



## THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

I hope everyone has been able to enjoy some of this beautiful spring weather in central and southern Illinois as thoughts turn to finals and commencement for thousands of our students, faculty and staff. For all of us who work at a university, we are entering our “high church” season, capped off by a series of graduation ceremonies that begin at Edwardsville this upcoming weekend and extend well into June with a number of military base commencement exercises around the country conducted by the Carbondale campus. Congratulations to the approximately 5,416 individuals slated to receive an SIU degree — wherever they may be over the next month or so — and my best to the rest of us for hanging in there to tie up a varied bunch of jobs and projects as we come to the end of the academic term and (soon) the fiscal year.

And for anyone who thinks I may have some procrastination tendencies ... you should be aware that when I was a professor at SIUC, I always had my grades submitted with at least an hour to spare! (Of course, that was in the day when faculty were required to walk grade sheets over to Woody Hall, so if I ran into somebody to talk to while crossing campus, that may have cut me a little closer to the deadline.)

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The University Community may be interested to know that I spent about three days in Washington, D.C., last week, accompanied by the administrators leading our research operations at SIUC and SIUE — respectively, Interim Vice Chancellor for Research Jim Garvey and Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School Jerry Weinberg. In addition to a very useful morning spent at the offices of the National Science Foundation in Arlington, Va., looking for ways to be even more aggressive in going after funding, we were able to visit the offices of numerous members of the Illinois congressional delegation, including Sen. Durbin in his leadership offices in the Capitol building.

While it was indeed valuable to be able to speak with our elected officials who are critical to advancing SIU at the federal level, maybe even more important — with all due respect to said legislators — was the opportunity to meet with nearly a score of legislative staff and aides who work for our delegation’s members. Of course, nearly all of them are 30-something-year-olds at best (I am aged enough to be the father of just about every staffer we met!), but as anyone who has spent some time in D.C. knows ... these are the people who run the government.

It has been some time since SIU had some visibility or presence in our nation’s capital, and we have to build back those relationships — and pretty quickly. Besides the University of Illinois of course, a couple of our sister state institutions have at least a part-time lobbyist based in Washington. We’re not in a

position to do that, but if we don't get those relationships re-established and maintained, all of our campuses and programs are going to have a tougher time getting "in the game" for funding from the federal arena. That's the reality of the situation. Fortunately, I am pleased to report that to a person, we received pledges of assistance and support in ways that will be helpful to SIU as we continue making a run at research and other grant dollars from numerous federal agencies.

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Speaking of things in Washington ... Among the issues I am trying to monitor on Capitol Hill is reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The HEA is the massive, sweeping law that governs federal financial aid programs and other federal issues related to higher education (e.g., tribal colleges, accreditation, etc.) and since it was first implemented in 1965, the Act has been rewritten eight times. Uh ... this is no small undertaking; the final version of the bill is expected to end up at around 900 pages.

The HEA now in place was supposed to expire at the end of 2013, but it has been extended through this year as Congress works on reauthorization, which looks very possible at this point. It is currently in the hands of the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (yes, the acronym is HELP), chaired by Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, a former U.S. Secretary of Education. As alluded to above, the final legislation likely will incorporate a wide variety of issues that many of us in HIED have been working to address: student loan programs; affordability and college costs; access, persistence and completion; the burden of federal regulations and oversight; and better information for consumers.

So far, I have to give Sen. Alexander credit for his efforts to have a conversation with the higher education community. Earlier this spring, the Senate HELP Committee released white papers written by committee staff on three of these issues and asked for feedback. One of them focuses on improving the institution-wide accreditation system. Most of you know that SIUC and SIUE are fully institutionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission; the HLC is an independent body that is one of six regional accreditors in the country, and it covers 19 states. Accreditation is basically the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" in higher education; a team of our peers has said we are delivering on our promise of excellence in teaching, research and public service. (Academic programs can also be accredited by their respective disciplinary bodies, e.g., education, medicine, art, engineering, etc.) But without institutional accreditation, our students would not be eligible for federal financial aid.

Many of you have followed stories over the past couple of years particularly about the glaring weaknesses of some of the regional accreditors (though the HLC is viewed as a strong agency), particularly in regard to addressing the problems of fly-by-night for-profit institutions and other poorly performing schools. In numerous cases, the regional accreditors have not proved up to the task of the HIED marketplace.

The Senate committee's white paper is a pretty good guide as to the potential areas of debate in the coming months over accreditation. It outlines four areas for review: accreditation has not always produced or improved educational quality; it can inhibit innovation and competition; federal recognition of accreditation can be political and bureaucratic; and accreditation can be costly, burdensome and inefficient. I, for one, welcome the debate and airing of this issue.

Most do think some reforms to the system of accreditation in our country are likely. As the white paper points out, Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and others all have indicated over the past

decade that they are dissatisfied with accreditation and the present “stamp of approval” of educational quality. It suggests several alternatives, including restructuring the accreditation associations, an idea that I think has merit. One proposal is to eliminate the *geographic-based* nature of regional accrediting agencies, meaning they no longer would have a guaranteed customer base and a college’s physical location would no longer determine its accreditor. Colleges and universities would instead have choices in a “free market,” and could organize accreditation around preferred characteristics such as institutional size, level of degree-granting, mission, or selectivity.

It will be interesting to watch developments in this arena over the coming months. Watch outlets like the *Chronicle* and *InsideHigherEd* for details as they develop.

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Finally: I get asked to speak at a lot of places, but this may be the first time I’ve been asked to give a talk at a medical conference. Who knew? Actually, my topic is going to be on values-based leadership, so I won’t be training anyone on a new surgical technique or something like that ... so you all can rest easy.

The School of Medicine’s Division of Orthopaedic Surgery, in conjunction with the Department of Surgery, is offering a host of tools in a one-day conference that can be adapted to serve individual communities and organizations. The conference is geared toward health care professionals and providers who want to be proactive in an environment that is rapidly evolving. The conference will take place on May 28th at Springfield Memorial Hospital’s brand new Center for Innovation and Learning.

This is one of many conferences hosted by the SIU School of Medicine each year, and Dr. Khaled Saleh, Division Chief in Orthopaedic Surgery, is working hard to get the word out about this conference, which is focusing on a new world of health care delivery.

With the many changes in health care, especially with passage of the Affordable Care Act, delivery models are evolving in new directions toward Accountable Care Organizations (groups of providers who join together to coordinate their care to Medicare patients), bundled payments, and population health management. Undergirding these changes is the push for health care providers to understand and address the whole person. Clear, timely, and technologically enabled strategies, focused on the entire range of patient care and needs, are important for success. There is no argument that today’s health care system has challenges and changes ahead. But what’s also very exciting is that SIU’s School of Medicine — as one of the country’s outstanding, community-based medical colleges — has always had at the forefront of its mission this comprehensive approach involving patient care ... education ... research ... community health ... service.

I’m honored to join our SOM colleagues for a day of learning to better serve central and southern Illinoisans who depend upon us. It’s something that SIU does in a multitude of ways every day — thanks to all of you!

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The last *Connection* column before I take a summer hiatus will be on Wednesday, May 20. Of course, I’ll provide updates on the state budget and other matters as status changes warrant through the summer.

Randy Dunn