



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

As noted last time, this will serve as the final *Connection* column for the academic year. To finish us out for 2015-16, I've gone the smorgasbord route once again, covering a variety of topics.

Opening with a budget update: Well, even though the legislative leaders and the governor are talking some now, there's still not a lot to update you on. Many of you likely noted that the Illinois House yesterday passed a bill to provide all need-based MAP grant funds obligated by the colleges and universities through September 1. However, the proposal came out of the House with less than a veto-proof majority, and its fate is uncertain in the Senate chamber. Further, it remains an open question whether Governor Rauner would even support such a bill without it being part of a "grand bargain" on the budget, which would include at least some of his stated policy reforms.

I must admit that I'm less than optimistic at this juncture that we'll see a state budget for FY16 or 17 adopted by the scheduled end of the legislative session on May 31. But I would be glad to be proven wrong!

Nonetheless, for all that has yet to get accomplished, I fear the days left are growing too few. And it is accepted by virtually all parties, including the governor, that any final budget deal that can get cobbled together has to anticipate new revenue. Not to be a naysayer, but the political facts of life tell us that it will be very difficult to put the required number of votes -- from both sides of the aisle -- on any question to raise taxes this close to an election.

Some of the other Illinois publics have already indicated they will be forced to dip into *restricted* cash reserves to get through the summer and stay in business until fall tuition money begins to trickle in come August. Our straits across SIU are not yet that dire, fortunately, and if we are able to secure another bridge payment (whether from the aforementioned MAP bill or another stopgap payment of some sort), we project being able to stay afloat until sometime after November 8, when we then would hope a budget could move. That is not to say that some additional level of cost reductions might not have to take place until then -- especially on the Carbondale campus -- and those reviews continue to take place system-wide.

So we'll see where we end up as of June 1; plan for me to be back to you with email reports from that point forward as status developments warrant. Until then, we'll keep employing the same cash management strategies we've been utilizing all year to hold things together and sustain ongoing operations as close to normal as possible.

I would be remiss if I didn't comment a bit on this topic before taking our summer hiatus.

With the academic year now in the rear-view mirror, it's important that we all think about -- and act on -- the valuable lessons we learned that will help us to become our better selves in the year ahead. And based on the conversations and protests of early May at SIUC regarding diversity and inclusivity, we clearly still have work to do to ensure that all members of our campus communities feel not just accepted, but welcomed, and can take full advantage of all of the opportunities we offer.

Accessibility and diversity have been core values for SIU since the founding of Southern Illinois "Normal" in 1869. Today, each of our campuses is at a different stage when it comes to diversity planning and implementation. If you have followed recent events at Carbondale, you likely are aware

that Interim Chancellor Colwell has directed the campus to move forward now and craft its plan.

As we proceed from here, civility must remain central to all that we do. We can't lose sight of the foundation of our university – commitments to both the freedom of inquiry and to the freedom of expression. One of the great strengths of our campuses is that they are home to many cultures ... and all cultures and varied points of view deserve respect.

As SIU's diversity planning develops and improves, several key elements must be reflected, among them:

- Better support for students – All of our campuses have programs and services in place that focus on meeting the needs of our diverse populations. Even during these challenging budgetary times, we must ask what more we should be doing. And that means listening to what our students tell us about where we are falling short – difficult as it may be to have those conversations.
- Improving our practices and structures – In recent months, the SIU Board of Trustees has had extensive discussions with the chief diversity officers on our campuses about their approaches to diversity and inclusivity. At the System and on our campuses, those of us in leadership – including at the college and departmental levels – need to be actively engaged in those processes that will improve the climate for students, faculty and staff.
- Celebrating diversity – We do this throughout the year across the System in numerous ways. I have attended many such events, and find them incredibly rewarding. (The series of Black Lives Matter conferences at SIUE comes to mind in this regard.) But again, we must explore ways to expand what we do, so that more members of our campus communities participate and benefit. This is why our Trustees are presently looking at an additional set of initiatives and activities that they could sponsor for this purpose as well.

A Final WTH Segment

Two recent reports caught my eye because they underscore the fact that we seem to now be continually called upon to justify the value of higher education – here in the Prairie State and across the nation. One of the [studies](#), *Higher Education as a Public and Private Good*, comes from the National Science Board, which is the National Science Foundation's policymaking body.

From the report's introduction: "Our higher education ecosystem simultaneously serves public and private purposes – contributing to our collective economic prosperity, a well-functioning public sector, a globally competitive private sector, and the creation of a STEM-literate populace that can navigate a data- and technology-intensive world. It also plays a vital role in shaping a thriving, democratic society..."

