

Slippery Rock University

Council of Trustees

President Report March 29, 2019

Systemness. It's a strange word. Chances are, before Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education embarked upon its system redesign, most of us had never used the term.

That certainly begs the question, "What is systemness?"

Nancy Zimpher, the former chancellor of the State University of New York who is described by many as the architect of the systemness movement, describes systemness as "the coordination of multiple components that, when working together, create a network of activity that is more powerful than any action of individual parts on their own."

Systemness, while recognizing that acting alone each of the 14 sister institution can and has made great achievements, also challenges us to envision what can be accomplished when we collaborate to leverage our strengths and find new synergies to enhance and revitalize the State System.

Creating a sense of unity among the System's diverse campuses and constituencies within a set of new, disciplined goals is the driving force behind the State System's redesign; a redesign that has now entered its second phase under the direction of Chancellor Greenstein.

But what does that mean for Slippery Rock University?

While discussions of SRU's role within the System are just beginning to emerge in my conversations on campus and with alumni, they have been more frequent in my interactions with other presidents and in Harrisburg. Let me share some thoughts on this emerging topic with you.

Since my arrival nine months ago, I have had the opportunity to interact with students, faculty and staff on our journey to make a positive difference in the life of each individual student and in the communities we serve. In words and actions, each of these groups continues to reaffirm my view that Slippery Rock University is a very special place. I believe we are at the precipice of an incredible future — a future in which we solidify our status as a destination University; a growing, global University that never forgets its deep, regional roots; a public University whose constituencies fearlessly tackle challenges; and a relevant, results-driven University that is propelled by the belief in the power and promise of higher education.

As our University community works through defining its place in the System's shared, strategic vision for where our journey together in systemness should take us, I would like to offer a pair of points that I believe will be critical to successfully navigating that journey. I see these points as priorities we must visit, embrace and strengthen together as we move toward a future of influence and involvement — involvement that continues to benefit all of western

Pennsylvania, makes a meaningful difference in the many communities we serve and will expand SRU's role as an academic and professional ally.

- First, we must hold tightly to a “students first” philosophy. This will require a continued, laser focused approach on helping every student graduate — and graduate with the knowledge and spirit to lead in extremely challenging times. This will require each of us – faculty, staff, administrators and alumni – to play a key role in creating the best possible experience for our students.

When I talk about a “students first” philosophy, I am saying that we should remain true to our roots. As most of you know, those roots were planted in the late 1800s, when, as a Normal School, our institution was created to prepare the best school teachers for western Pennsylvania. Today, SRU remains a leader in teaching and learning.

We can use our tradition of teaching excellence and innovation as a springboard to greater success — for those we serve today and for those we hope to one day awaken to the possibility of a college experience. I see SRU as a leader in proving that access and academic excellence are not mutually exclusive. We can already point to thousands of our students and alumni who came from humble beginnings — who once thought higher education was not an option, and who soared to unimagined success with a combination of courage and college.

So, let us move forward with the conviction that we will not gauge our success by the students we exclude from our community, but by the students we invite to join us on our mutual journey to make a difference.

- Second, recent events have spoken clearly to me that we must do more to foster an environment of inclusion. We want every corner of our campus to be a place where all voices are not only welcomed and represented, but also valued. Our students are at their best when they feel comfortable and supported. And when our students are at their best, SRU is at its best.

Creating a more diverse and accepting community requires our continuing and focused commitment. And in the face of recent events, I admire our students for standing up to say, “I care and I want to make a meaningful difference.”

Creating a community where *everyone* feels welcomed, safe and respected isn't a matter of balanced representation, but more so a matter of enhancing a campus culture that values inclusion.

From what I have seen during my time here, the SRU community expects a more inclusive culture; a place where everyone matters; where everyone is empowered to speak up; where all voices will be heard; where respect for others is a core value; and where learning about yourself and others is as important as learning about an academic subject.

Our focus on fostering an inclusive and caring community will include additional scholarship support to attract students from all walks of life and life experiences — different races, ethnicities, classes, cultures, orientation and identities.

