

**Enhanced Strengths – Evolving Challenges:
Strategic Planning Imperatives
for
Northern Illinois University**

Prologue: In Pursuit of Change, a Commitment to Constancy

Great universities have historically been shaped by two seemingly contradictory forces: a commitment to constancy, on the one hand, and, on the other, an equally determined pursuit of change. Indeed, much of what we do as members of the academy serves to advance the process of change – changing the knowledge base, changing people’s lives, changing how both individuals and communities interact with one another. But we often accomplish these ends by reminding ourselves of the constancy of our means – an unfettered commitment to teaching and learning, an equally passionate commitment to academic freedom and the pursuit of scholarly and artistic purpose. It is in that spirit we offer the development of a strategic plan for Northern Illinois University (NIU), recognizing both the importance of our mission and our willingness to explore constantly evolving ways to achieve its ends.

The development of the strategic plan has reached an important milestone. We have completed the conceptual stage in which the values and imperatives that will define the university’s future have been identified. We now prepare to move to the articulation stage, in which detailed operational plans, guided by the imperatives set forth in this document, will be formulated. These operational strategic plans will be created at all levels within the Division of Academic and Student Affairs, including all colleges and academic units. The university strategic plan may ultimately include all divisions of the institution.

The planning imperatives set forth in this document are the result of a deliberative process that, over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year, fully engaged the university community. The plan itself has its roots in President John Peters’ vision of NIU as a university that is sustainable, engaged, global, responsive, and accountable. To extend and provide detail to this vision the university’s new Executive Vice President and Provost, Raymond Alden III, created the framework for a series of exchanges involving a broad cross-section of the NIU community. The first result was the selection by the university’s key constituencies of the 45 members of a Strategic Planning Task Force that served as the central coordinating and overseeing body. A series of strategic planning roundtables convened in January 2007 provided an extended venue for dialogue and reflection, engaging over 100 university participants in a process of identifying core themes and planning priorities. These roundtables were reconvened in May 2007 to review the work of the Planning Task Force and the four working groups that were appointed to develop the plan’s imperatives in detail.

On the basis of those working groups’ efforts, the roundtable deliberations, and subsequent exchanges among faculty and administrators, the Strategic Planning Task Force has developed the foundation for a strategic plan for NIU. The document articulates a set of key values, derived from many conversations throughout this process that characterizes our university and informs the four interrelated areas of planning imperatives that follow. Those imperatives are to:

- Preserve, Strengthen, and Extend NIU’s Teaching and Learning Environment;
- Develop a Strategy for Investing in Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship and Artistic Clusters – to complement NIU’s focus on individual scholarly and artistic achievement;
- Strengthen and Extend NIU’s Global/Regional Impact; and
- Make NIU an Institution of “First Choice” for Faculty, Students, and Staff.

Together these four imperatives comprise a coherent and apt statement of priorities for our university to pursue. As with any process, some aspects of NIU’s strategic plan have emerged with greater specificity than others. In some cases the document offers examples, drawn from many exchanges, of steps that would advance the university in the direction identified. Other passages outline characteristics and criteria for denoting certain kinds of activity that would accelerate NIU’s progress, without specifying their content. And some passages contain specific proposals for major university initiatives. Our purpose here has not been to create absolute symmetry in every aspect of the plan but to identify what we believe are the most important issues facing NIU – today and in the foreseeable future.

Finally, as the university’s Strategic Planning Task Force, we present this document not as a finished product, but as an early milestone in a process that will engage the NIU community for years to come. We expect that this document will provide a framework for the work of individual colleges, departments, and units as they plan their own futures in terms of the particular challenges they confront. We also anticipate that the process will be an ongoing one, with recurring opportunities for both planning and implementation. We therefore expect that this document will provide key points of reference to chart the direction and gauge the progress of NIU in achieving its strategic priorities in the years ahead.

I. Key Values

The process that engaged NIU in planning its future included considerations of many specific actions. In the course of these dialogues there emerged a set of values that, while stated in different ways, were nonetheless consistently voiced across the university. Distilled from these statements is a very clear set of defining institutional values. NIU is a university that values:

- Engaged learning that builds upon and thereby celebrates the synergy of teaching and scholarship;
- Scholarly conversations about ideas, artistic expression, and the pursuit of new knowledge;
- The active pursuit of scholarship and artistic expression that prizes both individual achievement and collective endeavor;
- A commitment to engagement and public purpose that simultaneously embraces local needs and global opportunities;

- A diverse community of people, ideas, and scholarly and artistic specializations.

