to the
Slippery Rock University
Council of Trustees

Friday

September 9, 2005
The beginning of the academic year is always an exciting time made even more so by the very successful Week of Welcome (WOW) coordinated by the Divisions of Student Life and Academic Affairs. Congratulations to the more than 700 WOW Team, O Team (Orientation), and the Freshmen Summer Reading Team members for creating an exceptional start for the 2005 academic year.

This was our first year to integrate a summer reading program into our WOW. All freshmen were expected to read Nickle and Dimed, by Barbara Ehrenreich. The book was selected from an extensive list of suggested freshman readings by a team of faculty, students, and staff. The program included a presentation to the assembled freshman class on the Saturday before classes by the author followed by more than sixty small discussion groups with student and faculty facilitators. The purposes of the program were to engage the freshmen in a common intellectual discussion to set the tone for college work and to promote a community of interest in a common topic. Early results from the evaluations suggest this was a very successful event to start the year.

Part of the new student orientation was our third year to offer the Jump Start and Jump Start Mentor program for 65 students who want additional support services as they transition to college. Offered by the staff of Intercultural Programs, this successful program reaches all of our Board of Governors scholars.

We start the year with expectations of another record enrollment. Although the final enrollment will not be decided for a few weeks, the current enrollment is 8112, up 2.3% from last year. Notable for this year is the record number of transfer students who joined Slippery Rock University for the 2005-2006 year (more than 600).

Hurricane Katrina has had an impact on enrollment, the results of which will not be fully realized for several weeks. By the end of the first week of classes, nineteen students have been called into duty by the National Guard and deployed to the flood sites. The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and Governor Edward Rendell have offered free tuition support to any Pennsylvania resident enrolled in a college or university in New Orleans to allow them the opportunity to pursue uninterrupted their education until their university reopened. We do not have anyone who has accepted this offer as of this report.

We have demonstrated through our enrollment and retention program a unique campus culture. However, we are not resting. We have already begun recruitment for the 2006-07 class. Our intention is to focus on the quality of the freshman class by admitting those who meet our more rigorous admission standards and increase headcount through transfer and retention efforts. This may mean smaller freshmen classes in the future.

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1 As of September 6, 2005. The official date for reporting enrollment is September 12, 2005
Our focus on quality is supported by a new scholarship program approved this summer by the Slippery Rock University Foundation that provides $440,000 for the incoming class plus $20,000 in first-ever grants exclusively for transfer students. We believe that we have a very special message to deliver and that it takes a new marketing approach. A new micro web site and new DVD are in the final stages of production. More than forty videos are included in the DVD. We will share these with the Trustees when the product is completed.

The summer was also highlighted by seven program accreditation awards. The Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) approved the accreditation of the School Counseling program. ABET approved accreditation of all of our computer science and information science programs (six programs!)

We began construction of the student housing project on June 9, 2005. Construction is far enough along to see the first floor of one building and the concrete superstructure of three others. Phase I is on schedule and preliminary work has begun on Phase II. These projects may be the largest LEED Certified student residence construction project in the nation.

In other important news from the summer, we were able to work a dual strategy to increase revenue and decrease expenses to close a $4 million projected budget shortfall for the current year. The Board of Governors approved the smallest tuition increase in the past several years ($96 per full time student). However, the state appropriation to SRU was more than originally predicted as a result of improved performance and more strategic attention to the funding attributes. We still reduced salaries and compensation by approximately $2 million and decreased operating budgets in selected areas. The one setback was an increase of $.5 million for added energy costs in light of recent changes in the fuel costs.

Our budget strategies for 2005-2006 are some precursors to assuring we can balance our budget for 2006-2007 without severe cutbacks. We have set in motion better planning than was possible this past summer. We know we have back-loaded contractual salaries looming in the final year of the contract cycle for several unions. Our plans are to carefully examine low performing academic programs and the cost of athletics. We will begin conversations this year about both of these areas consistent with the principles and guidelines used last year to make our budget decisions.

Our budget issues may only be symptomatic of the challenges we face in the future. The larger issue is the erosion of the underlying social contract that charters us as a public university in Pennsylvania. We continue to see a constant shifting of the cost of public education from the public to the individual. This implies state universities are no longer considered public assets serving the Commonwealth’s vital interests but more of a provider of a commodity to be purchased for the individual good by those who can afford it.

