**To: Academic Senate**

**From: Planning and Finance Committee**

**Re: Institutional Priorities Report**

**Date: April 26, 2017**

The Planning and Finance Committee submits the following report to the Academic Senate for consideration and, upon approval, the 2017-2018 Institutional Priorities Report will be forwarded to the President.

***Introduction***

All members of the university community have a shared obligation to work cooperatively toward the accomplishment of Illinois State University’s ideals and goals. The university mission statement and strategic plan, ***Educating Illinois***,provide a unifying expression of these ideals and goals, serving also as a foundation for planning, development, implementation, and assessment of programs and policies throughout the University.

The committee’s deliberations were informed through presentations by and discussions with university officials, through responses to the previous year's report by each of the Vice Presidents, and through the diverse perspectives of the students, faculty and staff serving on our committee. The recommendations offered in this report are grounded in these conversations, reviews, and consultations.

Beginning with last year’s report, the committee has organized this report to align with the four goal areas of ***Educating Illinois***, which serves as a backdrop for these priorities. Since ***Educating Illinois*** is designed to be a five-year planning document toward achieving longer range goals, this move should further coordinate our planning efforts.

At the end of last year’s deliberations with regard to the 2016-17 *Institutional Priorities Report*, the committee realized that there was significant overlap with *Educating Illinois*. The committee decided to transition toward more long-range planning and vision development given the challenges the University is expected to face in the coming years. We have also included some medium-range priorities, many of which were retained from last year’s report.

We recognize that many of the priorities set forth in prior reports have been achieved and have become enduring values integral to the continued success of the university. Therefore, we urge the continuation and maintenance of those prior priorities given in past reports.

The environment surrounding public higher education is characterized by uncertainty in state and federal financial support, intense competition for students, and growing challenges in the prospect for tuition-based revenue gains. Maintaining affordability in tuition, fees, and housing for students and their families is a continuing priority for Illinois State University.

**New Initiatives**

*Recruitment*

* **Looking beyond Illinois** and the surrounding states, we urge the administration to develop additional resources for recruitment from targeted parts of the United States from which we are likely to attract students. We have seen that maintaining a consistent, high level of enrollment is critical to the financial stability of the institution. Therefore, meeting and exceeding the expectations of incoming freshmen, transfer students, veterans, and non-traditional students will be critical.
* In addition, the administration is wisely seeking to attract **international students** to our campus community, which will increase diversity and create a greater international awareness in our largely Midwestern student population. It will be important to anticipate the needs of these students and have the necessary support services in place for them.
* There is a great deal of concern about the loss of thousands of graduating high school students to schools in neighboring states. The University should develop a range of strategies to incentivize these students to make Illinois State their first choice.

*Educational Offerings*

One way to remain competitive and to maintain our enrollment, transfer, and retention rates is to provide educational offerings that better meet the needs to the students we seek to attract and retain.

* In our committee, we discussed the **possibility of having engineering degrees** offered. We are grateful that the Provost subsequently started an exploratory committee comprised of faculty, department chairs, and deans to examine the question further and to determine the faculty interest, possible degrees, and the needs for additional faculty and resources.

Engineering programs enable new cross-disciplinary research and training opportunities for students both on campus and off campus via internship programs.

The economy and modern life, in general, are increasingly technological. The need for STEM-based education has not diminished. Rather, the need for technology education continues to grow. Engineering would strengthen Illinois State’s current research programs in physics, chemistry, biology, environmental science, kinesiology, and information technology. Business and entrepreneurship programs and international studies programs will likely benefit from an engineering program as well.

Faculty research can lead to the development of new startup companies, creating new job possibilities for Central Illinois, and having an engineering program fosters new relationships between the University and local industries around the state.

