



# WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHAPTER STATE UNIVERSITIES ANNUITANTS ASSOCIATION (SUAA)

Serving the interests of the annuitants and survivors  
of Western Illinois University

**September 2025**

**2025-2026**

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### **SUAAction**

### **Representative**

Nick Pano

## **2025 SUAA FALL LUNCHEON NOON • TUESDAY, OCT. 21**

Wesley United Methodist Church  
1212 W. Calhoun St. • Macomb

### **Menu**

#### **Pasta Bar** with choice of:

Penne & Fettuccine Pasta

Meaty Marinara & Meatballs

No Meat Marinara Sauce

Chicken Alfredo

Sheet Pan Veggies

Breadsticks & Garlic Bread

Cherry Cheesecake

Coffee, Tea & Water

### **Cost is \$22 per person**

Please cutoff the form below and send your reservation(s) and  
check(s) by the **Oct. 13 deadline.**

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### **2025 SUAA Fall Luncheon Reservation Form**

1/We plan to attend the Oct. 21 Fall Luncheon at Noon.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Number attending at \$22 each \_\_\_\_\_ Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

### **Make check(s) payable to WIU SUAA**

### **Please RSVP by Monday, Oct. 13 to:**

Judi Dallinger, 800 Briarwood Dr., Macomb IL 61455

Email: J-Dallinger@wiu.edu • Phone: 309-837-6729

# Message from the President

## Lisa Melz-Jennings

As we embark on another promising year together, I want to extend my warmest welcome to each of you. Whether you're a returning member or joining us for the first time, you are an essential part of what makes our organization strong and vibrant.

This year holds tremendous potential for growth, collaboration, and meaningful impact. Together, we will continue to advance our shared mission while building lasting connections within our community. Please reach out to those who are not members of SUAA and ask them to join. We ALL need to be involved in preserving our benefits and protecting our pensions.

I look forward to working alongside each of you to make this our best year yet. Thank you for your continued dedication and enthusiasm. Please mark your calendars for our upcoming Fall Luncheon that will be held at noon on Tuesday, Oct. 21.

Here's to a great year ahead!

## SURS Update

### Steve Rock

For those in the Defined Benefit (DB) plan, the preliminary return for the portfolio for FY25 (as of the end of June 2025) was +7.1 percent. This exceeded the annual return goal of +6.5 percent. Assets totaled about \$25 billion, and the funding ratio was 46.7 percent. Due to the low funding ratio, the portfolio is invested to provide downside protection.

Assets in the Retirement Saving (formerly Self-Managed) plan totaled \$4.5 billion. The average balance was over \$182,000.

The required State FY25 appropriation of \$2.213 billion was paid fully and on time. Benefit payments for FY25 were estimated to be \$3.36 billion. The gap is funded by contributions from active employees and investment returns. The required State contribution for FY26 is \$2.32 billion.

While legislators did not pass any bills that changed the Tier 2 pension system, they did approve an appropriation for situations that violate the safe harbor provision (state pensions must be as good as Social Security). However, there is no current mechanism to distribute those funds.

Of concern to SURS, HB 3193 was passed and sent to the Governor. It gives a future credit to a state university which had to pay over \$300,000 to SURS due to hiring an employee in academic years 2021, 2022, and 2023 at high rate of pay. SURS has expressed its concerns to the Governor's office.

The Governor has appointed Jeanine Jiganti to the vacant appointed trustee position on the SURS Board. The press release for this is on the SURS website ([surs.org](https://surs.org)).

The next SURS Board meeting will be in Champaign Sept. 11-12.

*The views expressed are those of SURS Trustee Steven Rock and do not necessarily reflect those of SURS.*

## Membership

### Linda Farr

If you are considering retiring this year and are currently having your dues deducted from your paycheck, please contact SURS ([surs.org](https://surs.org)) and provide them with the signature to withhold the dues from your retirement check. You may also call SURS at 1-800-275-7877 if that is more convenient. If you know anyone who is interested in joining SUAA and has questions, please contact Linda Farr, [ls-farr@wiu.edu](mailto:ls-farr@wiu.edu), for help with signing up. They can also go to WIU's website at [wiu.edu/suaa](https://wiu.edu/suaa), click on the drop-down menu and go to *membership* to sign up. The cost is \$4 per month, but the benefits of being informed are worth much more.