The report, which includes data on such issues as public expenditures, R&D, enrollment and degrees, and the science and engineering workforce, also states: "Today, the pursuit of new knowledge and access to higher education matter as much as ever to individual and national prosperity. Yet data indicate that U.S. higher education institutions' ability to support research and provide access to a high quality education is at risk, in part because our Nation's commitment to public investment in higher education is wavering. Federal support for R&D conducted at colleges and universities has declined, and long term federal budget challenges loom."

We have seen those declines across our System, and they are all the more troubling when you consider the reputations of our campuses. The School of Medicine attracts millions of dollars annually for its ground-breaking research; the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching ranks SIUC among the top 5 percent of all U.S. higher education institutions for research; and *U.S. News & World Report* ranks SIUE among the best Regional Universities Midwest for the 12th consecutive year and among the top 10 public universities in that category.

When the NSF has to get involved in this discussion -- assuring us all that yes, HIED has value -- you know just how serious the threat is to our research enterprise, particularly for the public universities. Which leads me to the other study...

This one, which also shares a [national perspective](#), was from the American Academy of Arts & Sciences: *Recommitting to Lincoln's Vision: An Educational Compact for the 21st Century*. This is the fifth and final report in the Academy's *Lincoln Project: Excellence and Access in Public Higher Education*. It details what we know all too well in Illinois about states' disinvestment in HIED and the growing threat that poses to our region, the state and the nation.

The report concludes by stating, “State and federal government, business, and the philanthropic community all have roles in forging the new compact needed to sustain and strengthen public research universities.” Among specific recommendations:

- Public research universities should “form alliances with other colleges and universities to facilitate research partnerships, shared course offerings, collective purchasing contracts, common facility usage, and collaborations on innovative programs.” Universities also should pursue “multipartner capacity-building matching programs” involving state and federal agencies and philanthropic partners.
- State government should “find alternative strategies to balance the budget besides cutting university funding.” It also should provide “comprehensive financial aid to low-income in-state undergraduate students.”
- The federal government should “recognize that the intellectual infrastructure of the nation is as important to the future as the physical infrastructure.” It also should incentivize corporate and philanthropic contributions to public HIED through matching programs and tax breaks.
- The private sector should “cooperate with universities to develop licensing policies that accelerate the transfer of knowledge and research from campuses to the public.” The private sector also should “consider a new national endowment for public higher education, including public research universities.”

Higher education has for decades been viewed as a public good ... and not a private commodity. We will keep pressing that point home with our own legislators and elected officials here in Illinois. Public research universities are investments, not cost centers.

I'll be back in this same space for the new term on August 24. I'm thinking about maybe adding a new feature for 2016-17 ... just as we did with the "Faces" segment this past year. We'll see.

In the meantime, though, please accept my best for a safe ... enjoyable ... restful ... fun-filled ... or whatever-you-want summer. As I mentioned earlier, I'll weigh in as need be over these next three months when budget developments or other circumstances demand it. And of course, I'll look forward to welcoming everyone back in the fall.

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



Over the past academic year, regular readers of the *Connection* have had an opportunity to meet just a relative handful of dedicated and talented colleagues across our System. As I have said many times, ours is a human capital business, and it's important to shine a spotlight on the great work you are doing on our three campuses – which I will continue to do when the column returns in August.

My focus for this last installment of the year is on some of the people who truly are “faces of SIU” to prospective students and their families – our admissions folks.

Chester native Michelle Rust, a senior admissions coordinator at SIUC, is well versed in all things Saluki. She earned her bachelor's degree in 2008 and her master's in 2014; she had a graduate assistantship in Career Services, and as an undergrad was an office assistant for University Housing.

She started working for Undergraduate Admissions full-time in 2014, and was promoted to her current position in February.

Michelle puts in a lot of time on the road. She is the primary territory manager for Southern Illinois and southern Indiana, traveling extensively in the fall and spring semesters to promote SIU at more than 100 high schools, college fairs and other community events. She then systematically follows up with prospective students in person, through e-mail, by phone and mail.

She also develops working relationships with area school districts and school counselors to schedule visits and special events. Michelle presents SIU academic scholarships at several local high schools' scholarship and honors nights. She also plans and manages several annual events held on our

campus, including the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling- Southern Illinois Regional College Fair, State Universities Articulation Conference, and the Southern Illinois Prospective Student Reception. She coordinates campus-wide recruitment events as well, such as the College of Agricultural Sciences FFA Day. And she collaborates with colleagues in Undergraduate Admissions to train new admissions staff.

I would call that a full plate.

“I enjoy meeting prospective students and their families, and listening to their hopes and dreams while sharing my SIU experiences with them,” Michelle said. “Easing the anxiety of prospective students and parents and/or guardians while welcoming them to the Saluki family is always my goal.”

Michelle and her colleagues on all of our campuses are outstanding ambassadors for SIU, and I appreciate their passion and dedication.
