June 27, 2014

Dear SLU Community:

As my service as your interim president draws to a close, I want to take a few moments to thank you for your ongoing commitment to moving our University forward during this past academic year.

When I accepted this position last August, I did so with a belief that SLU is a very strong university and with confidence in the University’s administrative team. I promised you that I would listen, collaborate and work hard on your behalf. It is not for me to say how successful I have been at this, but I do hope you feel I have done my very best to fulfill that pledge to you.

I do know that working together, our University community has made great progress, and it is important that we celebrate our many successes, achievements and accomplishments. With this in mind, permit me to share just a few highlights from the 2013-2014 academic year:

- We began the year by initiating a search for our next president. In doing so, faculty, staff and students came together in many open fora and meetings conducted by our search consultant and chair of the search committee to talk about who we are as a University and the qualities we would seek in our next president. This effort allowed us to focus on our future rather than dwell on the past. It produced a very strong search profile that was adopted by the Board of Trustees in October and led to the successful recruitment of Dr. Fred Pestello as our next president.
- The administration and Faculty Senate representatives reached agreement on key shared governance elements that are guiding the ongoing efforts to revise The Faculty Manual.
- The University enrolled the most academically gifted freshman class in SLU history with the promise that the incoming class may reach even greater heights.
- The National Institutes of Health selected SLU among an elite group of vaccine research centers to bid on up to $1 billion in research funding.
- NASA launched a satellite designed and built by Parks College students into space.
- The University instituted new sustainability efforts across the St. Louis campus, including Chaifetz Arena, and recycled more than 235,000 pounds of waste during the annual RecycleMania competition.
- Three students, three faculty members and one alumna received prestigious Fulbright awards.
- SLU was one of a handful of institutions that received special recognition during the President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge National Gathering in Washington, D.C.
Our men’s basketball team reached the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive year and posted its highest national ranking (No. 8) in 50 years. And our 300-plus student athletes achieved an average 3.3 GPA for the year.

SLU’s endowment topped the $1 billion mark for the first time, strengthening our ability to provide an unparalleled educational experience for our students.

Deans were appointed for the Doisy College of Health Sciences and the School for Professional Studies, and searches were initiated using professional search consultants for the deanships for the John Cook School of Business and the College of Arts and Sciences.

On the philanthropic front, the “Go Further” matching gift initiative has raised more than $3.7 million for student scholarships.

To enhance communications at the University, we created the online communication feedback tool, which has received a number of comments and questions since its debut in late January. We also conducted a climate assessment survey of faculty and staff on both campuses in April. My thanks to everyone who participated in the annual survey, the results of which will be shared with you this fall.

This year, we also launched the Voluntary Enhanced Retirement Program (VERP). Thanks to the efforts of the faculty, staff and administrators who developed the program, we believe the VERP will be successful in securing the University substantial financial savings at a time when we need to reduce our rising expenses and align our resources to best serve the needs of our students and patients going forward. I also would like to recognize the dedicated team in Human Resources, whose members have worked tirelessly to assist eligible employees throughout their decision-making process. To address VERP-related vacancies in a fair and consistent manner, the deans and vice presidents have been provided guidelines for developing impact analysis reports that will be instrumental in helping the University make wise decisions in determining which of the vacated positions will be filled.

Toward the end of the spring semester, we were shocked and saddened by several bias incidents. These incidents do not reflect that for which we as a University stand, and I was heartened by the strong response of our students, faculty and staff who universally denounced these acts of hate and called for a greater commitment to diversity, respect and inclusiveness. Making SLU a welcoming place for all persons must be a priority of this University, and we must redouble our efforts to make this goal a reality.

During this year I was assisted on a day-to-day basis by the Office of the Chair, which was established by the Board of Trustees when I was appointed. My thanks to this dedicated executive team composed of Dr. Ellen Harshman, Dr. Philip Alderson, Mr. David Heimburger, Ms. Bridget Fletcher and Dr. Kent Porterfield and the oversight of Board Chair Joe Adorjan. I also wish to acknowledge the great work of the balance of the executive leadership: Ms. Kathleen Brady, Mr. Jeff Fowler, Mr. Jay Goff, Ms. Patty Haberberger, Mr. David Hakanson, Fr. Paul Stark, S.J., Dr. Raymond Tait, and Dr. Paul Vita, who supported me by effectively managing their units during the past nine months.

I also would like to thank all of the staff of the Office of the General Counsel for continuing to do that which needed to be done in my absence, with a special thanks to Senior Associate General Danielle Uy and Senior Associate General Anne Garcia, who effectively oversaw the direction of SLU’s legal affairs, which allowed me to devote my full energies to my role as interim president.
I am also grateful for my many new friends in the University Advancement Division who guided me with great enthusiasm and patience in our numerous community outreach efforts as we told the exciting news of SLU in many of our nation’s largest cities. These events demonstrated to me the great interest of our alumni in SLU and its promising future.

Thanks also to the Board of Trustees, the members of which have been uniformly supportive of me during the year. It also is notable that the Board has embarked on a significant examination of its governance structure with a focus on incorporating recognized best practices in its oversight of the University.

Before I close, I want to extend my biggest thanks to the faculty, staff and students of this University. You have shown me every imaginable courtesy. You have welcomed me at meetings of the Faculty Senate, the Staff Advisory Committee and the Student Government Association. You have greeted me in your departments, at campus events, and on and off the campus. While we may not have always agreed on the best solution to some of our challenges, you have consistently touched me with your personal kindness and support of our common objective of making SLU all it can be. I feel a renewed spirit of collaboration, collegiality and a commitment to our mission. Let us pledge to keep this spirit alive as we move forward.

My friends, it has been a true honor to work with, and for, all of you during this time of transition. We have selected an excellent new president in Dr. Pestello, and I know that you will greet him and his leadership with the same enthusiasm and sense of common purpose that you have extended to me.

When I accepted this opportunity, I expressed my confidence in our University. Today, I am even more confident of how good we can be. Let us continue to go forward together.

My best wishes to each of you.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Kauffman
Interim President
Saint Louis University