## Flu Shot Clinic

The McDonough County Health Department will be in the **University Union Heritage Room** from **8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 2** for the flu shot clinic.

This is for WIU retirees and active WIU employees covered by WIU health insurance.

The McDonough County Health Department will be administering the vaccines as long as supplies last. **Please wear a shirt that allows the vaccine to be administered in the upper arm.** You must present a valid WIU ID card and a state-issued health insurance card.

*If you cannot attend this clinic, you should contact the McDonough County Health Department to schedule your flu vaccine.*

## SUAAAction

### Nick Pano

As you know, SUAAAction is the political action arm of the State Universities Annuitants Association. Since its inception in 2004, SUAAAction has conducted an annual fundraising campaign to underwrite its financial support of legislators and legislative candidates who are sympathetic to the association's legislative agenda. Given the ongoing challenges to Illinois public higher education, including those noted in this issue's Legislative Update, SUAAAction will be intensifying its interactions with legislators and legislative candidates in the run ups to the March 16, 2026 state primary and November 3, 2026 state elections. If you have not yet done so, I hope that you will donate to this year's SUAAAction campaign, and my thanks to those who have already contributed.

You can give to SUAAAction by check made payable to "SUAAAction" at SUAAAction; P. O. Box 1770; Springfield, IL 62705-1770 or by credit card by accessing the SUAA website ([suaa@suaa.org](mailto:suaa@suaa.org)) and clicking the

SUAAAction link and selecting the credit card payment option. Your support is appreciated.

## WIU SUAA Website

The WIU SUAA chapter has a website at [www.wiu.edu/suaa](http://www.wiu.edu/suaa). There you can find minutes and treasurer's reports from monthly meetings and links to health, retirement, and benefit information, as well as University and state resources.

A video, produced in Fall 2024 by our University Television staff, is also available and explains more about the WIU SUAA chapter and its benefits to members. Scroll down the left side to "Video." It will open in YouTube.

Please mark your calendars for WIU SUAA upcoming events:

- Feb. 3, 2026 Snow Bunny Luncheon (Feb. 10 snow date)
- April 14, 2026 Annual Luncheon and Business Meeting

(Mailer sheet)

## Legislative Update Insert – September 2025

### Nick Pano

Governor Pritzker signed the Fiscal Year 2026 state budget on June 16. For the seventh consecutive year, the budget, as approved by the General Assembly, appears to be balanced with anticipated revenues of \$55.3 billion and projected revenues of \$55.2. The expected surplus will be heavily dependent on income from new taxes on gambling, nicotine products, budget sweeps from unspent FY25 state agency accounts and projected income from a state income tax amnesty program. It is difficult currently to determine the impact of possible federal reductions that support a variety of state programs on the FY26 budget. Furthermore, the General Assembly in its crafting of the budget failed to address several pressing issues, such as the funding requests of Chicago area public transportation agencies and Chicago public schools. And, as noted below, the legislature also declined to come to grips with several initiatives relating to public higher education.

In respect to public higher education, the FY26 budget provides for a *potential* 3 percent increase in funding for state colleges and universities but authorizes only a 1 percent immediate rise in spending, with an additional 2 percent possible if the federal government withholds "substantial funding" from Illinois public higher education. Given current and potential demands for state funding from a broad range of constituencies and uncertainties regarding federal funding, it is unlikely that our state colleges and universities can count on any additional fiscal support from Springfield during the current fiscal year.

The FY26 budget does provide full funding for the state's share of the pension costs for the five public employee pension systems. It also includes adequate support for state employee and retiree health benefits. It should be noted that state pension and benefit costs account for 21 percent of FY26 budget outlays.

