Dear Colleagues,

We want to thank the Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois Graduate College Review Project Team for its excellent work and thoughtful recommendations. It is clear that the Project Team understood its charge and employed effective feedback mechanisms to produce a very useful report. Dean Deba Dutta submitted a thoughtful response, and the comments received confirmed the contents of the report. We agree with the Project Team’s finding that the Graduate College should remain an independent unit. There was widespread support that most of the functions performed by the Graduate College should remain at a central campus level. We will, however, continue to review areas such as alumni relations, fundraising, and career services to determine whether these functions are better performed at a central or unit level. We highlight a few areas that warrant action or further deliberation.

Graduate College and Office of the Registrar- The Graduate College and the Office of the Registrar must reconcile any current difficulty with academic services and the maintenance of graduate student records. Over the course of the summer, the Graduate College, the Office of the Registrar, and staff members of the Office of the Provost met on a number of occasions and formulated solutions to most of the issues. We understand that when graduate admissions and records moved into the Graduate College that the Graduate College requested that the Office of the Registrar maintain some of the functions that are now in question. To the extent that the Office of the Registrar does not perform those functions for any other college, these functions will be integrated into the Graduate College. A committee has been charged to develop a detailed plan for this integration.

If feasible, this integration should involve current staff members in the Office of the Registrar that perform these functions, so that those providing the service in the Graduate College are appropriately trained. It is an important responsibility of the Office of the Registrar to provide a check and balance to ensure that the university’s system of records is properly maintained. Therefore, the Office of the Registrar should relate to the Graduate College in similar ways as it does to other colleges. If the admissions and academic services provided at the Graduate College have evolved sufficiently as to no longer need the services of the Office of the Registrar, then this arrangement should end. We appreciate the cooperation and collegiality shown by all involved and are reassured that real progress has been made in advance of the new academic year.
Graduate College Petitions- Under the leadership of Dean Dutta, we will ask a campus-wide working group (to include graduate student representation) to review the current petition process, guidelines, and mechanisms for submission of petitions.

Fellowships and Development- We strongly agree with the need for more fellowship support for our graduate students and have identified student support as a strategic goal for the Brilliant Futures Campaign. Although we continue to be supportive of the development position in the Graduate College at this time, we also support an annual review of the position and the return on the investment. In collaboration with the Office of the Chancellor, the Office for Institutional Advancement and the Graduate College, this position will be reviewed at the end of this academic year. If the future review determines that better uses of resources exist, we will not hesitate to make a change.

Educational Equity Programs- Given the importance of the educational equity effort we need to be assured that we are receiving the most effective programming and outreach. We agree that a central focus on educational equity is critical, and therefore we are mostly comfortable with the recommendation that this function remain with the Graduate College. It is an appropriate time, however, to determine whether these resources are being used most effectively and consistently with our overall diversity goals. We remain interested as to whether there is a different model for our efforts which will provide oversight and accountability in a similar way to the Diversity Initiatives Committee’s guidance and recommendations to the Office of the Provost across a number of domains. We will request that Dean Dutta consult with a group of external advisors from peer institutions and the Diversity Initiatives Committee as to how such a review could be conducted. An important focus of that review will be whether there are more innovative and effective models we should be pursuing. We expect a report on this effort at the end of the spring semester.

Overall Size of the Graduate Program- We received some thoughtful comments suggesting that the size of the graduate program at the Urbana campus should be reviewed. Additional reviews will be launched at the beginning of the fall semester, and the size of the graduate program will be part of the overall review of doctoral education at Illinois. In order to determine a meaningful answer to the question of the optimal size of the graduate program, it must be addressed within the context of a broader review.

Mergers or Consolidation- The report found that the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, the Office of International Programs and Studies, and the Office of the Registrar had sufficiently different missions and that a merger or consolidation with the Graduate College was not advisable. We accept this conclusion but we will continue to review whether there are units (even those previously studied) that could be appropriately aligned with or overseen by the Graduate College. If there is an opportunity to gain synergies and savings through mergers or consolidations, we will put forward a proposal.
This Project Team report confirms our belief that the Graduate College performs essential and valued services for our campus and graduate students. The report highlights some areas for continued improvement and examination as we move into this academic year. We appreciate the careful and focused review conducted by the Project Team and the early efforts to implement its recommendations.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Easter
Chancellor and Provost (Interim)

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

Attachment: Graduate College Implementation Grid