Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
March 18, 2011
By Robert M. Smith, President

The intervening three months since our last meeting have been entirely overshadowed by last week’s recommendation by Governor Tom Corbett to cut 50% of the state appropriation to the PASSHE institutions. Labeled as “The largest such proposed cut in higher education in the country this year”1 by the Boston Globe and others, the impact was as much from the surprise as from the size. For the state system, the cut would leave only $232 million, which is $2.5 million less than the system’s first appropriation in 1983-84, when enrollment was 81,524, compared to an enrollment of 120,000 in 2010-11.

The size of this proposed cut is difficult to grasp. For the state system, the total cut is approximately $60 million more than the entire budget of our largest university, IUP. It is more than the entire budgets of Cheyney, Mansfield, and Lock Haven combined. For SRU, the reduction is more than six times the total budget for Advancement, Student Affairs, and Public Relations combined.

The proposed reduction does not account for the replacement of the ARRA funds (stimulus money) of $38.2 million. Of this, Slippery Rock University expected to lose $3.1 million for its portion of the ARRA funds.

The additional impact of the reduction of the state allocation on Slippery Rock University is difficult to fathom. The cumulative shortfall of failing to restore ARRA funds and the proposed reduction is $24.3 million. Although the 50% reduction is for the state appropriation and not the overall budget, the shortfall is still 23.6% of the educational and general budget for the University. Last year, SRU received $39 million in appropriated funds including the $3.1 million in ARRA money. In terms of funding per student, this shortfall represents $2,700 per student on a current tuition base of $5,804.

Our strategy is a combination of advocacy for restoration of the funds and planning for the reduction. With only four months to assemble a budget (and conclude negotiations on five labor contracts), we obviously have much to do before July 1, 2011.

We are experienced in facing these challenges. The only difference is the scope of our work in this round. We have already held two informational sessions with faculty, staff, and students. We distributed an announcement to all of our faculty, staff, and students alerting them to the issues. We have updated our web site to allow two-way communication as we move forward (http://administration.sru.edu/president/budget/index.php)

We will fully participate in the advocacy activities that PASSHE has planned. Advocacy Days for PASSHE will be April 4-5, 2011 in Harrisburg. Several of our students, me, and others will attend. Others are invited. All of the arrangements are being made by PASSHE staff.

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We had been working diligently on creating a Slippery Rock University advocacy network as announced to you in December. Labeled, ROCK Nation, we envisioned this as a group of individuals willing to enthusiastically communicate messages of support for the University in particular and higher education in general. Advocates will be expected to share with elected officials, as well as business, community groups, and prospective friends of the University the value of Slippery Rock University to these constituents. The advocacy network will offer a great way to stay connected to the SRU and to be involved in the development of its future.

This is a nonpartisan project. The key to successful advocacy is for others to embrace the messages important to the continued success of Slippery Rock University and to provide proactive support for our efforts to build a great asset for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and our students and graduates.

Being an advocate will not require any special skills or political acumen. By participating in the advocacy network, individuals will be better informed about public policy affecting higher education and have an opportunity to shape Slippery Rock University’s future. Advocates will receive timely updates on University and legislative issues, periodic calls to action, and invitations to legislative strategy briefings.

We will ask advocates to:

• Stay informed of key initiatives of the University that can be enhanced by the help of our constituent interests. As a member of the advocacy network, individuals will have exclusive access to University updates, briefings, and alerts to special concerns of the University as it strives to meet its mission.

• Contact their elected state representatives about the higher education appropriation bill as it moves through the legislature.

We will provide advocates:

• Up-to-date Legislative Election Advocacy Guide detailing specific issues as well as helpful easy-to-follow strategies for being an effective advocate; and

• Special legislative briefings designed to inform advocates of the University's key messages and what they can do to help garner support to maintain a strong higher education system.

Although we have this immediate need focused on the 2011-12 Commonwealth budget, we do see that ROCK Nation should be a broader appeal to other elected officials or key community and business leaders about non-budget issues. The University's interests are not limited to budgeting or actions by the legislature. Some of our greatest opportunities are within the capacity of informed business and community leaders.

ROCK Nation is on the web site at: http://www.sru.edu/president/rocknation/Pages/WhatsRockNation.aspx You can find it on the President’s page of the web among the menu options on the left side. There you will find advocacy tools and a way to join the network using a private FaceBook account. The purpose of our private Facebook group is to provide advocates with materials to be successful. Resources found on the group page will provide a directive on how to be a good
advocate when reaching out to elected officials, businesses and community leaders.

Simultaneously, we will be working to prioritize where our budget reductions will be made. We will continue to hold to the basic fundamental principles that we have used in the past:

- Students come first. Educating students is always the highest priority.
- Consultation with faculty, students, and administration on matters of the strategic plan and budget decisions are an inherent integral part of the shared governance of the University.
- Cuts and/or increases are not made “across-the-board.” Doing so violate the purpose of the strategic plan and is a formula for mediocrity.
- The University cannot be all things to all people. The budget reinforces the strategic priorities of the University to preserve the overall quality of the institution.