We must bolster our efforts to attract and retain not only a more diverse student group, but faculty as well. In today's global, multicultural society, we must be able to communicate effectively with people who look, believe and think differently than we do. To that end, it only makes sense that it is important to our students that they learn from a diverse faculty.

We must be courageous and creative as we bring to life our shared vision for our future — a vision that honors our past but clearly defines a new era of influence and involvement that helps us to boldly share our remarkable University and its people with the world. It is our vision and the subsequent accomplishments derived from that which will allow our University to not only contribute positively to the PASSHE's "systemness," but help to drive it.

It is a tall task, but one that should reap benefits for all.

With your continued support and extraordinary work, our students will have an even better experience tomorrow than they have today.

“PLEASE HAVE YOUR BOARDING PASS READY ...”

International travel provides a transformative experience that enhances students' learning beyond the classroom. This semester, more than 350 of our students traveled to 10 countries during spring break to gain such an experience.

Coordinated by SRU's Office for Global Engagement, led by 18 professors and staff led 14 programs to destinations including: Netherlands, England, Lisbon, Portugal, Bahamas, Greece, Italy, Sweden, France and Ireland. Most of the trips were related to subjects covered in a particular class or academic program and included anywhere from 10-30 students. The lone exception was the SRU Marching Pride whose 118 members traveled to Ireland to perform in the St. Patrick's Day Festival parade in Dublin.

LUCK OF THE ROCK

Performing live in front of more than a half million people on a two-mile stretch of Dublin, Ireland streets, the Marching Pride was one of 11 marching bands from three countries and eight states invited to participate. As recognized earlier by the trustees, the band captured “The Best Adult Band,” and “Best Band Overall” awards for their outstanding performance.

The band then traveled to Limerick, Ireland for the 49th Annual International Band Championship, March 18, in Limerick. That event featured more than 1,300 musicians from Ireland, Europe and the United States. Once again, the Marching Pride made us proud by being named “Best International Band.” Nearly 30,000 people watched The Marching Pride and 19 other bands, comprised of more than 1,000 musicians, compete.

Through the power of social media more than a quarter of a million people were able to follow the sights and sounds of the band's performances, and to see first-hand the quality of SRU's

music program. It was one of those “drum rolls heard ‘round the world moments,” that was priceless.

HONORS AND ACCOLADES

The institution’s commitment to excellence and effectiveness continues to be recognized. Since January 2019, Slippery Rock University was:

- Ranked as one of the top 25 programs in the country by TheBestSchools.org for its the online master’s degree in history.
- Recognized as having one of the 20 most affordable online doctoral degrees in special education programs in the country by affordableschools.net.
- Ranked among the nation’s best online master’s degree in social studies.
- Ranked as one of the 50 best Bachelor of Science accounting programs in the country by study.com.
- Ranked one of the top 50 schools in the nation for finance by study.com.
- Ranked one of the nation’s 35 best criminal justice degrees in the country by bestmastersdegrees.com
- Recognized as a Military Friendly School 2019-20, as administered by VICTORY.
- Ranked No. 29 on the list of the top 50 schools in the nation for business according to study.com.
- Ranked No. 12 of the country’s best value sports management programs by Value Colleges.
- Named among the nation’s “best master’s in data science programs” for 2019 by onlinemasters.com.
- Ranked among the nation’s best online bachelor programs by U.S. News & World Report.
- Ranked in the top 200 among the world’s top schools for environmental sustainability on the University of Indonesia’s 2018 Green Metric World University Rankings.
- Ranked among the best nursing schools in Pennsylvania by nursingschoolsalmanac.com.

As is customary, I’ll leave you with a sampling of Good News being generated by our students, faculty, staff and alumni.

