Dear Colleagues,

We write to acknowledge our appreciation for the diligent work of the Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois IT@Illinois (SEI-IT) Project Team. We have consulted broadly with the Chief Information Officer and Associate Provost Sally Jackson, the Campus Advisory Committee, the campus community, and received feedback from the general public. The SEI-IT Project Team advanced the work which has been underway via the IT@Illinois initiative. Because information technology (IT) is an area where constant attention is required to keep up with the pace of development and changing computing needs, this important work will continue even after the Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois initiative moves into the implementation phase. We share some preliminary decisions and actions taken at this juncture in the Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois process.

We support the SEI-IT Project Team’s observation that implementation of the report’s recommendations should be facilitated within the existing IT@Illinois framework. Responsibility for mobilizing effort around these recommendations is assigned to the campus Chief Information Officer (CIO). Many of the actions required will depend, however, on decisions made by people in colleges, departments, centers, and institutes. For example, the CIO can direct CITES to implement Unified Communications and to begin installing computing infrastructure in shared data center space, but those actions must be complemented by departmental actions such as retirement of departmental email services and decommissioning of small server rooms. In order to ensure that we achieve our full savings potential, we expect all unit leaders to recognize, encourage, and reward these efforts. Likewise, because some IT@Illinois recommendations are that study teams be formed to generate additional cost-reduction projects, we ask that IT staff at every level be encouraged to contribute to these efforts. We know that these projects involve hard work, and the support of our department heads and deans will aid this process. It is important to recognize what IT staff contribute to IT@Illinois will usually result in direct savings to their home units. Finally, there will be areas where we need to invest to achieve necessary savings or to improve service to the campus community.

Notably, many of the findings of the SEI-IT Project Team are consistent with those of the Administrative Review and Restructuring Working Group (ARR). Information technology is an area where we are achieving current savings and where significant future savings are possible.
Areas to be aggressively pursued:

**Unified Communications:** The SEI-IT Project Team strongly supported the ongoing efforts to unify the campus voice and data communications systems. As a part of these efforts, the campus has begun reducing our reliance on externally-hosted Centrex service. In place of this traditional voice service and a host of other communication services, it is proposed that we adopt a unified communications environment built on new Microsoft technology. The campus has already purchased licensing for software products that will support voice communication and other forms of communication such as email, voicemail, instant messaging, and teleconferencing in a common framework. CITES has been directed to implement the infrastructure support needed to shift from our current technology to the new technology, and to develop plans for addressing issues that will arise as people adopt the new technology. The Academic Telecommunications Advisory Group has been designated as a conduit for concerns and issues to be addressed during what is expected to be an eighteen-month transition period. The issue of communications during major power failures and emergencies has been identified for the project team that will work closely with the Division of Public Safety, and the Office of Campus Emergency Planning to resolve this serious issue prior to full implementation of Unified Communications. This project will require an investment of $2 million and generate savings of $3 million per year, along with improved functionality.

**Consolidation of small server rooms:** The Data Consolidation Committee has extensively studied this project. A recent survey of data centers and server rooms has identified 150 computer rooms totaling 75,000 sq. ft. in computing operations space on campus. This project is aimed at decommissioning small server rooms and consolidating servers into a few, larger, and easier to maintain server farms. The Data Consolidation Committee estimates that with an investment of $6.4 million this project will generate a cumulative $8.4 million in savings over five years. We will continue to refine these cost estimates and expect that the necessary investment will decrease. In the current fiscal year, campus has committed $700,000 towards the effort to modify areas within the Advanced Computation Building and the Digital Computer Lab to accommodate more shared space for servers. The Campus IT Governance Committee is urged to quickly complete its study of the appropriate amount to charge as a fee for server use and storage.

**Desktop Management and Web Management:** In spring 2010, two working groups were established to propose specific plans for reducing cost and improving performance. In the course of proposing practical programs, however, these working groups will be asked to project more accurately what we can save and critically evaluate the data on equipment and web sites.

