February 3, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

On September 28, 2010, we shared with the campus our response to the Stewarding Excellence review of the Institute of Aviation. In that response, we announced our intent to propose to the Academic Senate, absent a firm commitment by another academic program to take over the Institute’s degree programs, that those programs be discontinued. We left open the question whether the Institute should create a non-degree flight training and certification program. The Illinois Business Consulting (IBC) group was asked to evaluate the marketability of a stand-alone and self-supporting non-degree flight certification program. We are grateful to that group for their diligent efforts.

As a part of their analyses, the IBC evaluated student demand for flight training and the financial investment that students are willing to make to become certified pilots. Based on the projected flight fees of $32,000, the IBC concluded that there was insufficient demand to support the expansion of a flight certification program. This finding is consistent with the Institute’s pattern of declining enrollment. The IBC noted that a new recreation flight training program for Light Sport Pilot Certification might present opportunities, but that additional investigation into student demand, insurance costs, and other business factors would be necessary to determine its financial feasibility.

We have determined that the creation of a new aviation program aimed at providing flight training and certification on a non-degree basis is not feasible at this time. As an institution, we must examine carefully our core missions and determine how to support and enhance those missions so that we may best serve our students, the state and society. We have arrived at the difficult conclusion that closing the Institute best serves those interests. Accordingly, we will propose to the Academic Senate that the Institute of Aviation be closed. We will ask that the Senate hear this proposal jointly with our earlier proposal to discontinue the Institute’s degree programs, which has already been heard and approved by the Senate Educational Policy Committee (EPC) on November 15, 2010. Consistent with University Senate Standing Rule 13, we will ask that the EPC hold a public hearing on our proposal to close the Institute of Aviation. The date, time and location of that hearing will be publicized to the campus so that interested parties can attend and provide comment.

We are proud of the prestigious history of the Institute of Aviation and of the contributions its employees, students and alumni have made to the field of aviation and to our university. We are grateful to Interim Director Tom Emanuel for the leadership that he has provided to the Institute and thank him and the entire Institute staff for their dedicated service to the university. We will honor all of our obligations to our employees and are committed to providing them with support and assistance as we move through this transition.

Robert A. Easter
Vice President and Chancellor (Interim)

Sincerely,

Richard P. Wheeler
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost (Interim)