Executive Summary

NIU Self-Study Report to the Higher Learning Commission: Successes, Challenges, and Opportunities

January 31, 2014
NIU Statement of Vision and Mission

The vision of Northern Illinois University is to be the premier student-centered, research-focused public university in the Midwest, contributing to the advancement of knowledge for the benefit of the people of the region, the state, the nation, and the world.

With this vision, the mission of the University is to promote excellence and engagement in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, creativity and artistry, and outreach and service.

In pursuing our vision and fulfilling our mission, the University values:

- A community of diverse people, ideas, services, and scholarly endeavors in a climate of respect for the intrinsic dignity of each individual
- Access for a broad spectrum of students to high quality undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs that prepare them to be lifelong learners and productive, socially conscious citizens
- Engaged teaching and learning that evolves from the synergy of research, artistry, and service
- Research and artistry in creating, transmitting, expanding, and applying knowledge
- Student success supported through academic and co-curricular programming and activities
- The application of current technology in enhancing and broadening all institutional endeavors
- A system of shared governance that incorporates input from faculty, staff, and students in decision- and policy-making
- Commitment to a public purpose addressing regional, state, national, and global challenges and opportunities

(Approved by NIU Board of Trustees, May 2012)
Our mission is to promote excellence and engagement in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, creativity and artistry, and outreach and service.

Our formal self-study process began in October 2011 with the appointment of a coordinator and chair of the HLC Steering Committee and nine subcommittees, each chaired by members of the professorial faculty. Subcommittee membership drew from the entire NIU campus community and included over 120 members representing students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The task for these members was to lead an exercise of institutional self-reflection of our activities over the past decade. As an initial step in self-reflection, our Statement of Vision and Mission was refined and approved in spring 2012. In addition, beginning in spring 2012, the Steering Committee and subcommittees met regularly to gather and evaluate evidence for the Self-Study Report. Evidence was collected from constituents throughout the campus for inclusion in the report and the physical and electronic resource rooms.

Based on the evidence collected by the subcommittees, several drafts of the Self-Study Report were created and then reviewed by the committee members. Drafts of the report were also reviewed by senior leadership in summer 2013. A penultimate draft of the self-study was posted on our HLC 2014 web site for campus community comment during September 2013. Incorporating campus input, the self-study report was finalized in October 2013. Throughout the fall semester, Information Technology Services and the Division of Marketing and Communications, particularly the Offices of Publications and Web Communications, worked with the Steering Committee chair and Office of the Provost staff to prepare the self-study report and the accompanying materials in electronic format. These materials were submitted to the HLC on January 4, 2014.

Our Self-Study Report accurately captures information from 2004 until October 2013, when our president announced, “sweeping organizational changes designed to further promote collaboration and integration within the academic and organizational structures of the university.” Available information pertaining to these changes, particularly to Bold Futures, is being compiled in an updated materials list for the HLC site team and will be available in the Resource Room. The following Executive Summary presents successes, challenges, and opportunities identified through our candid exercise in self-reflection.
**Criterion One:** The institution’s mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution’s operations

**Successes**
- We provide a wide spectrum of resources to help support the needs of our diverse community and enjoy campus-wide awareness of and participation in diversity initiatives
- We offer the flexibility of program and course delivery through a well-established regional presence, facilitating access to quality educational opportunity in the region and beyond
- Our Carnegie Community Engagement Classification identifies us as leaders in community and curricular engagement
- Our collaborative shared governance model engages a broad community
- Our updated mission statement captures our commitment to excellence and engagement in all our endeavors

**Challenges**
- We must continue our efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff to parallel the increasing diversity of our students
- We must direct student recruiting efforts to respond to changing regional demographics

**Opportunities**
- We must continue to enhance communication about and integrate our mission into all campus activities
- We should meet the challenge of changing demographics especially in offering greater access to increasingly diverse current and prospective students
- Our numerous diversity initiatives can be more cohesive to better capitalize on the opportunities available through the diverse cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives of our faculty, staff, and students

**Criterion Two:** The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible

**Successes**
- We have comprehensive systems in place for training in and maintenance of ethical research, scholarship, and conduct
- Our governance documents address ethics, integrity, and freedom of expression
- The NIU Board of Trustees functions as an independent oversight body and has regulations that address any potential conflicts of interest
- We offer multiple means of delivery to communicate information to faculty, staff, students, and the community

