

Chancellor James T. Minor Praises SIUE Strengths and Affordability in His First State of the University Address

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EDWARDSVILLE - To a diverse crowd in the Meridian Ballroom of the Morris University Center, Chancellor James T. Minor, PhD, spoke to the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville campus community in his first State of the University Address at 2 p.m. on Thursday, November 2.

The address opened with Barbara McCracken, PhD, president of the faculty senate, welcoming the full audience in attendance. McCracken introduced Geovonday Jones, assistant professor of theater, who passionately recited “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” an Emily Dickinson poem, and “Hope for Our New Beginning.” After a moving performance of prose and applause, the President of SIUE’s student government, Mackenzie Richards, took to the podium. Richards confidently introduced Chancellor Minor to an engaged audience.

Minor opened his address with gratitude and a pause of recognition for “one of the great caretakers” of SIUE, former Chancellor Vaughn Vandegrift, PhD. Vandegrift notably transitioned the University to Division I athletics. He died in July.

“Every time I see our student athletes competing successfully in Division I competition, I understand this is a continuation of Chancellor Vandegrift’s legacy here,” Minor said. Later in the address, Minor disclosed how proud he is of the student athletes, noting their success both in competition and in the classroom.

“SIUE is Illinois’ top public institution for graduating student-athletes.” Minor beams. “In addition to that number one ranking, SIUE is number five among all public institutions in the nation.”

The structure of the State of the University Address followed the five pillars designated in the University’s strategic plan. Minor introduced his talk with the University’s mission statement, underscoring the development of professionals, scholars and leaders who shape a changing world. The Chancellor also addressed enrollment, Project 283, budget and University accomplishments.

One of Minor’s key moments was his announcement that the University will increase its commitment to college affordability. “Starting fall 2024, the income threshold to qualify for the SIUE Commitment, that covers tuition and fees for families with an annual income of less than \$63,575 will increase to \$113,575, making college affordable for a greater number of low and middle-income families,” Minor stated, receiving considerable applause.

Minor credited the success of CODES, or the Community Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars, with a retention rate of 84%. This program is in its second year and emphasizes transdisciplinary research and problem-solving methods for student cohorts.

Regarding Project 283, an initiative with a goal to obtain 90% first-to-second year retention, Minor explained that it is a feasible and attainable benchmark when viewed through the lens of individual academic units and early major declaration. “Pursing this goal is consistent with our ambition to be first, and best, in class,” Minor said. “Achieving this goal would certainly establish SIUE as a national leader and would place us second in the state for first-second year retention.”

Lauding the community impact of SIUE in Alton and East St. Louis, Minor praised the work the School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) and School of Nursing provides. SIU SDM recently hosted a day of free dental care for children with the annual “Give Kids a Smile Day.” The clinic will hold a similar event for veterans, most of whom do not receive dental coverage as part of their benefits package. Minor reiterated pride for members of the School of Nursing faculty who secured a \$4 million grant to develop a mobile health unit that will provide services in East St. Louis, Fairmont City and surrounding communities.

Minor continued, acknowledging the Illinois Small Business Development Center and International Trade Center for receiving the presidential “E” award for export service. The award is the highest recognition a person or U.S. entity can receive for making a significant contribution to the expansion of U.S. exports.

“This national recognition demonstrates our ability to make outsized contributions to the economic development of our region,” said Minor. “We support the development of the business community in ways that merit national recognition. The award is a powerful and definitive statement about impact.”

Remarking on the groundbreaking of the new Health Sciences Complex, a facility that will eventually house the School of Pharmacy and School of Nursing, Chancellor Minor shifted his speech to the future.

“For the eighth consecutive year, our School of Pharmacy graduates rank number one in the state of Illinois and Missouri for board pass rates,” Minor adds. “This building positions SIUE to meet the demand of healthcare systems and produce exceptional health care leaders for the future.”

Drawing on the SIU system commitment toward anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, Minor excitedly discussed equity and regional impact.

“SIUE is serving as a research partner to law enforcement agencies through the region with our new Center for Crime Science Violence Prevention. As part of our holistic

approach, we have also developed the SIUE Institute for Community Justice and Racial Equity to address transformational change in support of historically marginalized populations.”

Recognizing the generosity of John Martinson’s gift to the University, a \$4 million donation, Minor touches on the renaming of the honors program and the spirit of philanthropy.

“This sizeable gift is projected to double enrollment in the program over the next five years and significantly expand co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities for honors students,” Minor said. “The 1975 Master of Business Administration alumnus John Martinson’s transformative gift will expand and enhance the honors experience at SIUE for students for years to come.”

Minor concluded the 2023 State of the University Address by stepping aside of the podium to face the campus audience directly. He recalled a moment when he was still new to the Chancellor’s seat, attending a conference in St. Louis with corporate executives in the area. When it became time to introduce himself, Minor said he was the Chancellor at SIUE.

“And did you know” he paused, “we’re the number one producer of bachelor’s degrees in the greater St. Louis Metro Area. We are powering the workforce of the future. You don’t have a workforce without us.”