NIU PROGRAM PRIORITIZATION 2015-2016
FINAL REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC TASK FORCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senior leadership at Northern Illinois University (NIU) initiated a systemic Program Prioritization process in the Fall of 2014 in response to a variety of factors: the recent hiring of a new university President as well as an Executive Vice President and Provost, a report by the Higher Learning Commission Site Team in 2014 that noted a lack of connection between budgets and the institutional mission, constriction in budgets as a result of regional and national economic crises, and the lack of participation and support of units of NIU’s shared governance structure. The Program Prioritization process was originally undertaken in order to assist senior leadership align expenditures with NIU’s institutional mission, however the higher education budget crisis in Illinois in 2015/2016 brought financial issues to the forefront of the campus community’s attention. Despite that, the Program Prioritization process at NIU differed from those conducted at other institutions in that the NIU task force charters had no specific charge with regard to the economic impact of the outcomes of its work.

NIU’s Program Prioritization Coordinating Committee, made up of 14 members drawn from various shared governance bodies across campus, initiated a process for selection of members of an Academic Task Force (AcTF). That task force was charged with the evaluation and categorization of 223 existing academic programs and 10 newly proposed programs with the ultimate goal of assigning those programs in relatively equal proportions to one of five (5) categories.

A challenge of the Program Prioritization process has been creating and balancing quantitative and qualitative metrics for analysis of programs across disciplines. The AcTF recognized the need to respect both type of metrics when evaluating program narratives.

The AcTF also recognized the financial efficiency with which programs at NIU are operating while providing quality education and degree programs at a significantly lower cost than other academic institutions of comparable size and purpose nationally and in Illinois.

The following is a general overview of the AcTF program placements:

- **Category 1 – Candidate for enhancement**: 44 programs (20.6%). Programs in this category are of high importance to NIU and are high performing making efficient and effective use of their current resources. Programs in this category were recognized for having unmet demand or potential for growth and that NIU is missing the opportunity to excel without resource enhancement.
- **Category 2 – Candidate for unchanged resources**: 45 programs (21.0%). Programs in this category are important and necessary to NIU and are making good use of their current resources. Programs in this category are generally meeting demand and doing well with current resources. However, the potential for growth is not as great as for the enhanced resource category.
- **Category 3 – Candidate for reduction in resources**: 40 programs (18.7%). Programs in this category may be underperforming or may have excess capacity or less potential for growth relative to other programs at NIU.
- **Category 4 – Candidate for transformation**: 44 programs (20.6%). Programs in this category need to transform to improve importance, performance, and/or use of resources. Transformation may involve an increase in resources to a program or a refocus of current resources. These programs appear to have greater potential than their performance indicates.

- **Category 5 – Candidate for review**: 41 programs (19.2%). Programs in this category, relative to category 1-4 programs, are lower performing and of lower priority to the NIU mission. There may be internal and external demand for some of the programs in this category, but there are too few student to make the program feasible. Some of these programs were slated for deletion by their offering department. Prior to elimination, further review is intended for these programs. Any program elimination will follow NIU policy.

The following are specific task force recommendations in no particular order of importance:

- Ensure programs are built with a clear foundation of tenure track faculty.
- Bring more attention to academic programs through high quality program marketing.
- Examine teacher licensure in an institutional context.
- Develop an institutional plan for making Graduate Assistant (GA/TA/RA) stipends more competitive.
- Ensure student outcome data are available for all programs.
- Engage in a campus-wide discussion of what diversity means and address the graduation rates of underrepresented students.
- Address the institutional barriers to the success of interdisciplinary programs.

The evaluation of academic programs and thinking strategically about the future is of importance to higher education generally, and of importance to NIU specifically. The distribution of revenues in alignment with future projections will assist the university with the provision of robust and well-rounded educational programs.

The Academic Prioritization Task Force endeavored to evaluate the performance and future potential of programs impartially, impersonally, logically and thoughtfully based on qualitative and quantitative information and discussion amongst task force members. It is the hope of the Academic Task Force that this work enhances Northern Illinois University's mission to provide an excellent educational experience for all students that is affordable, enriching and beneficial for their personal and professional goals.