THE GRAND CHALLENGES PROJECT
A Plan for SUNY Oswego Campus-Wide Common Problems

- One of the virtues of our academic calendars, set up several years in advance, is that the entire campus community can plan ahead. This proposal recommends that we set up a calendar of biennial common problems for SUNY Oswego.

- At present the college has a rich diversity of curricular and co-curricular activities. However, there is usually no central coordination of these activities and therefore no sense of shared community purpose. A calendar of shared themes would allow time for all SUNY Oswego stakeholders—students, faculty, staff and alumni—to prepare many different responses to a common problem the campus has chosen to tackle.

- Common Problem Pedagogy has been gaining currency in recent years. The pedagogy allows for unique disciplinary, interdisciplinary and co-curricular responses, while encouraging civic engagement and applied learning. Studies have shown that the pedagogy produces a high rate of student retention as well as a high rate of student meta-knowledge about their own learning. [See AAC&U, The Leap Challenge]

- By setting up a calendar of different campus-wide common problems for several years out, a SUNY Oswego “educational ecosystem” can be created for work on a single issue or set of problems inside disciplines, across disciplines, as well as in and out of classrooms.

- With a predictable set of topics, we would be better able to bring to campus coherent sets of speakers and events over the course of a given two-year period, create connected activities, read relevant books, write relevant papers, and find creative ways to link and promote our varied concerns and skills into common pathways.

- In short, we would be better able to tackle the grand challenges of our times in exactly the ways they need to be tackled—by a diverse community with shared goals, a mighty will, and an abundance of integrative skills.

Example of Common Problem: Fresh Water

Short list of possible sub-topics w/ disciplines:

- Social Justice (Flint, Michigan; global droughts; California water rights 1930s, rising oceans and third world)
  - Political Science, History, Economics, Philosophy, Global Studies, English, Risk Management, Education, etc.

- Sustainability (plastic in the Great Lakes; global warming, rain forest, Mars, acid rain)
  - Chemistry, Biology, Global Studies, Engineering, Technology, Astrobiology, Meteorology, Psychology, Business Administration, Education, etc.

- Media coverage and the above; artistic reaction to the above
  - Communications, Creative Writing, Art, Music, Theatre, Cinema & Screen Studies; etc.