



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

Good grief. Is it November 8th yet? This electoral season can't end soon enough for my taste to be honest. I've always been a political junkie and normally enjoy the intense campaign period -- particularly in presidential years -- but admittedly I won't miss the barrage of mailers or incessant ads on the airwaves, much less the extreme partisanship that just seems to build with each cycle. We may be reaching modern lows for the tone and tenor of races at both the state and federal levels. But a week from now we'll know all the results ... we better hope.

As weary as we may be of all this, though, let me suggest there's still work to do between now and Election Day. Regardless of party affiliation -- or lack thereof -- I hope you can see past all the political noise and study the candidates' positions on issues that matter to you personally ... and the state of higher education generally.

Across the SIU System, and really for all of the Illinois HIED community, the state budget impasse has forced us to maintain a narrow -- even myopic -- focus limited to getting through the immediate demands and crises on literally a day-to-day basis at times ... finding ways to keep on meeting the needs of our students in and out of the classroom, carry on meaningful research, and continue the service and outreach that improves the lives of our friends and neighbors.

Again, let me share my heartfelt appreciation for the sacrifices so many of you have had to make during this period of tremendous uncertainty in our state to keep our system and universities moving ahead. There are as many stories as there are people at SIU, and I hear them virtually every day in all kinds of settings. The "extras" that hundreds of you are taking on are what is sustaining us through these times.

But beyond this short-term (18 months? 2 years? 4 years?) mess that we have here in Illinois, we need the office holders in the White House, Congress, and state legislatures committed to the long-term viability of PUBLIC higher education supported with tax dollars, especially in light of the ongoing disinvestment in postsecondary education in Illinois and other states that I've written about before in this column.

A presidential colleague of mine, Susan Cole at Montclair State University in New Jersey, recently talked about this larger, broader perspective in an online [column](#) she wrote where her theme was this: If we want an educated society, it matters who we elect.

President Cole's argument is compelling:

It takes intentional effort and investment over long periods of time to create the social structures that determine whether or not the nation will have a well-prepared, well-educated citizenry capable of preserving and enhancing our democracy ... It takes a minimum of two decades to build a well-educated human being and informed citizen. It takes decades of persistent effort to build schools and universities capable of providing that education. It takes half centuries to create communities with a culture and understanding that values those schools and universities.

And it has taken centuries, Susan continued, for the "underlying concepts of democracy, the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and the relationship between education and a free and just society" to take hold.

Uh, folks, all this doesn't get accomplished via the 24-hour-news-cycle-quick-fix rants that our political discourse has seemed to evolve to and which now pass as policy positions. This is why the campaign discussions about higher education are important for us -- and the nation as a whole -- right now.

So think about those "decades of persistent effort" within the context of the SIU System -- with SIUC three years shy of its sesquicentennial, SIUE celebrating a 60th anniversary next year, and the School of Medicine in Springfield soon approaching 50 years. We can attribute the growth, longevity,

and contributions of our campuses to, yes, dedicated faculty and staff ... but also just as significantly to public officials and policymakers who have understood the value of what we do for society.

I've written and spoken on numerous occasions about my strongly held belief that higher education in Illinois sits at a critical juncture right now. How that plays out will determine what we shall look like as a public university, and those who we will be able to serve, for at least a generation.

Of course, neither is there any shortage of concerns at the federal level: reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, regulation of how colleges and universities manage and spend their endowments, stricter oversight of for-profit institutions (which, thankfully, we have seen by the Obama Administration, if not the state), accreditation, accountability, research funding levels for NSF, NIH and other agencies ... and this list is just off the top of my head. The Association of Public & Land-grant Universities has developed a series of well-written higher education policy **proposals** that it hopes will be adopted and supported by an eventual Clinton or Trump Administration. These are worth a read for anyone interested in following some of the national conversation taking place in this vein.

Alright ... enough of the voter education drive. Granted, delving into the policy positions of the various candidates for all the open offices this year takes time, which now is in short supply before we head to the polls. But just remember -- to turn a phrase we've heard often this season -- elections have consequences. For all of us, one of the most important of those consequences is maintaining the role of the public, state-supported university as a pillar of our democracy, with policies that will support the ongoing ability to carry out an expansive and vital mission in the years ahead.

Many across the SIU System are aware that the Board of Trustees this summer approved a system-wide framework for promoting diversity and inclusion. Work is underway on about a dozen initiatives within that framework to advance awareness-building and cultural competency that should better support the stand-alone diversity plans developed by each of the campuses.

Others of you -- particularly at the School of Medicine -- may further know that Dr. Wesley Robinson-McNeese has decided to step down from his position as the SOM's Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion effective next June 30. However, Wes is not retiring and plans to maintain teaching responsibilities and clinical assignments as needed by the medical school.

As such, I've asked Dr. McNeese to start taking on some additional duties for my office on an internal consulting basis. He will assume a variable-time assignment to basically serve in the role of an executive director for diversity initiatives at the system level.

So you'll be seeing Wes not just in Springfield, but also around many other SIU locations over the coming months. I appreciate him taking on the extra duties for us -- and I can tell you that the Board and I are glad to have his expertise available to support diversity efforts across the entire SIU organization.

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



The SIU School of Medicine was just 20 years old when Cris Milliken joined the Department of Surgery as a clerkship coordinator. She brought with her valuable experience from the hospital in her native Danville as well as St. John's Hospital in Springfield, where she was a pharmacy tech.

Over the past 26 years, she has contributed to the growth of SOM through her various positions, including in Internal Medicine and the Department of Education and Curriculum. In 2001, she joined the Alumni Affairs office as a coordinator.

"It seemed like a good fit for me since I knew 11 years' worth of students/graduates at that point," she said. "I enjoyed watching the students mature, graduate and move onto having busy practices and families."

As you would expect, her office plans class reunions, dinners, alumni board meetings, and other functions for the SOM's nearly 2,700 graduates. Cris appreciates the longstanding relationships she maintains with many alums and their families.

"It is satisfying being able to staff registration tables at different events and recognize/greet the people who attend," she said. "I've had the opportunity to watch our school grow at an amazing rate over the

past 26 years, and I enjoy the many continued friendships with other SIU employees who have been here a long time – as well as with some who have retired.”

In addition to her alumni office responsibilities, Cris is an AFSCME officer and she has served on the Civil Service Council and Employee Advisory Committee.

And, like so many members of the SIU family, Cris also enjoys serving others outside the workplace. For the past 11 years, she has been a volunteer board member for Illinois Senior Olympics, which draws more than 1,100 participants from around the country.

“I really enjoy interacting with the athletes,” she said. “Seeing the level of fitness in these seniors is inspiring.”

Thanks, Cris, for your efforts at SOM and in the community.

Other Voices in HIED

Chicago Tribune: [Why lower-income students are drawn to for-profit schools](#)

The Conversation: [Is it time for a new model to fund science research in higher education?](#)

The Baltimore Sun: [Colleges to promote statistics over algebra for liberal arts majors](#)

The New York Times: [Editorial: College Accreditors Need Higher Standards](#)

The Conversation: [Could subscriptions for academic journals go the way of pay phones?](#)

Washington Post: [U-Chicago leader: Beware the 'speech police committee'](#)
