



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

I actually had great plans this week to get my regular *Connection* piece written before heading out the door of the Stone Center later today — in preparation to greet about 20 family members who will be converging on the Dunn household this evening for the holiday weekend.

In fact, I already had my column topic picked out: the none-too-soon demise of No Child Left Behind, the sweeping federal act that has guided elementary and secondary education policy for more than a decade ... and how that action may now “clear the decks” for needed changes with an overdue Higher Education Act reauthorization.

Nonetheless, events conspired these past couple of days to prevent me from giving that subject matter the full attention needed — so I have switched gears as of very early today to instead just offer a short Thanksgiving message to members of the SIU family.

And that’s probably the right thing to do anyway.

Thanksgiving — that quintessential American holiday — is enduringly referred to as an appropriate time to pause and reflect. Of course, many of us are simply grateful for a long weekend that provides a needed respite from those final, intense weeks of a semester — but we also gain by recalling our blessings and extending gratitude to those people who mold us, inspire us, and make us what we are.

Ha ... I suppose in this vein then I should even give thanks for those circumstances right now that challenge us daily as SIU strives to fulfill our potential as one of America’s respected university systems. Though we face significant challenges (that I’ve described just about every time I write in this space), I am reminded, also on a daily basis, that huge numbers of passionate, smart, and dedicated faculty and staff remain as committed as ever to the success of our students, the strength of our university, and the stewardship of the region and state we serve.

I daresay there is not one individual associated with SIU who has not been impacted in some way by the ongoing difficulties presented with being a public university in a state experiencing governmental freefall and fiscal crisis. As one presidential colleague has aptly stated, we are becoming permanently underfunded and overwhelmed. But through it all (and it’s important to use this *internal* newsletter to remind ourselves of this), we have had the steadfast and continuing *external* support of so many alumni, donors, friends, and community partners —particularly throughout southern and central Illinois, and the Metro East area. I’m really thankful for each of them, too. There’s plenty to remain optimistic about on all fronts of SIU.

On a personal note, I must again say that I am honored to lead our engaged and thriving University Community. I’ve also mentioned repeatedly over the last 20 months how grateful both Ronda and I are to be back at SIU. If you happen to be a Facebook friend, you also know this is an especially memorable Thanksgiving for us following the birth last week of our second grandchild — Lily Grace, in St. Louis — who joins Ella, from Tampa, who has been staying with us for part of this week. Thanks to all who shared their good wishes with us on Lil G’s arrival.

If you are traveling for this holiday weekend, or over the winter break, please return safely to us. And Happy Thanksgiving!

For those of you whose reading preference goes to a more substantive and less schmaltzy column, rest assured this will be my only holiday contribution — back to the regular stuff next time. In fact, I’ll do my best and try to finish the NCLB piece started for today ... We’ll return with the normal

Connection offerings, including our “Faces of SIU” segment, for the final time in 2015 on December 9.

Randy Dunn