event to recognize military students who had completed degrees, the consortium led a team of college partners planning the first Fort Drum Graduation Recognition in 2013. That event continues annually, and the consortium rotates the collaborative planning with Fort Drum's other college partners.



*The proud graduates at the 2018 Fort Drum Graduation Recognition.*

- *Youth preparation for college:* At the request of the Fort Drum Youth Center, the consortium provided "College 101" classes for youth, providing an overview of the processes of identifying career goals, searching for colleges, applying for admission, and navigating financial aid.

## Indirect Service to Military/Veteran Students and Other Stakeholders:

- *Council of College and Military Educators (CCME):*
  - The consortium has been active member of CCME, attending the Annual Symposium, which provides updates from the Departments of Defense, Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, and Veterans Affairs that affect education benefits and policies for military and veteran students. The symposium also provides a venue for sharing best practices in serving these students.
  - As mentioned above, at the 2008 Annual Symposium, the consortium elevated the topic of serving Wounded Warriors for the first time at a CCME Symposium with a panel titled “Partnering to Serve the Educational Needs of America’s Wounded Warriors.”
  - SUNY Jefferson and SUNY Empire have presented at several of the Annual Symposia.
- *New York State Advisory Council on Military Education (NYSACME):* This is the state-level equivalent of the CCME. Colleges and other stakeholders gather to exchange best practices and to solve problems or advocate for policy changes that assist military students in achieving their academic and career goals.
  - The consortium played a lead role in organizing this group over multiple years.
  - As a result of this group’s efforts, in 2005 the NYS Legislature passed a bill that waives the financial aid state residency requirement for servicemembers and their immediate family members stationed in NYS.
- *SUNY Veteran and Military Advisory Council:* Because of their long history of serving this population, the consortium director and advisors and staff from the consortium’s member campuses comprise the majority of the SUNY Veteran and Military Advisory Council.
- *DOD Worldwide Education Symposium:* The Department of Defense used to host a triennial symposium that convened military officials involved in Education Services and the colleges and universities who served military students.
  - The consortium participated actively in these symposia.
  - In 2009 the consortium offered a second panel discussing best practices in serving Wounded Warriors.
- *Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO):* This not-for-profit organization is an agency that strengthens the North Country Health System for Fort Drum Soldiers, their families and the surrounding communities. Essential to this mission is recruiting and maintaining a robust healthcare workforce.
  - Since its founding, FDRHPO has included a Recruiting, Retention and Education Committee (RREC) focused on building and sustaining that workforce. The consortium has been a leader on that committee, as well as participating in the work of some of the sub-committees.
  - Health Professions Career / Education Fairs: The consortium partnered with FDRHPO and ACAP/SFL-TAP to plan and host the first ever Health Professions Career/Education Fair at Fort Drum in 2008. The team repeated this process in subsequent years.
- *Publication:* Several members of the consortium co-authored an article “SUNY Colleges in the North Country: A Successful Partnership with the Military” in *New Directions for Higher Education*, Issue no. 120 (Special Issue: Leveraging Resources through Partnerships), Winter 2002.



- *Needs Assessment:* The consortium has commissioned several periodic higher education needs assessments for Fort Drum and the surrounding region. The results of these assessments have provided consortium partners, as well as other stakeholders, insights into educational achievement, aspirations, learning preferences and career choices of the population in Jefferson, Lewis, southern St. Lawrence, and northern Oswego Counties.



*MG Walter E. Piatt, Commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum inspires graduates at the 2017 Fort Drum Graduation Recognition.*

- *Seamless services:* In 2009, long before the advent of OpenSUNY, the consortium convened registrars and financial services directors from partner campuses exploring ways to design seamless cross-registration and transfer between member campuses. After nearly a year of effort, the task force concluded that a systematic solution could not be found at the time due to the disparate student information systems (such as Banner and Datatel) and requirements of each campus. The group agreed to continue processing cross-registrations as manual exceptions. However, this collaborative effort set the stage for subsequent initiatives to offer students more flexible options for completing degrees while accessing the unique strengths of various campuses.
- *Workforce Investment Board:* The consortium director served on the Jefferson – Lewis Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for years, collaborating with employers and other agencies to address the workforce needs and challenges of the regions. This included several years as vice-chair of the WIB.