

Slippery Rock University
Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees
Quarterly Business Meeting
President's Report
September 29, 2023
9:30 a.m.
Alumni House and Conference Center

Thank you all again for this remarkable opportunity. The past couple of months have been a wonderful immersion into Slippery Rock University. As I mentioned in my initial acceptance interview, I am both humbled and honored to serve as President, and I am committed to doing my very best to advance this institution. We have a great deal of talent and dedication across the University and our goal now is to create and implement a plan that builds on our laudable history while positioning us well for the next several decades. We are striving to be a First-Choice institution, meaning the top preference for people who want to learn and work at SRU, as well as partner with us.

First 90-Day Communication Plan: Prior to my July 1 start date, I met with the communications team, and we drafted a 90-day communication plan. The goal was to ensure that we started out with a clear and consistent approach to communicating across the internal and external community. The plan included engaging with students, parents, and the campus community as quickly as possible following my arrival. A town-hall meeting was part of the communication plan. At the annual Fall Assembly/Town Hall, September 14, 2023, I had the opportunity to address the University community and share my observations and campus updates. The slides provided at the town hall are similar to those provided during the Council of Trustees meeting on September 29, 2023. The goal of the Town Hall was to provide faculty and staff with a state of the University summary, to initiate a culture of transparency and provide time for questions. This report provides highlights from that address. [The full slide deck is available at, file:///C:/Users/tina.moser/Downloads/Town-Hall-Fall-2023%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/tina.moser/Downloads/Town-Hall-Fall-2023%20(1).pdf)

Welcome Back Videos: We shared welcome back videos with the campus on the first day of class, one with a message for students and another directed toward employees. Then, we started the Town Hall with a celebratory video, depicting the events of the first few weeks of the semester.

Enrollment: Enrollment has increased 1.4% compared to last year. There were 8,362 students enrolled as of the 15th day of classes in the Fall 2023 semester, which is 119 more students compared to the same day last year. These numbers are subject to change as Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education will verify and report enrollments by Oct. 9. Census data for each school is taken on the 15th day of the semester for national and state reporting purposes. Included in the 8,362 students are a record 1,547 graduate students, surpassing SRU's previous high of 1,503 in Fall 2021, as well as 1,535 first-year students which was the largest class size since 2019 and reflects a 5.2% increase from last year.

Financial Picture/Budget Scenarios: According to the data provided by the Budget and Finance committee the FY 23 budget has closed with a balance of \$222,000. This money will be transferred to the reserve accounts within the facilities department for deferred maintenance projects. The FY 24 budget is currently incomplete due to the lack of a CBA with APSCUF. We are currently engaging in various scenario planning and will complete a budget when the compensation for our APSCUF employees is determined. The budget must balance, and we are engaged in activities now to ensure that this occurs. The **Comprehensive Performance Plan** was submitted to PASSHE on September 15, 2023. It too will be amended once additional compensation information is available.

Construction Projects: There are several projects that have been completed and/or are in various stages of completion:

- The President's House was completed on July 28, 2023, with the inventory tour being completed on August 2, 2023. The kitchen and upgrades to the facility look good and will be good investments in the future. The intent is to use the facility to house the president and their respective families and as an entertainment space. The first group to have a formal recognition in the completed facility was the staff who worked on the house. This was a delicious upscale lunch for all of the carpenters, painters, grounds crew, plumbers, electricians and custodial staff. We wanted to recognize this group first, and it sent a message to our entire staff about the culture that we want at SRU.

We established a few new programs for the President's House. Dr. Judy Silva, SRU archivist, will be providing materials for the first-floor library. This space will be an extension of the University Archives with rotating material and artifacts. Additionally, the first-floor art will be curated by the SRU Art Department. Sean Macmillan, associate professor and department chair, selected the collection for current display. Student and faculty art will be displayed and rotated three times per year. We have created a new award for students, President's Student Art Award in Residence. The space in the entry way over the large credenza will display a piece of art that was created by a student. Students will compete and the Art Department has created a process by which the pieces will be selected. This will also be rotated two times per year. Many thanks to Theresa Antonellis, Gallery director, for working together with us on establishing the student award.

- The engineering labs received the necessary certification prior to the start of the fall semester, which allowed for student use on day one.

