

Slippery Rock University

Council of Trustees

President Report

Sept. 21, 2018

Last week I had the opportunity to address the University community and share my observations as a relative newcomer regarding the state of the University. Since many of you were unable to attend, this report provides highlights from that address.

By most measures Slippery Rock University is doing extraordinarily well. Our enrollments are solid. We are down less than one percent at a time when some of our sister PASSHE institutions are experiencing double digit declines. And, we are continuing to reinvest in our campus at a time of extreme austerity at other regional universities.

Since Jan. 1, 2018, the University has completed 25 projects with an aggregate value of \$23,049,000. The ESCO project when fully complete will generate \$1.08 million annual utility and operation/maintenance savings. We estimate that it will also reduce annual electricity usage by 4.23 million Kwh and water usage by 12.6 million gallons. These are major steps forward in meeting the President's Climate Commitment signed in 2007 goal to be carbon neutral by 2037. We currently have 12 additional projects in construction with an aggregate value of \$41,911,000, and we are actively preparing for another 11 projects which currently have an estimated value of \$25,935,000.

Our construction dollars have been invested in everything from building renovations to adding labs to upgrading steam pipes and HVAC systems. And, while all projects are critical to maintaining an exceptional learning environment, I think the loudest cheers went up when the state *finally* launched the performing arts project.

We are engaged in a vigorous master planning process that focuses on aligning facilities with our academic mission and vision. We'll continue to discuss, prioritize and reach consensus and then develop a framework and a phased action plan for implementation of the envisioned projects.

Financially we are solid.

The fiscal year 17/18 finished on-track to budget, with an E&G surplus of \$691,725, or 0.5 percent of the total budget.

The fiscal 18/19 budget is balanced. As mentioned earlier, we have a small decrease in enrollment, but a 2.99 percent tuition and fee increase and \$1.1M appropriation growth will help offset this decline.

When I arrived at SRU in July, I inherited an enviable situation. I am thankful to Philip Way and Cheryl Norton before him for their careful stewardship of this extraordinary place. As a result of their leadership. The staff's devotion to this institution, their talents and compassion have made Slippery Rock University strong and resilient, and which have afforded me the luxury of spending much of my first 83 days listening and learning. While others are struggling to survive, we are engaged in defining the best ways to thrive. And thriving we are --

FY 2018 year was a benchmark year for friend and fundraising:

- Charitable Gift Support increased 9.4 percent and totaled nearly \$3 million.
- \$142,000 was generated from the President's Scholarship Gala – SRU's most successful scholarship gala.
- Total assets surpassed \$37 million – highest asset total in the Foundation's 48-year history.
- Investment portfolio value surpassed \$30 million for the first time in the Foundation's history

As a result:

- 40 new or increased scholarships were realized during the year.
- The Foundation was able to provide \$2.1 million in scholarship support for SRU students.

I'm pleased to report that this year, 100 percent of the members of our executive leadership – the president, vice presidents, deans, assistant vice presidents and associate provosts – made financial contributions to the University. And, 54 percent of our faculty and staff participated in the SRU Family Campaign.

This is a great start. We still have a way to go and more work to do, but a great start.

Our alumni continue to demonstrate the value of their SRU education through their contributions to their professions and communities.

- Two of the top six health and physical education teachers who received National Teacher of the Year awards from SHAPE America this year are SRU alumnae. Jody Duff, a 2006 graduate with a degree in health and physical education, and Johanna Wininsky, a 1997 graduate with a degree in dance, were honored at the SHAPE American National Convention and Expo last March.
- Kirk Sander, a 2003 SRU graduate with a degree in environment geosciences, was recently named vice president of safety and standards for the National Waste & Recycling Association, leading safety initiatives for a trade association that represents private-sector U.S. waste and recycling companies. Sander previously worked for the National Safety Council, the White House, the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Safety & Environmental Enforcement, NASA and as the chief of staff for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

We need to expand our outreach to alumni. They, better than anyone, know the value of a Slippery Rock University education. We have very loyal alumni but we need to engage them in financially supporting the University. Currently only 5 percent of alumni give to SRU. That's low compared to our peers. Moving forward, private support will be critical to our success. We need to achieve 10 percent alumni giving by 2024. That would be a great way to celebrate the institution's 135th birthday.

