**For immediate release: February 10, 2022**

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**SIU Board of Trustees begin 2022 highlighting familiar themes: progress and collaboration**

In their first meeting of the year, members of the SIU Board of Trustees highlighted the continued progress and collaboration found across the university system. During the meeting, both the president and trustees emphasized positive growth, increased opportunities for collaboration and adoption of a strategic plan as examples that the system has used the previous year to generate even greater success for its students, faculty and staff.

“We’re beginning this year even better than the one before,” remarked Phil Gilbert who was unanimously elected to another term as board chair. “Even with the challenges we have faced from COVID, thanks to the dedicated leadership of our president, chancellors and their teams, as well as our students, faculty and staff, the SIU brand of a quality education backed by cutting edge research, superior healthcare delivery and committed public service is stronger than ever.  I’m proud to have been re-elected and look forward to working with this board and our university leaders in the coming year.”

Trustees also unanimously re-elected Dr. Ed Hightower as vice chair and elected Dr. Subhash Sharma as secretary. During the meeting, held via Zoom following COVID precautions, trustees were updated on the newly formed Office of Community Engagement and formally adopted a system-wide strategic plan which has been in development for the past fifteen months.

In other business, President Mahony led a discussion regarding tuition and fee rates for the coming academic year. He pointed out that the system is very supportive of the budget proposed by Governor Pritzker and has reached out to express the system’s appreciation for the support of Illinois higher education. Of note, the budget provided a substantial $122 million increase in MAP funding. More importantly, it contained a five percent increase across the system that would help address most, if not all, inflationary costs.

“We are very much looking forward to working with our partners in the General Assembly to see a successful budget, like the one proposed, adopted this spring. If we do see such a budget, there might not be a need to increase undergraduate tuition to cover costs,” Mahony said.

Another part of the president’s presentation however, was a discussion that a modest increase in undergraduate tuition could be used to create a scholarship pool for students with the greatest needs. Mahony expressed his concern that the university’s ability to help these students could be reduced with the loss of federal dollars the university has seen over the last couple of years because of COVID. “We want to explore this ability as a way to support our equity agenda and to make sure we address affordability for all of our students.”

Next, Interim Director Dr. Stacy Grundy, provided an update on the very successful start of the SIU System Office of Community Engagement (OCE) which was approved by the board in July 2021. Created to leverage system-wide resources to strengthen and grow communities in central and southern Illinois, the OCE serves as a catalyst for community advocacy and elevating the voices of current and future community leaders.

Already, the OCE and its campus partners are engaging in successful collaborations with the City of East St. Louis and the metro east communities of Venice, Brooklyn and Madison. With a focus on improving broadband, public safety, economic development, water quality and community development, Grundy noted the OCE has already qualified for over $1.8 million in grants and awards.

“These early success stories and the promise they have for communities all over southern and central Illinois are why this board so enthusiastically endorsed the creation of the Office of Community Engagement,” said Dr. Ed Hightower. “Public service is in the SIU System’s DNA, so working with these communities and our partners in state and federal government, is a natural fit as we give back to those who support our campuses.”

The highlight of the meeting was the adoption of a comprehensive system-wide strategic plan which was one of the first goals set by the president when he took office in March 2020. Even before his start date, Mahony charged a series of working groups to begin laying the foundation for the plan’s development. In July 2020, Vice President Gireesh Gupchup was given the role of organizing the plan’s creation and working with co-facilitators Dr. Lakesha Butler, clinical professor at the SIUE School of Pharmacy and Dr. John Pollitz, dean of library affairs at SIUC on its successful implementation.

“The success of our strategic plan is not just going to be the outcome of bringing together all corners of the system to set goals for our future. It will be found more importantly in tracking the outcomes and measuring the success of the goals we have set. If we see the same level of enthusiasm in executing this plan as we had in creating it, I believe the result will be tremendous for everyone across the system,” said Dr. Gireesh Gupchup.

The plan, unanimously approved by the board, focuses on six goals: academic innovation and student success; anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion; community impact; research, creative activity and partnerships; faculty and staff and infrastructure.

“I want to begin by thanking Drs. Gupchup, Butler and Pollitz for their tremendous leadership, as well as every member of the strategic planning committee, whose work has laid a solid foundation for the SIU System’s future,” said Mahony. “A strategic plan isn’t just a document that defines what an organization is. A strategic plan sets goals; provides a realistic direction in how to meet them; measures when they succeed or fall short; and charts a positive course both now and for the future.”

“Besides being forward-thinking, an important characteristic of our plan, which I believe makes it that much more effective, is that it overlaps our system goals with those of not just our campuses but also with the Illinois Board of Higher Education which recently adopted their own strategic plan,” Mahony continued. “We have defined our mission. Set our goals.  Determined how we will measure our outcome. Now the work begins as the SIU System steps in to its future. I’m proud to say that under this strategic plan, it does so united, committed to its values and enthusiastic to meet the challenges ahead.”

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