Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
June 10, 2011
By Robert M. Smith, President

The primary focus for the past two months has been on restoring the recommended cuts to the state appropriation for Slippery Rock University. As of this writing (subject to daily changes), House lawmakers passed their version of a proposed $27.3 billion budget and sent the bill to the state Senate for consideration. The House version restored $195 million of the $232.6 million cut proposed by Governor Corbett for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. This would reduce the overall impact from a 54 percent to approximately recommendation of a 15 percent reduction from the current fiscal year’s budget. Early words from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives suggest the proposed restorations could be “a floor not the ceiling.” That is certainly positive news and demonstrates that our advocacy efforts are taking hold to present SRU as good stewards of the public’s money and a respected major economic force in the region.

We believe SRU is a sound investment from multiple perspectives: Students’ benefit from improved lifestyles and increased earnings; taxpayers benefit from a larger economy and lower social costs; and the state benefits from increased job and investment opportunities, higher business revenues, and greater availability of public funds and eased tax burdens. In these next several weeks, it is critical that our voice continues to be heard and not lost as others press their cases for additional funding.

I want to acknowledge the role students and faculty have had in our advocacy efforts. I am especially grateful for the hundreds of our students who have participated in some way to make the Slippery Rock University case through organized letter writing campaigns as well as their own individual initiative. Six of these students gave their time over two days in face-to-face conversations with our legislators. They were Sarah Browne, Adam Kennerdell, Jeremiah Rosser, Jim Kramer, Elise Michaux, and Logan Miller.

The RockNation web site was developed and managed by two extraordinary students, Nicole Vandyke, who makes sure the messages get out both on the web and the ROCKNation FaceBook page and manages the database for the ROCKNation advocates; and Lou Bouselli, who designed the format for the ROCKNation web site and was the genius that made all of the linkages and FaceBook software work for us.

While we work to restore the state appropriation, we are simultaneously working to manage the shortfall we will likely face. The 15 percent reduction still requires us to make up more than $6.6 million either through revenue enhancements or expense reductions. All of the divisions have been engaged in addressing these needs. During our meeting, the vice presidents will update the Council of the most recent decisions and plans.

We are hopeful that the Council will approve the recommended new “Student Life Enhancement” fee to provide a strong foundation of support for our student life initiatives. This
proposed fee helps meet our strategic planning goal to assure a dynamic enrichment of the student’s leadership experiences in residence. These are the programs that have attracted our recognition by “Colleges of Distinction” (more below) as well as other college rating organizations. The fee also is consistent with our goal to control our own financial destiny. This fee, managed by Slippery Rock University, assures stability for Student Life and grows as the number of students grows on campus. A separate proposal detailing the plan for the fee has been distributed to the Council members.

While these activities are ongoing, the University has enjoyed several nice moments worthy of celebration. Our Exercise Science “Exercise is Medicine” program showcased at the last Trustees meeting was unanimously selected as the 2011 inaugural winner of the Exercise is Medicine Active U Challenge. The other contenders for the prize included the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of Louisiana at Monroe, the University of Michigan, and Mississippi State University.

The University was also rated as one of only 14 colleges and universities in Pennsylvania as a “College of Distinction” and the only public university to make the list. Other notable honorees were Saint Francis University, King’s College, and Washington and Jefferson College. To be recognized, the university must excel in four areas: (1) Nationally recognized by education professionals as an excellent school. (2) Strongly focused on teaching undergraduates. Students are taught by real professors, not by graduate students or teaching assistants. (3) Home to a wide variety of innovative learning experiences. From study abroad and scientific research to service learning and internships, these schools sponsor hands-on programs that open up new ideas, new worlds, and new opportunities. These activities are to provide many opportunities for personal development. And (4) Highly valued by graduate schools and employers for its outstanding preparation.