II. Four Planning Imperatives

The five key values identified above provide a framework of themes that inform the four planning imperatives for NIU's Strategic Plan.

A. Preserve, Strengthen, and Extend NIU's Teaching and Learning Environment.

Over the last quarter century and more, through good times and bad, NIU has invested in a teaching and learning environment equally committed to undergraduate and graduate education, facilitated by faculty members who are themselves active learners in a process of constant exploration and discovery.

NIU's teaching and learning environment is distinguished by a faculty whose members value the synergy of teaching and scholarship uniquely situated to engage a richly diverse student body in active learning at all levels of instruction. In the classroom, the laboratory, and the community at large, faculty and students together focus on the discovery, application, and dissemination of knowledge, resulting in graduates who are prepared to participate and lead in a dynamic, diverse, and global society. As a result of this distinctive environment, NIU is poised to maximize its resources in order to establish its preeminence as the knowledge center for the northern Illinois region, which is universally regarded as one of the nation's global portals.

Preserving as well as strengthening what has evolved as a unique characteristic of NIU will require focused attention on four key components of our teaching and learning environment:

1. *Engaging learners.* Foster the continued strength of NIU's distinctive teaching and learning environment. This is a dynamic that engages faculty and students in active learning through mentored research and artistry as integral components of an NIU education. Examples of steps to achieve this purpose include:
 - a. Expanding and enhancing existing programs that support engaged learning:
 - i. Honors Experiences
 - ii. NIU programs that enhance opportunities for all to engage in knowledge creation in conjunction with faculty members. For undergraduates this commitment means strengthening a host of targeted programs including the Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research (USOAR) Program; Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program (URAP); and the Undergraduate Artistry and Research Apprenticeship Program (UARAP). For graduate students this commitment means extending and in some cases creating a network of programs providing university, dissertation, and traveling fellowships along with an extended list of mentoring opportunities.

- iii. Mentorships, including Cooperative Education Programs
 - iv. Freshman Seminars
 - v. Capstone Experiences
 - vi. Graduate Symposia
 - vii. Area Studies Centers
 - viii. The Deacon Davis CHANCE Program
- b. Developing a more flexible and focused general education program;
 - c. Developing and expand technologically-mediated enhancement of faculty/student interaction;
 - d. Expanding opportunities within the curriculum for interactive small group learning at the undergraduate level;
 - e. Expanding equipment and library resources for faculty-mentored student scholarship.
2. *Fostering opportunities for thinking broadly and deeply* – by integrating structures for multifaceted inquiry/problem solving and critical thinking throughout the institution. Examples of steps to achieve this purpose include:
- a. Expand UNIV 101 to include a more academic focus;
 - b. Establish an inquiry/problem-based seminar requirement within general education;
 - c. Establish a capstone requirement in all majors;
 - d. Establish a “learning to teach to learn” requirement for all graduate programs;
 - e. Establish outcome-based goals and objectives for students learning at all levels;
 - f. Facilitate and expand collaborative teaching within and across colleges.
3. *Enhancing actions to foster more substantial embracing and expanding of diversity.* This can be done in part by stimulating comprehensive internationalization and multicultural transformation of the curriculum and the campus learning environment. Examples of steps to achieve this purpose include:
- a. Establishing a multicultural seminar requirement within general education and academic majors;
 - b. Expanding the number and variety of opportunities for global engagement (including, but not limited to, study abroad, foreign language knowledge, and infusion of international perspectives into the curriculum);
 - c. Establishing university-wide strategies for attracting and retaining a diverse faculty and student body;
 - d. Expanding community outreach with a learning or scholarship component (service learning and other models).

4. *Creating venues for conversing about ideas* – helping to broaden/enhance the intellectual culture at NIU. Examples of steps to achieve this purpose include:
 - a. Establishing a “Themed Year” at NIU;
 - b. Incorporating the theme into the curriculum, the co-curriculum, NIU materials and activities, and the campus community;
 - c. Establishing a unified reading selection for the theme (required in some settings) as a way of creating a conversation on campus and in the larger community;
 - d. Establishing an annual lecture/residency by a figure of national or international stature relative to the theme;
 - e. Establishing a university forum for faculty mentored student research.

B. Develop a Strategy for Investing in Multi-disciplinary Scholarship and Artistic Clusters – to complement NIU’s focus on individual scholarly and artistic achievement.

