Report of the President

to the
Slippery Rock University
Council of Trustees

Friday

April 4, 2008
Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
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By Robert M. Smith, President

This is the final meeting for Mr. Scott McCaskey, our student trustee. Mr. McCaskey has been an exceptional advocate for the students of Slippery Rock University and an important contributor to the good work of the Council for two years. Mr. McCaskey served several significant roles as our student trustee, no less of which was our representative in 2007 to the Board of Governor’s Budget Workshop for Slippery Rock University. He still remains the only student within PASSHE to be included in the discussions of university budgets. We all wish Scott the very best and congratulate him for his outstanding career at SRU.

Slippery Rock University continues to be an institution driving for excellence as exemplified in the work of the faculty and staff in the past several months.

One important project engaging the entire university has been the University Strategic Plan. The University Strategic Planning Council has continued to meet regularly. During these meetings, Council members learned of the plans devised by various divisions and offices and discussed how best to proceed with planning, assessment, and related resource allocation.

Throughout this academic year, I’ve now met with 27 academic departments as well as faculty leadership groups and the Student Government Association leaders to discuss strategic planning and obtain feedback. In addition, the President’s Cabinet conducted a retreat to discuss strategic planning on January 27-29, 2008, with the goal of coordinating all the division’s plans.

From these deliberations have emerged an updated strategic plan, reviewed by the Planning Council at a meeting on February 29, 2008, and a structure meant to ensure that strategic planning is ongoing and inclusive, both informed by and influencing the results of institutional and learning assessment, and the budgeting process.

The strategic plan has become an on-line document, replete with hyperlinks to the subordinate plans and assessment results of various divisions and offices. For example, under the goal of continuously improving “the quality and value of ...academic degrees, intellectual products and programs” an on-line reader can link to the strategic plan for the academic affairs division and to assessment data for various sub-goals and objectives subsumed under that goal.
The Council will now form into subcommittees focused on the three main target areas of increasing the value of a Slippery Rock University degree, maintaining status as a premier residential public university, and attaining financial flexibility. These subcommittees will meet on a regular basis with the goal of completing a final draft of the plan in time for the Council of Trustees’ June meeting.

The University Strategic Plan sets sights on the long-term and presents a continuing exciting future for our students, faculty, staff, alums, and constituents. Among the key elements is continuing measured growth in enrollment, including students of increasingly higher quality despite a forecasted drop in the state’s number of high school graduates, most especially in the western region.

This drop begins in 2009 and continues until 2016. Consequently, the university’s comprehensive enrollment plan includes a variety of offsetting measures, including: more intensive recruitment of students from the eastern region of the state and from neighboring states (New York, New Jersey, and Maryland) that anticipate larger increases in high school graduates; a non-resident tuition rate meant to make the university affordable to academically successful out-of-state students; ongoing improvement of retention rates through the strengthening of the first-year program and of academic and student life programs throughout the university; expansion of transfer programs; and increased recruitment and retention of both graduate students and students of diversity.

For 2008, the University has already closed freshman enrollment (closed in February of this year, our earliest ever). Registration of the freshman class began March 29 with more sessions to follow in April. Again, the early predictions are for an outstanding academically qualified group of students entering this coming fall.

Marketing is an important part of building our image and our enrollment success. We were pleased that the Office of University Public Relations won five national awards in the 23rd Annual Admissions Advertising Awards competition sponsored by Admissions Marketing Report. Competing against 2,000 entries from more than 1,000 colleges, universities and secondary schools from all 50 states and several foreign countries, SRU won a gold award for its poster series and a silver award for its 30 second, “I Rock,” television commercial. The University also earned three merit awards. One for a series of magazine ads touting, “It’s a Great Time to be at Slippery Rock University,” one for a direct marketing postcard campaign with the same theme, and one for the dance department newsletter.

As part of the comprehensive strategic enrollment plan are innovative programs responsive to new markets. The Council previously approved one such program Criminology and Criminal Justice. Already, this program has attracted more than 220 majors. At our next meeting, the Council will be asked to approve new graduate level programs in Adapted Physical Activity and Criminology and Criminal Justice. Both of these programs are proposed to be on-line programs.
Building quality programs and implementing new ones depend on careful assessment of student learning. A yearly cycle of assessment activities has been established that includes interactions among faculty members, department chairpersons, and deans, curricular changes resulting from assessment, and a yearly report of assessment progress submitted by each department to their dean. A Degree Coherence Matrix has been developed that links university-wide learning outcomes with degree program and liberal studies (the university's general education program) goals, program curriculum, "out of class" experiences, and assessment data sources and results. The DCM now serves as each department's annual report of assessment progress, and the college deans use these reports, along with specific budgetary requests related to strategic planning goals, when drawing up their annual budgets.

