

State of the Community

Aug. 22 / Drury Convention Center

Thank you so much for inviting me to join today's State of the Community event to share information about Southeast Missouri State University. To begin, I would like to thank the Cape Girardeau Area Chamber of Commerce for including SEMO as part of this event. I am honored to join the stage with Mayor Stacy Kinder and Governor Mike Parson who have both been exemplary partners for the University.

I would like to start by highlighting the significant transformation that teaching and learning is undergoing at every educational level. Higher education, in particular, is undergoing fundamental changes that impact every aspect of the industry—these include changing student demographics, a different perception of the value of a college degree, innovative delivery modalities, dramatic instruction such as Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence as well as business technological changes and everything in-between. BTW,

these remarks were all done using NATURAL intelligence.

At SEMO we work hard to keep up with these changes and, in fact, we work hard to stay a step ahead of them, whenever possible. We spend much time identifying programs that may be relevant to our region by monitoring the marketplace, listening to our faculty experts, and by increasingly learning from the region's businesses and industry. We are guided by our most recent Strategic Action Plan that was approved by our board in 2021. **We are a high-**

quality institution that strives to be as innovative as possible.

I am sure you all know that we are 150 years old! But, you may not know some of the following facts. SEMO's FY25 approved operating budget is approximately \$155M. Our core operating appropriations are approximately \$54M which includes Governor Parson's 3% recommended increase for higher education institutions.

At \$9900 a year for tuition and fees (30 credit hours), SEMO is unarguably one of the

most affordable universities in Missouri and in the Midwest. We are proud of this. But we also recognize that financial assistance is a key component of affordability. Every year, more than 70% of incoming freshmen receive an institutional scholarship and we offer a pathway to make sure low-income Missouri students can attend and have the full amount of tuition and general fees paid for – by a combination of federal, state of Missouri, and institutional funds.

SEMO currently has a workforce of 1000+ faculty and staff and is a master's-level

institution. Our faculty come from across the U.S. and many other countries, and over 80% of them hold a terminal degree in their field of expertise. Our student headcount is about 9,500, and we provide educational services to students spanning high school to master's-level. We are institutionally-accredited, meaning, we are eligible to offer federal financial aid – Title IV - to enrolled students by the Higher Learning Commission (one of the seven CHEA-recognized accrediting organizations in the US).

SEMO has been accredited since 1915!

Our latest re-accreditation took place in 2019, and we passed with flying colors. This means that HLC re-accredited SEMO for the maximum period allowed--10 years--and no areas of weakness were identified.

In athletics, we compete at the Division I level. We are one of only 365 institutions competing at the highest level of competition in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). In the interest of time, I will not elaborate too much on this matter. But, I will tell you that, make no mistake, we are very proud of our coaches, staff, and student-athletes for

this accomplishment which is also reflected in their academic performance! For example, this spring 2024 semester, our student-athletes GPA was 3.44. The highest ever!

We are one of over 500 comprehensive regional public universities in the US and are represented by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

According to AASCU...

45% of the 7 million undergraduate students enrolled at public four-year institutions are enrolled at AASCU institutions.

43% of public four-year bachelor's degrees are awarded by AASCU member institutions.

The above numbers are but an attempt to share with you that we are one of a select number of public four-year institutions that educate and graduate a significant number of students in the US.

Quality and innovation at SEMO go hand-in-hand. Let me share a few examples.

We seek program accreditation whenever feasible and possible. Currently, we have 30+ programs that are accredited and others that

are recognized by governmental or other organizations. This level of program accreditation is unusual for institutions like ours. You just heard me talk about being a Division I in athletics. In my mind, we should think of ourselves also as a “Division I” school in academics!

We were the first public four-year institution in the state to develop a cybersecurity program (2011). We were the first public four-year institution to develop an unmanned aircraft

systems, or “drone”, program. We established a very successful professional pilot program and have also established an aviation management program. At the risk of “counting the chickens before they are hatched”, we are currently exploring the development of an airframe and powerplant (A&P) program.

We offer a degree in geographic information sciences or GIS. GIS uses integrated computer hardware and software to manipulate and visualize data for applications in engineering, planning, transport, logistics, and the military, among others. FYI, the National Geospatial-

Intelligence Agency in St. Louis, is an example of an organization that relies heavily on GIS talent and technology.

In 2021, SEMO applied for and was granted a statewide mission by the state of Missouri in three different areas: Cybersecurity, Computer Science, and Visual and Performing Arts. A statewide mission represents a recognition by the state of Missouri that those programs satisfy the state's expectation of growth, quality, innovation, and external recognition, perhaps in the form of accreditation or awards from independent organizations. SEMO was the first

public comprehensive university to be granted a statewide mission in 3 areas.

As many of us are aware, institutions of higher education are increasingly called upon to also become engines of economic development. At SEMO, we have taken this challenge very seriously. A few examples will illustrate our commitment to fulfil this expectation.

Two years ago, SEMO added a division of Economic and Workforce Development. This division incorporates the Office of Career

Services, the Office of Workforce Training and Development, the Regional Professional Development Center, the Small Business Development Center, and the Law Enforcement Academy. This division is charged with engaging with and supporting local and regional efforts to promote non-credit workforce training and development, participate in the development of pathways to offer credit for prior learning, as well as to develop corporate partnerships to provide support and promptly respond to the needs of local and regional business and industry within our available

resources, of course. Currently, we are the only four-year institution that houses a MO Jobs Center. I encourage you to visit it.

We also offer musical and other cultural events for the community. We produce, host, and/or promote activities that enrich the intellectual and cultural life of the region.

