Dear Colleagues,

The Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois Project Team charged with evaluating the Campus Programs Supporting Teaching provided a thorough and thoughtful report. We are grateful for their efforts and have received valuable feedback from the units that were reviewed, the Campus Advisory Committee, the campus community, and the general public.

Teaching is a core mission. To serve that mission, we must endeavor to ensure that our instructors are excellent, that the technology to design and deliver the highest caliber of instruction is readily accessible, and that the online and blended learning opportunities valued and demanded by our students are available.

Although there are many ways that the campus and the colleges are engaged in promoting and supporting teaching excellence, the Project Team reported that there is some duplication and a lack of coordination of our campus programs supporting teaching. Because the absence of a coordinated approach to supporting teaching excellence negatively affects the accessibility of our resources and their impact, this situation must be addressed.

The Project Team recommended that we consider uniting our existing programs into one campus “umbrella” unit. In making its recommendations, the Project Team made many compelling observations. The feedback we received from the campus community along with the team’s report has led us to conclude that the following are the central questions that must be answered:

- Which teaching services are best centralized and which should be discipline-specific?
- How should we implement a more rigorous cooperative approach to student learning outcomes assessment?
- How can we help instructors make better use of available technologies?
- How do we ensure the optimal use of technology to facilitate the most dynamic and effective learning environment, both on-campus and through our distance learning?
- How do our faculty evaluate the current resources available to them?
- Are there gaps in our services and resources?

As we evaluate our teaching support and our efforts to maximize student learning, we must consider carefully all the ways in which we currently provide instruction as well as strategically plan how to adapt to and meet the needs of our future students. The role of technology is critically important to both of these endeavors. To facilitate learning in the most
dynamic and accessible way, we must consider how information technology is mobilized for our on-campus instruction, distance learning and blended learning modalities that are used for both our residential and off-campus students. We examine these issues to meet the needs of the new generation of learners and of the 21st century workforce.

A working group composed of core campus representatives, nominated by the deans, will examine these matters and the fundamental question of how best to promote and support our goal of providing highly effective and dynamic learning opportunities for our students. The working group will provide their recommendations to us by the end of the academic year. During the upcoming spring semester, the working group will host a symposium and solicit both internal and external expertise. Representatives from our peer institutions who have excelled at developing exceptional teaching support programs will be invited to present at this symposium. Additionally, we are fortunate to have many talented individuals across campus who have given considerable and careful thought to these issues. Their valuable perspectives will be solicited and many will be invited to participate in this symposium. We will implement changes and restructure our campus programs supporting teaching in Academic Year 2011-2012.

The Project Team also recommended that the campus consider alternatives to our current course management system, Compass. The April 2010 Administrative Review and Restructuring Information Technology Subcommittee Report examined this issue. We are persuaded by their preliminary conclusion that offering one consolidated course management system may not offer the greatest cost reduction or most effective tools to our faculty and students. Therefore, we have asked Chief Information Officer (CIO) Sally Jackson to conduct a cost study of all existing course management systems, including Compass and the systems operated by several of the colleges, and present a general plan for managing the overall cost of the support environment. Because quality of environment is as essential as managing cost, we have asked the CIO, in consultation with the appropriate faculty and staff, to organize a faculty-led effort to develop a new direction for course management systems that will balance cost containment with faculty preferences.

We are confident that the steps we have outlined will further our goals of improving our teaching support program and eliminating duplicative services and costs.

Sincerely,

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