to the
Slippery Rock University
Council of Trustees
Friday
December 12, 2008
Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
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By Robert M. Smith, President

Responding to Challenges of Economy

The national and state economy overwhelms the news and is of concern to everyone around the globe. As the economic downturn spreads and the news becomes more and more dire, concurrent news stories have targeted the rising cost of higher education with alarming accounts about affordability for those who wish to pursue a degree. Together, these news events have placed a great deal of pressure on the University to respond responsibly to both.

I want to assure you that Slippery Rock University has well-prepared itself to weather these times and to remain this region's premier residential public university.

We have been asked by Governor Rendell to return 4.25% of our state appropriation as a consequence of the shortfall in tax collections for fiscal year 2009. That amounts to $1,700,879. In addition, we have been asked to identify another 3% in the event the shortfall deepens. That second amount is $1,200,621 for a total of $2,901,500.

This shortfall is for the current fiscal year and with almost half of the year expended, we have completed the budgetary adjustments based on not filling existing vacancies where those might exist, reductions in support services, and cancellation of capital projects budgeted for this year. The positive view of these cuts is that we are not cutting mission-critical services, classes, or our high priority capital projects. The negative view is that we will not be able to stay on the fast track we set for ourselves to complete certain projects (i.e., the new campus road system from highway 208), and we will depend on some people to absorb additional workloads.

We are very focused on our priorities. In contrast to stories you might read about others, we are not increasing the size of classes or otherwise diluting our classroom experience. Our faculty will remain with more than 90% full time teaching professors without us using any graduate students or hiring less-qualified adjuncts to staff lecture halls. We are proud that 90% of our faculty hold the highest degree within their field while the remainder hold specialist credentials important to teaching within their discipline. We are passionate about assuring quality of instruction.

You may also have seen news about the skyrocketing cost of higher education. Those stories do not represent Slippery Rock University. We remain committed to providing a high quality education at an affordable cost. According to the latest report by the College Board, the average total cost of attending Slippery Rock University—including tuition, required fees, room and board—is below the national average and more than $2,000 below the average charged by other four-year public colleges and universities in the Middle Atlantic region. For all 14 of the
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions, our tuition increases in each of the last four years have been held below the inflation rate — averaging 2.9 percent — a record no other public university system in the nation can match. Tuition and required fee increases over the last five years have been the lowest among all public college and university systems in the United States, according to a study by the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Our costs remain one-half or less than those of most private and the larger public institutions in Pennsylvania.

We are looking ahead to 2009-2010 budget planning. No prognosticator suggests that all will be well on July 1, 2009. Therefore, we are taking proactive steps to examine our state appropriation funds and prepare early decisions on how we would respond to a request this Spring to make further cuts. It is in times like these that I am particularly happy with the budgeting methods we use at Slippery Rock University. We fund on performance and project initiatives. Consequently, we build in flexibility. We also have generated one of the nation’s best enrollment management systems. Consequently, our applications are up and our commitments from admitted students are up. We are in full control of our enrollment for 2009 and can manage that as a resource for contending with budget needs.

Successful Assessment of Quality: NSSE

With our budget challenges under control, the University is staying focused on building this region’s premier residential public university. One important goal is to continually improve the quality of our students’ education.

Assessment of the quality of our students’ education is measured by several methods at the University. One that is very significant for us is the approval rating by our students on the five benchmark categories of the National Survey of Student Engagement (academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment). The NSSE project surveyed 1,200 colleges and universities and more than 1.5 million students, making it one of the largest annual studies of student engagement. NSSE provides both longitudinal data as well as national comparative data by various institutional groupings. This allows us to both see how we are improving and where we measure up to our peer institutions.

The latest data from the 2008 administration, shows our new students rated their experience higher than their peers did at comparative sister institutions in the areas of academic challenge, collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and campus experiences. SRU seniors gave solid evaluations on the national survey, exceeding last year’s rating in four of the five categories surveyed.