Strategic Plan: The strategic planning process was initiated in 2020. There were various iterations of an outline, and the process was disrupted for a variety of factors, including but not limited to the pandemic and multiple leadership changes. Prior to beginning my tenure, I met with the leaders of the steering committee regarding the progress of the plan. Although there was a framework, the plan had not been shared with the broader community, nor was there a narrative or implementation plan. Upon my arrival, I met with the leaders of the strategic planning committee and invited them to the cabinet retreat. There was a lack of clarity regarding previously articulated next steps. We agreed to

move forward quickly with several small and large group meetings intended to distill the original plan into pillars for the new plan. The overarching goal is to be a **First-Choice** institution. The proposed strategic plan has four pillars that represent the University's commitments to:

- Robust, supportive and inclusive culture;
- Academic discovery and human growth;
- Community impact and collaboration;
- Financial sustainability and resource stewardship.

The framework developed by SRU's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategic Plan Committee is a crucial component woven into the fabric of the institutional strategic plan to ensure that our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is more than just rhetoric. This comprehensive plan will serve as a roadmap to guide our collective efforts in fostering a truly inclusive and equitable campus. It reflects our shared vision of an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

The DEIB Strategic Plan outlines four key themes that will shape our journey toward a more inclusive future:

- The People (students, faculty/staff, community)
- The Policy
- Creating a Stronger Sense of Belonging
- Improving Cultural Competence

The DEIB Strategic Plan is not merely a document, it represents our shared commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable campus. We invite you to join us in this vital work, bringing your unique perspectives, insights, and experiences to the table. Together, we can make a lasting and positive impact on the lives of our students and the larger community we serve.

The foundation of the overall strategic plan is our continuous mission to provide the highest quality education at the lowest possible price. We have already started with several initiatives that fit into the pillars and are based on the data that was gathered over the course of the last few years. A sampling is provided.

Pillar #1 Robust, supportive and inclusive culture

Develop a culture of recognition and engagement

The You Rock Initiative to **recognize kindness**

SRU is starting an initiative called "You Rock" to maintain a positive campus culture and recognize people for their acts of kindness.

If you want to recognize someone for their kindness,

1. Visit Old Main, Room 201, to pick up a small rock that says, "You Rock."
2. Give the rock to a kind person as a token of appreciation.

If you receive a rock,

1. Take it to the information desk attendant at either the Smith Student Center, Bailey Library or the Aebersold Recreational Center.
2. Receive a card to fill out with your name and email address and drop it in the “You Rock” box.
3. Give your rock to someone else who performs an act of kindness to keep the cycle going.

Cards will be drawn occasionally from the “You Rock” boxes to select random winners of prizes.

Pillar #4 Financial sustainability and resource stewardship

Improve decision-making to appropriately fund initiatives that generate value

Investment vs. Expenditures: Recent concerns over the financial health of our PASSHE peers has raised concerns regarding the SRU reserves. PASSHE has developed a Financial Health scorecard, which is used to determine the overall financial health of each university. The score card has four separate but related categories.

- *Annualized Student FTE*-combines full-and part-time student credit loads and equates those totals to an annual full-time equivalency (July 1 through June 30). Green requires increases or relatively stable, which is characterized as less than a 2% decline in the past two years. SRU is currently considered yellow but will be moving into the green category with the data from the AY 23-24 entering class.
- *Annual Operating Margin*-shows the impacts of both pricing and operational decisions on financial health. Annual revenues minus annual expenses divided by the annual revenue. Green requires a 2% or higher increase with a 3-year moving average. SRU is green in this category demonstrating a sound operating margin without the use of reserves. Deferred maintenance and capital projects could decrease this margin as reserves would be invested.
- *Primary Reserve Ratio*-showing how long an institution could function using its expendable net assets. Expendable financial resources (unrestricted plus temporary restricted) divided by annual operating requirements (total expenses). SRU is in the green category. Reserves necessary at our operating budget requires \$79 million in reserves.
- *Minimum Reserve*-Cash within all funds, with the exception of restricted and agency, to cover at a minimum 90 days of operating expenses based on prior year financial statement. SRU is currently in the green. 180 days of operating expenses requires \$71.5 million in cash reserves.

These metrics provide guidelines for how we can and should utilize our reserves. In order to ensure our overall financial health, we will adhere to the current guidelines and as such will ensure that we maintain at least \$79 million in cash reserves. This allows us to invest approximately \$10 million. We are adopting an invest-not-spend approach to utilizing our

reserves. We will approach each investment with an approach that considers long and short-term return on investment. We will also be considering investments that advance our strategic plan. Additional information on this approach will be provided in the Finance Committee.

