June 14, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

We want to take this opportunity to thank the Stewarding Excellence Review of Initiatives and Small Centers Project Team for its careful work. The Project Team embraced the challenge of reviewing ten very different programs and provided meaningful recommendations for systemic improvements and individual initiatives. The methods used to produce the Team’s report were effective and the campus has gained greatly from the work of the Project Team.

As acknowledged by the Project Team, each of the ten multi-disciplinary initiatives and small centers (though not alike and thus representative of the highly decentralized nature of Illinois) “was centered on a legitimate and important domain.” The Project Team focused on “the impact of the resources that are dedicated to recent initiatives and small centers and the efficiency with which the unit/activity operates.” The Project Team responsibly answered the questions raised in the initial charge letter, determined the feasibility of continued central funding for the reviewed initiatives and small centers, and developed a structure for evaluating initiatives and small centers, both at the time of creation and on a periodic basis during the organization’s life cycle.

Five system-level recommendations resulted from this review. We will respond to those recommendations in the order in which they were presented and then outline actions to be taken based on the recommendations for the ten initiatives and small centers reviewed.

System-level recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Ensure explicit, detailed charters for new Centers and Initiatives.

We are in full agreement with the recommendation to clearly establish at the outset the structure, funding, roles and responsibilities, and expectations for self-sufficiency for any proposed center or institute. The Project Team has made a significant contribution to campus by creating an analytic framework to evaluate these organizations. Initiatives and small centers were evaluated along three different dimensions—location, function type, and stage in a life cycle. The use of this framework, or some modification of it, helps in the classification of the various entities and assists in identifying the challenges and opportunities presented to initiatives and small centers. The framework is an excellent starting point for a more disciplined handling of new and existing initiatives and small centers. A Provost's Communication will be developed for additional guidance after appropriate campus consultation.
Additionally, Chancellor Easter is leading a university-wide effort to study and make recommendations for the periodic review of centers and institutes at the request of President Hogan. The results of this effort will be to establish university-wide policies, which will be applied in a uniform manner to meet the requirements of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. This work is well underway and should be completed soon. This effort is consistent with the Project Team’s observation that centers and initiatives need to be reviewed based on published milestones and standards. The following list reflects some of the possible criteria that could be used—with fewer questions being asked at the formation of a center or initiative and more questions being asked as it matures in its operations:

- Number of years in operation
- Organizational chart
- IBHE status, if applicable
- Mission Statement with an update as to its continuing relevancy and viability
- Operating budget
- Request for tuition and/or general revenue funds
- Level of grant activity—dollars, number of proposals submitted/awarded
- Plans to achieve self-sufficiency over what period of time
- Evidence of ability to raise money and an explanation of source of funds
- If not able to achieve full funding from alternative sources other than tuition and general revenue funds, then an explanation as to how the activities support the public land grant mission and are reputation enhancing
- Scholarly output
- Connection/engagement with academic unit(s)
- Involvement of students—undergraduate and/or graduate/professional
- Sustainable plan for the future—mission, leadership and finances

Receiving the information outlined above will facilitate a more meaningful review of proposed or continuing initiatives and centers.

**Recommendation 2: Develop clear, balanced policies on the distribution of IUs and ICR for Centers and Initiatives.**

For the most part, the units studied in this report are not units that would typically receive a substantial amount of IU or ICR earnings. Irrespective of this fact, the recommendation has merit. There are changes being proposed for the reimbursement of IUs with the intention to simplify and increase the allocation of the amount reimbursed closer to the real cost of instruction.

The campus budget model currently in place covers the distribution of ICR. The College of Engineering’s new policy on the distribution of ICR is guiding an active discussion regarding proposed changes to the campus policy. Engineering’s new policy has three main objectives: to create a distribution model for ICR which is straightforward and uniform across the college; to encourage faculty to conduct research where it is most intellectually productive; and to
encourage growth in research. The model allows the amount received in ICR from campus (25% earned) to be allocated as follows:

- 12% of that amount (i.e., of the 25% earned ICR) is distributed to the principal investigators (PIs) on the grant for research support;
- 44% is distributed to the home department of the PIs; and
- 44% is distributed to the unit where the research is being conducted.

If the grant is a center-type grant, then half of the final 44% normally distributed to the unit where the research is being conducted (i.e., 22%) goes to the unit hosting and supporting the center. Although the College of Engineering has achieved a transparent and uniform ICR distribution model within the college, the lack of such an ICR model across the campus has been a drawback in the implementation. We recognize this as a problem and are moving to remedy and improve the situation for all colleges and units.

