

Subject: Join President Behre for his State of the University address, 12:30 p.m., Oct. 5

Date: Monday, October 4, 2021 at 9:07:17 AM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Office of the President

To: SRU Stakeholder

Oct. 4, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

As has become my custom, I am writing to you in advance of our Fall Assembly, 12:30 p.m., Oct. 5, in the Smith Student Center Ballroom, to discuss the state of the University.

I am happy to report that despite a myriad of challenges, the University remains on solid ground. This is not to suggest that we have not faced or do not continue to face challenges. We do. However, because of the hard work of our dedicated faculty and staff, our foresight in diversifying our graduate program array, and our historic commitment to cost containment, we continue to address our challenges from a position of relative strength.

COVID-19 continues to shape our world. For the second year in a row, we have experienced a small decline in first-year and transfer student enrollment. Fortunately, our retention remains strong as 81.2% of the fall first-year cohort returned this fall – evidence suggests that student engagement this fall is strong, suggesting that retention will remain solid going forward.

My hope is that these trends will help to counteract some of the pandemic declines. All told, while total enrollments are down about 5% this year, as compared to the previous year, graduate enrollments posted a school record with more than 1,500 students. This shift follows a pre-pandemic trend towards a smaller undergraduate population and a larger graduate one. Early indicators of undergraduate interest suggest that next fall's first-year class will likely rebound towards pre-pandemic levels. Still, there has been a steady trend that predates the pandemic towards a reduction in undergraduates. We are down about 900 undergraduates (12%) the past nine years. As a result, we must carefully review how we schedule our classes and adjust to our new enrollment patterns.

However, lower enrollments are not the only factor that is straining our budget. We are currently in our third consecutive year with no tuition increase. Yet our costs, driven primarily by our wages, have continued to rise. While we did receive a modest increase in our State System allocation, these funds do not cover our increased personnel costs. Fortunately, federal COVID relief money has allowed us to recoup some of our lost income from the pandemic, so we have a balanced budget during the current fiscal year. Without federal money, we would have had a substantial deficit.

Looking to next year's budget, we are currently making the following assumptions:

- Next year's first-year class will be about 1,500 students.
- Other new student enrollments and retention will likely hold steady.
- The SRU council of trustees and State System board of governors will approve a yet-to-be proposed 2% tuition increase.
- A revised State System allocation formula will yield an additional \$1M for SRU.

Even with these assumptions, which are optimistic but not unrealistic, SRU will likely be facing a deficit of more than \$3M. To put things in perspective, our total budget exceeds \$200M. So, relatively speaking, this deficit is not massive. Still, we must attend to it. In the coming days, expect to see revisions in how we roll over unused funds from one year to the next. Also, as you think about spending in your areas, please keep in mind that many of our students struggle to cover the costs of what we spend. Please do all that you can to keep SRU affordable.

As I write this message, the chief diversity officer search is coming to a conclusion and I hope to announce a new hire in the coming days. I would like to thank Dennis Washington, vice president for advancement, for chairing the search, and all of the committee members who have worked diligently to bring this important process to fruition. Similarly, I would like to thank the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Planning Committee for the extraordinary work that it has done to draft a diversity and inclusion strategic plan. This plan will be incorporated into the University's strategic plan, which should be completed during the spring semester.

Just as the Cold War was the historical touchstone of my youth, I believe that, along with climate change, the efforts towards racial, social, and economic justice are the defining struggles of our current students' coming of age. We must do all in our power to build an infrastructure that fosters progress in these areas. This work starts with our people. To this end, I ask everyone to avail themselves of professional development opportunities as they arise. With that in mind, I'd like to remind staff that we will be hosting Justin Jones-Fuso, founder and CEO of Work Meaningful, as our presenter on Professional Development Day, 9 a.m. to noon, Oct. 11, in the Smith Student Center Ballroom. For faculty, Carl Moore, assistant chief academic officer at the University of the District of Columbia will lead [two workshops via Zoom](#) at 8:30 a.m. and 10:15 a.m., Oct. 12. I encourage everyone to attend these and all future educational opportunities.

As is often the case, I have spent much of this communication laying out the challenges before us. Let me conclude this message by reiterating my abiding faith that we are up to the task. During the past 18 months, our community has rallied to sustain our University along an unpredictable and unsettling path. And, by and large, we have done so with grace and good humor. I look forward to addressing our current challenges with equal aplomb. Our students are counting on us; we have no choice but to succeed.

Best,

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