Recently an alum visiting campus remarked, "I can't believe how fast things move at SRU." His comments certainly echoed what many of us at the University are feeling as we bring this semester to a close. It's been an incredibly busy 15 weeks as we've worked hard to deliver on our mission - critical educational programs, activities and services, while simultaneously celebrating alumni and donors, hosting a major PASSHE conference, dedicating a building and formally installing a president.

Since this body met just prior to the inauguration, I have not had a chance to officially thank you for your support of the University, and me, as together we celebrated Slippery Rock University's tradition of excellence and our future of unlimited potential.

Each event, from the opening 5K-run/2K-walk, which raised more than $4,000 toward a new undergraduate research scholarship, to the planting of the ceremonial "serviceberry tree," engaged the entire campus community – students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends alike. I want to thank Chairman Holmes for serving as the honorary chair of the inaugural planning team, and all the members who worked so hard to make everything look effortless – when I know it took a lot of effort and collaboration to make it so.

Since arriving on campus June 4, I've spent the last 187 days immersed in learning as much as I could, as fast as I could, about the University. No place is this more true than in Academic Affairs – the core of the institution. I've used every opportunity to pick Bill's brain and to absorb his institutional and System knowledge gleaned over the past 30 years. As expected, Bill has been very generous and gracious during my learning process. Although you honored him earlier on behalf of the University, I want to personally thank him for his commitment to the University, to me and to SRU’s future. Bill provided great insight and leadership during the provost search process to ensure we selected the right person to help lead us forward.

And I believe we have that person. We are currently in negotiations and I expect to be able to make a formal announcement regarding the next Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs in the very near future. In the interim, Bill continues to lead the division as they prepare for the transition.

In other transitions, I would like to personally welcome Mr. Thomas Breth and congratulate him on his appointment to the Council of Trustees. I'd also like to congratulate Dr. Robert Marcus on his re-appointment to the Council and Courtney Baker-Sehroth on her appointment as our student representative to the Council. Courtney is an accounting, finance and health services administration major. Each of you brings a variety of experiences to the Council and I look forward to working with you.

I would also like to congratulate David Wolfe, chief executive officer and president of the Slippery Rock Student Government Association, on his selection and confirmation to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Board of Governors. Dave will serve as one of three student members on the Board… an amazing accomplishment.
Since we met in September, the University has marked several milestones worthy of mention.

In October we formally dedicated the Robert M. Smith Student Center as part of our Homecoming ceremonies and "welcomed home" President Emeritus Robert Smith and his wife Ramona. It was certainly a special day for them and the University. As I said at the dedication, it only took eight years, two student referendums, dozens of focus groups and some last minute politicking in Harrisburg to bring us to this point — but it was well worth the effort. The Smith Center has already become our "town center" and is alive with student activities from the time the doors open to when the building is closed.

At homecoming we also presented Distinguished Alumni Awards to:

- Andy Major, a 1988 communication graduate, in his fifth season with the Buffalo Bills football team front office staff and his 18th season in the National Football League;
- Garry Benford, a 1977 physical education graduate, now personal fitness and wellness director at the Physical Therapy & Performance Center at the Cardinal Orthopedic Institute in Columbus, Ohio;
- Mary Jo Geyer, a 1973 physical education graduate, now program officer and technical consultant with the American Leprosy Missions in Greenville, S. C.; and
- John Hicks, a 1962 secondary education graduate who retired from SRU in 2002 after three decades of service in the University's College of Education and who currently serves as a member of the SRU Council of Trustees.

Also in October, Four Distinctions, a company dedicated to higher education, named Slippery Rock University a 2012-13 College of Distinction. Slippery Rock University was the only public university in Pennsylvania to garner the honor, and one of only 294 nationally. Colleges and Universities are nominated for participation in Colleges of Distinction through high school counselors' recommendations as well as quantitative research, and are chosen based on four areas of distinction: great students, engaged teaching, vibrant communities and successful outcomes.

Just last month we received our official occupancy permit for Patterson Hall, which is home to our award-winning exercise science program and a spattering of additional academic areas. I trust you were impressed when you toured the building earlier today with how the University successfully transformed this former residential hall into a vibrant learning environment.

In November, like much of the northeast, our emergency planning was tested when Super Storm Sandy threatened the region. Thankfully, we were spared the brunt of the storm and campus operations continued uninterrupted. For us, Sandy served as an excellent tabletop exercise, which I'm pleased to report we passed.

Also in November, the University was honored to host the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education 2012 Diversity Summit. More than 250 students, faculty and staff from throughout the State System converged on SRU to explore "Inclusive Excellence and International Education," and how we could chart the future together. Members of SRU's Council on Social Equity, Campus Climate and Inclusion, and the PASSHE-International Education Consortium planned the event.

Looking forward, the University continues strategic efforts to address enrollment, resource and potential labor challenges.

