



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

As I mentioned in my column two weeks ago, I planned to use this space today (and occasionally over the coming weeks) to provide some additional background and context for what lies ahead for the SIU System financially. So let me say this upfront: Like most of the public universities in Illinois, we are probably going to have some long-term decisions to wrestle with this year. Short of a return to budget "normalcy" in our state -- if anyone can recall what that means any more -- we are heading into a period of difficult choices to ensure that ongoing university operating costs match up with the revenue stream it seems we are going to have available to us.

Maybe it is good to start by stating the obvious: Nothing much is going to clarify until we get past the Illinois legislative elections in November. There is a possibility that we could see some sort of overall budget fix take place during the traditional "lame duck" session in January, before the 100th Illinois General Assembly is sworn in. Unfortunately -- and I won't take time to try and explain here -- I could also give you a couple of very good reasons why that fix may well NOT happen.

Nonetheless, as Comptroller Leslie Munger and others have warned, Illinois hits the next fiscal cliff in January 2017. I wrote last time about the current bill backlog; Munger has predicted she'll grow that backlog to \$10 billion in unpaid invoices when we turn the page to Calendar Year 2017. Without an agreement on new state revenue as part of any "grand bargain" budget deal, no financial blueprint exists for this second half of Fiscal Year 17 ... or beyond.

Moody's Investors Service acknowledged that it could be more of the same. Just last week, the credit-rating agency offered this gloomy prediction: "Moody's expects Illinois will manage its deficit by continuing to delay payment on expenses. The state's long-running reliance on bill deferral has eroded its fiscal position while creating a growing payment backlog. This backlog is anticipated to reach at least \$14 billion this fiscal year, a new record."

As you know, all three of our campuses have cut their budgets by millions of dollars in response to the state's fiscal crisis. That has been accomplished through various means, including not filling hundreds of positions -- while still protecting our academic core, critical student affairs support, and the research and clinical enterprise to the fullest extent possible. I know those words are cold comfort to those individuals -- notably grant-funded employees and non-tenure track faculty -- who have lost their positions these last few months. But across our campuses and other locations throughout the footprint of SIU, we've still held things together and generally been able to avoid the dismantling of our mission-critical programs and services.

But our reality is that -- as we are presently structured -- numerous elements of the SIU system won't remain viable without more state money than what we have seen these last 18 months. We can't do for another two years what we've done these last 18 months. The money isn't there. So figure we'll be looking this fall at another round of scenario planning to be ready for what may come in a worst-case situation through this next spring. One of those worst cases would be no additional state support for higher education in FY17 beyond the \$106 million in "Stopgap #2" last June ... and believe me, that's something that is being seriously talked about among the state's political intelligentsia.

We're going to have to double down on reducing even further operational and administrative costs throughout the system -- even though the SIU campuses hold the lowest cost ratios within each sector for Illinois (regional/comprehensive, research, and university-wide).

Many readers are also aware that academic program reviews have been on the docket at both

SIUC and SIUE, a challenging task that has to take into account a range of factors, including the centrality of programs to our historical mission, program demand factors, enrollments, and degrees awarded. Those reviews should keep moving forward to provide the least disruptive options for our students if it looks as if we're going to drop off that fiscal cliff.

And later this fall, the Illinois Board of Higher Education will be weighing in on those numbers.

Under state law, the IBHE must produce a report for the General Assembly -- based on data supplied by each university -- that includes information on new programs created, existing programs that have been closed or consolidated, and programs with persistent low performance or productivity. The IBHE uses a set of metrics to define low-performing programs. (For associate degrees, a low-performing program has fewer than 25 majors and fewer than 12 degrees conferred annually; for bachelor's degrees, fewer than 40 majors and fewer than nine degrees awarded; master's, fewer than 10 majors and fewer than five degrees awarded; and doctoral, fewer than 10 majors and fewer than two degrees awarded.)

For those who were around here in the mid-1990s, some version of the IBHE's old "PQP" program could be coming back ... this time with a vengeance. Their report could affect funding for some programs. Or, the General Assembly can express serious concerns about certain programs, and order the IBHE to re-consider its degree authorization for low-performing programs.

