to the
Slippery Rock University
Council of Trustees
Friday
September 14, 2007
Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
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By Robert M. Smith, President

Extraordinary beginnings for our school year seem to become the expected for Slippery Rock University: We began the 2007-2008 academic year with another enrollment record. We again set new heights for success with our Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Performance Indicators. We anticipate an even greater financial award for our merit performance achievements. We received additional recognitions from national ranking services. These and many more accomplishments gave proof to our oft-used statement that “this is a great time to be at Slippery Rock University.”

With a few days remaining before the official enrollment report is made, we stand at 8,350 enrolled students (up from 8,230). More importantly, the quality of our entering class remains on par or better compared to the previous years. The average SAT score remains above 1000, the average high school grade point average is up to 3.26. The percent of students from the top 25% of their high school class is now at 35% of the total admitted and enrolled while the admission acceptance rate is approximately 70% of those who apply.

Other evidence that we have increased our quality is provided by national ratings. In addition to this summer’s Consumers Digest ranking of Slippery Rock University as one of the "Top Best Values among Public Colleges and Universities," Princeton Review again listed Slippery Rock University as one of the top 225 public and private universities in the Northeast United States. Princeton Review’s rating is particularly gratifying as they rely on measures of academic quality first and then survey students for all remaining criteria used in their rankings. Consequently, our students’ critical evaluations placed us among the elite in the Northeast.

Out of 65 measures used to evaluate the University performance, 36 are at ten-year record highs and we are continuing to improve. Among the important figures from the early 2007 data are evidence that retention from the freshman to the sophomore year has increased to 78%. The percent of students graduating in four years is at a ten year high and the percent of students graduating in six years has increased each of the past two years.

Our performance specific to efforts to diversify the campus by the recruitment of students, staff, and administration has been particularly successful. As of this year, the following diversity records are at ten-year highs:

- Percent of new students who are African-American
- Percent of new students who are Hispanic
- Percent of total students who are African-American
- Percent of total students who are Hispanic
- Percent of executives who are female
- Percent of faculty who are female
- Percent of faculty who are people of color
• Percent of professionals who are female and
• Percent of professionals who are people of color

In spite of these accomplishments, we believe we can do better. We have given special attention to recruitment and retention of students of color and have significantly increased the presence of African-American and Latino students as well as faculty. However, we have depended too much on the theory that the presence of a diverse population will somehow mysteriously lead to better appreciation and understandings across racial and ethnic lines. Consequently, our students have very limited experiences with issues of diversity and do not have the skills to teach themselves about living in a pluralistic world.

Therefore, the Office of the President is offering an instructional grant program to all faculty interested in enhancing the course content they devote to diversity issues within their courses. Interested faculty have been invited to attend a workshop on Professional Development Day, October 9, 2007, facilitated by Dr. Herman Jones and his recruited group of dedicated faculty. Our goal for this project is to assure that students are repeatedly presented throughout their academic career with new and challenging ways to broaden their interpersonal/intercultural skills and leave Slippery Rock University with a basic set of multicultural competencies.

We began this academic year with work on our two strategic planning initiatives: The Foundation of Excellence project and the University Strategic Planning Committee. The Foundation of Excellence team of 104 faculty, staff, and administrators compiled a set of 101 recommendations for action. To sort through and give priority to these recommendations, a ten-person President’s Council on the Foundations of Excellence for the First Year Experience has been appointed with the hope of an action plan sometime this fall term.

Last spring, the University Strategic Planning Committee completed a series of meetings to review the varied strategic directions of the University. The University Strategic Planning Committee has a draft version of last year’s work to assemble all of the University’s planning activities into a single focused document. The task for the committee is to now shape that document into a dynamic set of priorities and strategies for sustaining the University’s drive for excellence.

