

Regional

Higher education fundraisers react to new realities

As state and federal support for public universities dwindles, there is an increasing need to obtain revenues from other sources. This funding is needed not only to compensate for some of those losses, but more importantly to initiate new programs and campus construction. This need for external sources of money has increased greatly the need for good fundraising professionals. One such person is Craig Steiner, director of development for the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. When it comes to the issue of “making up” for diminishing financial support from the state, Steiner said that universities must be careful.

“I think one of the things that you need to worry about when you’re doing fundraising is that when we approach people and corporations that we don’t sell ourselves as trying to make up for shortfalls in state funding,” Steiner said. “Nobody wants to manage shortfalls coming to you from the state. What we try to work on and really identify with is that we are doing things that are really going to benefit students, doing things that are going to benefit the education programs.”

He added that donors have become savvier when it comes to giving money.

“People are more critical in how they distribute their money,” he said. “They’re very selective. They want to make sure their money is stewarded out properly and make sure that it is being spent the way they intended it to go. People are not in the same position they were 10 years ago. Ten years ago it was a lot easier to get someone to write a check for a thousand dollars to benefit an organization. That’s no longer the case.” Steiner points to the effects of the 2008 economic downturn as a prime reason.

“Donors are very particular about who they contribute their money to. They very much want to give money to something



SIUE photo

Craig Steiner (far right) with Kim Durr, SIUE Chancellor Dr. Julie Furst-Bowe and College of Arts and Sciences Dean Aldemaro Romero Jr. during the Art and Design Building West Grand Opening in March 2013.

they engaged in themselves or they were involved in, or something they can become involved in,” he said. “They’re very much more restrictive in how they would like their money being spent. They want to make sure the money will be used how

they would like it to be used, not just openly used in those organizations.” This leads us to the question of how to best approach donors today given these new realities.

“Donors have giving habits that they like to follow,” Steiner explained. “Being

able to identify how to match donors up with the right program is very important. In the College of Arts and Sciences we have people who are graduates from the mass communications department, we have chemists, we have biologists, we have art-

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

ists. So being able to research and identify who can give to a program in the arts, or who would like to fund a program in the sciences is something that you really have to dig into.” Then there is, of course, the issue of personal trust.

“You have to gain their trust and gain their focus into one of those programs,” said Steiner. “So you have to drill into the details. You have to identify where those opportunities are. Number one we don’t want to waste people’s time by trying to talk to them about supporting the university if it’s someone who doesn’t have a pattern or a habit of giving to the university.” A new approach to fundraising that addresses this issue has become popular thanks to the Internet. It is called crowd funding.

“Crowd funding takes a large number of ideas and it gives people the opportunity to selectively go somewhere and see the opportunity that they would like to support,” Steiner explained. “We talked about people wanting to be selective and wanting to give to things that they have an interest in. On some of these crowd funding and crowd sourcing sites that are out there, people can go on them and they can find four or five different programs that are looking for funding. Another thing that crowd funding is, is it’s a way you can get yourself out in the social media lines and you can create the quick hits, the quick opportunities and people can donate online.”

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, “Segue,” can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.