Quarterly Report
To the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
September 9, 2011
By Robert M. Smith, President

We begin this year with great optimism because of the strong unified commitment of our faculty, staff, and students to assuring this will be a great university. Evidence of that commitment has been received from numerous external reports throughout this summer and it is a commitment that will serve Slippery Rock University well in the coming years.

The first evidence was the official notification from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s report on the Slippery Rock University’s reaccreditation review. Most notably, the University was reaccredited for the full ten years with no stipulations, no requirements, nor recommendations. Not only did the University receive full credit for each of the fourteen standards of excellence, but also earned nine commendations. No other PASSHE institution has received such a positive report in this current reaccreditation round. In fact, few public or private institutions in the entire Middle States region have received a clean report, let alone commendation!

The report was very generous in acknowledging the extraordinary culture that is now Slippery Rock University. The report noted, "Since its last full Middle States accreditation review a decade ago, Slippery Rock University has made enormous progress toward its goal of becoming a premier residential university." The visitation team said morale on campus is based on "civility, mutual respect and pride in the accomplishments of the last few years. Shared governance on campus works well. The relationship between the Council of Trustees and campus leadership appears to be strong, as does that between the system administration and the campus leadership." They went on to add, "The student life staff shows a true commitment to students and assist in facilitating a small college feel for all students," the committee wrote, and noted, "SRU shows a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism through its sustained efforts."

The second significant evidence of the strength of our culture was the Chronicle of Higher Education’s designation of Slippery Rock University as a 2011 Great College to Work For. This is the third consecutive year to be recognized among these elite schools and every year since the inception of the program. The university was recognized for special distinction in two categories: Collaborative Governance, and Compensation and Benefits.

The third evidence of our strong community was the designation by Princeton Review as one of the “Best Colleges in the Northeast.” This is the ninth year in a row for this recognition and is especially important because our students rate us in this competition and their good words and confidence in Slippery Rock University raises us above the rest.

The fourth external evidence of how strongly our faculty and staff believe in SRU comes from.....wait, I can’t share it just yet. We are embargoed from revealing this story until September 15. However, when we can make this announcement you will be proud of another reason to believe this is truly an amazing place.
This strong foundation will serve us well as we address the challenges ahead. We predicted ten years ago that we would be entering a demographic downturn in the number of college eligible high school students. We knew we were going to face difficult enrollment challenges for about an eight-year period. We are approximately in the middle of that downturn and our enrollment this fall shows the force of that challenge. As of this report, we are 55 students (.62%) down in headcount (the first drop in enrollment since Spring, 2000) and down 617 credit hours (.50% in full time equivalencies). The official final report day is September 19, when we will know our exact numbers.

There are several points to be made about our enrollment status. The first is that we made a conscientious decision last October that we would pursue quality over quantity as we entered this difficult recruitment year. We will continue that choice as we recruit for the 2012 year. We satisfied that goal as this year’s freshman class continues the trend to higher quality students. We increased the average entering high school grade point average and those entering from the top 10 percent of their class. We were down slightly in the average SAT and those from the top quarter of their high school class. Retention increased .41% to the highest levels we have known (the official statistics will be based on September 19 enrollment data).

The second point to note about our enrollment was the unintended effect of the Banner SIS implementation. With the conversion over the summer, our Enrollment Services team had difficulty tracking accurate data that they could use to adjust our strategies. The differences between the new system and two of the older systems made for a frustrating and tension filled August. Nevertheless, we owe considerable praise to this team for their diligent work, and long hours to recruit as well as implement the Banner system. They put in a phenomenal effort.

The third point to make is that enrollment does impact our budget. Our original budget projection was predicated on a 1.0% increase, downgraded to a .50% increase in August. Each one percent of enrollment is approximately $250,000 to the budget, which is where we are now.

The second impact on the budget will follow with future PASSHE allocations of the state appropriation. Currently, those allocations are based on a three-year rolling average. If the final enrollment average for PASSHE is above our final enrollment, we will have a slight decrease in the 2012 allocation, depending on the impact of this year’s enrollment in the previous two-year average. That is a long way to say, if the current decline remains this small, the impact on the allocation for 2012 will be negligible. However, if we do not reverse the trend, we could compound the impact as we did throughout most of the 1990’s. That is not something we want to repeat.

The university’s budget is the second major challenge to occupy our attention. As of this report, we are stable for the 2011-12 fiscal year. As reviewed in our workshop early today, we are closely monitoring several key variables: salary and benefits, utilities, and enrollment.

We are planning our budget needs for 2012-13. I’ve requested Dr. Charles Curry, Vice President for Finance and Administrative Affairs, to identify from reserves an amount equal to 20% of our allocation to balance the 2012-13 budget if there are possible state appropriation cuts this coming summer. If we are prudent with the 2011-12 budget and well organized to cope with the 2012-13
budget, then our new president will have a full year or more in office before needing to make budget changes. And that was one of my goals in staying through January 2012 before retiring.

