



Building Missouri's future...by degrees

June 17, 2011

Dr. Bruce Speck, President
Missouri Southern State University
3950 East Newman Road
Joplin, MO 64801-1595

Dear President Speck:

During the last several weeks I have been evaluating Missouri Southern State University's request for a waiver of penalty under the Higher Education Student Funding Act (HESFA). The waiver request was submitted because the university approved a 9.27 percent increase in tuition and fees for Academic Year 2011-12, an amount that exceeds that permitted by HESFA. With a CPI change last year of 1.5 percent and as an institution with a below average tuition, the maximum tuition change allowed Missouri Southern under HESFA without a waiver is 2.0 percent.

As you are aware from our previous conversations, I have concluded that the magnitude of the tuition increase that Missouri Southern students will face in the fall is not sufficiently warranted. When the 3.7 percent CPI increase booked last year (but not charged) is factored in, students at your institution will face a 13 percent cumulative increase in tuition and fees this fall.

Consequently, I have seriously contemplated recommending the assessment of a fine in accordance with the provisions of the HESFA. However, it is difficult to envision a scenario in which the imposition of a fine would be of benefit to the students at your institution as the loss of additional resources would likely result in diminished services, programs, and/or lower or fewer financial aid awards, without reducing any costs for students.

Of course, this situation is made more critical by the disastrous tornado that swept through Joplin on May 22nd. Countless students and their families have suffered grievous personal losses and we can anticipate that it will be difficult for many of these students to return to campus this fall, much less to carry a full academic load.

Imposition of a penalty under these circumstances would merely compound the problem for the community and region that MSSU serves. Given this context, I urgently request that you consult with the MSSU Board of Governors regarding the feasibility of revisiting the previously approved tuition increase for AY11-12. A voluntary reduction in the tuition increase would bring MSSU more in line with increases adopted by the vast majority of four-year institutions and appropriately acknowledge the extraordinary challenges posed to students and families by the natural disaster of May 22nd. Part of the rebuilding process includes continuing to provide education opportunities to assure residents of a brighter future: hence, such a decision by the Board is certain to be well received.

Thanks for your continued engagement in this process. I am hopeful that we can achieve results that will redound to the benefit of students and their families. Know, too, that the entire higher education community joins me in pledging our active support of Joplin's citizens in this time of extreme need.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David R. Russell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "R".

David R. Russell, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Higher Education