We see numbers from the IBHE later this month. After that, we will have to decide what we do about those programs that don't meet the minimum thresholds -- merging them with other programs, flagging them for priority review, or suspending future enrollments -- watching for the approach the IBHE decides to take at that time. We have until November to report our plans to act.

As I write this, I've seen the 10-day enrollment numbers, and there is no question these issues are exacerbated by the enrollment declines at SIUC. The drop from a year ago equates to about \$6.5 million in revenue, which SIUC incorporated into its budget for this year. However, I know that Interim Undergraduate Admissions Director Terri Harfst has a strong student recruitment plan in place -- including a fully staffed office now -- and that everyone associated with the Carbondale campus is going to have to think of enrollment as Job 1. Of course, a stronger enrollment profile has buffered SIUE from the most severe budget reductions that could have been taken. Even so, faced with the prospect of no additional state funding after December, that positive enrollment history cannot forestall planning for future tough choices.

Obviously, there will be much more to come as the picture emerges.

I plan to discuss this and more during my State of the System address next month on all three campuses. Those of you who attended last year may recall that I talked about some of the national issues affecting HIED writ large, obviously the situation in Illinois, and the three big "eras" of SIU.

Building on last year's talk, I will be sharing some more specifics about how I think we need to address our current situation. This year, too, I plan to set aside a good amount of time for Q & A at the end.

Here's the schedule for the addresses. Exact locations and other details will be announced soon. The respective campus foundations will sponsor light refreshments after each presentation:

SIUC: Oct. 17, 4 p.m., followed by after-hours reception

SIUE: Oct. 18, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch

SOM: Oct. 18, 4 p.m., followed by after-hours reception

My apologies to everyone on the SIUE campus who did not receive the *System Connection* on time two weeks ago. Though we sent it as part of our standard Wednesday delivery, technical problems got in the way.

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



Like her colleagues throughout the SIU School of Medicine and the Simmons Cancer Institute, Andrea Braundmeier-Fleming is devoted to finding solutions to some of our most vexing health problems.

A Highland native, she joined the faculty in 2014 as an assistant professor in the medical microbiology, immunology and cell biology, and obstetrics and gynecology departments. She previously was a research assistant professor in reproductive immunology at the University of Illinois and a post-doctoral fellow in the obstetrics and gynecology department at the University of Illinois-Chicago. She earned her bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from the U of I.

"UIC provided a strong clinical team and UIUC provided a strong competitive research program," she said. "SIU attracted me because it supports a competitive research program in a basic sciences department and a strong collaboration with a clinical department that was enthusiastic about basic science. The School of Medicine provided the best of both worlds."

Andrea is continuing a family tradition at SIU. Her dad, Arthur Braundmeier, Jr., is an emeritus professor of physics at SIUE. He retired in 2010 after 39 years on the faculty, including serving as department chair for several years prior to his retirement. One of Andrea's brothers attended SIUE; the other attended SIUC.

"It was only fitting that I eventually found a home in the SIU system," she said.

Her research focuses on how our immune system, or problems with our immune system, impact reproductive function.

"Since immune measurements have great variability between people, we use microbial communities to gauge immune function and to determine if there are specific microbial communities associated with different diseases or medical syndromes," she explained. "Specific topics that we study are pre-term birth, endometriosis, prostate cancer, endometrial cancer and ovarian cancer."

Andrea also teaches in the pre-doctoral and post-doctoral medical curriculum, and several of those students are involved in her research program. In the graduate curriculum, she teaches advanced immunology and is in charge of the graduate seminar series.

"I love that my students get to see science occur from the 'bench to the bedside,'" she said. "I think this is a valuable experience for any researcher or clinician. It makes what we do very real-world and stimulates amazing creative thought, which is so important in mentoring."

Other Voices in HIED

Springfield State Journal-Register: [Illinois' fixed-tuition law drives up others' costs](#)

Money: [Why Attending a Private College Might Not Be Worth the High Cost](#)

New York Times: [How Cuts to Public Universities Have Driven Students Out of State](#)

Time: [College Degrees Are Due for Reform](#)

The Atlantic: [Poor and Uneducated: The South's Cycle of Failing Higher Education](#)

Bloomberg: [Op Ed: Another Reason to Cheer for Local U](#)