* **Interdisciplinary Studies** (IDS) is an option that the majority of students do not know is available to them. In this program, students work with an advisor to develop their own degree sequence by combining their normal general education requirements with courses from two or more departments to create their own degree. We believe that this should be promoted to potential students as an indicator of flexibility at ISU to meet their educational needs and interests. The program should be gradually expanded and monitored, as well as coordinated with existing interdisciplinary minor programs, such as Women’s and Gender Studies, Cognitive Science, Children’s Studies, and the ethnic and area studies minors, that might have the potential to grow into majors. This will enable departments/schools to learn about new areas of demand directly from the students and in the long term possibly enabling the piloting of new formalized degree sequences.

*Learning Communities and General Education*

* The **General Education** program has been in place with its existing structure for two decades. It will soon be time to consider a review and redesign toward a newer model that better promotes a sense of a **campus learning community**. Students currently have a very strong first year experience, but that sense of belonging to the wider campus community may dissipate as students become more focused within their disciplines. In addition, transfer students would become part of a learning cohort and feel more connected to the university as a result.

In order to prepare students adequately for life, citizenship, and the more competitive workforce of the future, courses offered in the General Education program should be evaluated at regular intervals for effectiveness in meeting the goals of the program, which should ensure the intellectual rigor of courses and developing new course options that enrich the general education experience. In addition, today’s students need to have a broader range of skills, including college-level reading and writing in English, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, and foreign language skills. General education is the foundation for those needed skills.

In the meantime, we continue to support the recommendations from the General Education Task Force Report to integrate learning in General Education courses, major courses, and co-curricular activities.

* As we seek to create learning communities, the success of **transfer students** at ISU is dependent upon their ability to join and feel a part of the existing campus community. A systematic review of major requirements, giving consideration to the unique advising needs of this population, and offering programs and services that support transfer students will be important.

**Continuing and Medium-range Priorities**

***Goal I.******Provide a supportive and student-centered educational experience for high-achieving, diverse, and motivated students that promotes their success.***

**I.A.** Illinois State University has developed strength among the state universities by attracting students through student-centered programs and services, support for individual learning, student engagement in the community, more individualized attention in small-class settings, and co-curricular opportunities for leadership development and support for student projects. The University must ***continue to maintain and to build on these strengths.***

**I.B.** Resource constraints preclude support for every worthwhile proposal; however, the University must ***identify and support critical initiatives*** that will enhance the educational experience for students and ultimately contribute to sources of future revenue.

**I.C. Additional Priorities for Goal I**

(1) In the context of recruitment and retention efforts, **expand scholarship opportunities** for current students and develop additional scholarships based on merit and need for incoming students as continuing priorities for advancement efforts.

(2) Develop successful models of **effective academic advising** at the department/school level within the University, identify areas for improvement, and provide support for adoption of best practices by all academic units throughout the University including smaller departments/schools.

(3) **Increase summer school** opportunities for students by being more responsive to student needs and by creating financial incentives for departments to meet these needs, yet refine in a manner that enables revenue growth for the university. Care should be taken to ensure courses meet academic standards as any other course offered through the rest of the year. We have serious reservations regarding three week courses.

(4) Continue to monitor and evaluate the possible expansion of having a **winter session** between the fall and spring semesters during which short courses could be offered to aid students wishing to complete their programs and to enable timely graduation.

(5) Continue to offer and work to augment support services to meet the increasing demand for counseling, tutoring, wellness, student access and accommodations services, and leadership development opportunities for students.

***Goal II. Provide rigorous, innovative, and high impact undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare students to excel in a globally competitive, culturally diverse, and changing environment.***

**II.A.** Continued fulfillment of the core elements of our mission requires effective recruitment, retention, professional development, and productive deployment of a talented university workforce. The Academic Senate endorses the continued efforts of university leadership **to invest in human capital** as a mission-critical resource. We encourage university leadership to continue efforts within the context of a challenging budget environment to bring median faculty and staff compensation closer to that of faculty at peer institutions.