**Recommendation 3: Utilize targeted alternatives to creating Centers and Institutes.**

We will look to leadership from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (OVCR) to provide the overview, structure, and organization of the use of targeted funds to encourage research and scholarship in developing areas of inquiry or established themes. We have a long history of successfully operating the Campus Research Board. Instead of creating mini research boards that would operate independently from the Campus Research Board as recommended by the Project Team, we will ask the OVCR to administer targeted research funds within an expanded portfolio of the Campus Research Board. The Campus Research Board currently seeks the advice of the individuals or groups in established themes. The Board should seek advice for new targeted research programs to be funded based on emerging issues, funding opportunities, and faculty interest. In this way, under the umbrella of the Campus Research Board, seed grant funding could be provided for specific themes with input from faculty and staff having appropriate subject matter expertise into the identified themes.

**Recommendation 4: Address additional structural and systems issues impacting Centers and Institutes.**

Through this review and the Stewarding Excellence reviews of the Beckman Institute and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications we expect to learn more about the structural and systems issues mentioned in the Project Team’s report. Although this recommendation did not initiate the review of these two units, these organizations are sufficiently large and intertwined with other initiatives on campus to warrant the kind of thoughtful review and attention provided by past Stewarding Excellence Project Teams. This period of exploration will guide the future decisions for the organization of multi-disciplinary initiatives so important to the vitality of institutions of higher education.
Recommendation 5: Better integrate educational activities of centers and initiatives with department, college, and university governance.

The Project Team has appropriately pointed to this issue, while acknowledging that there is no easy solution to bridging differences between new fields of scholarly exploration and more established disciplines and degree programs. It is our hope that performing a more rigorous review at the creation of centers and initiatives and scheduled periodic reviews will reveal areas of potential conflict that could be avoided by the kind of oversight suggested in this recommendation.

Specific recommendations on the programs reviewed:

The ten units chosen for this review illustrate the broad range of activities that faculty and staff pursue and the importance of facilitating the pursuit of new and ambitious agendas. The review also illustrates that it is not always necessary to build an infrastructure of staff and physical space in order to meet worthy objectives. As a guiding principle, the least amount of bureaucratic structure should be created in order to pursue any area of research and scholarship. It is important that the structure meets the funding and scholarly objectives of the organizers and allows for an appropriate review of the effort. The Project Team has rightly recommended alternative structures for stimulating and encouraging scholarship in emerging areas of interest which do not require the level of investment previously provided.

Informatics and Humanities Initiatives:

The Dalkey Press has prospered in its movement to the University of Illinois and has raised the visibility of the campus in the literary world. Although it currently maintains its status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, whether it should remain independent of a campus unit or be incorporated into an academic home is a question we will pursue with the directors of the Dalkey Press and Dean Ruth Watkins of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS). Most of the academic partnerships that the Dalkey Press has created and fostered have been with LAS units. The Project Team recommended that a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) be negotiated and that the Dalkey Press become a unit of the Center for Translation Studies. A new MOU is being developed with the assistance of University Counsel and the leadership of Dean Watkins. Any changes to the structure or funding of the Dalkey Press will be decided through this negotiation. Given that the Dalkey Press has established a fellowship program, an on-line certificate program, new student programs, and receives campus funding for its work, it is important to integrate its activities more closely with academic programs. To realize its full potential as an academic partner, the Dalkey Press must deepen its connection with faculty and students.

The Center for Translation Studies (CTS) should remain a program within the School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics with strong affiliations with other departments within the School. The Center has received preliminary approval to operate as a temporary center from the campus and its application was scrutinized using many of the criteria listed earlier in this response. The Center’s application is currently pending before the IBHE. The Center has
offered undergraduate and graduate certificates in translation studies and applied literary translation, offering an 18-credit program, and is pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Translation and Interpretation. The MA degree proposal should be a revenue generating activity consistent with the recommendations given by the Revenue Generation Project Team report. We are encouraged by the opportunities for CTS to provide more instruction and student internships. As the Project Team mentioned, campus support to CTS should be able to decline as more revenue is generated by the Center. There was a reduction in non-recurring funds of approximately $35,000 from fiscal year 2010 to the current fiscal year.

The Illinois Informatics Initiative (I3) has served a useful role as a research, teaching and intellectual community-building project. The Informatics minor, the coordination of the Bioinformatics Master of Science program, and the recently approved doctoral program to be managed out of the Graduate College are important curricular activities of I3. These illustrate the opportunity for multi-disciplinary course offerings across academic units and physical locations, but also the challenge in coordinating new programs with established academic units, i.e., Computer Science and Electrical and Computer Engineering. I3 has served as the home for two other programs, I-CHASS and Community Informatics Initiative. I3 has received external funding and future possibilities look promising. The tough fiscal environment and the opportunities for external funding are factors which have caused the campus’ share of on-going operations funding to decrease. The amount of campus recurring support will be declining from approximately $650,000 currently to $420,000 in fiscal year 2012, and I3 will be asked to operate under a different administrative model.

