June 8, 2016

Dear Iowa State students:

I write to you to discuss the tuition increase proposal that will be considered tomorrow by the Board of Regents. A tuition increase became a necessary recourse following the Legislature’s approval of the state’s FY17 budget, which occurred April 29. While the Legislature did approve a $2.2 million increase to Iowa State’s general university appropriation, it represents only 27% of our $8.2 million request. We knew $8.2 million was an ambitious request, but yet it was still not enough to fully maintain academic quality and support student success. It is unfortunate that Iowa State’s record demand is occurring at a time when state revenues are tightening, and therefore, so is funding for higher education.

In the month since the Legislature adjourned, university leadership has been thoughtful and diligent in calculating an appropriate tuition increase that would enable us to maintain high quality without undermining our commitment to affordability and accessibility. We determined that even with the proposed $150/semester increase for resident undergraduates and the additional increases for nonresident undergraduate students and graduate and professional students, Iowa State would continue to be the most affordable university among our group of peer research institutions. This group includes several neighboring and Midwest schools: University of Illinois, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, Michigan State, Ohio State, and Purdue.

The tuition increase is estimated to generate $7.3 million in additional revenue; however that number is predicated on early fall 2016 enrollment projections, which can still fluctuate. Specifically, the additional revenue would be used for:

- recruitment and retention of faculty to improve our student-to-faculty ratio (currently 19:1),
- expansion of services such as academic support and health and wellness,
- expanding financial literacy education, and
- increasing campus safety and accessibility services.

We understand that even a modest tuition increase can be burdensome and the timing of this particular increase is unfortunate. The university faced difficult planning challenges as a result of the Legislature’s appropriations schedule, making a delay in tuition action hard to avoid.

I can assure you the university does not take this tuition increase proposal lightly. There is a tremendous amount of thought and research that goes into determining appropriate tuition rates so as not to put unnecessary financial strain on our students and their families. We also are working hard to mitigate the cost of an Iowa State education; over the past four years, we have raised nearly $188 million in private funds for student support and scholarships through our Moving Students Forward campaign. This will continue to be a high priority for the university.

The Board of Regents will consider tuition proposals for all three Regents institutions tomorrow. I appreciate your understanding of the university’s situation as we strive to maintain the exceptional academic quality and experience you expect and deserve at Iowa State.

Sincerely,

Steven Leath
President