Certainly the most frustrating part of this experience is how it threatens to derail the impressive growth in the quality of Slippery Rock University over the past ten years. We will remain determined to protect as best we can the investment everyone has made in building this great University. Consequently, we will continue our commitment to:

- A faculty that is full time and professionally credentialed;
- Sustaining high quality and accredited academic programs;
- Maintaining our investment in quality teaching/learning environments, campus safety and security; and
- Recruiting, educating, and graduating high quality engaged students.

The timing of this event presents additional challenges. Beginning in two days, we welcome visitors from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Led by Dr. John Estling, SUNY Plattsburg, the team will be here March 20-23, 2011 to assess our qualifications for reaccreditation. It will be difficult to not let the events of this budget issue overshadow this review.

Our preparation for the review has been an absolute act of pride for Slippery Rock University. The incredible team approach, the engagement of the University, the countless hours of preparation by hundreds of committed faculty, staff, and students has been nothing short of inspirational. Led by Dr. Cornelius Cosgrove, Professor of English and Ms. Cynthia Dillon, Assistant to the Provost for Academic Affairs, we are not only ready for the review, we are excited to have the team see what an amazing place Slippery Rock University is.

The team will primarily validate the institutional self-study approved earlier by the Council of Trustees. Regional accreditation provides affirmation to the public that Slippery Rock University:

- Is guided by well-defined and appropriate goals, including goals for student learning;
- Assesses both institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes, and uses the results for improvement;
- Is accomplishing its mission and goals substantially; and
- Meets the eligibility requirements and standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
There are many achievements to celebrate from the past three months. Among the highlights are:

- The University entered an agreement for students majoring in physics to transfer to West Virginia University to pursue a degree in engineering following a three year plus two year plan. This provides a stable and commutable opportunity for Western Pennsylvania students to receive an engineering degree while attending SRU. The partnership enables students to receive a bachelor's degree in physics from SRU and an engineering degree from WVU in five years.

- Vincent Science Center reopened for the first day of Spring classes following a three-year and $14 million renovation, transforming the delivery of health and science education. Students described the learning center as the best-looking building on campus and said the work shows the University’s commitment to academic quality. The state-of-the-art facility houses the departments of nursing, biology, mathematics, physics and psychology.

- Slippery Rock University was ranked 34th in the nation as one of the 50 safest campuses in the nation. This is the second year in a row to be ranked and SRU is the only campus in Pennsylvania to make the Top 50.

- The SRU Counseling Center has been accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services for five-years. This is the first year the Center has been accredited. Dr. Carol Holland is the Director.

- Spring break is an annual opportunity for our students to travel internationally. This year 265 SRU students spent their spring breaks studying in Italy, France, England, Ireland, Spain, Costa Rica and San Salvador.

- Dr. Christopher Kreiser, assistant professor of English at Slippery Rock University, has been awarded a Fulbright Scholar grant to lecture and offer consultation at the Universidad de Cartagena in Cartagena, Colombia. The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government.

- Dr. Michael Ignelzi, a Slippery Rock University associate professor and graduate coordinator of counseling and development, received a Diamond Honoree award from the American College Personnel Association. Only 17 individuals nationwide received the award, which recognizes leadership and scholarship.

- Rock Athletics has had a very strong winter season:
  - Men’s basketball made its first trip to the NCAA tournament since 1991. The team finished second in the PSAC Championships. Coach Kevin Reynolds has won 57 games in the last three seasons, up from 14 total wins in the three previous seasons.
  - Rock track continues with its winning tradition. The Slippery Rock University
women’s indoor track and field team came in second place at the 2011 Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Indoor Track and Field Championships and the men’s team placed fourth. Six Slippery Rock University men’s indoor track and field standouts earned all-region honors from the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association for their performances during the 2010-11 season (Chris Warning, Brady Wert, Cameron Daugherty, Kevin Jewel, Terrece Draper and Ryan Camody). Nine Slippery Rock University women’s indoor track and field standouts earned all-region honors from the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association for their performances during the 2010-11 season (Whitney Hendershot, Kelly Bruder, Crystal Burnick, Angela Schroeder, Kelly Fischer, Caitlin Hancox, Jen Harpp, Rachel Knapp and Kaela Snyder).

- Cameron Daugherty earned All-America honors in the pole vault at the NCAA National Track and Field Championships.
- Brandon Fusco of Cranberry Township and Akeem Satterfield of Erie, both Slippery Rock University football leaders, were named to the Don Hansen Football Gazette All-America team. Fusco was named to Football Gazette first team All-America honors at center, while Satterfield was named to second team honors at running back.

The University continues its commitment to diversify the campus and create an inclusive environment. Simultaneous with the Middle States visit, we will host our second annual Diversity and Democracy series. Under the direction of Jessamine Montero, Senior Diversity Officer, this extensive engagement in speakers, activities, panel discussions, and performances brings the entire campus together. I hope you will be able to attend some of the events.