



## THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

My last column of the academic year comes in the midst of graduation ceremonies taking place across our campuses: the past weekend at SIUE, this weekend at SIUC, May 20 for the School of Medicine, and the finale on June 3 for the School of Dental Medicine. As I am wont to say during this time of the semester, commencement is our “high church” in the Academy, but it’s also an opportune time to once more thank faculty and staff across all of SIU for your hard work and dedication this year — along with your generous patience and perseverance given our ongoing budget crisis — to create the MANY successes that SIU continues to celebrate even through this most difficult period. A university is its people ... and we have among the best.

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Many of you will be following developments this afternoon as the SIU Board of Trustees meets in special session to make a determination on the interfund loan from SIUE unrestricted reserves to provide bridge funds for SIU Carbondale operations in anticipation of 1) future state appropriations from either a full budget agreement, or yet another stopgap payment; 2) local income dollars rolling in from tuition and fee payments for summer and fall; and 3) realized savings from the \$30 million in operating cuts under a comprehensive financial sustainability plan for SIUC to be acted upon by the Board in July.

In response to the many concerns raised by individuals and constituency groups on the Edwardsville campus, the recommendation in front of the Board this afternoon will set a borrowing cap as well as codify the pledge that the first obligation on the replenishment of funds from SIUC will be to SIUE once a state budget is in place. Without any action taken to provide working cash for Carbondale, our financial staff projects that the campus will go into deficit later this month.

Today’s meeting takes place in the Morris University Center at SIUE, starting at 4:30.

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So at this point, it probably makes sense to give you an update on state budget talks. As it happens, today or tomorrow could turn out to be highly significant on that front.

I’ve shared before — as you’ve seen for yourselves in other media of late — that the Illinois State Senate has been making a serious attempt to cobble together what is getting referred to as the “Grand Bargain 2.0” to advance a budget for FY17 and FY18 that could do a number of things: garner gubernatorial support, have some chance of making it through the Illinois House of Representatives, and, to quote political reporter and blogger Rich Miller, “(end) the long and seemingly insurmountable impasse that has sent the state into a frightening death spiral.”

Regular followers of the column will remember that the first version of a grand bargain was teed up in the Senate earlier this spring, and then agreement on that deal broke down around March 1 along partisan lines. Subsequently, the House in early April passed a “lifeline” or stopgap temporary spending plan that has been on ice in the Senate, pending that chamber coming back together on this second omnibus budget deal.

We’ve seen some of the numbers for higher education support that are being floated under GB2.0, and while it appears we would still take a good hit from our last “normal” year of FY15, we could make it work ... it would get SIU back to a semblance of regular operations ... and we’re to a point where all the public campuses need the stability and predictability that a state budget provides, and which is essential for us to unfreeze organizationally and move forward on some plans for the future. We all know Illinois has to get fixed fiscally and financially; HIED can handle its share of that fix to get all this past us. We just can’t come back and do it all over again a year from now...

While the situation continues to be fluid, it is possible that Senate votes could begin today.

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Interestingly, the College Board mailed a bunch of presidents — nationally, it appears — a copy of Tom Friedman’s latest book that some of you have probably seen him pitching on various media outlets the past few weeks, *Thank You for Being Late*. I’m not 100% sure why the CB was compelled to send all the prezzy the free book (many of whom have likely already purchased it), but my impression is that they wanted us to better understand what Friedman talks about as “the age of accelerations” and tie that to the Khan Academy’s partnership with the College Board, which by the way administers the SAT college entrance examination. To wit: The Khan Academy does free, highly targeted SAT prep online. (If you have the book and want to read about all this, the section — entitled “You Need Work on Fractions” — starts on page 227.)

From the book:

*Today ... Khan Academy can put up a set of calculus tutorials and see within hours which ones are the most effective in helping students come up with the right answers, iterate immediately, and start scaling the best tutorials globally within a few more hours. The ability to refine content and make it better at scale is staggering.*

Wow. Our admittedly insular world of traditional HIED is indeed changing, and the description of the SAT-Khan partnership is yet one more exhibit entered into evidence. Like the College Board, we — traditional public higher education — have no choice but to provide these and other tools while improving and enhancing our special role and place in what Friedman calls the “education-to-work-to-lifelong-learning social contract.” Think on that during the summer. But I’m also convinced that no matter the case and the course of progress, there still remains a vital need our students hunger for that can only truly be fulfilled by the caring and touch and mentoring and guidance (and the list could go on) provided by the human capital of a college or university. At SIU we know how to do that ... and through whatever crises we face, if we continue to commit to that goal and keep building upon it ... we’re not going to fail.

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Let me end this year by wishing a great summer to everyone. Enjoy and be safe. If you are on an academic term contract, have a wonderful three months and we’ll look forward to seeing you in August. For our year-round employees, find time to refresh and re-charge during some lazy days of summer.

We’ll plan to be back here with the first *Connection* of 2017-18 on Wednesday, August 23 — assuming we survive the Eclipse! If the need arises over the coming weeks to provide important updates on the budget or anything else of note, I’ll take to an all-users email to stay in touch.

Thank you for what you do for SIU!

Randy Dunn

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## Faces of SIU

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Dr. Meghna Desai’s commitment to treating cancer patients and to conducting research is both professional and very personal.

An associate professor of clinical internal medicine at the School of Medicine’s Simmons Cancer Institute, she was drawn to oncology after seeing family members suffer with various forms of cancer. She lost her father to the disease.

“My personal experience with cancer was when I took care of my father in 2009, who had stage 4 lung cancer and died from it,” she said. “That made me have even more empathy toward my patients. I believe that all of my patients are like my family, and that helps me do my best for them. They are all warriors.”

Meghna earned her medical degree from Mahatma Gandhi Mission’s Medical College in New Mumbai, India. She completed her residency in internal medicine, and a fellowship in hematology/oncology, at North Shore University Hospital in New York.

“I have had a tremendous love for science, and especially medicine, since I was very young because I knew I wanted to help people,” she said. “When I came to the U.S. for my residency and fellowship training, I was fascinated by the fields of hematology and oncology and by the new drugs and research in oncology. I knew that it was my calling to help cancer patients.”

Meghna joined the School of Medicine in 2010 after learning of an opening through a friend.

"I always loved to teach as well as be involved in cancer research, and at the same time be a busy clinician, and SIU has given me the opportunity to do all of those," she said.

Meghna is principal investigator in several lung cancer trials at the institute. She also is involved with research in recurrent breast cancer with Dr. Sophia Ran, professor of medical microbiology, immunology and cell biology. Previously, she was the PI in sarcoma and pancreatic cancer trials, and a sub-PI in trials involving leukemia and breast, genitourinary, head and neck cancers.

"Thanks to research, there is hope that we will beat cancer one day," she said. "It is very intriguing to ask a research question hypothetically and then apply all the methods and principles, and when you find an answer, it is very provocative and rewarding."

She shared an anecdote about a woman who had never smoked yet developed stage 4 lung cancer last year. The patient agreed to participate in a clinical trial with chemotherapy and immunotherapy available at the Simmons Cancer Institute at the time.

"She went into complete remission soon after, which is unheard of in stage 4 lung cancer, and it is absolutely because of the fact that she enrolled in the clinical trial," Meghna said.

That's just one example of why Meghna finds her work so rewarding.

"You become the whole heart and soul of the person suffering from cancer, as they are going through this very difficult journey of fighting cancer and chemotherapy," she said. "Being there for the patient and their family every step of the way is a very rewarding and humbling experience."

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## Other Voices in HIED

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Hechinger Report: [Is the college degree outdated?](#)

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