**II.B.** In fulfillment of the core values of Illinois State University, faculty contribute to new knowledge through scholarship, integrate new knowledge into their teaching, apply new knowledge, and provide leadership in public service initiatives. Sufficient levels of **support for research** are an essential element in the promotion of productive scholarship, including continued support of the library to provide for effective research resources. Priorities for administrative attention include:

(1) allocating additional resources to support increased scholarly productivity, to assist faculty in identifying external grant opportunities, and to aid in the development of competitive grant applications,

(2) maintaining or increasing university support for adequate numbers of graduate assistantships and increased stipend levels, and

(3) developing a strategic plan for increasing support for the university research grant (URG) program, faculty travel (including conference fees), and undergraduate and graduate research.

**II.C. Additional Priorities for Goal II**

(1) Continued attention should be focused on improving campus diversity and inclusion toward becoming a more **culturally competent community**.

(2) Continued support and for the goals articulated by the International Strategic Plan in its efforts to work toward comprehensive campus internationalization. This includes support for the global learning outcomes, knowledge, and competencies, through the support of AMALI, area studies, foreign languages, and study abroad, as well as support for co-curricular programs that enable all members of the campus community to **develop international perspectives**. Expand resources for students to further facilitate participation.

***Goal III. Foster an engaged community and enhance the University’s outreach and partnerships both internally and externally.***

**III.A.** To ensure Illinois State University’s continued growth, opportunities for students, alumni, local businesses, local communities, and others to ***create strong, lifelong connections to ISU*** should be developed, improved, and maintained. Marketing research should be conducted to help the university develop and refine its image both within Illinois and nationally.

**III.B.** Teaching, research, and public service activities of the university are primarily carried out in the academic departments and schools. Therefore, enhanced collaboration between academic departments, campus units, and advancement should be undertaken, including an ongoing analysis of current practices and plans for future growth. A first step should be to identify and needs and priorities of departments and units.

***Goal IV. Enhance institutional effectiveness by strengthening the organizational operation and enhancing resource development.***

**IV.A.** Various elements of the infrastructure of the University are essential to the effectiveness of teaching, research, and public service, especially as we seek to be competitive with other universities. Investments in information technology have commanded a growing portion of infrastructure spending and strategic investments in this area will continue to require substantial funds in the years ahead. Priorities include:

(1) improving and investing in a **user-friendly IT infrastructure** that has the necessary reliability, stability, bandwidth, and speed to support the creative and educational needs of the campus community,

(2) continuing efforts to **modernize administrative computing resources**, network connectivity, and database operations, and

(3) addressing the unintended consequences that have resulted from the implementation of the new information systems and moving toward a **student information system** that is fully functional and meets the needs of all stakeholders.

**IV.B.** We support efforts to complete capital improvement projects that expand the productive capabilities of the University, address health and safety issues, and improve the efficiency of utility support. Priorities include:

(1) maintaining and rehabilitating existing facilities, and

(2) reevaluating the University Master Plan in light of the new fiscal challenges the University faces, the difficulty in moving forward with the existing plans, and new initiatives evolving from more recent planning in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, and

(3) strongly advocating for unfunded capital improvement projects.

**Requested Administrative Actions**

* The Planning and Finance Committee of the Academic Senate asks the President to charge each Vice President to make a formal, written response to the recommendations above.
* We request that these administrative responses reflect the planned activities/initiatives as well as continuing efforts toward fulfilling the priorities discussed above. We see these efforts as part of a continuing dialogue and do not wish to promote shorter-range thinking and action ahead of its time.
* We also expect that the administrative responses will explain any substantive rejection of the institutional priorities forwarded by the Committee and Academic Senate.
* It would be helpful if data in the administrative responses be reported, where feasible, in the context of internal changes over time and external comparisons to other institutions.
* We ask that the President's office receive these reports and then forward them to the Planning and Finance Committee no later than January 15, 2018 to inform the Committee's ongoing deliberations.
* This report should also be distributed to the college deans, department chairs, and school directors, so that they may also be informed of these priorities.
* The President is encouraged to use the transmission of these reports as an opportunity to update the Senate on the University's progress in each of these areas through whatever means the President finds appropriate.