

Subject: A special message from President Bill Behre

Date: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 at 11:26:13 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Office of the President

To: SRU Stakeholder

Feb. 15, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

As many of you have come to know during my nearly four years at Slippery Rock University, I am not one for dancing around a topic. Rather, I prefer to get straight to the point. With that in mind, I am writing to let you know that after much reflection, I have decided that I will be retiring from The Rock when my contract ends on June 30, 2023. I will always be grateful to the SRU community for welcoming my wife, Leah, and me so warmly upon our arrival. And I want everyone to know that being your president has been, and continues to be, my proudest professional accomplishment.

When I gave my inauguration speech, I laid out a clear agenda for our community that included the following goals:

- We would work to build a truly inclusive campus.
- We would increase financial aid and focus on affordability.
- We would continue to emphasize educational outcomes with a particular focus on addressing achievement gaps.
- We would seek to add to geographic diversity and the difference of perspective that it fosters.
- We would build our community-engaged service-learning capacity.
- We would seek to leverage our position in the community to encourage thoughtful dialogue across ideological differences.

Around that same time, we had also lived through several stark reminders that student mental health has been in crisis.

Addressing these issues was an ambitious agenda, but one which I believed we could make much progress. Indeed, we were beginning to make remarkable headway in some areas, including adding resources to financial aid and the Student Counseling Center.

Yet three semesters into our work together, our world was dramatically upended by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, our focus on navigating such unprecedented times overshadowed our normal agenda.

I remain humbled by the way our community rallied to sustain itself during the darkest days of fear and loss. I am particularly proud that we were able to avoid mass layoffs by nimbly redesigning jobs in order to sustain our students. What we did was important and necessary. Certainly, the pandemic was not what any of us had planned for, but as the saying goes, sometimes you must play the cards that you have been dealt. In retrospect, I believe that we, as a community, played our hand just about as well as anyone could have. I can't thank everyone enough for contributing to our success during this troubling period.

Now though, it is time for us to begin planning for a post-pandemic SRU and to refocus in earnest on the priorities that will sustain and propel our University to fulfill its true potential. This is challenging work and we must prepare to effectively hand off the mantle to the next president. One of the reasons I have announced my decision to retire so far in advance is to allow Chancellor Greenstein and SRU's council of trustees to work together to select a new president and to plan a smooth transition well ahead of my final day in office.

As we plan for this transition during the next 16 months, three goals will dominate our work:

- Stabilizing the near-term budgetary outlook for the University with a focus on emerging from the pandemic on strong financial footing.
- Continuing to build the physical and organizational infrastructure to meet the commitments that we have made, including continuing to invest in the work of our chief diversity officer.
- Developing a strategic plan that is built around a shared vision. Given the uncertainty of the higher education landscape, this plan must look different than a typical plan, even one from just five years ago. While it must clearly articulate our values, it must also be flexible enough to account for multiple contextual scenarios.

Continuing to focus on these three key areas will help us to recapture our pre-pandemic momentum, which will serve the University, and its next president, very well.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks for the support that I have received from this community and for the dedication and work that each of you provides to the institution and its students. As we embark on this final leg of our journey together, let's make sure that we remain focused and steadfast in our approach and decision making in order to move SRU seamlessly into its next chapter.

Best,

Bill Behre
President