As some evidence to why we were selected as a College of Distinction, you need look no further than our recent graduates who crossed the stage this past month. We proudly highlight the future for some:

- Sara Elling, a double major in biology and exercise science, has been accepted in the Temple University School of Medicine.
- Andrew Ryan, an environmental science major, has been accepted into the doctoral program in planetarium science at Arizona State University.
- Mary Bresnahan, a safety and environmental management major, has been hired as a site manager at General Electric Transportation in Chicago.
- Ashley Kostelnik, a dance major, landed a position with the August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble in Pittsburgh.
- Christine Lundblad, a chemistry major, has been accepted into the doctoral program in inorganic chemistry at the University of Oxford.
- Brent McKendry, a safety management major, has been hired as a safety engineer for Alcoa Fastening Systems – Aerospace Products in Los Angeles, Calif.
- Anthony Christie, a computer science major, has enrolled in the computer science master's program at the University of Hawaii.
- Kelly Myers, theater, was hired as the wardrobe manager for the Tony-Award winning American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Wisconsin.
In April, we announced the following leadership appointments:

- Dr. Brad Wilson appointed as Director of Honors Program beginning this fall.
- Mr. John Rindy, appointed as Director of Career Services. Mr. Rindy joins us from Theil College where he was the Dean of Educational Outreach.
- Dr. Kurt Schimmel, appointed as Dean of the College of Business, Information, and Social Sciences. Dr. Schimmel joins us from Robert Morris University, Associate Dean, School of Business and Professor of Marketing. We thank David Valentine for his service as Interim Dean. And,
- Dr. Kathleen Strickland appointed as Dean of the College of Education.

Rock athletics continued with a spring of outstanding accomplishments. I bring to your attention some elected highlights:

- Whitney Hendershot capped off her outstanding track and field career at the 2011 NCAA Division II Outdoor Track and Field National Championships by winning a national championship in the high jump. This is the fifth outdoor national championship in SRU women’s outdoor track and field history.
- Women’s outdoor track and field team took second place in the PSAC Outdoor Track and Field championship. The track team sent 10 athletes (six women and four men) to the national championship.
- Slippery Rock University finished fifth in the 2010-11 Dixon Trophy competition designed to identify the top all-around athletic program in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference.
- Women’s soccer coach Noreen Herlihy will be enshrined in the Massasoit Community College Athletic Hall of Fame at a banquet in Brockton, Massachusetts, June 10.

For the record, I want to chronicle as part of this quarterly report my intent to retire in January 2012. My reason for making this announcement early was to allow for a search committee to be appointed prior to the end of the current academic year to allow for a smooth transition to the next generation president for Slippery Rock University. The committee is now in place and the process begun in preparation for the next generation of leadership for this great University.

I deliberately postponed my intent to retire in order to achieve three immediate goals important to our University:

1. Stabilize the current budget crisis so that Slippery Rock University remains on solid financial footings for the next two years. We are making excellent progress on achieving that goal.

2. Assist in reaching a successful contract agreement with our collective bargaining groups through the next four years. At this point, none of the agreements have been finalized although there has been promising work by the committees.

3. Help, as we did in 2003, prepare our University to be an attractive place for the very best qualified candidates for this presidency. To that end, I’ve worked:

   - To bring closure to the strategic plan, Reaching for 2025 and Beyond,
• Expedited the planning meetings with the architects for the performing arts center,
• Initiated other renovation projects including the addition to Patterson,
• Begun the process for a new marketing/advertising presence both in traditional media as well as with social media and specifically mobile devices, and
• Continued to build the base for our advocacy work and to extend that work to other aspects of University support.

In reflection, our recent accreditation review affirmed we have come a long way together to establish a truly outstanding center for learning. The visiting team chair said in his oral report that he knew of no institution who has come as far from one review to another. We have moved from questioning our role in the higher education community to an expectation of greatness. I sense a confidence throughout our community that we can overcome any challenge and that we are capable of being among the best student-centered higher education institutions in the nation. I am confident that Slippery Rock University is positioned to achieve even higher levels of excellence and distinction in the future under your leadership.