



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

Given that SIUE completed its spring break two weeks ago — and SIUC did the same last week — you may not be surprised to learn that the Illinois General Assembly is on its own spring break, returning back to session during the week of April 4.

If there's any upside at all to that, it may be the fact that it will make the now-routine state budget update in this space a touch shorter than usual ... or not.

Admittedly, I was surprised to learn how many of you must have listened in on the March 10 higher education testimony before the Senate Appropriations II Committee (though not quite as many who video-streamed NCAA games last Thursday and Friday at work). Illinois Board of Higher Education Executive Director James Applegate led off, followed in turn by yours truly, and then the presidents of EIU and WIU. We all shared variations on a common theme from recent months; if nothing changes on the political front, and soon, Illinois' once-revered higher education system will be left in tatters. And the promising futures of far too many students will be delayed, if not completely undermined. As I stated for the record: SIU will still be here, but it will be a vastly different institution.

My general take-away coming out of that first round of hearings was that those of us giving testimony were rather like bit actors in a political theatric. Typically, these appropriations presentations — followed by the back-and-forth of legislators' questions — provide a forum to lay out future directions for a campus and highlight some of the accomplishments that demonstrate the wisdom of continuing the state's investment of public funds in its institutions of higher education.

Not so much this time.

Even more so this year than last, when we were reeling from that first budget Governor Rauner proposed, did it seem as if the presidents were almost superfluous to the political philosophy colloquium that was taking place.

When testifying in the particular chamber where Senate Approps met two weeks ago, you sit at a table facing the Committee, whose members are arrayed before you in a tiered horseshoe, Democrats on stage left and Republicans on the right. There were times when one could simply sit at the testimony table or in the audience and watch it like a tennis match.

But all that said, having a forum where each public university can tell its story and make its case in front of elected officials who must vote to get your budget "out of committee" is an important part of the process and I appreciated the opportunity nonetheless. At this juncture, however, there is no indication as to when the House may hold appropriations hearings, if at all.

Still, there was an important legislative development last week. The Senate passed SB2059, which would authorize FY16 funding for about \$3.8 billion in programs and services — including higher education operations and MAP money — not covered by the various court orders and consent decrees that already account for 90+ percent of ongoing state spending. The bill will have to go over to the House where passage is expected ... but it has been given no chance of approval by the governor.

Who knows if we'll see a budget — for FY17, maybe not until after the general election in November ... and for FY16, maybe not at all — but today, this is true: We. Have. To. Get. A. Spending. Bill. Who knows if our funding model will change in the future — but today, there remains a covenant relationship with the state to provide resources in support of its higher education institutions and need-eligible students. Who knows if postsecondary education is still viewed as a public good — but

today, we have Moody's Analytics (in their *State of Illinois Economic Forecast 2016*) explicitly naming Southern Illinois University as "provid(ing) long-term stability to the downstate economy."

A spending bill for us — whether via SB2059 or some other vehicle — is not a sham or a hoax. It is real authority for real dollars that allows SIU and other schools to finally get their place in line for our turn. Comptroller Leslie Munger has said to me personally she fully understands that when there's an enacted appropriation, she must stand ready to work with us all to get some money out the door.

For SIU ... that time has come.

I know many of you have to be getting your fill of these sometimes tedious pieces on the state situation. And when I write again, on April 6, I don't expect there'll be much new to report with the legislators just back from spring break. So to change things up a little — and give you all a breather from the gloom-and-doom — plan for a kind of potpourri or catch-all column next time 'round. Some policy stuff ... some commentary ... maybe even a little gossip, who knows!

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



Carolyn Pointer is an educator, researcher and attorney at the School of Medicine in Springfield. Her official title is assistant professor of medical humanities.

She's also an "upstreamist." But more on that in a moment.

A former high school history teacher turned lawyer, Carolyn joined the Medical Humanities Department in 2014. She teaches undergraduate and graduate medical students, and her research focuses on social determinants of health and how health-care providers can address those issues for their patients.

She also is part of the team that earlier this year launched a medical-legal partnership with the SIU Center for Family Medicine and the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation. The goal is to help the area's most vulnerable citizens navigate the legal system and improve health outcomes.

Carolyn is a graduate of the Boston University School of Education and Boston University School of Law.

"As much as I thought I could change the world by teaching, I recognized the same social determinants that limit health outcomes limited education outcomes," she said. "I wanted to be able to change those social determinants, so I went to law school, thinking I'd work in education policy. Then I spent a summer in the medical-legal partnership at Boston Medical Center, and realized it was the right combination of clinical work that informs policy advocacy that makes sense for creating better laws and policies that allow our most vulnerable families to succeed."

The new medical-legal partnership is designed to improve health outcomes for patients by making sure they have the legal tools and resources necessary to help them meet their health needs.

"While I won't be representing patients, I am very interested in serving as the upstreamist," Carolyn said. "In other words, when we start seeing a number of cases in a particular area, can we identify the systemic barriers that are harming our patients, and help find a solution that will help prevent patients from needing a lawyer's assistance in the first place."

One of the issues they have identified is the high rate of uncontrolled pediatric asthma leading to emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

"Working with community and SIU partners, we've been able to identify several possible interventions to help address this disparity, as it mostly impacts children in lower socio-economic neighborhoods," she said, adding that they are exploring what needs to change in homes, schools and neighborhoods to improve health outcomes for the children.

This partnership is a great example of the positive impact SIU has on the quality of life of our friends and neighbors.