The governor's budget includes a \$10 million increase for the Monetary Assistance Program (MAP). These additional funds will provide \$721.6 million in grants for approximately 170,000 Illinois students during FY26. And the budget continues to support a variety of other student financial aid programs such as the AIM-HIGH Scholarships that are designed to stem the exodus of talented Illinois high school graduates, the Minority Teacher Education Program and the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty Initiative, among others.

The General Assembly considered four significant proposals of especial interest to the Illinois higher education community during its recently concluded session.

The first of these initiatives and the only one that was approved by both the governor and legislature will enable high school seniors and community college transfer students to apply simultaneously online to all participating state universities (the Urbana-Champaign and Chicago campuses of the University of Illinois are non-participants) for which they qualify and be offered immediate admission. This program will begin in January 2026 and is expected to stimulate enrollments at the participating institutions.

Gov. Pritzker in his February 2025 State of the State Address had proposed authorizing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in such areas as nursing, law enforcement, industrial technology and agriculture, among others, to address labor shortages in these fields and to enhance educational and employment opportunities for non-traditional and other students who live at distance from existing state university campuses or who cannot afford to attend an existing four-year institution.

This proposal met with considerable opposition – especially from the Chicago area public universities and their downstate regional counterparts – and failed to gain legislative approval. Gov. Pritzker continues to support this concept and will again submit this measure to the General Assembly next year.

(over)

SUAA and its public employee union allies gave a high priority to their legislative efforts to redress the inequities in the current Tier 2 state employee pension plan benefits. Although the General Assembly and governor were not inclined to address the issue in all its aspects, they did agree to a temporary fix to the situation by creating a \$75 million fund to resolve cases arising from the state's violation of the Social Security "Safe Harbor Law." It is apparent that, as the number of Tier 2 pension retirees continues to increase, the state will have to deal with this matter in a realistic manner.

Finally, a proposal to develop a new plan for funding Illinois public higher education like the evidence-based formula for the state's K-12 schools failed to gain legislative approval owing primarily to the opposition of the University of Illinois and anticipated budgetary constraints. The proposed legislation would have formulated criteria to establish appropriate funding levels for each of the state universities. The research on which the legislative proposal was based observed that the State of Illinois provides about 35 percent of the funding for its public universities as opposed to the national average of 60 percent. And the findings of this study revealed that WIU was the most underfunded of the state's public universities.

At this time, it seems unlikely that any legislation affecting public higher education will be considered during the General Assembly's autumn "veto sessions."

### **SUAA Foundation Professional Development Grant Guidelines**

#### **Judy Brown**

The SUAA Foundation offers up to two grants of up to \$1,000 per grant annually for professional development activities. If any funds are remaining, additional grants may be awarded. The applicant must be an SUAA member in good standing who is currently employed at an Illinois institution of higher education. Applications are accepted throughout the year, and grants are awarded throughout the year until two grants have been awarded.

Application review began June 1. The award year is Fall 2025 through Summer 2026.

Professional development activities must be related to improving or enhancing the SUAA member's ability to perform in their current position at their institution. The grant may be used for conference registration fees, travel expenses to conferences, tuition fees, or books for educational expenses.

In addition to the grant application, an essay and one letter of recommendation are required. Please contact Judy Brown for more information ([ja-brown3@wiu.edu](mailto:ja-brown3@wiu.edu) or [j.judy.brown@gmail.com](mailto:j.judy.brown@gmail.com)).

### **More About the SUAA Foundation**

A 501(c)(3) organization, the SUAA Foundation was established in 1989. According to the present bylaws, its purpose is to provide the following services:

1. Support for education and dissemination of information regarding issues affecting the welfare of SUAA members, which includes sponsoring informational lunch-and-learn programs.
2. Emergency assistance to SUAA members who need financial support. This can grant up to \$1,500 to individuals who have been SUAA members for 5 years or longer.
3. Survivor Assistance Information for SURS members in the form of the Foundation Bookmarks that covers information that members should know when a SURS member passes away, including who to notify when and paperwork or information that needs to be filed with SURS.
4. Supporting and maintaining a Scholarship Program for the spouses, children and grandchildren of SUAA members and their families.
5. Supporting and maintaining a Professional Development Program to provide support to active SUAA members in improving their skills.