Dr. Amanda Yale, associate provost for enrollment services, oversees the administration and analysis of NSSE. She notes “With first-year students, our students scored significantly higher than our Carnegie Classification peers, our state system peers and all institutions in NSSE on three of those benchmarks: academic learning, student and faculty and interaction and enriching
educational experience,” she said “This shows that students, overall, are engaged with the campus and are involved with activities in and out of the classroom.”

Seniors gave SRU higher approval ratings than their peers did at other Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) schools, Carnegie peers and all NSSE institutions in the categories of collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supporting campus experiences.

One of the most important NSSE results is academic challenge, a yardstick for evaluating how much time students spend writing reports, studying and preparing for class. SRU comparison mean scores on each of the five benchmarks – level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experience and supportive campus experience – show increased engagement and involvement improvements in 2008 compared to previous years.

The key to our continued success has been the faculty. Additionally, we offer an extensive range of supportive experiences for first-year students to help them make the transition from their high school habits to those needed for college whether through our FYRST Seminar, the living-learning clusters in the new residence halls, or our programs in student leadership, Compass Leadership Program and intercultural services.

Another assessment tool designed specifically to enhance a student’s ability to make a successful transition to college is being piloted at Slippery Rock University this semester and is already receiving accolades from students and faculty alike. MAPWorks is an online computer software program that provides both students and University professional staff with relevant, timely information to allow appropriate interventions before the student is at risk of failure.

Nearly 90 percent of all SRU freshmen took advantage of the program in its first year. Students, as well as those faculty and staff involved in the program can view aggregate results from the survey. Individual students may review their own responses and compare their answers to totals supplied by their peers. With this software, we can identify early on any barriers student might be facing, and, in many cases, offer solutions to eliminate or mitigate problems – resulting in student success.

The survey covers a vast range of topics including parental educational levels, grade averages in high school, health issues, financial issues, personal relationships and homesickness. It also brought us new information about how many students bring computers – 90 percent, mostly laptops – to campus; how many spend at least one hour a day on social networks – 50 percent, and how much time is spent up to an hour daily texting (68 percent) and instant messaging (30 percent).
The survey covered two major areas, academics and student development. On the academic side, questions dealt with reading, writing and speaking skills; items that could interfere with class attendance; how students maximize their study skills; and other related topics. On the development side, questions examined health and wellness; stress indicators; commitment to college; an interest inventory; and social aspects of living on campus, including roommate and neighbor relations.

The survey found nearly 50 percent of SRU freshmen report they anticipate their greatest challenge in transition to college will be time management and study skill improvement. In looking at responses, we can see the number of students who said they were having problems with homesickness—5 percent of the respondents—and we can offer help through our residence hall programs, community assistants in the residence halls, those from the residence hall staff and faculty involved with the FYRST Year Seminar classes before it gets out of hand.

The software program has been customized to tie to actual programs offered at Slippery Rock University. MAPWorks often offers potential solutions, naming specific SRU programs designed to provide the specific kind of remedy needed. By using the online program, students get immediate feedback. In addition, a large number of faculty teaching FYRST Year Seminar classes are making extensive use of the program. They monitor a student’s progress and identify problem areas needing proactive intervention.

In addition, residential staff also has data access, allowing them to follow up in the same areas as they monitor students in their living and learning environment. Part of our goal is to help students focus on the elements needed to succeed academically. The program allows us to minimize the number of drop outs that could have been retained by early intervention. Through these individual successes SRU’s retention rates—and the University’s graduation rate—will continue to increase.

The University received additional national recognition of its academic quality when the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education voted to reaccredit the institution’s teacher education programs. This continued a 53-year record of successful accreditation of our programs.

SRU was among the first programs in the nation to earn NCATE accreditation in 1955. Even more impressive is that only 20 of the 95 teacher preparation institutions in Pennsylvania have NCATE accreditation.