While policy makers appear to neglect financing the “public” in education, they are increasingly intrusive in demanding unpredictable duties of us. Here are some examples from the past six months: (1) All higher education institutions that receive federal funds from the Department of Education are now required to implement an educational program relating to the United States Constitution on September 17 of this year and every subsequent year; (b) Within the next year we are likely to be required to do criminal background checks before hiring employees (including faculty), and (c) We hear proposals that transfer credit will no longer be decided by the
individual campuses.

Any of us might consider each of these to be a reasonable request. After all, who wants a dangerous criminal or predator teaching on our campus? Who is opposed to the U.S. Constitution? To me, the underlying concerns are that we are experiencing an erosion of confidence that we understand our responsibilities and can self-determine our own values. We see in these actions a loss of trust that we can competently determine within the academy what we mean by a quality public university. A second point is where does this stop? Once these “grocery lists” of public policy expectations begin to be assembled from all of the special interest groups, what will be our next assigned duty?

One of these items deserves special consideration. The State House of Representatives voted this July to form a committee to investigate claims by students that professors graded them unfairly because of their political views and used class time to talk about their own political opinions. Complaints from students prompted Representative Gibson Armstrong to sponsor a measure that will lead to hearings, take testimony, and conduct investigations this fall and coming spring with a report due November 2006.

Intellectual pluralism and academic freedom are essential principles for SRU. We will vigorously defend these principles. As a public university committed to developing engaged citizens and leaders for a complex world, we must encourage debate over complex and difficult issues. In the teaching/learning environment we are developing at SRU, students are to be encouraged to express their opinions and to question ours in an arena characterized by openness, tolerance, and civility.

We recognize that there are responsibilities that come with these freedoms. Our collective bargaining agreement is very clear: The classroom is not a forum for controversial matters that have no relation to the subject matter of the course and are not consistent with the accepted standards of the academic and professional disciplines. We recognize that academic decisions including grades should not be decided on the basis of the student's political opinions.

As teachers, we should be particularly sensitive to the power associated with our position and that when we express our views, students may not fully appreciate they have equal rights to offer their own. Neither students nor teachers should be disadvantaged or evaluated on the basis of their political opinions. Those who believe they have been treated unfairly will have the means to address and correct their grievances. Those safeguards are in place at Slippery Rock University.

With the start of the academic year, we look forward to sustaining our vision of being an exceptional residential regional public institution. Earlier this week, I asked our faculty and staff to think boldly — to look out further to our future: twenty years from now to 2025.

Predicting out five or ten years into the future is difficult. To give you some example of how difficult, who would have predicted in 2000, we would be at the threshold of the greatest changes in our history? Let me remind you that since 2000:

1. We have come from being declared dead last among the PASSHE schools in terms of the System Performance Indicators to now place second only to West Chester.
2. We have raised more than $19M in private support for the university.
3. We have turned around a nine year enrollment decline to stand on a 16.5% enrollment increase while attracting the best academically qualified students in our modern history.
4. We have dedicated three entirely new campus buildings and rededicated Carruth Rizza Hall.
5. Most significantly, two of every five faculty members currently with us have been hired since 2000. Essentially, 40% of our faculty have only known our recent successes.

However, we should be thinking now how our work influences today’s students in 2025. Twenty years from now, the students we enrolled this year will be in their most productive career years. Their children will be at their most formative ages—A time of life when our education of today’s students will be most meaningful. If our mission is to educate the next generation, then this oft-used cliche must become a reality in our classrooms and on our campus with those who arrived last month if we are to live up to the belief that a SRU degree is about educating leaders who are to be engaged citizens.

If we are educating leaders for the next generation and beyond, we beg the question, for what?
1. What challenges or tasks are these young people going to face?
2. Is our curriculum suited to those needs?
3. Is our teaching signaling our awareness of those needs?
4. Does our university focus on a mission committed to resolving problems of the world?
5. Can we say with confidence that we are meaningfully educating the next generation?

There are certain aspects about 2025 we can predict that should inspire our action:

**Resource Management**
We can easily predict that better resource management will become an increasingly significant issue for 2025. As a campus with excellent programs in ecology and environment, we should be a leader in developing solutions. One significant problem is that 1.7 billion people currently lack access to safe drinking water.