The work of the University continues to be defined within three broad categories. The first category captures our efforts to increase the value of the Slippery Rock University degree. For this coming year, we are launching three new or enhanced initiatives to advance this goal. One is to encourage more collaboration among our faculty and students in joint research projects. A new Center for Undergraduate Research has been established based on the successful undergraduate research symposium. With the help of the library staff and a committee of faculty, we hope to encourage broader participation in and support for the symposium and develop a culture of undergraduate research at Slippery Rock University.

A second initiative is to celebrate the careers of our distinguished faculty who are retiring. Too often we let these outstanding faculty depart without a fitting opportunity to recognize their careers and their contributions. Therefore, we are offering each faculty retiree opportunities for a Seminar in his or her honor prior to retirement. The seminar, featuring a presentation by the honoree, will be
sponsored by the Office of the President with a reception and formal program materials fitting as a remembrance of the person’s service to the University. The overall program has been developed by Public Relations with the assistance of the respective academic departments. The invitations will be offered to the University community as well as special guests suggested by the retiree. We are hopeful that departments see this as an opportunity to reach out to alumni as well as prospective majors in addition to a fitting celebration of a colleague’s career.

A third initiative is to begin developing viable commercial projects in anticipation of the opening of the business incubator facility. We have announced to the faculty that a pool of $25,000 is being made available to provide “Angel Funding” to aspiring entrepreneurial ventures proposed by faculty or joint student/faculty teams. Angel funding is first-investment dollars used for developing a plan, finance an achievement (proof of concept, beta testing), or support of management team. The intent of this fund is to encourage projects that have promise for the new university incubator and show a likelihood of developing to the stage of venture capital funding. Proposals will be submitted to a review panel simulating an entrepreneur’s experience in seeking Angel Funding. The initiative is offered by the Office of the President in collaboration with the School of Business.

Our second strategic direction is to build a premier residential community. The keystone for this work is currently the residential housing construction, now two-thirds completed. The next phase of capital needed for this strategic direction is the construction of a student union. We anticipate taking our comprehensive master plan for the student union to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education within the current month.

The work on the student union project has meant a vigorous summer working with consultants and architects to more carefully define our overall master plan for the next twenty years. With the help of Paulien & Associates, we can now offer a capital needs plan projected for fifteen to twenty years or longer. Based on conservative analysis of enrollment and utilizing objective independent criteria, we can envision a comprehensive master plan that encompasses both our academic and student life needs. One important feature of the proposed plan is utilization of resources in a manner that will not require academic facility capital requests coming forward to the State System for at least a decade.

From our plan, we now envision three significant areas to be addressed to complete an exceptional learning environment: (1) expansion of library services, (2) a student union, and (3) enhancement of a Student Resource Center. We see completion of this plan as a coordinated design to position the University for the next twenty years.

Slippery Rock University aspires to follow the research trend for contemporary libraries by transforming the library into learning spaces that facilitate peer learning and support technological sophistication. In doing so, the library will become a place of interaction and experience instead of a warehouse as it was viewed in the past. This approach will advance the library’s mission and benefit both the University community and the broader user community. At the same time, the library’s role will increase as a gathering space for collaborative work, as an information center of the campus, and a connection for users with the scholarship and learning they are seeking from the University.
The SRU Council of Trustees approved the plan to build a new union and we are now prepared to move that decision to the next stage with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Board of Governors. Our vision is that we have a place for our students built around the fundamental principal of community. The union brings people together. It broadens the academic experience by offering a diversity of programs and activities that enrich the quality of campus life.

The third element is the opportunity to repurpose space within the existing union from the library and other spaces on campus. The current union building would then become a dedicated student resource center to include the Registrar, Advising Center, Orientation, Act 101, our First Year Student Program, University Police, Health Services, Student Counseling Services, and Student Accounting.

With the relocation of over 2,200 residents to the lower part of the campus, we feel it is essential to relocate all of our safety and health response units closer to the residents and with greater opportunity for collaboration of services. In addition, this plan creates a geographically unified set of student resources, including a board cafeteria, Student Union, and the recreation center in an arc between the residential district and the academic district, thus fulfilling our original master plan.

