

Questions from Faculty Town Hall 1, 2024

Date: September 11, 2024

Attendance: approximately 350 in person/virtual

Given the challenges outlined by the President has there been any consideration to offering early retirement packages?

- All items are on the table for discussion. If anyone has particular interest, please contact your dean who will share this with the Provost.

Can we be assured that the same raise pool applies to all SLU employees including administration positions?

- The same raise pool applies to faculty, staff, administrators. Faculty Senate President has seen the documentation.

Were all departments, specifically athletics, required to make budget cuts as part of the 4% reduction my department had to comply with?

- Yes. On behalf of the faculty, Chris Rollins was able to see all the department's suggestions on budget reductions.

Will the presidential transition affect the expense reductions you are preparing to make? With a new president (and potentially following that, a new administration), will we have to repeat this process?

- The Board of Trustees are setting the expectations that we balance the budget. These same trustees are hiring the new president. We can anticipate that the new president will receive consistent expectations from the board.
- Though not stated during the meeting, this additional context may be helpful: We will need to balance the budget in FY25 and submit a balanced FY26 budget for board approval, before the new president arrives on July 1. This will require us to make appropriate reductions to expenses in a timely way.

Administrative bloat is an enduring feature of higher education in the 21st century. Does the hiring freeze we are under apply to administration positions as well.

- Yes

How will we be able to support R1 with less faculty, staff, and resources?

- R1 status will be maintained by continuing to support those faculty whose research and scholarship has helped SLU achieve this status.

While I appreciate the efforts to address our financial challenges by our leadership, I'm concerned about the reliance on year-by-year projections of international student enrollment to make significant budgetary decisions. Given the unpredictability of international visa processes and other external factors, how can we justify making operational cuts based on such volatile figures, especially when we have record undergraduate and graduate admissions, along with increasing research grants?

- Our revenues have continued to grow, and we are taking steps to continue this trend. The reality is that our expenses are outpacing our revenue. One-, two- and three-year budgets will be built with the best information we have at the time. We are taking steps to reduce our expenses over this same period.
- It was also noted that if the university had budgeted accurately for the number of international graduate students who arrived, we would have had to make the same expense reductions – only sooner. The expenses were already present in our operations.

It would be helpful to understand if there were any past investments or financial decisions that contributed to the current budgetary shortfall, so we can avoid similar issues moving forward. How do we reconcile these challenges with the overall successes we've experienced in admissions and research growth?

- Challenges identified within the annual financial audit have required changes in how SLU manages grant funding and compliance. A substantial amount of work has been done over the past 18 months overseen by the President's Research Committee to assure overall compliance as we move our research growth forward under the guidance of OVPR.

Though not stated in the meeting, these additional points are relevant:

- Like any organization navigating large scale changes, the University continues to analyze past events and implement improvements from year to year.
- Budget updates from the president have stated that the fall 2023 first-year class came in below our budgeted projections, both in terms of number of students and net tuition revenue. Processes were updated and these mistakes were corrected in fall 2024, resulting in a first-year class that met (or even slightly exceed) our projections in terms of both numbers and net tuition revenue.
- The shortfall in fall 2024 international graduate student enrollment stemmed from very different causes, related to the issuance of visas by certain US consulates abroad. Administrators and staff are currently engaged in inquiry and action planning to make adjustments for next year.

Can DuBourg provide the number of staff and other budgetary information for how they staff their and other VP offices at SLU? Specifically, can they show us how the budgeting for these offices has expanded or contracted during the past five years?

- Comparisons of overhead expenses at SLU and other universities have been done in the past and can be revisited. Please note the first working group is looking at four specific administrative job categories to determine if efficiencies can be achieved.
- Leadership is committed to looking at staffing at every level.

Given that the new workload guidelines no longer provide all faculty with balanced (e.g. 40:40:20) workloads for teaching, research, and service, will colleges be asked to revise promotion

guidelines? In other words, if a faculty member is expected to spend 70% of his/her time teaching, shouldn't the promotion guidelines for that person reflect a reduced requirement for prominence in research and service?

- Absolutely. Changes made to the Promotion and Tenure and/or Promotion guidelines should be updated. The changes that need to happen start within the school/college. Changes that reflect consistency with the reality of workload expectations are encouraged by the provost and he has demonstrated a willingness to approve them as evidenced by the adjustment made in the School of Social Work.

How can we, as an institution, claim to prioritize research and innovation while exploring models that penalize those who successfully secure external funding by imposing tuition or flat fee requirements on grant-funded PhD students? This approach, instead of fostering ambitious research, risks depleting the very resources intended to advance cutting-edge work and elevate our institution's reputation. What steps can we take to oppose this structure and ensure our policies genuinely support research goals and acknowledge the critical role of external grants in driving the university's mission forward?

- Responsible grant writing includes funding for the support of PhD students. This is not unique to SLU. This is standard procedure for research institutions.

SLU's admissions acceptance rate increased notably this year. Are efforts to grow enrollment leading to less selectivity in admissions? Faculty in some courses are observing that students seem to be arriving with less academic preparation.

- Our admissions criteria have not changed. Faculty may be observing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the high school experience of many students who are now in college.
- Following the meeting, we can also add: University acceptance rates published online are based on IPEDS data. A few years ago, IPEDS changed the definition of what could be included in the acceptance rate calculation, limiting the total number of applications to the number of "completed" applications. This made the denominator of the calculation smaller and increased the acceptance rate percentage – but this is an artifact of data and definitions, and not a result of a change to SLU's practices.

How will the expense reductions affect future repairs and renovations to university buildings?

- We will need to make careful decisions about improvements that we make.
- In the longer term, as we think about the structure of the organization, we will also need to look at related items like the number of buildings we maintain. Each constitutes a significant expense.