One new program we will launch this year is an ambitious initiative to create a global school to help Third World entrepreneurs develop water filtration devices that will help solve the thirst for clean safe water. Combining the talent we have in ceramics, international business, water quality research, and ecology, our goal will be to create micro-businesses exportable around the world.

**Global Governance**
Global governance has changed to a strange mix of governmental units, non-governmental agencies, and multinational companies. Thirty-nine of the largest economic entities in the world

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2The following categories are developed from the work Global Strategy Institute. For further information: www.7revs.org/
are now multinational companies and not countries. WalMart is the twenty-fifth largest entity in
the world. Home Depot would easily be listed among the top 100 entities as would be Kroger,
Target, Dell, and Costco. We have to provide our students with a realistic view of how truly
global their life will be. Regardless of what careers our students will have, they will be called
upon to address global issues.

This year, we are reorganizing our Office of International Services to expand outreach for global
travel, exchanges, as well as campus-based programs. We look for continued development of
our curriculum-based service-learning efforts to be global as well as national.

**Economic Integration**

We need to notice the globalization of our economy and the increasing polarization between the
haves and have nots. The issue our students may be asked to solve is not whether American
companies will be successful but will American workers be successful. Companies have
adapted. Take some of the most American brands: Maytag—built in Mexico, Ford—built in
Canada, Dell laptops—assembled in Malaysia, Jeep and Chrysler—owned by a German firm.

However, workers have not adapted. While we may lament that other countries pay lower wages
for cheap assembly jobs, we have failed to notice those countries are also paying lower wages for
highly skilled and well-educated jobs. This is not true just of China and India but also Mexico,
Malaysia, Brazil, and others. Those jobs offshore could reach 44% of all info tech jobs, 25%
banking, 19% of all insurance, 52% of engineering, and 31% of accounting jobs.

Our students need opportunities to excel on the national and international stage. As the world
shrinks or flattens, we cannot disappoint our best students by not providing them exceptional
opportunities. Consequently, we will launch a special office and web presence to help our
students be eligible and competitive for national recognitions such as Fulbright Scholars, Truman
and Marshall Fellowships, and Phi Kappa Phi fellowships.

**Technology**

In a world where technological leadership determines the winners, education is the central factor.
We will soon have a better infrastructure for advanced teaching and research in technology and
sciences. We intend to spend almost $1M on technology upgrades this year thanks to the
technology fee increase approved by the Board of Governors. We need to be sure that we are
using those precious dollars wisely in light of the rapidly changing technology world.

**The Knowledge and the Information Economy**

The technology revolution is the source of today’s growth and abundance. Our students fully
understand the power of technology. They unpack their computers and laptops before anything
else when moving in the residence halls.

Just ten years ago (August 9, 1995), Netscape went public. More than any other company, it
opened up the arcane and limited world of a group of academics and government intellectuals
whose tech mumbo jumbo had been built on insiders’ references to the Archie and Jughead
comics. In ten short years, what Netscape set forth has been totally embraced by the students
while the academics have been outpaced.

We do not want our faculty to be left behind. We have added two additional people to the
Collegis staff this summer to work with Russ Dively to provide professional development for our faculty. Currently, we have only 150 of our 400 faculty fully engaged with our advanced on-line classroom technology. We will work with our faculty this year to get the other 250 up to the same speed of our students. The students are demanding our response.

One additional goal I’ve set for this coming year is to do a better job of engaging the campus in a discussion of important transformational issues such as those previewed today. As we continue to build a great regional public university, we need to spend more time communicating with each other. Consequently, we are scheduling a series of conversations with faculty on important topics to share views and exchange ideas. Our first will be based on Thomas Friedman’s best seller, The World is Flat and the implications of his ideas for our university.

Our product is not a diploma. It is a person capable of making a positive difference in the lives of others: A person who understands the problems of our global society and has confidence he or she has the skills to address those problems. We can restore the social compact that is our rightful heritage. We must courageously focus on educating the next generation to be problem solvers, critical thinkers, visionaries, and civic advocates. We must audaciously state we are focused on educating the next generation of global leaders.