While these plans are moving forward, hard work is devoted to the upgrade of several of our facilities. For this fall term, Finance and Administrative Affairs was busy with a $1.4 million upgrade to the chemistry labs in the new ATSH, a completed renovation of the McKay auditorium, a new women’s athletics locker room at the stadium, renovation of Gail Rose Lodge, expansion of the Alumni House, and the demolition and rehabilitation of abandoned residence halls. Additionally, we resurfaced and constructed parking lots to ease the congestion around the major construction projects underway.

The Division of Student Life has also put ambitious plans in place this fall term for an innovative program to engage our students in leadership development. Under a theme of “learning reconsidered,” the division is imaginatively integrating student life with academic life to create a seamless relationship. At the heart of this work is the new “Compass” program composed of a cascading series of certification challenges for our students to demonstrate their leadership competencies. This program is led by Mr. Brad Kovaleski, Director of the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership. Mr. Kovaleski returns to SRU from Franklin and Marshall College, where he served as Assistant Dean of Students since May, 2006. We anticipate Brad’s work will be another national “best practice” model coming from Slippery Rock University.

Within student life, campus safety is the number one concern for parents, students, and all of us as a consequence of the tragedy at Virginia Tech. We want to do everything in our power to safeguard our students and staff. Consequently, we have taken aggressive actions to upgrade our protective, preventive, and notification systems for all foreseeable emergencies. Among the initiatives that have been addressed recently:
  1. Residential Life has a new brochure they are distributing to identify the services available to students for their protection and health. The Counseling Center has developed a companion program to help faculty and staff make proper referrals for anyone who needs help or
represents a threat to others.

2. We have reinforced the Emergency Operations Team that authorizes action in case of an emergency.

3. We are expanding the composition of our existing team that evaluates students who need special help to resolve personal problems.

4. We are adding a Threat Assessment Team charged with examining the most complex cases of distressed students and empowering the team to act quickly when necessary to protect the student from self-inflicted actions as well as protect the community from possible outward actions.

5. We have appointed Mr. Eric Holmes as our Interim Director of Campus Safety and Security. Eric, a 1993 SRU graduate has been a member of the Pittsburgh Police Department for the past ten years, and is past-president of the SRU Alumni Association. Mr. Holmes brings to SRU a wealth of experience in law enforcement.

6. We added a text messaging system to our portfolio of communication channels used to notify the campus community of emergencies. Powered by e2Campus, the system allows us to send a message simultaneously to students, faculty, staff and parents via the method each recipient chose to receive it, such as a mobile phone (SMS text message), e-mail, RSS feed, wireless PDA, personalized web pages from Google, My Yahoo and AOL, as well the SRU homepage. The text messaging alert system went live July 20. Students, faculty, staff and parents of current students who want the alerts must sign up through the University’s homepage at www.sru.edu/alerts.

Our hope is that we will never have to use these systems – but should we need them they are available.

On another technology note, Slippery Rock University has continued to attract international news with the new official Rock ID card and a separate contactless token designed to be used with the recipient’s mobile phone. On campus, the card or chip is read by scanners in dining halls, for residence hall admittance, for laundry services in residence halls, at vending machines and photocopying machines across campus and for campus library services.

The contactless system is the first application for ID cards in North America and is made possible through a partnership with Heartland Payment Systems. Over fifty national and international articles have picked up the story of Slippery Rock University moving to this frontier of technology. Our primary objectives for this new system were to leapfrog Slippery Rock University to the leading edge of technology, help students understand the importance of financial responsibility, and know the importance of technology security.

The coming academic year is full of promise and extraordinary opportunities. Fall is always a wonderful time for SRU as we take on the challenge of changing lives and shaping destinies for our students. That challenge is what drives the work of all of us at Slippery Rock University.