As noted above, one of the distinguishing strengths of NIU’s teaching and learning environment is the practice of engaging students directly in the process of knowledge creation through individual mentorships as well as research and creative projects linking students with faculty in combined pursuit. The same qualities of accessibility and openness to collaboration that enrich individual student learning also strengthen NIU’s ability to build intellectual partnerships across the boundaries of disciplines and departments. In the development of NIU’s academic programs, particularly at the graduate level, there is rich potential for the university to foster and grow interdisciplinary clusters to enhance teaching and learning as well as the creation of new knowledge. Such linkages result in greater coherence and strength across fields of study, and in many cases they create opportunities for partnerships extending beyond the university that serve the region and state in new and more effective ways.

The comprehensive nature of Research-High Activity universities requires a community of faculty members conducting original scholarship across a range of academic disciplines. Both individual and group configurations are valid and important approaches to scholarship, research, and artistic expression. The university’s ability to support and foster both individual and cluster approaches to scholarly production has the further advantage of extending the ways that students can be linked to faculty – through individual mentor/student engagements or through participation in multidisciplinary teams, either of which can lead to the production of new knowledge while enhancing NIU’s institutional reputation.

Some of the most exciting research developments now occurring in virtually every domain are those that draw on the data and methods of several disciplines to create new realms of understanding and new opportunities for expanding knowledge. Tremendous opportunities can result from configuring scholarly and research clusters that draw from the faculty and academic strengths of different colleges and departments. At the same time, the obstacles to creating such clusters can be formidable. A key strategy for

ensuring NIU's continued prominence in the growing realm of interdisciplinary scholarship and research is to create clusters that enable such configurations to occur in more timely ways to take advantage of strategic opportunities.

1. For the purposes of the strategic planning process and investment in the initiatives stemming from it, *a multi-disciplinary scholarship or artistic cluster is an endeavor that:*
 - a. Raises the visibility of the university and strengthens our national standing as an institution of research and artistry;
 - b. Is intended as a long-term collaboration involving participants from more than one academic unit;
 - c. Has a clearly defined focus involving investigation of problems or questions (or the production of artistic outcomes) that, by their nature, can be best investigated (produced) by joining the methods and conceptual (artistic) resources of the disciplines involved in the cluster;
 - d. Provides unique educational opportunities to students, through either multi-disciplinary programs, courses, or research (artistic) apprenticeships, which are unavailable apart from the cluster.

So defined, multi-disciplinary clusters may eventually result in the formation of centers, institutes, programs, or concentrations.

2. *The selection of scholarship or artistic clusters shall be through open competition* involving the active participation of the Council of Deans serving in an advisory capacity to the provost. Successful proposals for a multi-disciplinary scholarly/artistic cluster will:
 - a. Distinguish NIU without duplicating efforts of other academic institutions or organizations which have greater resources and with which NIU cannot easily compete;
 - b. Complement other programs of the university or benefit other departments not specific to the cluster;
 - c. Yield outcomes that have a positive impact or contribute to society;
 - d. Have a large size or scope, preferably involving more than one college, and potentially be as large as a multi-institutional consortium;
 - e. Have a total number of participants sufficient to ensure its sustainability for at least a five-year period; and
 - f. Identify potential resources, both internal and external, for sustained operations.
3. *Successful scholarship and artistic clusters will most likely be those that evolve rather than spring from the ground fully formed.* In most cases the majority of resources following initiation of a scholarship or artistic cluster will be self-generated except in those fields and disciplines where modest continuing subsidies will be required given

the limited potential for external funding. It will also be necessary to ensure a safety net is available to an externally funded program that encounters a brief hiatus in its support. The success of a scholarship and artistic cluster will also depend directly on the skills and leadership capacities of those responsible for its management. To ensure its smooth functioning, adequate infrastructure support will be required as well as a clear and stable set of rules and guidelines establishing how the cluster relates to the colleges from which it draws its faculty and to the central offices that provide it administrative support.

C. Strengthen and Extend NIU's Regional and Global Impact.

As its name implies, Northern Illinois University is intimately connected to the region it serves and the communities from which it draws most of its students. But just as NIU has grown and changed through the decades, so has its region evolved into one that is both multi-cultural and multi-national. As a consequence NIU has simultaneously become a global, national, and regional university with a reputation for excellence in strategic centers of research, artistry, and scholarship. It offers high-quality, experience-based education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. NIU thrives in relation to the vitality of its extraordinarily complex region. The university is committed to direct, two-way interaction with area communities and other external constituencies – regional, national and global – through the creation, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit. NIU maintains a continuous presence throughout the region, connecting stakeholders with NIU resources in research, artistry, and scholarship, and adding value to the region's growth and development.