The emphasis in academic departments has been on assessing student learning through various capstone experiences or courses, the development of comprehensive senior portfolios, and/or the use of a nationally standardized test such as the Praxis II for education majors and the Social/ACAT Field Exams for Social Work majors. Instruments that have been developed by departments for their five-year program reviews, such as surveys of majors and alumni and graduate exit interviews, employed by departments on a more frequent, recurring basis. All departments that are offering courses in the Liberal Studies program are to submit assessment plans for those courses to the Liberal Studies Program Committee for approval. This process has been going on for more than a year, with courses that are core requirements or goal courses within particular blocks of study being examined first.

As of February, 2008, 36 of the 42 academic departments and student life offices have developed and implemented comprehensive plans for assessing student learning. Each of these plans articulates expectations for student learning at various levels, the methods used to assess whether the expectations are being met, and descriptions of how the assessment results are influencing teaching approaches and curricula. The remaining six academic departments have developed student learning goals and instruments for assessing the learning that is taking place, and are expected to demonstrate how the assessments are applied to curriculum, student activities, or teaching by June 2008.

The institution's overall strategic plan is dynamically linked to plans developed by the various divisions and offices, and to the results of assessments performed by those divisions and offices, particularly when they relate to the university's strategic goals.

One of the major capital projects in the University's Facilities Master Plan is a new student union. The concept is framed as a "town center" for the SRU community. The proposed 118,000 sq. ft. facility would feature three times more dedicated space for student organization offices/meetings (town center governance), expanded retail operations (town center retail), theatre and grand ballroom (town center entertainment), branded food operations and convenience store (town center food and beverage), and wireless lounges and study areas (town-center communication and information).
The new facility would allow us to achieve other facility master planning objectives. The old union would be used to bring our University Police, Counseling, and Health Center together closer to where our students reside and thereby increasing safety for our students. The rest of the building would be used for a student success facility by consolidating our tutorial and advising services, orientation, and registrar increasing retention and graduation services for our students. Some of those units will be relocated from the library, which in turn, frees up much needed library space. This way, we make more efficient use of existing space on campus without requesting major capital funding.

We can cite some progress on securing support for this project. On March 20, 2008, I was able to meet with the Board of Governor’s Finance Committee to discuss the project. Following a careful review by committee members, they agreed to place the project on the April Board of Governor’s agenda.

On expectation by the committee is confirmation by students that this is a project they desire. As of this writing, students are engaged in a reconfirmation referendum vote through April 1 (an update of the original student vote taken in 2005). Students were given three choices along with the respective costs: build a new union, expand and refurbish the old union, or leave things as they are. After four days of voting, approximately 1,700 students had voted with 94% supporting the new union (a final update will be made at the Council meeting).

Throughout the semester, our students and faculty have brought great distinction to the university. Here are some of the notable achievements earned in the past few months:

Faculty and Administration Accolades:

- Slippery Rock University’s Adapted Physical Activity Program has been named the Adapted Physical Activity Outstanding Program of the Year for 2008. SRU’s program teaches students how to organize and manage physical and recreational activities for children and adults with disabilities.
- Brian Meixner, SRU assistant professor of music, was one of only three college low brass teachers from around the world invited to perform with the United States Army Band Tuba and Euphonium Conference at Fort Myers, Va.
- Connie Foley, vice president for student life at Slippery Rock University, has been named an American College Personnel Association Diamond Honoree Award recipient for her more than 30 years of student advocacy and leadership in higher education. She received the award March 31 in Atlanta.
- Gordon Ovenshine, senior writer in University Public Relations, had his article about Robert Arnhold, professor in exercise and rehabilitative sciences, awarded a Gold CUPPIE award from The College and University Public Relations Association of Pennsylvania. CUPRAP received more than 300 entries from institutions in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Arkansas.
Student Accolades:

- Duwayne Rieger, a Slippery Rock University computational physics major, has been admitted into the geophysics doctoral program at Yale University on a full-tuition scholarship and teaching assistantship worth $60,000 a year.
- More than 200 Slippery Rock University students spent spring break learning about the languages, cultures and history of Italy, Amsterdam, Brussels, England, Ireland, Costa Rica, San Salvador, and other nations as part of their classroom studies.
- In a related program, 17 students involved in "Student Leadership" at SRU traveled to Italy to meet with fellow students involved in student government and leadership programs at local universities.
- Slippery Rock University students grabbed two of the five finalist rankings at the Allegheny College and The New York Times Presidential Primary Reform Conference. The competition asked students from universities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York and New Hampshire to suggest a plan for reforming the presidential primaries. Twelve SRU students competed in the one-day conference, in conjunction with a four-week online course offered via The New York Times Knowledge Network. Students explored past changes with the nominating process and suggested possible reforms for the 2012 election.
- Christie D. Willison, a secondary education and English major from Cranberry Township, won the "Meritorious Student Paper Award" at the 2007 ISECON (Information Systems Education Conference) for her paper "Teaching Students How to Evaluate Sources in Online Research."
- The SRU men’s and women’s track teams both won Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference team championships. The Rock women captured their second-straight team championship. The men’s team won its first PSAC championship. John Papa, SRU’s head track and field coach, coaches both teams.
- Danielle Cooper, a forward on the women’s soccer team, was named to the National Soccer Coaches Association of America/Adidas Scholar All-America third-team College Division. She is the only Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference student-athlete to be honored by the coach’s organization.
- Slippery Rock University student athletes Jen Blasko of Summit Hill and Mike Butterworth of Northern Cambria were named as recipients of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference "Fall Top Ten Award." The Top Ten Awards, selected by PSAC sports information directors, recognize student athletes who distinguish themselves in the classroom, as well as in competition. The conference designates Top Ten Award winners after each sport season: fall, winter and spring. To be a candidate, a student athlete must have achieved a minimum 3.25 cumulative grade-point average and must be a starter or key reserve with legitimate athletic credentials. Blasko, a junior volleyball team member, carries a perfect 4.0 grade-point average as an exercise science major. She was named to ESPN The Magazine first-team Academic All-District honors for the second consecutive season. Blasko also earned first-team American Volleyball Coaches Association All-Atlantic Region and second-team All-PSAC-Western Division honors last fall. Butterworth, a senior offensive tackle on the football team, owns a 3.69 GPA as a health and physical education major. He also received a PSAC Fall Top Ten
Award a year ago and, likewise, earned his second consecutive ESPN The Magazine first-team Academic All-America honor last fall. On the field, Butterworth earned second-team All-America honors from Daktronics Inc., honorable mention All-America honors from D2Football.com and first-team All-Northeast Region honors from Don Hansen’s Football Gazette. He was also a national finalist for the Gene Upshaw Division II Lineman of the Year Award and received first-team All-PSAC-West honors for the third successive season. Butterworth was also a member of the winning East squad in the Valero Cactus Bowl for Division II Universities all-star game. The selection of Blasko and Butterworth as Top Ten Award winners marks the 11th consecutive year and 13th time in the 14-year history of the award that SRU has had at least one student athlete named a recipient.

- Army ROTC cadet Zachary Foster, an environmental science major from Volant, has earned the Air Assault Badge from the U.S. Army’s Sabalauski Air Assault School at Ft. Campbell, Ky. During the Jan. 2-17 training, which started with 193 soldiers (99 cadets), Foster earned the position of “Honor Graduate” making him the top student in the class of 131 graduates.

Alumni Accolades:

- Helen Soehart, a 1972 Slippery Rock University graduate, was named the first lay president of Cardinal Stritch University. The 71-year-old institution with an enrollment of 6,900 is in Milwaukee. She has a bachelor’s degree in sociology and psychology from SRU.
- Daniel P. Barr, a 1994 history undergraduate and a 1996 history master’s degree recipient from SRU, has received the Philip S. Klein Pennsylvania History Prize from the Pennsylvania Historical Association. The award is presented biennially to the scholar who writes the best article for the association's journal, Pennsylvania History.
- Kathe House Posey, a 1979 Slippery Rock University graduate and sixth-grade teacher at Mount Union-Kistler Elementary School in Mount Union, has been named Teacher of the Year in Pennsylvania in the 12th annual Wal-Mart and Sam's Club State Teacher of the Year program. The Teacher of the Year program honors one teacher from every state. Phi Delta Kappa, a professional association for educators that partners with Wal-Mart on the program, selected the winners from among 1,200 applicants.
- Bob Murray, director of the Gatorade Sports Science Institute and a 1971 and 1974 Slippery Rock University graduate, is part of team working on a line of Gatorade that will be named for Tiger Woods. Murray was recently pictured with Woods in USA Today along with a story announcing changes in the sports drink company’s product line.

The conclusion of the academic year is always an intense time of celebrations and recognitions. Over the next few days (April 3 and 4) 65 of our students will present original research projects mentored by our faculty in our annual Research Symposium, sponsored by the Bailey University Library. This is a wonderful example of one of our goals to bring students and faculty closer together through research.
Two dates of significance for the Council are April 6 and May 10. The Academic Honors Convocation will recognize outstanding students as well as present awards for the outstanding teacher, research/scholar, and service. Dr. Athula Herat, assistant professor of physics, is this year’s winner of the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Timothy D. Smith, associate professor of physical therapy, will receive the President’s Award for Scholarly and Creative Achievement for his “Evolution of the nose and nasal skeleton in primates” research published in the peer-reviewed journal *Evolutionary Anthropology*. Mary Ann King, director of academic resources for Slippery Rock University, is the recipient of the 2008 President’s Award for Outstanding Service. More than 2,500 students will be honored for academic achievements. The convocation begins at 2:00 p.m. Commencement will begin at 11:00 a.m.