The University, and individual programs, continue to garner state, regional and national recognition for outcomes, student experience and value. Since January 2018, the University has earned nearly 100 awards. I won't list them all, but among them the University was named:

- **“Best Regional, Public and Value University“** by U.S. News and World Report
- **“One of Pennsylvania’s Best Online Colleges”** by Bestcolleges.com
- **“One of the best Universities in the NE”** by Princeton Review
- **“A Top Online School for Students with Disabilities”** by SR Education Group
- **“Best Value” University in the Nation** by MONEY magazine
- **“A Gold Award Military Friendly Top 10 University”** by Victory Magazine
- **“One of the nation’s 375 most environmentally responsible colleges”** by Princeton Review
- **“A top college for on-campus, part-time student employment”** by The Student Loan Report
- **“Most Environmentally Friendly Colleges and Universities”** by University of Indonesia’s GreenMetric World University (20th in US/142nd world)
- **2018 Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence** by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, a
- **Great College to Work For** by The Chronicle of Higher Education, and my favorite,
- **“A Cool School”** by Sierra Club

The list goes on, but without question, one of the most prestigious honors the University earned this past year was being selected as one of 15 recipients nationally to win a 2018 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest U.S. government honor given to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees.

Gary Clark, an SRU assistant professor of physical and health education and an Army Reserve member, nominated the University, citing its “incredible support” that has allowed him and others to “concentrate on their military obligation and not stress about their civilian employment.” While we are incredibly proud to win the Freedom Award, we are even more proud of Gary and the 100 students at SRU who identify as veterans and the 350 military-affiliated students who are either reservists, active duty military, contracted ROTC cadets or dependents in military families and we thank them for their service.

Our faculty and students continue to make the news because they are doing important work. For example:

- Nitin Sukhija, assistant professor of computer science, has organized high performance computing workshops for supercomputing practitioners all over the world. In the 2018 calendar year alone, he has helped lead workshops in San Francisco, Dallas, Pittsburgh, Germany and later this month he’s co-chairing a conference on the management of emergent digital ecosystems, hosted by Tokyo Metropolitan University in Japan.
- In a five-week span last summer, Jason Kush, professor of music, taught and performed at festivals and concerts on three continents, jetting from Colombia, to Pittsburgh to Croatia.
- Qi Chen, assistant professor of chemistry, and one of the top students from her Organic Chemistry class, junior Alexander Smith, spent the summer in the SRU lab creating and identifying compounds that could inhibit viral enzymes and be used in antiviral drugs to prevent outbreaks such as the Ebola virus.
- John Yannotty, a senior mathematics major, completed a 12-week paid internship at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, using machine learning to assist environmental and autoimmunity laboratory groups analyze the risk factors for a rare autoimmune disease called myositis.

This is great stuff. Important stuff. Work we can all celebrate. But we must, as the old song says, "Keep our eye on the prize.

"When the Board of Governor's enacted this year's funding formula, SRU received about \$1M less than we anticipated under the existing funding formula. This was unfortunate, but not unexpected. As a system, PASSHE is struggling. As one of the handful of schools that is thriving, SRU has been asked to carry a heavier load than some others. Until system redesign is completed, I expect this trend to continue.

We will continue our path to prosperity through thoughtful growth. As we do this, we will continue to define our core values and commit to supporting what we say we believe in. In other words, "putting our money where our mouth is." You will hear me repeat *ad nauseum* that you cannot judge a university based solely on its flowery belief statements and ambitious strategic plan. Talk, as they say, is cheap. The two best ways to assess a university's commitment to its expressed ideals are through its curriculum and its budget.

I am thrilled by the vibrant and creative thought that seems to be emerging in the liberal learning redesign. My compliments and gratitude go to the faculty who have rolled up their sleeves on this important work. I am anxious to see where this important work takes us.

From a budgetary perspective we will continue to work to align our spending with what we say is important to us.

We say that internationalizing our campus is important to us. In response, we have hired an assistant provost for global initiatives who has expertise in building partnerships across national borders.

