



**REMARKS TO BOARD OF GOVERNORS
OCTOBER 6, 2011**

APSCUF President Steve Hicks: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Board for this opportunity.

I want to start by adding to the comments made by the Chair about the work of Bloomsburg University in the wake of the flooding in town there. As a resident, I have heard of the good work and the positive image it has presented of the university in town and gown relations. Dr. Soltz is to be commended for the work the university has done in support of the townspeople.

On the topic at hand, as you talk in this session about next year's budget and your request to the state, I wanted to encourage you to be positive in your approach and to talk about restoring the funding cuts of last year, as well as restoring the public's perception of the value of public higher education in the Commonwealth, because the two are intrinsically related.

One thing that came out of last spring's budget debate was a clear sense that the State System is a great positive for the Commonwealth. You all are pretty aware of the numbers: approximately 90 percent of our students are Pennsylvanians, and about 80 percent of our graduates stay in the Keystone State. We have the lowest tuition of any four-year institution in the Commonwealth, and lower than our competition on the Eastern mid-Atlantic coast by thousands of dollars. Although the borrowing of our students is a huge concern – it's near the regional average – we still are the affordable option for working-class families in the Commonwealth.

And you all know we need those working class students to fill our classrooms, or else programs like the Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025 – which you've adopted – will fail to meet their goals on graduates. For the Commonwealth to be economically successful in the future, we need to provide access to those students and graduate them at a decent rate.

And we do graduate them at a decent rate. Despite recent comments by the governor, our institutions have a graduation rate that is similar, and often superior, to the comparable private colleges in the state. In fact, four of our universities (Shippensburg, Millersville, West Chester and Bloomsburg) boast six-year graduation rates above 60 percent, rivaling institutions like Albright, Drexel, York, and Temple, who do not have our access mission and charge double, triple, or four times our tuition.

We have a lot of quality to rave about. Seven of our schools are in this year's U.S. News rankings, which, though flawed, generate a lot of positive PR. Take it from someone who has seen the raw data, it is surprising that more of our schools aren't ranked.

These are triumphs that we need to trumpet to the legislature and the Governor in the next few weeks because they seem to misunderstand the quality and inexpensive cost of what we do. We need to remind them of our value to the Commonwealth and to remind them that, before raising corrections appropriations 10 more percent or so, they need to invest in us. Doing so will

mean less incarceration, lower health care bills, fewer on the welfare rolls, and more options for businesses who come and want to stay in Pennsylvania. Another cut is unconscionable; with a \$1 billion surplus last year and another surplus likely this year, anything but an increase looks like ignoring the wisest investment the Commonwealth could make. Let's make that our message: ***investing in PASSHE is Pennsylvania's best investment.***