1. *Defining regional impact with national and global consequences*

NIU's regional impact is most clearly reflected in the identity and aspirations of its students, most of whom come from the region and return to it after graduation (or remain employed there while seeking additional educational credentials). This concentrated impact on the workforce of a global region is further enhanced by NIU's commitment to providing experiential learning opportunities in the "living laboratory" of the greater Chicago area.

NIU vigorously pursues strategic partnerships, alliances, and collaborative initiatives that enhance student learning, inform scholarly pursuits, provide venues for artistic expression, and leverage university resources for the good of the region. University engagement in a global region connects NIU to national and international audiences, initiatives, and agendas. Those connections put university programs and experts on a global stage, strengthening NIU's reputation and influence on public policy and professional practice.

2. *Focused investments in regional impact*

The best strategy for extending the university's regional impact is to begin with a coordinated set of focused investments. Some examples of these investments, derived from the dialogues of the strategic planning process, are to:

- a. Invest in relentless promotion and identify a permanent revenue stream for an enhanced communications and marketing program to highlight faculty research and artistry, unique instructional opportunities, regional partnerships, and other academic initiatives through multiple media. The university will realize the full benefits of its regional impact only if that impact is promoted widely and broadly understood.
- b. Create a business model that provides a revenue stream for expanded off-campus degree and credit programming.
- c. Complete the development of NIUNet and seek additional partners to offset cost to the university.
- d. Provide more and better designed classrooms with the flexibility of distance learning technology.
- e. Create the infrastructure and business model needed for progressive online learning curricula in strategic high-impact, high-demand fields.
- f. Establish an NIU-Chicago regional center for workshops, conferences, programs, outreach, and alumni events.
- g. Actively utilize both the financial and programmatic resources alumni can contribute to NIU programs of education, research, and public engagement.

3. *Cluster investments*

As noted above (see section II.B), one of the four central planning imperatives is to develop a strategy for investing in multi-disciplinary scholarship and artistic clusters. Interdisciplinary clusters that seem particularly well-suited for support are those that enhance NIU's ability to fulfill its academic, regional impact, and public purpose missions more effectively while also strengthening its contributions to research. Another important factor in the identification and support of clusters is the ability to build on existing strengths within the university. It is important to extend the concept of multi-disciplinary scholarship and artistic cultures to shape and give direction to major investments NIU will make in pursuit of its commitment to public engagement over the next decade. Accordingly, the Strategic Planning Task Force offers two examples that may fit the criteria established for selecting scholarship and artistic clusters.

a. *Technology / Health Care Initiative Centered on Proton Therapy*

This initiative has achieved priority because of the unique opportunities offered by the development of NIU's Proton Therapy Center. Once approved and launched, this project would serve as a centerpiece for a series of research,

instruction, and public engagement initiatives that would bring health care, technology, and social services together. These initiatives would offer new opportunities for regional partnerships and could expand and redefine the University's impact on its region. Examples of benefits that could result from the creation of research clusters in the health care field include:

- i. Expanded and refocused curricula in the health sciences to take account of changing medical technology and new treatment modalities;
- ii. Experiential learning opportunities, internships, and graduate assistantships at the proton facility for students in many disciplines;
- iii. Support services (education, counseling, assessment, hospitality) for cancer patients and their families;
- iv. Delivery of innovative science and health care technology to underserved areas of Illinois via NIUNet and access to Internet2.

b. World Education Center

Development of a "World Education Center," either in concept or as a place, will allow the university to capitalize on and affirm the multicultural complexity and global importance of the region by consciously offering learning experiences that engage students in the global environment in which they will live and work. Applying the cluster concept to create a World Education Center would allow the university to strengthen its own programs while simultaneously contributing to the vitality of the region as a hub of intercultural exchange and growth. A cluster of this kind would enhance the university's ability to:

- i. Develop a critical focus on multiculturalism, globalization, and regional identity throughout the graduate and undergraduate curricula;
- ii. Offer communication programs in a wide range of critical languages needed for careers in defense, diplomacy, and commerce;
- iii. Develop partnerships with regional businesses and industries seeking assistance in transitioning to a global economy;
- iv. Work with area municipalities on issues related to incorporating/integrating and empowering new population groups.