We say that undergraduate research is important to us. I am happy to announce that later this semester we will publish a competition for 10 fellowships that will provide salary for faculty and students to perform mentored undergraduate research or creative endeavors during Summer 2019.

We say we are committed to diversity. Still we struggle to achieve this goal. In fact, the single strongest concern that I have heard since my interview process has been in regards to the University's efforts in this area. To help address this issue, I am thrilled to announce that we will be committing \$400,000 of the \$691,000 surplus from last year to scholarships for students from underrepresented groups. This marks an additional \$100,000 to be awarded for the fall that will be guaranteed to continue for four years. In truth, this is not enough, but it is a start – and, we must start somewhere.

As this year progresses, we will continue to define our challenges and refine our responses to them. Later this semester I will be sharing a working document with the University community based on my observations during the preceding months. I expect that this piece will focus on the questions that have emerged from my conversations. I will ask for feedback, first on the questions. Then, on the potential solutions. I hope that these questions form a backbone for the strategic initiatives that will guide our work into the future. Our focus will be on initiatives that serve our mission and propel us to greater financial independence.

While financial independence is important, because it allows us greater control over our own destiny, we must *always* remember that finances are a means to a greater goal, not an end unto themselves.

When I greeted the first-year students a few weeks ago, one of the points that I attempted to highlight is that when they joined our academic community, they joined something that is bigger than themselves. They became part of more than a century of history at SRU and part of the privileged few who have the opportunity to earn a four-year degree. Worldwide, roughly only 7 percent of the total population has a four-year degree. This great opportunity I reminded them, comes with the responsibility to commit to giving back and helping to create a socially just world.

As I shared with the assembly: We tackle these daily mundane issues because they lead to something much, much more important. They allow us to use education as a lever towards greater equality. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, "We do not do take on these challenges because they are easy. We do this work because it is hard." And, I might add, because it is the right thing to do.

I look forward to working with each of you – as *together* we forge a path that allows this great in institution to be an extraordinary engine of personal growth and social mobility.

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

STUDENTS

- **Chase Upchurch**, a senior music education and music therapy dual major, and **Marie Helstrom**, a senior music major, traveled to Italy after being accepted into the esteemed Accademia Vocale Lorenzo Malfatti program. The AVL program, is a four-week course that accepts only 18 vocal performers from around the world every summer to study voice, Italian language, acting, style and diction.
- **Alex Gessinger**, a senior computing major, and **Zach Miller**, a graduate student majoring in computing, worked with **Nitin Sukhija**, assistant professor of computer science, conducting a research study into optimizing applications that use big data systems.
- **Lance Neuscheler**, a senior exercise science major, is the co-investigator of a study called "The Effects of Isometric Handgrip Exercise and Arterial Occlusion on the Inter-Arm Systolic Blood Pressure Difference."
- **Jasmine Medina**, a senior biology and music double major; **Aisha Aldubayan**, a senior digital media production major; and **Jana Ponder**, a junior athletic training major; were the recipients of the 2018 Marjorie Stephenson Scholarship.
- **Nico Russo**, a senior geology major, spent his summer working with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, plotting locations in the greater Pittsburgh area where fossils in the museum were found and where people can go to possibly discover more remains that are 300 million years old.
- **Sam Hone**, a senior geology major from Prospect, won the Best Student Poster award at the Institute on Lake Superior Geology's annual meeting.
- **Hannah Nestor**, a senior accounting major from Lykens, has been awarded a \$10,000 academic scholarship from the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board.
- **Jacob Gillette**, a junior political science major from Schuylkill Haven, is working in the office of state Sen. Vincent Hughes, D-Philadelphia, as part of a 15-week internship sponsored by Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education.
- **Lacey Cohen**, a sophomore health science major (3.75 GPA); **Carla Corrochano Moracho**, a 2018 graduate with a major in marketing (3.8 GPA); **Viola Lugmayr**, a sophomore exercise science major (4.0 GPA); **Amy Varckette**, a freshman biology major (3.5 GPA) and **Allie Welch**, a junior marketing and business major (3.97 GPA); were named to the Intercollegiate Tennis Association Scholar-Athlete Team. **SRU's**

tennis team was also one of 99 teams in NCAA Division II to earn the ITA's team academic award (3.737 GPA).

