



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

After devoting the last several *Connection* columns to Illinois' budget impasse and its implications for SIU – and seeing nothing yet to suggest the divide between Governor Rauner and the General Assembly is narrowing – I thought today might be a good time to shift gears and explore some of what's going on across the national higher education landscape recently.

But first: As I write this from Springfield, SIU -- along with four other public universities -- just finished a round of FY18 appropriations testimony with a Senate committee yesterday. Nonetheless, much of the attention right now has turned to the full Senate chamber, to see if they will this week take up the "lifeline" stopgap funding bill earlier passed by the House, and which I wrote about here two weeks ago. That bill is absolutely important for minimally carrying SIU through the remainder of the current fiscal year, although the governor has threatened a veto of the measure. I'll keep you apprised of where things go on that front.

In the national arena, if you are one who closely follows the HIED trade press, some of the items below may not be new news to you. However, if you don't regularly keep up with what is taking place elsewhere, you may find some of these recent developments interesting. And if nothing else, maybe there is some slight consolation in knowing that Illinois is not alone when it comes to funding crises.

At this time, legislators in more than a dozen other states are also exploring big funding reductions to public colleges and universities – which of course would be in addition to the federal cuts proposed by President Trump. His budget blueprint unveiled in March -- the so-called "skinny" budget -- includes a \$9 billion cut to the U.S. Department of Education and proposes decreases at several agencies that provide vital funding for SIU research and public service efforts, including the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. Further, the president wants to eliminate funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting ... all of which have been sources of federal support for various units across SIU.

State budget cuts to HIED are nothing new of course, meaning we have increasingly relied on federal funding to offset some of the state-level reductions. A study by the Pew Charitable Trusts showed that from 2000 to 2012, revenue per full-time equivalent (FTE) student from federal sources going to public, non-profit, and for-profit institutions grew by 32 percent in real terms, while state revenue fell by 37 percent. Meanwhile, the number of FTE students grew by 45 percent.

In some states where HIED funding may be cut, lawmakers also are advocating a freeze or cap on tuition. Fortunately, that has not been on the table in Illinois, and hopefully we won't face that additional battle anytime soon; most Illinois legislators *do* understand the tremendous strain the state universities are under, and know they cannot make our situation even more dire through such a proposal. As a university system committed to access and opportunity, SIU has always been sensitive to the impact of tuition increases. At the same time, we cannot ignore the increasing costs of carrying out our mission while other funding sources continue to contract.

In the "If You Think It's Bad Here" department, consider the debacle going on right now in New Mexico, where earlier this month, Governor Susana Martinez zeroed-out the entire higher education budget. In addition, her line-item vetoes eliminated funding for a range of programs and services provided by universities and colleges – including agricultural extension offices, hospitals, and even a hotline for poisoning victims.

What may sound familiar is that this is a pitched battle between a governor of one party and a legislature controlled by the other party. The governor modified her tune somewhat last week, saying

she will fund higher education in the fiscal year that begins July 1 ... as long as there are no tax increases. A special legislative session looms ahead in New Mexico.

This is a particularly busy time in our financial aid offices, where folks are putting together aid packages for new and returning students. So the uncertainty over the federal FY17 appropriation hangs ominously over that process. Earlier this month, the American Council on Education and two dozen other national higher education associations wrote to the U.S. House and Senate leadership, sharing concerns about what further delays in the appropriation process could mean for student aid as well as research programs. As for SIU, we've reached out to our Illinois federal delegation as well.

To quote from the joint letter: "At this stage in the process, any reductions in funding for student aid (such as to Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, or Federal Work-Study) could result in millions of students and their families being forced to either find additional money at this late stage in their planning, or forgo their studies entirely. Similarly, uncertainty or delay in research funding can lead to the abandonment of promising lines of discovery."

What's been a little overshadowed in the wake of the release of the Trump administration's FY18 budget proposal is their FY17 supplemental funding request. It includes a cut of \$1.3 billion to Pell grants and more than \$1.2 billion to NIH funding, along with reductions to many other programs. As the ACE letter points out, these cuts would do serious harm, especially this late in the fiscal year.

Uncertainty also continues to loom over what U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos plans to do with Title IX enforcement through the department's Office of Civil Rights – though there certainly have been signs that she will undo the 2011 "Dear Colleague" letter that has basically mandated how universities and colleges address cases of campus sexual assault. The letter instituted the "preponderance of evidence" standard, similar to civil cases.