D. Make NIU an Institution of "First Choice" for Faculty, Students, and Staff.

Realizing this imperative will require the energies and creative talents of a university community whose members have chosen to be at NIU—who are both attracted by and committed to the vision of strengthening NIU's distinctive learning environment. Making NIU a first choice for all members of the university community will require that the university address a number of campus issues that are critical to improving the recruitment and retention of a diverse, talented, and engaged faculty, staff, and student body. Additionally, engaging NIU's alumni base will both extend the university's reach and enrich a wide variety of university programs. Such efforts will strengthen NIU as a

university poised to fulfill its role in the region and its promise as a nationally prominent university known for its pursuit of scholarly and artistic excellence and its commitment to community engagement and public purpose. A strong community can enhance the ability of NIU faculty to teach and engage in productive, collaborative scholarship, and to provide a supportive and collaborative learning environment for all campus constituencies.

The actions that can advance NIU in its goal of being and remaining an institution of first choice are of two kinds. One category, denoted as “planning tasks,” are steps that the university should consider even in the absence of a strategic plan; they are actions to fulfill the responsibility of stewardship, ensuring that the university’s assets remain conducive to fulfilling its mission of education and research in the twenty-first century. Another category, which we have termed “strategic initiatives,” represents a set of opportunities for NIU to consider that will extend its distinctive strengths to greater effect in enhancing the environment for teaching, learning, research, and engagement.

1. *Planning tasks*

- a. Develop a plan to bring NIU faculty salaries at the senior ranks to those offered by peer institutions, and include in such a plan a full review of all NIU’s systems for reward/recognition.
- b. Appoint a task force to make recommendations on needed building renovations so students can live in quality university-owned housing that fosters learning and social engagement among its community members, and so faculty and staff can teach, work, and learn in classrooms and work spaces that are designed to encourage faculty, staff and students to adapt spaces in ways that will foster learning in all its various forms. Emphasize spaces that can be used flexibly to address teaching and learning needs.
- c. Develop strategies for preserving and improving the environment through an expanded set of coordinated projects, initiatives, and best practices.
- d. Strengthen the university’s planning for safety and security, with investments to increase the number of emergency telephones in campus buildings, information on emergency procedures posted in campus buildings, first-aid and safety equipment in campus buildings, and CPR classes for staff and faculty. Encourage departments and colleges to develop their own supplemental safety and security plans.
- e. Develop a university plan for technology resources that addresses comprehensive campus needs, renewal and replacement plans, and embraces Internet2 and Web2 technologies, and thus provides critical support for the research, teaching and learning missions of the university.

2. *Strategic initiatives*

- a. Expand campus “wayfinding” systems for students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors – including better signage, virtual maps, campus maps, location of safety resources, and student information desks/kiosks, with priority placed on

reconfiguring the search engine for the NIU website for more effective information retrieval.

- b. Use the arts to introduce NIU to the world, by highlighting music, theatre, fine arts, other art events, and public radio, with appropriate marketing campaigns.
- c. Use the arts in the broadest sense as a way to promote collaboration and interdisciplinary/cooperative relationships with other disciplines.
- d. Implement a multiphase marketing plan that promotes the NIU “brand” and enhances our pride in working, teaching, attending, and graduating from NIU (see section II.C.3.b.2).
- e. In order to retain valued faculty and staff, with special attention to women and minority faculty, implement mentoring systems and leadership development programs for faculty and staff.
- f. Provide endowments and funding to assure student opportunities for research and experiential learning in their fields of study (see sections II.C.1 and II.C.3.a.iv).
- g. Seek named endowed tuition scholarships for students in priority programs to attract students nationally.

III. The Articulation Process

This document focuses principally on the university *writ large* – celebrating key institutional values, laying out centrally defined planning imperatives, and defining tasks and initiatives to be undertaken centrally. Fundamentally, however, in great universities responsibility for achieving academic purposes is highly decentralized, the province, in the final analysis, of individual colleges, departments, centers, and programs. Hence the NIU Strategic Plan that results from this document will only achieve its goals if it leads to focused and coordinated planning and activity by NIU’s colleges, departments, centers, and programs.

To that end, each unit across the university will be asked to develop specific plans and proposals designed to implement the imperatives and values outlined in this document. While each unit will want to approach planning in ways consistent with its own culture and history, it is important that each plan simultaneously address the issues and opportunities identified above.