Pillar #4 Financial sustainability and resource stewardship

Engage in environmentally sustainable practices

There has been a great deal of discussion during previous Council of Trustees meetings regarding the Green Fund. The policy has been amended in accordance with the agreed upon language, and as such the bylaws will be voted on during the September 2023 meeting. Additionally, we have been exploring other green projects.

- *Recycling during WOW.* During move-in 2024, we will be providing a receptacle for all of the cardboard used by students to move into student housing. During the move-in process for the 2023 fall term, we noticed significant amounts of cardboard being thrown away. We feel that we can significantly reduce the amount of trash and increase the amount of cardboard sent to recycling if we provide instructions, additional trained staff, and a large recycling receptacle. The Green Fund will be used to fund any expenses related to this activity. This will be organized by Student Life.
- *Digital Rock.* We are exploring converting the majority of The ROCK magazine to a digital format. We have begun discussions for the Spring 2024 edition. Recipients of the fall 2023 paper version will be surveyed regarding their format preferences. The PR and Communications team is exploring various vendors to support the move to a digital format. We will continue to offer print versions to a small percentage of our alumni and community readership. We estimate significant savings with the move to the digital format as well as a significant decrease in the use of paper. There will be initial expenses related to migrating content into a digital format. As such we will use the Green Fund to cover some of these expenses.
- *Digital Commencement.* We will be converting the commencement programs to a digital format. We will print a very limited number of programs. We will provide graduates and their guests with a QR code which will allow them to download the commencement program. Limited copies will be available. We estimate significant savings with the move to a digital format. We also estimate a significant decrease in the use of paper and in the amount of paper waste created by the ceremony. We do not foresee the need for any investment from the Green Fund to support this shift to a digital format.

Pillar #4 Financial sustainability and resource stewardship

Increase gifts, grants, internships, and sponsored research

Comprehensive Campaign. As is clear from the strategic plan, financial security and resource stewardship is paramount to the long-term success of the University. A capital campaign was initially launched in 2019, but momentum stalled, and the process has not moved forward over the past several years. Prior to my official start date, I met with Dennis Prescott from bwf consulting in Denver. Dennis shared the Feasibility Report dated December 2019. Samantha Swift and I met with him on September 14, 2023. The plan that has been proposed is out dated at this point, and additional data is necessary prior to moving forward with a comprehensive

campaign. Dennis will provide SRU with a proposal for next steps with an accompanying proposed budget. After this has been reviewed, we will determine next steps. The goal is to engage all of the affiliated entities in a collaborative approach to “work together, purposeful planning, address challenges, celebrate achievements, great expectations.”

As is customary, I’ll leave you with a sampling of news about our University, students, faculty, staff and alumni:

[SRU’s computing program receives reaccreditation](#)

SRU’s computing program received its reaccreditation with the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology through September 2029.

[SRU receives Telly award for advertising video](#)

SRU received a Telly Award in the education institution category for regional television advertising.

[SRU recreational therapy program recognized by ATRA](#)

SRU’s recreational therapy program received several honors at the American Therapeutic Recreation Association’s 2023 Conference, Sept. 9-12, in St. Louis. SRU earned the ATRA’s Excellence in Education Award, which recognizes an institution of higher education that has distinguished itself through outstanding contributions to the recreational therapy profession.

[SRU among PASSHE universities to receive Keystone LSAMP Alliance grant](#)

SRU and three other universities from Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education recently received approval for funding of the Keystone Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation Alliance. SRU, along with East Stroudsburg, Millersville and West Chester, are collaborating to increase and retain unrepresented minority students in higher education to prepare them to graduate and work in STEM fields or progress to graduate school.

[SRU named a top 50 ‘Best Regional University’ in 2024 U.S. News Best College rankings](#)

SRU was recognized within several rankings published in U.S. News & World Report’s 2023-24 Best Colleges guidebook. SRU ranked 50th on the “Best Regional Universities North” list, up 35 spots from last year, and 17th for “Top Public Schools – Regional Universities North.” SRU also ranked 22nd among regional universities in the North for “Best Colleges for Veterans.”