As you know, the membership of APSCUF, the union that represents the faculty of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, including faculty at Slippery Rock University, voted in November to authorize its leadership to call a strike should the ongoing contract
negotiations between PASSHE and the union reach an impasse. However, I want to emphasize that this vote does not mean a strike will occur. Similar votes have been taken in the past, but have not lead to a strike in the 29-year history of the State System.

PASSHE has already reached agreement with six of its seven labor unions. In negotiating with each of the other unions, PASSHE has had to balance a variety of factors, including cost savings to help offset proposed salary increases. And, because negotiations are continuing, we remain hopeful that a positive resolution will be reached.

To keep our students and their families informed and provide answers to a variety of questions concerning this situation, PASSHE and SRU have set up websites to share the latest information. The SRU site can be accessed via the icon "Negotiation Updates" on the home page. There is a direct link to PASSHE on the SRU negotiation site.

The next bargaining session is scheduled for Dec. 11 and the faculty indicated there would not be a work stoppage or strike this fall.

As we wind down the semester and prepare for finals and the Dec. 15 commencement, my message to students has been to concentrate on their studies and to keep their educational focus.

As I will do with each of my reports, I want to close by sharing just a sample of the honors, accolades and strengths of our students, faculty, staff and alumni:

- SRU's success in improving black student graduation rates placed it eighth in the nation among public institutions showing substantial gains, according to The Education Trust. SRU's six-year black student graduation rate was 25.7 percent in 2004 but improved to 44.1 percent in 2010, an improvement of 18.4 percent.

- SRU student-athletes met or exceeded the national average in 22 of 26 categories of the Division II Academic Success Rate report released by the NCAA. Rock student-athletes' graduation rates on the ASR were 10 or more percent higher than the national average in four of a possible five men's sports, and seven or more percent higher than the national average in six of a possible eight women's sports.

- A four-member Slippery Rock University sport management team took first place in the inaugural Sports Entertainment and Venues Tomorrow Conference Case Study Competition hosted by the University of South Carolina. SRU's team of Kristopher Nolt of Stevens, Kyle Heiden of Reading, Michael Pehosky of Scott Township and David Riederer of Cranberry Township beat teams from South Dakota, Liberty University and the University of South Carolina to bring home the honors.

- The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals named Gregory Taranto, a 1995 exercise science graduate, the 2015 Pennsylvania Middle Level Principal of the Year. Taranto serves as principal of the Canonsburg Middle School.

- Eric Holmes, a 1993 Slippery Rock University graduate and current chair of the University's Council of Trustees, and Christopher Walker, assistant professor of public health and social work, received the New Pittsburgh Courier's "Men of Excellence Award." The award honors men who exemplify strength by standing firm in the face of adversity, leadership in periods of struggle, compassion in times of peril and integrity in the midst of opposition.

- Michael Wolf, a 1988 Slippery Rock University political science graduate and former member of the SRU Council of Trustees, was named acting secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Gov. Tom Corbett made the appointment. As secretary, Wolf is the commonwealth's top health regulator and is responsible for carrying out the health department's mission to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent
injury and disease and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all Pennsylvania citizens. The cabinet-level post reports directly to the governor.

- Kimberly Kline, a 1989 graduate and currently an associate professor of higher education administration at Buffalo State University, was named a Fulbright Scholar and will serve in Kyiv, Ukraine. The Fulbright Scholar Program provides merit-based grants for international exchange for students, scholars, teachers, scientists and artists.

- Kara Styles, a doctor of physical therapy student from Windber, was named the Champion-Scholar of the 2012 Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference-West Women's Cross-Country Championships for the second time.

- Wayne Forbes, assistant professor of biology, was named a "Minority Achiever" as part of the Annual Minority Achiever's Awards Program sponsored by Minority Opinion/Talk Magazine.

- Robert Arnhold, professor of physical education, received a five-year, $1.25 million renewable grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help certified physical education teachers expand their skills in teaching children with disabilities. The grant, which will be paid in $250,000 increments over the five years, will provide scholarship support for nine students annually enrolling fulltime in SRU's adapted physical activity graduate program.

- George Brown, political science, received $7,000 from the Asian Studies Development Program at the East-West Center to produce and coordinate a three-day faculty workshop regarding "Rising China: Economic, Geopolitical, Environmental, and Cultural Dimension of China's (re) Emergence as a Global Superpower." The workshop featured seven nationally recognized speakers and drew more than 400 attendees from throughout the northeast.

- Noreen Herlihy, head women's soccer coach, was named Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Coach of the Year. Herlihy, now in her 18th season at the helm of the program, earned her third PSAC Coach of the Year honor and her first since 2003. She has guided the program to 17 consecutive winning seasons with 10 or more wins, which is the eighth-best streak in Division II history.

- Julie Swiney, field hockey head coach, was named the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference-West Coach of the Year. Her coaching peers recognized Swiney for turning the SRU program around over the last three seasons and this fall leading the team to its best year in more than a decade.

With that Chairman Holmes, I complete my report.

Cheryl Norton, president