While the articulation of the strategic plan must occur at the unit level, it is also essential that the unit plans are coherent with one another and reinforce one another. To promote these two values of decentralization and coherence, the following articulation process has been designed:

A. Planning Process Timeline

1. Short (2 page) concept papers are now solicited from the university community (see attached RFP). These concept papers are sought from anyone within the university community, and can address any aspect of the strategic planning imperatives.

2. Concept papers will be examined at the unit level and at the university level, to determine possible synergies and promote partnerships; route proposals to the appropriate governance structures; and provide feedback.
3. Two RFP's for formal proposals will be issued:
 - a. The VP for Research will issue an RFP for research clusters, as outlined in II.2.
 - b. At the same time, the Provost will issue an RFP for strategic planning initiative grants (see section IV.D). All aspects of strategic planning may be addressed in the initiative grant proposals.
4. In parallel with these university funding evaluations, units will be expected to build on the concept papers and other inputs to construct unit-level plans for their engagement with the strategic planning imperatives. These unit level plans will be completed by the end of Spring semester. While units will have latitude in determining their internal criteria, procedures and reporting formats, they will be expected to produce plans that align with the strategic imperatives, and that are presented according to the reporting template described below in III.B.

2007 – 08 Timeline for Strategic Planning Articulation	
September 27	State of the University address; call for concept papers
October 26	Concept papers due to the deans or vice presidents of non-academic units
Late November	Council of Deans retreat to examine synergies among proposals and direct proposals to appropriate offices for further development and prioritization
Early December	Based on feedback from units and College of Deans, recommendations for further development of concept papers are communicated
Early January	RFP's for multidisciplinary clusters and strategic planning initiative grants
Late February	Proposals for multidisciplinary clusters due to the vice president for research Proposals for planning grants due to the provost
Late March	Decision announced by provost for initial support for clusters and planning grants
Mid April	Units report their strategic planning goals and implementation strategies

B. Strategic Planning Reporting Template

To promote a shared discourse on strategic planning, we recommend that the development of strategic plans at the unit level should be organized according to a common structure, and employ a common lexicon. The structure we recommend operates on a hierarchy of planning levels, from imperatives to goals to strategies to action steps.

1. The **imperatives** are set forth in section II of this document, and inform all university strategic planning.
2. Each unit will define a series of **goals**. These are outcomes that the unit seeks to achieve that will address the university imperatives. A goal may be shared to multiple units, and may address multiple imperatives.
3. As many goals will seek outcomes that reach across unit boundaries, the same goal may be shared by multiple units. The **champions** for that goal must be identified, including both the person or unit with primary responsibility, and those who will be actively partnering with them.
4. Each goal will be achieved by a series of **strategies**. That is, goals can be thought of as the ends or outcomes, and strategies as the means or processes used to achieve those ends. A strategy represents a coherent set of **action steps** that, when executed successfully, will achieve (or make substantial progress towards) the goal. There may be multiple strategies that can be pursued independently. The elements of a strategy should include:
 - a. **Timeline**: what are the action steps, who will be responsible for each, and when will they be accomplished?
 - b. **Requisites**: what is needed to successfully implement the strategy? This may include both resources (personnel, funding) and policy changes that may be needed for the strategy to be implemented.
5. Each goal must have associated with it a clear **evaluation plan**. The evaluation plan sets forth the process that will be used to determine if the goal has been achieved. This should include (but is not limited to):
 - a. Quantifiable **performance indicators** (numerical quantities that can be compared across time, across units or across institutions).
 - b. **Milestones** (key steps in the process of implementation whose completion can track progress towards achieving the goal).
 - c. A **summary process** that integrates quantitative and qualitative indicators of success to give a nuanced understanding of the outcomes produced in relation to the outcomes originally sought.
6. Finally, as we will inevitably have more good ideas than we can immediately implement, each goal must be given a **priority**. Goals should be categorized as:
 - a. **Immediate**: goals that can be readily achieved, with minimal requirements in time or resources.
 - b. **High**: goals that require significant investment of time, effort or resources, and which are determined to be most deserving of that investment.
 - c. **Long Term**: goals that require substantial policy changes or require significant investment of time and resources, and which may be eventually pursued if appropriate opportunities arise.