**Challenges**
- We need to improve transparency and communication across all university functions
- We need to continue to refine our system of checks and balances for monitoring compliance across all divisions
- We need to find mechanisms to channel items through the shared governance system in a timely manner in order to decrease time consuming and resource intensive service obligations on faculty and staff

**Opportunities**
- We will continue the integration of Compliance Administration with all functions of the university
**Criterion Three:** The institution provides high-quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

**Successes**

- Our tenured and tenure-track faculty teach at all degree levels in programs that reflect our mission.
- Our qualified and committed non-tenure-track instructors regularly interact with and engage our undergraduate students, especially in our core competency and general education courses.
- Our nationally recognized, award-winning professional development programs and services are delivered through the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center.
- We continue to make an impact through our long-standing history of successful engagement with and service to the region, primarily led through the Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development and the academic colleges.
- We have a burgeoning system of student-engaged learning opportunities coordinated through the colleges, the Division of Academic Affairs, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and other units across campus.

**Challenges**

- We have to address the changing state funding and retirement issues that impede our ability to hire and retain highly talented faculty and staff and our ability to plan and operate more efficiently in both the short and long term.
- We must fully develop and implement a systematic assessment of the baccalaureate student learning outcomes adopted in 2010.
- We must continue our efforts to increase program cohesion in the general education program and implement systematic assessment of the general education learning outcomes.
- We need to work toward more consistent and regular reporting of the outcomes of co-curricular programs in order to assess their effectiveness and to better integrate them into our teaching, research, and service mission.

**Opportunities**

- Our General Education Visioning Task Force (Now the NIU PLUS Task Force) is poised to address the challenges of the general education program in the context of an integrated learning model.
- We are ready to implement a distributed learning model to enhance and expand modes of delivery and increase our presence in online learning.
- We can increase our coordination of and communication about student engagement opportunities and outcomes at all levels.
- We see an opportunity to align curricular and co-curricular activities in an integrated learning model to help students develop the skills they need to be lifelong learners and experience career success.

**Criterion Four:** The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

**Successes**

- We have a strong program review process and an invested community of faculty and staff engaged in continuous improvement of the program review process.
- We enjoy a robust culture of assessment, particularly at the programmatic level, and an emerging research agenda in the field of assessment, led by the Office of Assessment Services.
- Our students have access to increasingly user-friendly interfaces to monitor and assess their degree progress, registration, and transcripts.
Challenges

- We must address the challenges inherent in the enrollment, retention, persistence, and completion targets established by the Vision 2020 Initiative
- We need systematically implemented and broadly shared outcomes results for co-curricular programs and initiatives that will contribute to a university-wide picture of learning outside the classroom

Opportunities

- We should continue development and implementation of a set of academic performance measures that align with our mission and priorities with external benchmarking against peers and with state performance-based funding metrics
- We must create a more cohesive model of student retention and completion, coordinating programs in the Division of Academic Affairs, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment and Management, and the Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development
- We have to meet the challenge of changing demographics especially in offering greater access to increasingly diverse domestic and international current and prospective students

Criterion Five: The institution’s resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

Successes

- We have an established shared governance system that successfully involves the university community at all levels
- Our record of capital improvements and performance contracts has allowed us to maintain and upgrade some facilities
- Our strategic planning processes are inclusive of and responsive to the broad university community

Challenges

- We are forced to manage with a flat or decreasing state budget and uncertainty about state appropriations
- The shift in state government support for higher education and the ensuing increased reliance on student-generated funding poses a challenge to our mission to serve the broad and diverse population of learners that NIU has traditionally embraced
- A lack of transparency and limited communication regarding budget processes and allocations has hampered our ability to address pressing academic, infrastructure, and planning needs
- We need to focus on increasing degree completion rates, especially among our Pell/MAP-eligible students pursuing state-identified high-value degrees
- We need to implement systematic integration of all curricular and co-curricular programs and processes to better serve student needs

Opportunities

- As we continue to be evaluated on external performance funding measures, we would be well-served to review and assess our institutional operations to best meet our mission. As the proportion of General Revenue that is dependent on these measures increases, we will need to be proactive in improving our performance
- As our internal performance metrics are developed, refined, and implemented, we should take action on the opportunities they provide for self-assessment and improvement
- With new leadership, we have the opportunity to evaluate all university procedures, policies, and strategic initiatives