STUDENTS

- **Alexander Gessinger**, a senior computing major from Murrysville; **John-George Sample**, a senior computing major from Corry; and **Sonny Sevin**, a senior computing major from Grove City are members of a research team that has begun looking into better usage for supercomputers at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, home to the second most powerful supercomputer in the U.S. The lab is a multiprogram national laboratory managed by the University of California for the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Science. The three SRU students were hired as temporary employees, joining the more than 4,200 scientists, engineers, faculty, postdoctoral scholars and graduate and undergraduate students currently on staff.
- **Allison Kronyak**, a senior recreational therapy major from Wood Ridge, New Jersey, was awarded the 2019 New Jersey Recreation and Park Association Student Scholarship. The \$1,000 competitive scholarship provides opportunities for university and high school students to advance their education in the field of parks, recreation, conservation and leisure services through both scholarship and a professional development support program.
- **Chase Upchurch**, a senior music education major from Titusville, was accepted to present at the Association for Popular Music Education national conference, June 12-15 at New York University. Upchurch’s presentation, “General Music; What are we missing? A Student’s Thoughts on New Curriculum,” will provide educators at the conference a template for teaching

a student-centered song analysis class in which teachers and students analyze, discuss and create music within the genres that they are studying with a focus in popular music.

- **Micah Till** became the 14th player in SRU men's basketball history to record 1,000 points and 500 rebounds. His resume includes a trio of post-season accolades. He was named to All-Region honors in the Atlantic Region, recognized as a first-team All PSAC West selection and a second team All-Region honoree on the Division II Conference Commissioner's Association (D2CCA) team.
- **Brooke Hinderliter** became the 13th player in SRU women's basketball history to score 1,000 career points.
- **Marshall Tuten**, a senior Slippery Rock University dual major in economics and modern languages and cultures from Slippery Rock, has been named the JoAnne Day Student of the Year by the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Employers in the business category
- The National Broadcasting Society-Alpha Epsilon Rho named **WSRU-TV**, SRU's student-run television broadcast and video production company by the NBS as its "Chapter of the Year" and "Model Chapter." **Haley Potter**, a junior communication major from Leechburg, was named "AERho Member of the Year." **Thomas Fabian**, a senior communication major from Burton, Ohio, won first place in the NBS's National Undergraduate Student Electronic Media Competition's Video Program Opener category for "Around The Rock Introduction." **Logan Snyder**, a senior communication major from Beaver Falls, won first place in the Video Editing category for "Pittsburgh Penguins Winning the Cup." Nicholas Coffman, a senior communication major from Bradford; **Angela Jacoway**, a junior communication major from Farrell; and **Ian Swartz**, a junior communication major from Greensburg; won first place in the convention's On-the-Spot Instagram Promo contest.
- **The Rocket**, the independent, student-run newspaper at Slippery Rock University, earned seven awards in the 2018 Gold Circle Awards for outstanding collegiate journalism sponsored by the Columbia Scholastic Press, and four Student Keystone Press Awards.

FACULTY/STAFF

- Slippery Rock University has received an award of \$138,735 from the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust through the PNC Charitable Trusts to expand its University's Growing Together aquaponics program. **Robert Arnhold**, a former professor of physical and health education who retired in January, wrote the grant and will remain involved with Growing Together as a consultant. Housed at the North Country Brewing Company's canning facility in Slippery Rock, the aquaponics system is a sustainable farming method that combines raising fish and the soilless growing of plants.
- **Laura Smiley**, an associate professor of theatre, was awarded the Kennedy Center Gold Medallion by the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Region II. Each year, the eight KCACTF regions honor individuals or organizations who have made extraordinary contributions to the teaching and producing of theater, and who have significantly dedicated their time, artistry and enthusiasm to the KCACTF. The award is considered by the KCACTF as the organization's most prestigious regional award.
- **Jonathan Helmick**, an associate professor of music, was awarded the 2018-19 Pennsylvania Music Educators Association Citation of Excellence, representing PMEA's District 5. The Citation of Excellence recognizes individuals who have made lasting contributions in their area of music education.
- **David Skeele**, a professor of theatre, will have his work featured in "The Best Women's Stage Monologues 2019," an anthology of the best playwriting from the 2018-19 theatrical season. The book, to be released this fall, will be published by Smith and Kraus. Skeele's play, "Becky and the Magic Harp," was selected by the book's editors for inclusion.