IV. Supporting the Implementation Process

As the call for college and unit planning makes clear, the successful articulation and implementation of the NIU Strategic Plan will depend directly on the subsequent actions of the university's colleges, departments, centers, and programs. Developing those commitments and corresponding action plans will require the better part of the 2007-2008 academic year. In the meantime, there are four important initiatives that can be launched centrally.

A. Recruitment of Provostal Strategic Planning Task Forces

To complement the university's existing shared governance structure, various task forces will be created to address specific aspects of the strategic planning process. Each task force will be created to address a specific task, such as awarding Strategic Planning Initiative Grants (see section IV.D below), and will serve only until their task has been completed (i.e. these will not be standing committees). Some task forces may be created to develop proposals that will be submitted to the appropriate governance bodies for approval and implementation. Others will assist the provost in implementing those aspects of the strategic plan that fall outside of the existing shared governance structure. The members of the task forces will also serve as the plan's informal champions – distinguished university citizens who, on the one hand, understand and support the plan, and, on the other, can tell the plan's underlying story with great effect. In particular, they will be expected to represent the plan and its goals, rather than serving as advocates for their own unit.

The following two initiatives involve the creation of funding streams that over the next decade will allow the plan to grow and flourish. The specific allocations we are calling for now should be viewed as prerequisites for achieving the academic excellence called for in the NIU strategic plan.

B. Enabling NIU's Teaching and Learning Environment.

Provided sufficient instructional and related funds can be identified, future budgets should include the following investments.

Increased budget allocations for:

1. The University Libraries, including increases in the subscription budget to match inflation;
2. Instructional equipment – technology;
3. Additional support for impacted majors;
4. Experiential learning opportunities for students;
5. Upper-division honors courses within and across majors.

Additional faculty lines to:

6. Staff high-demand general education courses;
7. Reduce class/section sizes;
8. Provide additional instruction within existing degree programs;
9. Jump-start innovative multidisciplinary degrees that support the educational, health care, and/or workforce needs of the region.

Additional funds to:

10. Promote salary equity and competitiveness;
11. Establish a richer mix of rewards and incentives.

C. Enabling Investments in Support of Research, Scholarship, and Artistry.

Provided sufficient research and related discretionary funds can be identified, future budgets should include the following investments.

Increased budget allocations for:

1. Technology to help ensure that all faculty and staff meet the university's minimum level (e.g. appropriate Internet connection/bandwidth, desktop/laptop computers, site licenses for additional data analysis software and other ITS support);
2. Research infrastructure (space, equipment);
3. Faculty buy-out time, releasing faculty from some departmental teaching for involvement in a multidisciplinary cluster;
4. Multidisciplinary center infrastructure (space, equipment);
5. Administrative staff (director, secretary) for multidisciplinary projects;
6. Stipends for graduate assistantships in multidisciplinary centers;
7. Increased support for the Office of Sponsored Projects.

Additional faculty lines for:

8. Research faculty and post-doctoral fellow lines to support the mission of multidisciplinary research centers;
9. Tenure-track faculty lines to fill gaps in both existing multidisciplinary clusters and those to be started in the future.

D. Strategic Planning Initiative Grants

To stimulate the development of new initiatives that advance the university's strategic imperatives, the university will initiate a competitive program of Strategic Planning Initiative Grants that will be made available on an annual basis. Depending on the scope and nature of the initiative, grants may include funding for planning, demonstration

projects or full implementation. Successful proposals will be those that have the greatest potential for advancing the strategic goals of a unit and the university's strategic imperatives. Preference will be given to proposals that have the potential for producing "big picture" effects across units.

V. A Narrative of Strength and Promise

We believe the Northern Illinois University Strategic Plan will offer a set of bold visions for charting our university's future. By stating our university's key values and identifying planning imperatives in four domains, NIU can tell a powerful story not just of its past and present, but also of the university we seek to become in the future. Inherent in this plan is a case for financial support, and the plan's development coincides with the launch of a major capital campaign for NIU.

At the same time it seeks to attract private financial support, however, with this plan the university also underscores the important contributions it makes to the vitality of the region and the State of Illinois. In telling NIU's story and choosing its future, all of those involved in planning have understood how accomplished the institution has become at achieving extraordinary things with limited public resources. NIU is now poised to direct and enhance its strengths to become a knowledge center for a global portal in the twenty-first century. To do so requires measures of public as well as private support. If the university succeeds in this narrative – making progress in the areas identified in its Strategic Plan – one important result will be to strengthen the social compact with the State of Illinois and its citizens.