SRU’s most recent accreditation approval covers both the initial teacher preparation program and the advanced preparation level program. To receive accreditation, teacher candidates must have in-depth knowledge of the subject matter they plan to teach as well as the skills necessary to convey it so students learn. The University must carefully assess this knowledge and skill to determine that candidates may graduate. Multiple types of performance assessments are expected throughout the programs of study. Candidate qualifications are assessed upon entry, and candidate competence is assessed throughout the program as well as prior to student...
teaching/internship work, and before completion of the program.

NCATE requires institutions to have partnerships with P-12 schools that enable teacher candidates to develop the skills necessary to help students learn. Candidates must be prepared to understand and work with diverse student populations. Faculty must model effective teaching practices and the College of Education must have the resources, including information technology resources, necessary to prepare candidates to meet new standards. Slippery Rock University's teacher preparation programs have long been at the forefront ensuring our graduates have the latest tools and theories necessary to enter the classroom ready to teach.

NCATE updates its standards every five years to incorporate best practice and research in order to ensure the standards reflect a consensus about what is important in teacher preparation today. In the past decade, NCATE has moved from an accreditation system that focused on curriculum and what teacher candidates were offered, to a data-driven performance-based system dedicated to determining what candidates know and are able to do. The new system expects teacher preparation institutions to provide compelling evidence of candidate knowledge and skill in the classroom. SRU was among the first schools to meet those new accreditation standards when they were first implemented. SRU's latest accreditation process was a pilot program for NCATE with the report and documentation done online rather than in paper report form.

James G. Cibulka, NCATE president commented on the SRU accreditation: “This accreditation decision indicates the unit and its programs meet rigorous standards set forth by the professional education community. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you and your professional education unit for displaying the high quality necessary to be granted national accreditation.”

Other accreditation news came this October with The Storm Harbor Equestrian Center (SHEC) at Slippery Rock University becoming the only university-based equestrian center in Pennsylvania to receive a premier center accreditation from the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). Storm Harbor provides weekly therapeutic horseback riding for more than 55 community children and adults with disabilities. SRU students, many in the University’s signature adapted physical activity program, assist with the lessons. A NARHA-registered instructor conducts all the lessons. Storm Harbor also serves as a site for camps, Special Olympics’ events and a program for veterans with disabilities.

NAHR examined the center’s riding programs for people with disabilities, professionalism, cleanliness and educational effectiveness. Storm Harbor exceeded the required standards in all categories. The NARHA makes several standards mandatory, which you must score 100 percent on to pass and other sections that require a minimum of 75 percent or better in each category with an 80 percent in the overall scores. SHEC scores were 100 percent, 94 percent and 95 percent. Only three other equestrian centers in the state have the premier center accreditation. None is located in western Pennsylvania. Ohio has 11 premier centers, the closest being in Cleveland.
In news related to our programs for people with disabilities, Slippery Rock University’s “I Can Do It, You Can Do It” mentoring program was selected to be the national role model for launching nine new I Can Do It programs at schools and community centers across the country. SRU received a three-year, $850,000 contract from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Disability to become the charter institution for a national expansion of the program. “I Can Do It” partners college student mentors with children and adults with disabilities for weekly physical activity sessions. SRU was the only university in the country that was asked to help launch new programs. The University was selected from a national pool of applicants.

Robert Arnhold, SRU professor of exercise and rehabilitative sciences, will serve as project director and technical adviser for implementing the new programs. “We chose Slippery Rock University because the peer review committee judged it to be an excellent proposal and one of high quality,” said Michael Marge, deputy director for the Office on Disability. “Bob Arnhold is a nationally recognized specialist. He has been identified as a major leader in the field of physical fitness for youth with disabilities. He’s got the intellectual capabilities and the creativity to take on real challenges.”

The Sunset Serenade Celebration benefit for the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center raised $50,000 to expand services and provide scholarship assistance to SRU students and riders. More than 200 friends of the center attended the Oct. 4 celebration under the theme “Presenting Horses of the World.” Storm Harbor serves riders from several counties, including Butler, Lawrence, Mercer, Allegheny and Washington, on a weekly basis. SRU students who work with the riders are learning how they can incorporate adapted riding activities into their future work, making adapted riding more accessible to people with disabilities.