Desktop management and web management are areas that are well-suited to a shared service model. During this academic year, the feasibility of sharing services will be actively studied and models will be identified for sharing at various levels, (e.g., college, administrative unit or based on proximity of locations). The College of Engineering is currently involved in the implementation of an IT shared services center, called Engineering IT, as a result of a recommendation from the College’s Budget Advisory Group this spring. As of July 1, all
college IT staff (except those who are supported by and work directly for research groups) became a part of a new shared service center for all administrative, institutional and research-related IT support. Similarly, the Institute of Natural Resource Sustainability Web Committee commented on the success of the Institute’s integrating web-based services within its units. We encourage units across the campus to explore how they may benefit from these and examples in other units which have migrated to a more coordinated development and service model.

**Acquisition of IT & IT-Related Services:** The need for a coordinated and strategic purchasing approach has been identified by this group and by the ARR recommendations. Given the highly specialized nature of IT products and services and the accelerated pace of development, an advisory group on IT purchases will make informed suggestions on cost savings and product and service improvements. This advisory group, to be assembled and charged immediately, will include faculty and staff, IT professionals, and business managers who are aware of the current and future trends of best practices and products. This advisory group will be coordinated through CITES and Purchasing and will be aligned with the strategic procurement effort at the university administrative level. This group will be charged with studying the desirability of centralized purchasing of certain commodities and identifying improvements to iBuy to make it more user-friendly. The creation of approved vendor lists across a variety of IT support services, e.g., web developers, also should be actively considered. The group will provide specific recommendations no later than the end of the fall semester.

We feel it necessary to specifically mention the need for continued guidance from the Distance Learning Advisory Committee (DLAC) on distance learning programs and technologies so that Illinois’ investment in online learning applications is compatible with the needs of faculty, staff and students. The charge for the DLAC will be supplemented to add this additional focus for its activities during the academic year.

**Business processes:** The Project Team has mapped a course for improved stewardship of business processes, including the creation of innovative and readily accessible solutions to common business needs. In our highly decentralized environment, individual units are developing IT solutions to aid their business needs. The lack of a coordinated effort to develop and maintain applications for business purposes results in redundancies and thus, lost efficiencies and savings. Consequently, this academic year we will ask the Deans Budget Committee (DBC) to incorporate a method by which units report on their pressing business processing needs and how solutions that have been produced could be applied to other areas or units.

We support the creation of an Innovation Investment Fund and will ask the Budget Officers Council to suggest an amount to be held in the fund and a process by which an individual or group would get access to the fund. The Innovation Investment Fund is intended to reward individuals or units that succeed in designing solutions to these pressing needs. Innovations will be highlighted in the reports issued by the DBC and the DBC will be encouraged to develop further communication links. The ARR report highlights the need for improved management information systems and the Project Team’s observations, particularly in this area, show how systems of accounting for personnel and procurement are critical to good management decisions.
Data Stewardship: Increasingly, funding agencies are requiring, or considering requiring, grant awardees to keep perpetually the data generated by the grant-funded projects and, in some instances, to make those data openly accessible. Even when not required, long-term data storage and accessibility will be useful both to the researchers who generate data and to other scholars who may find that research useful to their work. As a major research university, the campus must offer the capability for researchers to store and access such data.

Data curation and stewardship cannot be provided by a single campus entity but rather should be built and operated by a strong partnership of relevant campus units and built on infrastructure and systems that have served the university well throughout its history. We are designating University Librarian and Dean of Libraries Paula Kaufman to lead a group to study this subject area and to produce an action plan for how we address the needs of our researchers and students. Members of the group will include representatives from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, the Office of the CIO, and the Graduate School of Information and Library Sciences.

We are confident that a world-class support environment is possible at much lower cost. The critical enabler of this world-class support environment is better coordination of our investments at every level and much better connectedness among our IT support units. IT@Illinois is demonstrating that we can drive cost out of the system without harming our mission activities. The University of Illinois has a distinguished IT history, and our future depends on identifying innovative and highly collaborative solutions. We feel a sense of urgency to take those actions that will improve performance and the computing environment, gain efficiencies, and decrease costs.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Easter
Chancellor and Provost (Interim)

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

Attachment: SEI-IT Implementation Grid