



## THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

Many of us have been pre-occupied over these past few days with the state budget situation ... and for good reason. But for this issue of the *Connection*, I want to focus on another of our priorities across the SIU System, something that is central to our mission — and that's inclusivity.

Thanks to our faculty, staff, and students, we have great opportunities throughout the entirety of the academic year to celebrate the rich diversity not only of our campuses, but our communities and region. Recent events I've attended this past month or so have been inspiring, of course — most notably the annual university-wide Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration at SIUE, and an outstanding Black History Month forum focusing on the Ferguson crisis sponsored by the College of Business at Carbondale and featuring CNN commentator John Gaskin. I look forward to participating in Women's History Month activities in March as well as Asian Heritage Month in April. Fall events at our various locations typically celebrate LGBTQ history, Hispanic heritage, and our Native American heritage. I have to additionally mention, by the way, what an honor it was for me to walk with international students earlier this month during SIUC's International Festival Parade of Flags.

The many cultural events, the discussions, the films, and other activities broaden our horizons and enhance our understanding of and respect for all members of our campus communities — and the global society. Lots of our SIU folks invest significant time and effort in all of these celebrations, and I appreciate their commitment.

And certainly, there are continuous efforts on all of our campuses that you may not hear about as often, but that are dedicated to increasing diversity and the ongoing engagement that is very much at the heart of inclusivity. For example, there is the Minority Faculty Mentorship Program at the School of Medicine, which also partners with the Springfield School District to sponsor "P4" — the Physician Pipeline Preparatory Program. That's a great initiative that gives high school students an inside look at what life is like as a practicing physician. Many of you are even more familiar with our MEDPREP program, which helps prepare under-served students for success in the health professions. The Multicultural Center at SIUE (dedicated in November) and SIUC's Center for Inclusive Excellence are among various administrative units actively promoting inclusivity — and all these serve as outstanding resources for our students and beyond. Many other efforts across the system bring people together to learn from each other, whether it's the Black Men's Initiative or Sisters Interacting Successfully on the Carbondale campus, the Peer Consulting/Mentoring Program for SIUE faculty, an array of academic programs, or informal brown-bag lunch discussions.

But, as doctoral candidate Johnathan Flowers so elegantly stated in his guest column yesterday for the *SIUC Daily Egyptian*, diversity is not a numbers game. The challenge for us as a university — or for any

organization that says it values diversity and inclusion — is not to just create activities ... events ... hires ... resources ... or other “spaces” for inclusivity. Doing such may be only a necessary — but not a sufficient — condition. As Johnathan said,

... by creating these spaces, the university also places all of the responsibility for action on the individual: if individuals choose not to use the resources that the university has generously provided, then it is not the university that is at fault, but the individuals who have chosen not to use these spaces to engage in the activity of inclusivity.

Every college campus of any size and distinction around the country has those few people who *everyone* on campus knows, sees, talks to, and hears about. Father Joseph Brown is one of those folks on the Carbondale campus ... and has been for many years. He is also my friend — a rare one, because he pushes me to look at things differently and think in ways I haven’t been challenged to previously. And I agree with Father Brown as we are maybe pushed more to think about the constructs of “diversity” and “inclusion” around this time each year:

For us — not just at SIU, but any organization — it’s not simply about how welcoming we can be, or how many “spaces” we can provide, or what our numbers are on any diversity metric (though yes, all those are important), it’s instead about how our university becomes a *new place* because we are inclusive. Diversity is not something intended to be additive to our institutional identity — rather, it’s about how our identity changes and now becomes different. Father Brown uses the analogy of marriage: When the couple comes together or when a child is born — a new family is created to go in another direction to its own different place. If diversity doesn’t serve to create a new community for us ... nothing really changes except for the numbers.

And even though I know we are not always the shining example of how diversity must transform an organization, instead of being a place that just strings together a series of inclusive-seeming transactions (indeed, Johnathan closes his column admittedly less than optimistic about our ability to have the necessary “hard conversations” around this), it remains especially important for our region that SIU demonstrates this commitment beyond the borders of our campuses. In this way as well — although imperfect — the university still can serve as a beacon for the larger society. The journey never gets completed.

Randy Dunn