We may have seen one of those indicators two weeks ago, when DeVos met with Georgia Congressman Earl Ehrhart. The representative has sued the Education Department over that Dear Colleague letter, calling the guidance document unconstitutional in that it does not have the power of law or administrative regulation. Ehrhart additionally argues it violates an accused student's due process rights.

If DeVos elects to roll back the 2011 guidance, it will largely be moot for us in Illinois, as state law already closely replicates the bulk of the ED's letter.

Beyond these national stories, finally, there are also some developments locally that bear quick mention:

- Some of you may have received this information from your campus HR offices, and I referenced it before, but to ensure everyone is aware, please note that the Illinois Department of Central Management Services -- which administers the state employee health insurance program -- is offering "status quo" benefit options for the annual benefit choice period running from May 1 through May 31. More simply stated: We should not see premium increases for full-time employees, and the other plans we were worried about (at higher cost and/or with lesser benefits) will not be implemented in FY18. CMS will be sending information to employees' home addresses at any point now.
- Many readers noted that SIU's credit rating as issued by Standard & Poor's was dropped last week along with the other Illinois public universities rated by S&P. With the downgrade, our bonds become less than investment grade ("junk bonds") and drive the cost of any borrowing significantly higher. On the good side, if there is any with such news, we don't anticipate any large bond issuance until at least FY19; but on the negative, this adds in a big way to the overall crisis of confidence that has built up around HIED in our state, and certainly bleeds over into making it tougher to do even smaller, short-term borrowings such as with lease-purchase arrangements and the like.
- We'll do one more *System Connection* on May 10, before starting the regular summer hiatus. As always, if important information -- budget or otherwise -- needs to be shared with the SIU community over the summer months, I'll take to an all-users email to provide updates as needed.

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



Ben Moyer is relatively new to SIUE, joining the staff as a multimedia technician at the Morris University Center (everyone at SIUE calls it “the MUC”) in 2014. Then again, he’s really no stranger to the campus. In fact, he pretty much grew up on it.

For several years during his childhood, Ben and his parents, Pam and Larry Evans, lived at the Tower Lake apartment complex – now Cougar Village – while his parents attended SIUE.

“I spent a great deal of time on campus with my parents, often going to class with them, going to concerts at the Mississippi River Music Festival, swimming at Tower Lake, and riding my Big Wheel in and out of every building on campus,” he recalled. “I really considered the entire SIUE campus to be my playground.”

He joined the Suzuki violin program at SIUE in second grade, and by seventh grade, he was also playing bass guitar. After graduating from Edwardsville High School, he worked as a professional musician in the St. Louis area and around the Midwest. About five years after graduating high school, he enrolled at SIUE as a music major. He subsequently switched majors to mass communications, studying television and radio production, advertising and 3D animation.

Opportunity knocked during his senior year. Ben began working as a musician for the U.S. Department of Defense, touring extensively throughout Central America, the Caribbean, Europe and the Middle East.

“I was incredibly fortunate that all of my SIUE instructors were supportive of me during this time,” he said. “They found ways to work with me to cover course material since my touring often required that I miss substantial portions of the semester.”

Following graduation in 1997, he began freelancing with several video production companies in the St. Louis area and he continued touring for the Defense Department. After nearly six years of the intermittent international touring, Ben decided to focus on video production, which also required extensive travel. By late 2013, he had decided to find employment closer to home to spend more time with his family.

As a multimedia technician, Ben and his colleagues work closely with Event Services, Dining Services, Housekeeping and Facilities to meet all the needs for events at the MUC.

“On a typical day, we may have several conferences, student group meetings, and large events such as step shows, wedding receptions or fund raising events for various community organizations in the Meridian Ballroom,” he explained. “Needless to say, we are very busy.”

Among his responsibilities are hiring a staff of approximately 12 student workers, scheduling, and coordinating with clients, vendors and other departments.

“I enjoy the opportunity to be a mentor to our student staff,” Ben said. “And something I truly love, which I learned shortly after I started here, is that I have as much to learn from them as they do from me. The personal interaction that I have with students, faculty, staff and event clientele is what I find most satisfying.”

Thanks, Ben, for sharing your expertise and your enthusiasm.

Other Voices in HIED

The Atlantic: [What Is the Future of College Marketing?](#)

Washington Post: [Trump expected to order study of federal role in education](#)