- **Elizabeth LaGamba**, an instructor of elementary education and early childhood, was awarded the 2019 Outstanding Ed.D. Dissertation Award by the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education. The award recognized LaGamba's doctoral dissertation titled "An Investigation of Read-Alouds, Classroom Interactions, and Guided Play as Supports for Vocabulary Learning in Preschool."
- **Junko Yamamoto**, an associate professor of secondary education/foundations of education, has been certified as a rater for the assessment of performance toward proficiency in languages by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language. Yamamoto earned AAPPL rater certification for the Japanese language. As a rater, Yamamoto is certified to assess the proficiency and performance of students who take the test to complement classroom-based language learning through the ACTFL.
- **Col. Joseph Richey**, Slippery Rock University professor of military science and head of SRU's Army ROTC program, was promoted from lieutenant colonel to colonel.
- **Pragati Rawat**, a Slippery Rock University assistant professor of political science, presented papers at two recent conferences and for a workshop in Mexico. Rawat presented a paper about environmental management decision-making at the American Society for Public Administration earlier this month in Washington, D.C. and a paper about e-participation at the Southern Political Science Association Conference in Austin, Texas, which was attended by people engaged in the professional study and practice of government and politics.

ALUMNI

- **Meghan Thompson**, a 2015 graduate with a bachelor's degree in biology, posted the highest national score on the National Board of Examiners' Optometry Part 1 Applied Basic Science Examination. The exam is one of three administered by the NBEO that optometry students must pass to become licensed practitioners.
- **Michael Allison**, a 1989 graduate with a bachelor's degree in secondary education, was elected president of the Pennsylvania Principals Association. Allison, the principal of Hopewell High School in Aliquippa and member of the PPA for more than 20 years, will serve a two-year term as the organization's president.
- **Sharif Bey**, a 1998 graduate with a degree in art, is a featured artist for Disrupting Craft: Renwick Invitational, a six-month art exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. The exhibition, which runs through May 5, presents the work of four emerging artists who challenge the conventional definitions of craft to disrupt the status quo and promote collective engagement through their handmade works inspired by social justice, cultural identities and historical narratives.
- **Shawn Bean**, a 2011 graduate with a master's degree in education, was named the 2018 High School Physical Education Teacher of the Year by the Pennsylvania State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Bean is a health and physical education teacher at Cranberry High School in Venango County.
- **Ramon Gardenhire**, a 2000 graduate with a degree in political science, was appointed by Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker as deputy chief of staff for policy in the Office of the Governor. In his new role, Gardenhire will help advance the governor's policy agenda.
- **Darin Clark**, a 1988 graduate with a degree in resource management, was recently promoted to land management group supervisor of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. In his new role, Clark supervises habitat management crews in Erie and Crawford counties which keep the 27 state game lands ready for hunters. Previously a state game warden, Clark is a retired U.S. Army Reserve helicopter pilot.
- **Kathleen Neeley**, a 1994 graduate with a degree in elementary education, has published her novel, "The Street Singer." The book centers on a law school student who befriends a once-famous recording artist who has become poverty stricken and turned to singing on the

streets. Neeley, who resides in Greenville, South Carolina, is a retired teacher and school administrator.

- **Matt Hoffmaster**, a 2007 Slippery Rock University graduate with a degree in sport management, was named assistant general manager of the Reading Fightin Phils, a minor league baseball affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies..
- **Alan Lombardo**, a 1998 Slippery Rock University graduate with a degree in biology, was recently named the chief executive officer of Sheltering Arms Institute in Richmond, Virginia.
- **Cheryl Bailey**, a 1977 Slippery Rock University graduate with a degree in physical education, will be inducted into the Chautauqua (New York) Sports Hall of Fame.
- **Pam Best**, a 1980 Slippery Rock University graduate with a degree in physical education, received the 2019 American Heart Association Faye Biles Education Award.

Respectfully submitted,

William J. Behre
President