I mention these examples ... and they really are only a few examples ... of our commitment to enhance the economy and the quality of life in Southeast Missouri.

Now, some comments about
PARTNERSHIPS.

We benefit from many of you who partner with SEMO to provide opportunities for the residents of our region and beyond. These partnerships give our students valuable hands-on learning and professional experience. Our programs give back to the community as well. We have partnered with many of you to create programs to provide a much-needed workforce for our region. Our partners in health care have helped us tailor programs when they saw a gap in specialized degrees for their employees.

I will mention the long-established and successful partnerships that SEMO has had with the Southeast Missourian and with KFVS12. Over the years, however, we have also partnered with various businesses and industries, such as TG Missouri, St. Francis Healthcare System, Cape Schools (via Career & Technical Center, through a bachelor's degree for Respiratory Therapy), and have long-standing transfer agreements with a number of community colleges; particularly with Mineral Area College and Three Rivers College, More recently, we have partnered with the City

of Cape Girardeau, supporting the establishment of the professional pilot program at the Cape Girardeau Regional Airport, and the renovation of Houck Field, SoutheastHEALTH (now Mercy) that manages our Campus Health Clinic, and provides athletic trainers for SEMO's Athletic teams, intramural sports, and performing arts programs, Century Casino that allows us to offer courses for Nutrition/Dietetics and Hospitality Management at its Event Center.

For more than 150 years ... SEMO has been educating our area's teachers. We are

currently working on developing new and exciting partnerships with our local schools to help their employees earn and/or advance their degrees ... We are proud of our education programs, and we are grateful to assist in addressing our state's teacher shortage.

We are greatly appreciative of not only what the business community provides to our students but also how you collaborate with us and charge us to identify solutions for the needs in our region. We value the partnerships we have with you... and we want to develop even more !!!

Indeed, our efforts to continue to enhance our portfolio of partnerships will continue in earnest. You may be hearing about some exciting developments soon.

Our partnerships reach beyond Southeast Missouri. One of those KEY partners is with us today. I cannot overstate what a friend **Governor Parson** has been to higher education in Missouri. In particular, Governor Parson has been instrumental in supporting improvements to SEMO that have strengthened our academic programs, and he has worked tirelessly to make gaining credentials and

degrees more affordable to the people of Missouri thanks to initiatives like the Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant.

Governor Parson, we are certainly grateful for your support during your service as Governor. During your time in office, you have provided significant enhancement to higher education's core funding. We truly thank you for that!

In addition, Governor Parson's support has also been felt through funding received from the state through capital projects to address

deferred maintenance, and the MOExcels program, among others.

SEMO has also been fortunate to receive funding from our federal partners as well.

Without state and federal grants over the last five years ... SEMO could not have made the more than \$16 million in improvements in technology and facilities for our programs in nursing, computer science, cybersecurity, professional pilot, unmanned aircraft systems, and health sciences, as well as SEMO's Law Enforcement Academy.

In addition, SEMO has received from the state \$46 million in appropriations for utility projects, the Autism Center, and the University's Modern Campus Transformational Project which includes renovation of Houck Field and a new Health Sciences facility.

These investments in SEMO are investments in our entire community. While the University sees the benefit of new facilities and our students gain access to industry-recognized credentials and other academic opportunities ... our region sees the economic impact of new construction and enrollment.

In fact, the economic impact of SEMO is nearly \$1 billion to the state of Missouri. Yes, you heard right... \$1 billion dollars. That includes the impact of our alumni throughout Missouri who are part of the state's workforce ... it includes the daily expenditures of the University ... and it includes more than \$14 million annually spent by our students in the local economy.

SEMO is a SMART investment for Missouri; not only for the students who earn their degree here but also for taxpayers. For every dollar taxpayers contribute to SEMO, taxpayers get

back \$2 ... which, by the way, is above the national median.

These numbers are from the 2020 economic impact report that the international organization Lightcast carried out at SEMO's request to analyze the institution's importance and value to the regional economy as well as the return on investment for students and taxpayers. We have engaged Lightcast AGAIN to produce an updated report that should be released in early 2025, and we are eager to see the impact the University continues to have as an economic engine for the region and state.

Now, let me spend the last few minutes talking about the people that make up the university. We are all familiar with FACULTY and probably most of us have a clear idea of their role and responsibilities within the institution. Their jobs are critical for the success of the university. But, we also have staff. Today, I want to highlight the hundreds of individuals who work in offices and departments that WE frequently do not talk about. These are individuals that keep our campus beautiful, the ones that maintain our facilities in good condition so students can concentrate on their

classes, the administrative assistants that provide support to faculty and students in the instructional departments, the individuals that keep our IT infrastructure operating and free from cyber-attacks, the accountants that keep track of our finances and monitor our available resources, the individuals that day in and day out help students understand their financial aid, advise them, tutor them, and help them change majors. SEMO would not be able to operate; in fact, SEMO would **implode** if these individuals did not do their job. So, today, I wanted to take a few minutes to share publicly my appreciation

to the hundreds of employees at SEMO that silently contribute their energy and passion to keep the university operating.

Where we go next is a journey we will take with you. We will remain fully connected and engaged with the residents and the business and industry in the region.

We will also work tirelessly to further strengthen the quality of our academic programs by assessing our environment and recruiting high quality and innovative faculty ... creating relevant programs for our region's

workforce ... and producing graduates with the right skills to be successful not only for the careers of today but also for the opportunities of tomorrow.

I am appreciative of the opportunity to share this update with you today.

For more than 150 years ... SEMO's success has been deeply intertwined with this community. It is a reciprocal relationship.

We are partners in growth ... innovation ... and community.

GO REDHAWKS !!!