A second goal for my work was to assist in reaching a successful contract agreement with our collective bargaining groups through the next four years. Although I am not in control of the bargaining process, I do take responsibility for the campus climate during negotiations and to keep our community informed about the discussion (depending on what is or can be shared with me). At this point, only AFSCME has agreed to a contract. None of the other agreements has been finalized although there has been promising work by the committees.

A third goal was, 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 set before you five projects that I would pursue. Each is listed below with recent updates:

- To bring closure to the strategic plan, *Reaching for 2025 and Beyond.*
  - The University Strategic Planning Committee finalized the priority initiatives and will review the plan again this semester. We are anticipating a petition from faculty to add a theme related to health and wellness. This is actually an exciting prospect as it shows the engagement by faculty with the plan and identification of a new theme that fits the criteria for global concern and is a particular strength of our existing curriculum.
- Expedited the planning meetings with the architects for the performing arts center.
  - The architects have prepared a preliminary design and are working on the construction elements for the performing arts center. Numerous meetings and site visits have been completed. The final design is expected to be presented by January 2012.
- Initiated other renovation projects including the addition to Patterson.
  - The design for the addition to Patterson is under way as of this writing. The Phase II renovation was substantially completed over the summer. Phase III bids for construction are to be opened September 15.
- Begin the process for a new marketing/advertising presence both in traditional media as well as with social media and specifically mobile devices.
  - A contract has been signed between the university and Spots and Dots, a Pittsburgh comprehensive marketing and advertising agency. We expect to launch a campaign this fall focused on attracting the best students to enroll at Slippery Rock University. A second agreement with SongWhale, a specialist in mobile and social media, is underway with numerous projects that will have high appeal to our students. And,
- Continue to build the base for our advocacy work and to extend that work to other aspects of University support.
  - We are working on our advocacy campaign for the coming legislative sessions. We know that we will need to address the issue of “vouchers” for higher education.

In other events and news over the past quarter, we are delighted to report the triple accreditation earned by our Computer Science programs. The University was notified of accreditation for Information Technology, Information Science, and Computer Science just two weeks ago.
ABET accreditation has one of the most stringent program reviews and very few institutions are accredited in all three areas. In fact, only SRU, Drexel University, the University of North Florida, and the University of South Alabama currently hold triple accreditation. Congratulations to our faculty!

In other significant news:

- SRU expects to be named for the third consecutive year to another national designation where they have asked us to refrain from publicly revealing until the end of September (holding back on announcing these recognitions is hard!)
- This week, SRU was selected for the second consecutive year as a “College of Distinction.” 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.
- Selection to The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Role. This is our first appearance on this national registry designed to recognize “exemplary commitment to service and volunteering from institutions of higher education.” Special thanks to Student Life for helping to qualify for this honor.
- The Slippery Rock University women's and men's track and field programs earned U.S. Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association All-Academic Team honors. The accolade is the third consecutive for the women's program, which ranked 11th in Division II in 2010 with a 3.21 grade point average. The SRU men's program ranked 18th in NCAA Division II with a team-GPA of 3.12. In addition, 11 individuals on the SRU women's track and field team and five members of the men's team earned All-Academic honors.
- The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education designated SRU as a STARS Bronze Institution based on our accomplishments in campus sustainability.
- The Harmony House at Slippery Rock University has been awarded LEED Silver Certification. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a national program operated by the U.S. Green Building Council that recognizes design, construction operation and maintenance of high performance green buildings.

If anything is taken from the preceding, it is that we have achieved much and should be rightfully proud of what we have become. We would also note that there is much left to do. If we are to sustain the work of this University, then we have to be good stewards of place.

This is the start of my 44th year in higher education. Some of you have greater seniority than I and I would yield to your wiser perspective. However, I think we would agree that this is an era when higher education is under great attack from many different sides and we are without sufficient voice to respond.
Those of us within the profession are perceived as the problem. Those who are outside, you as Trustees, are our strongest advocates. Many of you are products of this University. All are products of a higher education. You have earned no less than 19 academic degrees with one pending. You are clearly knowledgeable and passionate by the value of higher education. You are the credible voice we need to assure the continued future of this University. Your advocacy is our future.

You will embrace our next leader(s). I am confident you will provide great mentoring and wise counsel. Around these tables in Old Main or the Alumni House, your experience and enthusiasm will inspire. You will need to do more. You need to model advocacy for Slippery Rock University with your colleagues and friends within your communities and across the Commonwealth. Invite our new leader(s) to community events or the Capitol and provide introductions that begin the process of building great relationships. Be present at significant events so all can see that you are an active partner in the leadership of the University. Continue to tell others that something special is happening at Slippery Rock University unlike “those other places.” Be audacious in your support. Remind all that this is still a great time to be at Slippery Rock University.