[SRU group receives award for conservancy research in Pennsylvania state parks and forests](#)

A group from SRU received a \$19,990 award from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy through Indiana University of Pennsylvania. As part of the grant, the group will document indigenous forest resource practices and create interpretive media meant to foster inclusive community engagement in Pennsylvania’s State Parks and Forests.

[SRU earns validation for cybersecurity program from the National Security Agency](#)

SRU's cybersecurity program has been validated by the National Security Agency for a National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Program. The NSA awards designations to institutions that commit to producing cybersecurity professionals who will reduce vulnerabilities to national infrastructure.

[SRU signs six articulation agreements with Butler County Community College](#)

SRU and Butler County Community College have signed six new articulation agreements creating more opportunities for BC3 students to transfer to SRU and earn their bachelor's degrees. These agreements will help save students time and money by opening 13 new formal transfer pathways, bringing the current total of formal pathways between the two Butler County schools to 46.

[SRU recognized in Washington Monthly's 2023 national rankings and on its "Best Bang for the Buck" list](#)

SRU was recognized in the Washington Monthly's 2023 College Guide and Rankings as a top Master's University. SRU was also included among its "Best Bang for the Buck" colleges. Washington Monthly's editors rank four-year schools based on their contribution to the public good in three broad categories: social mobility, research and providing opportunities for public service.

[Thirteen SRU faculty earn ACUE educator credential](#)

Thirteen SRU faculty members are part of the first cohort at SRU to become credentialed educators by the Association of College and University Educators, which is the only nationally recognized collegiate teaching credential endorsed by the American Council on Education.

[SRU group performs at National Flute Association convention](#)

Cassandra Eisenreich, a SRU associate professor of music, performed and conducted at the National Flute Association Convention, Aug. 3-6, in Phoenix, Arizona.

[SRU's homeland security program recognized by CollegeRank](#)

SRU's homeland security program was named to CollegeRank's list of the 35 Best Bachelor's in Homeland Security. CollegeRank's editors ranked SRU's homeland security program ninth in the nation. Rankings were based on potential salary for students after graduation, individual program accreditation and overall affordability.

[SRU named a Money Best College for 2023](#)

SRU was recognized by Money.com on its list of the Best Colleges in America for 2023. Money evaluated more than 2,400 four-year colleges in the country and selected just over 700 of those for its list based on quality, affordability and student outcomes.

[SRU signs agreement with Widener Law Commonwealth to establish 3+3 law degree program](#)

SRU and Widener University Commonwealth Law School have signed an agreement providing SRU students from most bachelor's degree program the opportunity to complete their undergraduate

degrees and law degrees in six years.

Giant leap for women: SRU alumna Angela Baker among the trailblazing female coaches in the NFL

A growing number of female coaches are making an impact on the sidelines of NFL games. More than a dozen full-time female coaches are now employed by NFL teams. Among them is Angela Baker, a 2021 SRU graduate, who is entering her second year as an offensive quality control coach for the New York Giants.

SRU students recognized for Up to Us case competition

Three student groups from a SRU Policy Analysis and Evaluation course placed in the top five among national submissions for the Up to Us Civic Solutions Case Competition.

Irlbacher appointed to Gehring Academy's senior faculty

Scott Irlbacher, SRU director of student conduct, was appointed as senior faculty for the Donald J. Gehring Academy, July 17-20, in Detroit, Michigan. The Gehring Academy is an annual summer institute hosted by the Association for Student Conduct Administration for new student conduct professionals and new directors of student conduct offices.

McGinty selected for NEH's Rust Belt Humanities Lab

Patrick McGinty, a SRU assistant professor of languages, literatures, cultures and writing, was among 25 scholars selected for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Rust Belt Humanities Lab.

SRU named a College of Distinction for the 10th straight year

SRU has been named a College of Distinction for the 2023-24 academic year. This marks the 10th straight year that SRU received this recognition for its commitment to providing a high-quality undergraduate education focused on hands-on learning, strong student-teacher relationships, a vibrant campus life and successful outcomes.

SRU professor and alumnus rocks the Tribeca Film Festival as a guitarist with The Vindys

John Anthony, a SRU music instructor who also graduated from the University, is the lead guitarist for The Vindys, an emerging rock band based in northeast Ohio that is catching a lot of attention for their music, as well as in the film and sports industries. Earlier this year, The Vindys' music video for their song "Bugs" was selected for the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, where it premiered with eight other music videos.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen S. Riley, Ph.D.
President