

## Notes from May 15-16 BOT meetings

Dave Johnson

### More important points

- Things can change, but the board seems committed to transparency, and no more than that. I.e., they will expect that Dunn and Dorsey explain (i.e., have Komarraju explain) why they make their decisions about restructuring, but they probably aren't going to overrule anything. When Dorsey was asked whether he was still committed to the process (approved by the BOT in December 2018) whereby he would have the final say on restructuring plans, he said yes. There was a good deal of "change is hard" and "it's time for tough decisions" rhetoric.
- Our efforts to push for efforts at building consensus and rebuilding morale did not seem to find any purchase, despite the repeated stress on all hands being on deck to help with recruitment and retention.
- One reason for this is the emphasis on comity, collegiality, and system-first thinking on the board. These are good things in and of themselves; the previous board mouthed those pieties on occasion, but was obviously split. One carryover, however, was effusive praise for various administrators: Dorsey, Komarraju, etc. Save for one pointed question from Subhash Sharma (who asked why SIUC hasn't done a scientific study of why enrollment is down), this appeared to be a board unified with each other and happy with their administrative staff.
- "The resistance" has gone silent. Dan Silver and I were the only ones to raise any questions about restructuring. Eight speakers spoke up in support of it, and only two of them were Kathie Chwalisz. The presentation by Mike Eichholz was the best I've heard in defense of restructuring, an effort, within three minutes, to tell of the rise and fall of disciplines and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.
- The outlook for areas not yet reconstructed isn't necessarily bleak. The administration would clearly prefer some sort of arrangement people could live with, and when asked about the future of humanities and other areas opposed to the restructuring, Dunn endeavored to be relatively reassuring. Komarraju said they are both working with faculty and waiting for what faculty come up with (somewhat different takes, of course).
- But the outcome will be bleak unless people are willing both to work creatively and flexibly to devise ways to increase enrollment, and to speak up in defense of the continuing value of academic disciplines. Of course some people can do more of one of these things and others more of the other. But if faculty in liberal arts don't get engaged, they are going to have to live with whatever the administration can come up with on its own. The administration will keep saying they are talking to liberal arts and

happy to work with them—until they decide to impose their own plan, as they've done on education, agriculture, and economics. And given their past record, they won't come up with anything that will do the liberal arts any good.

### Other stuff

- It's all about Komarraju. She took the lead both on restructuring and enrollment, with Dunn playing second fiddle. She was praised effusively by (new acting system VP for academics) Jim Allen upon her introduction, and then praised by trustee Curtis who said her "passionate" plan for enrollment showed that she was the right person for the job. If this doesn't look like someone running for permanent chancellor, I don't know what does.
- Komarraju's presentation on enrollment emphasized hard work, patience, and realistic goals, but was light on specifics. She noted that our yield from applications has declined since 2010-2011 from c. 30% to c. 22-25%; she said it was improving, but did not provide a figure. She noted an improvement in retention (freshmen to sophomores) from 66.73% (the ten-year average) to 72.1% (F 2017); but this figure, if significant, may well be attributable to the Saluki Success program she is disbanding.<sup>1</sup>
- Komarraju also emphasized the importance of setting realistic goals. I think that is wise; as she noted, when unrealistic goals aren't realized, that results in a hit to morale and motivation. So her goal was getting to 15,000 students within 3-5 years. But is that goal realistic?
- We are currently headed for an enrollment of about 9,000, given that our incoming freshmen class will be 1,000-1,100. I judge this by looking at past years of relative stability where our incoming freshmen made up 12%-13% of our overall student body. So that's a decent projection for where we will be next year. Getting to 15,000 would therefore require an **increase of 67%** in our overall enrollment within the next five years. It would, in other words, require us to increase our enrollment much more quickly than we've lost it. I will eat my hat—happily—if we get anywhere near that figure in five years. But it looks to me like even the best effort we can make at realism is a pipe dream.
- Dunn added an argument for restructuring. Chairs come from faculty ranks whether they haven't had to deal with budgets, need to figure budgets out, and then go back to the faculty ranks. So it would be more efficient to have fewer individuals who would presumably stay in office longer as directors of schools. This is less convincing than it sounds. As a chair, I certainly needed to figure out budgeting—and I made some

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<sup>1</sup> I'm not a statistician, but it seems entirely possible that the figure is noise (how many years in the ten year average were also at or above 72%?). The random change from two to one decimal point in her figures does not inspire confidence.

mistakes. But I controlled very little money, and in the last few years chairs have lost even more of their autonomy over expenditures. In other words, budgeting has already been centralized at the college level, at least in my neck of the woods.