Also, in October the University broke ground for a $1.3 million development of 12 acres for the intramural sports complex on the fields located at the corner of Harmony and Branchton roads. The project, paid for by campus recreation, includes creation of four, multipurpose recreation sports fields that will primarily be used for flag football, soccer and Ultimate Frisbee. There will also be two softball fields. Four of the six fields— and possibly all six— will have lighting for evening and night games. Plans also call for construction of a facility for concessions, storage and restrooms. The complex will also include the new walkway path being constructed along the eastern edge of the fields. The walk/jog path was paid for through a state grant.

Construction is expected to be completed by December, with fencing installed next spring as grass grows on the fields making them ready for fall semester intramural sports. More than 4,500
students participate in intramurals each year. We average 65 flag football teams, 30-35 soccer teams and the same number of Ultimate Frisbee teams. In addition there are usually 50 to 80 softball teams. This facility will add significantly to the resources students have to enjoy recreation and improve their health and wellness.

The women's soccer team made it to the semifinals of the NCAA Division II Atlantic Regional semifinal game. The Rock was in the NCAA playoffs for an unprecedented third straight season and for the fifth time since 2001.

The men's soccer team made it to the NCAA Division II Atlantic Regional final. The loss gave The Rock, which made its first-ever appearance in an NCAA regional final, a final season record of 14-7-1.

Sophomore soccer player Toby Bowser headlined a list of four Rock men's soccer student-athletes named to Daktronics Inc. All-Atlantic Region honors. Bowser was also named as an honorable mention All-America performer by Daktronics Inc. in voting by the nation's NCAA Division II sports information directors. Teammates Greg Blum (sophomore goalie), Patrick Conley (freshman defender) and Jeremy Deighton (junior forward) were all named to second-team all-region honors.

Senior volleyball player, Jen Blasko was named to ESPN The Magazine Academic All-America first-team honors in voting by the College Sports Information Directors of America. The women's volleyball team made it to the semifinals of the NCAA Regional.

Senior Jaime Wright placed 20th in the individual cross country competition to lead The Rock to an 11th-place finish in the NCAA Division II national championships at Cooper's Lake Campground. Senior Jeff Weiss and junior Pat Reagan both earned U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association All-America honors by virtue of their finishes in the championships. SRU was host to the national championship and our athletes, coaches, administrators, and police did an extraordinary job as hosts to this national showcase in 25 degree weather, four inches of snow, and a slight breeze. It was cold!

The women's tennis team, under the leadership of veteran head coach Matt Meredith, was named All-Academic Team status by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA). In addition, six Rock student-athletes were named as ITA Scholar-Athletes. That quintet included Melissa Herron, Christina Rhodes, Lara Rizzi, Christina Rubino, Casey Runyan and Kelly Stenger.

In news of note from our faculty, staff and students:

Dr. Stephen Barr, assistant professor of music at Slippery Rock University, has been chosen as the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers to receive its 2008-09 ASCAPPLUS Award in the concert music division.
Dr. Charles Cuny, vice president for finance and administration at Slippery Rock University, was recognized with a Minority Achievement Award at the 34th Annual Minority Achiever’s Luncheon sponsored by Minority Opinion Magazine.

Dr. Warren Davidson, an instructor in the Slippery Rock University music department, will debut as the musical director of the Pittsburgh Civic Orchestra this Saturday when the group launches its 50th season.

The December Commencement celebration will honor 561 graduates. The December graduating class includes one doctorate of physical therapy degree recipient, 77 master’s degree and 483 undergraduate degree recipients. U.S. Navy Capt. Kathlene Contres, commandant of the U.S. Navy’s Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute and a 1977 Slippery Rock University graduate, will become the first SRU commencement speaker to have her graduation address video-streamed worldwide.