- **Erien Brown**, a junior political science major, (3.58 GPA); **Danie Porath**, a junior biology major (3.51 GPA); **Tia Torchia**, a sophomore social work major (3.57 GPA); and **Bre Vodde**, a senior mid-level mathematics education major (3.95 GPA); were named to the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association Academic Honor Roll. The **team** was named an Academic Honor Squad (3.21 GPA).
- The **SRU women's volleyball team** (3.53 GPA) was a recipient of the America Volleyball Coaches Association Team Academic Award.
- **Emily Bitka**, a senior from Amherst, New York, was named to second team All-America honors by the IWLCA. She is one of just four goalies in the nation to earn the All-America honor at the Division II level and is just one of two goalies named to first or second team honors.
- **Lydia Perozzi**, a senior communication major, interned in New York City with the Disney ABC Television Group, working on the set of the talk show "The View."
- **Jacob Palmer**, a junior chemistry major, tested magnetic properties of materials in the SRU chemistry lab this summer as part of research to create a single-molecule magnet, which could be used for data storage in computers.
- **Shannon Rose**, a junior chemistry major, studied amino acids in the organic chemistry lab, testing ways to isolate amino acids so they are able to disrupt the forming of amyloids, which are protein aggregates linked to Alzheimer's disease.

FACULTY/STAFF

- **Barbara Billek-Sawhney**, professor of physical therapy, instructed students, faculty and professionals at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka as part of a Fulbright Specialist Program. Billek-Sawhney instructed more than 300 undergraduate physical therapy students and helped faculty improve their curriculum with more innovative practices in geriatrics and screening for neuromuscular diseases such as Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis.
- **Tim Smith**, a professor in the School of Physical Therapy, who was recently awarded a \$109,470 grant from the National Science Foundation in support of his project entitled: "Collaborative Research: Cranial Base Development in Primates."
- **Judy Silva**, assistant professor of library and University archivist, was awarded a \$1,000 President's International Professional Development Grant from SRU to visit several repositories and institutions in Ireland under the mentorship of Kate Manning, archivist at University College Dublin.
- **John Golden**, assistant professor of business, and **Li Pu**, associate professor of communication, received a \$29,000 grant from the ASIANetwork's Student-Faculty Fellows Program conduct a sustainability study in Southwest China that will benchmark outcomes from rapid modernization initiatives in that country by accounting for economic, environmental and social influences.
- **Joshua Ballew**, assistant professor of mathematics and statistics, was chosen as a 2018-19 Project NExT Fellow by the Mathematical Association of America.
- **Cara Kriebel**, senior budget analyst in Slippery Rock University's Finance Department, was appointed to the Butler County Children's Center's board of directors.
- **Chase Wickerham**, assistant director of web communication, developed the University's new interactive map. The map features 360-degree images, embedded drone video and syncs with Google maps to link to turn-by-turn directions to the University.
- **Emily Keener**, assistant professor of psychology, was honored by the Association of Women in Psychology with the 2018 Distinguished Publication Award.

- **Junko Yamamoto**, associate professor of secondary education and foundations of education, was published in the Kappa Delta Pi Record, a peer-reviewed journal for education professionals.
- **Jennifer Willford**, associate professor of psychology, has been named president-elect of the Developmental Neurotoxicology Society.

ALUMNI

- **Amber Donaldson**, a 2001 graduate of SRU's doctoral program in physical therapy, is the senior director of sports medicine for the U.S. Olympic Committee, meaning she is on site at the Winter, Summer and Paralympic Games leading a staff of clinicians who provide care for more than 1,000 U.S. Olympic athletes. She also manages four clinics at USOC Training Centers, including the flagship site in Colorado Springs.
- **Jessica Hickey**, a 2010 SRU graduate in communication-public relations, created a community development project called the Downtown Greensburg Project in 2015 and serves as its director. The project brings together community members and businesses for events and volunteer activities to revitalize Greensburg, a city with more than 14,000 residents in Westmoreland County.
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Respectfully submitted,

William J. Behre, Ph.D.
President