- One argument for schools was that they make programs more visible to students. This seems a half-truth at most. Komarraju noted that they were pushing more program-specific marketing, and used Forestry as an example. But we won't have a forestry school. Forestry is more visible, not less visible, as a department. In some areas, true enough, students may find schools more intelligible. This might be the case with Health Sciences—students might have a generalized interest in health care, rather than a more specific interest in radiology. But does anyone want to grow up to study Human Sciences, for example?
- Another argument was that schools would give students “more opportunities to enroll.” I guess that means more programs—as if schools are the only way to generate new programs.
- Allen and others said that the IBHE staff were impressed by our restructuring plan, and considered it a possible model for other universities. That's why they were happy to approve schools rejected by faculty in 48 hours. When asked in the presser why the IBHE liked our plan, Dorsey could only speculate that it had something to do with efficiency. (See my presentation for an effort to explode that argument.)
- In public comments, speakers from the School of Allied Health noted that their students benefitted from taking courses in their various fields (health care management students, for example, benefit from being in the same unit as people in dental hygiene, etc.). I don't doubt this—but it doesn't demonstrate that one size fits all.
- Sholar asked whether we have lost students locally, and Komarraju agreed. I think this is a red herring. I glanced back at a Factbook from 2007 and compared Fall 2017 (latest figures readily available online at [irs.siu.edu](http://irs.siu.edu)). Here are counts of incoming freshmen.

County	Fall 2007 incoming freshmen	F 2017
Cook	753	336
DuPage	150	46
Lake	125	53
Jackson	59	60
Williamson	47	44

So we are getting killed both in Chicago and in the collar counties but actually haven't lost anything, at least in new freshmen, in Jackson and Williamson. Unless I'm missing something, the efforts at local recruitment (while laudable in themselves) aren't

targeting the real problem. We've been bringing lots of local students to campus for decades; we never stopped doing it; it's a good thing; but it won't turn around the enrollment decline.

- Komarraju said the four college proposals will be put forward this fall. The latest round of schools (the five just approved) would go live January 1. I hadn't heard her commit to the school launch date previously, though she had mooted it as a possibility. It seems absurd to me to launch something like this in mid-year, but go figure.
- Dorsey noted that the governor's original projection of a 5% increase in state funding for higher education appears unlikely to be met. He thinks it's possible that state funding could even decline slightly, given legislative concerns about how to pay for any increase. He also noted that legislators do not want to continue to disinvest in higher education. They just aren't willing to spend any money on it, apparently.
- I was struck again by the fact that SIUE was perfectly willing to put out figures about fall enrollment while SIUC was too afraid to do so. Early indicators for SIUE look good. Early indicators for SIUC are—we're trying really hard!
- Gilbert says he is pushing to try to get a new system president in place by January 1, 2020.
- SIU Arena is going to be renamed something like the Banterra Bank Arena (the exact name will be announced later today) thanks to a \$10 million gift to Saluki Athletics. Trustee Tedrick recused himself from this vote, so was presumably instrumental in arranging this. Assuming, to simplify, that it is just a chunk of cash that can be invested and drawn upon over time, this would net SIUC roughly \$500,000 per year, which is 20% of our annual deficit spending in athletics of \$5 million.
- Speaking of money, the Forever SIU fundraising campaign appears to be going well, and has already essentially met its goal of \$75 million. For context, an endowment of \$75 million (assuming, to simplify, that it is just a chunk of cash that can be invested and drawn upon over time) would net SIUC something like \$3.75 million per year in earnings. That's not chicken feed; it makes up roughly 2% of our state budget. If we directed all that money, together with interest on the \$10 million for Banterra Arena, we'd be able to pay off most of our annual deficit in athletics.