Instead of hiring a full-time director as recommended by the Project Team the new business model will support a half-time director who will facilitate the activities across the various academic units and who will establish an advisory committee to inform the development of additional curricular and program offerings. This model has been used successfully in the Division of Nutritional Sciences. The Advanced Learning Group (ALG) will be moving from NCSA into I3 while we continue to invest in resources to support the digital needs of faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences. This will require a small infusion of annual non-recurring funds into the I3 budget. The addition of ALG into I3 is intended to be an investment of resources to faculty. Finally, if there is an interest in targeted seed funds in Informatics, the Campus Research Board will oversee such a program under its established processes.

I-CHASS has distinguished itself with the application of engineering and computer science to the fields of the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. The work of I-CHASS in building digital tools and serving as a clearinghouse for faculty with digital needs have assisted faculty in pursuing external research funding. I-CHASS has done an excellent job of receiving external funding, and we encourage it to continue pursuing this funding to support its staff. This unit should continue and strengthen its assistance to faculty in pursuing more grant funding opportunities. It is appropriate for whatever advisory committee is formed for I3 also to serve in an advisory capacity for I-CHASS. Over the next two years, the campus will continue to examine the I-CHASS budget with the goals of protecting this valuable service to faculty while reducing the required central funding. Any future seed funding under this program’s guidance will be under the oversight of the Campus Research Board.
Campus funding for Community Informatics Initiative (CII), formerly Prairienet, will end in 2012. The final year of funding for CII will be $125,000 in fiscal year 2012.

**Education and Diversity Initiatives:**

The Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society (CDMS) has realized some of its potential but due to many factors, its existence as a continuing center has been questioned. We will close CDMS as a separate entity as of August 15, 2011. We agree with the Project Team’s recommendation that a targeted research fund should exist to support the research activities in this area, e.g., the “Democracy in a Multiracial Society Fund,” under the oversight of the Campus Research Board. The campus will continue its commitment to this scholarship while opening up access to the funds more broadly with an initial investment of $150,000 into this fund. The Office of the Provost will work with current faculty and staff during this transition period from a unit to a research fund. Transition planning will also cover existing programs housed within CDMS and the current space occupied by CDMS.

The Center for Education in Small Urban Communities has succeeded in building strategic partnerships with local community schools and officials, and as a portal for academic research. The Center’s work has enhanced the university’s reputation in supporting community schools. External support has increased allowing the campus support to be reduced to a recurring level of $350,000. We encourage the Center to seek increased funding from the school districts and to otherwise continue to obtain external funding. We agree with the Project Team’s observation that the Center should continue to exist to pursue research and not be overtaken by the programming aspect of its work. The Dean of the College of Education will make the decision as to whether to pursue a permanent director of the Center.

I-STEM has an impressive record of receiving external grant funds, especially since it is such a newly-established entity. We have concluded that I-STEM should exist outside of any college so that the breadth of I-STEM activities on campus can be captured. We applaud the creation of advisory groups to help guide the work of I-STEM. Because of the ambitious academic and the research agenda of the Center, it should exist within the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost and not as a unit within the Office of the Chancellor. The move to the Provost’s office will be effective as of the new fiscal year, July 1, 2011.

**Health and Science Initiatives:**

There is no question that an integrated and efficient infrastructure to support innovation in biomedical and translational research is critically important to a research institution in the 21st century. The Division of Biomedical Sciences (DBS) is early in its work, and there is a change in day-to-day leadership given Dr. Larry Schook’s recent appointment as the Interim Vice President for Research. The work of DBS represents an area where the campus is committed to making a significant investment in recurring funding for the future. The activities of DBS will need to be more carefully integrated with the various colleges, including the College of Medicine, and external partners. To increase its impact, the mission of DBS should be more clearly communicated. We will continue to look for guidance from the reports of the faculty-led
Illinois Interdisciplinary Health Science Initiative which we charged with developing a strategic plan in this area.

The **Health and Wellness Initiative (HWI)** was established in 2009 with a mission to advance Illinois’ health and wellness research efforts campus wide. Progress has been made on these objectives; however, a different structure will be pursued going forward. For the present, the activities of the HWI will be integrated into the Center on Health, Aging and Disability within the College of Applied Health Sciences and the seed grant funding program moved to the Center.

**Conclusion:**
We again want to acknowledge the comprehensive work done by the Project Team. The Project Team did a good job describing the mission and current state of each initiative and small center reviewed allowing our response to be more abbreviated. The Project Team’s work facilitated a careful review of each initiative and small center and assisted us by providing a framework with which to make decisions on future directions and funding. We are indebted to the Project Team for highlighting many important issues and proposing solutions.

Sincerely,

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