

**NIU Strategic Planning Task Force
Work Group I
The Teaching and Learning Environment**

Recommendation: Establish the Provost's Working Group on Strategic Investment

Rationale: NIU's teaching and learning environment is distinguished by a faculty who values 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 one of the nation's global portals, northern Illinois.

Proposal: The Provost's Working Group on Strategic Investment (WGSII) will be representative of all campus constituencies with majority faculty membership. Members of the WGSII will be vetted and appointed by the Provost for a specified term of service. The WGSII will report to the Provost and its members will require a reward and/or support system for participation. This recommendation assumes that the Provost's office will provide appropriate staff support.

• **Mission** – The WGSII will champion both the Strategic Plan and its implementation and advise the Provost on the appropriate prioritization and applications of resources. The WGSII will be guided by four values that enhance intellectual culture:

• **Values**

- A. Engaging Learners – Foster engaged, mentored research, artistry and active learning as an integral component of the NIU experience
- B. Thinking Broadly and Deeply - Integrate structures for multifaceted inquiry/problem solving and critical thinking throughout the institution
- C. Embracing and Expanding Diversity – Stimulate comprehensive internationalization and multicultural transformation of the curriculum and the campus learning environment
- D. Conversing about Ideas – Broaden/Enhance the Intellectual Culture at NIU

Implementation: The values of the WGSJ provide an empowering framework for the other three work groups of the NIU Strategic Planning Task Force. These four values are interconnected and mutually supportive. Below are examples of possible tactics and metrics for acting upon each value, assessing impact, and building on NIU's existing strengths. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

A. Engaging Learners

Tactics:

- Gather baseline data that enables the institution to communicate the current state of the value
- Expand and re-contextualize existing positive programs to support the four values of the Strategic Plan
 - USOAR, URAP, UARAP
 - Mentorships
 - Freshman Seminars
 - Capstone Experiences
 - Graduate Symposia
 - Honors Experiences
 - Area Studies Centers
- Develop a more flexible and focused general education program
- Develop and expand technologically-mediated enhancement of faculty/student interaction
- Expand opportunities within the curriculum for interactive small group learning at the undergraduate level
- Expand equipment and library resources for faculty-mentored student scholarship

Metrics:

- Percentage increase over specified time in the number of undergraduates involved in individualized research or artistry in collaboration with a faculty member
- Percentage increase over specified time in the number of graduate students involved in field based application of thesis or dissertation scholarship
- Percentage increase over specified time of new, additional faculty positions dedicated to a prioritized implementation of the above tactics
- Percentage increase over specified time of the number of faculty with release time for the development of new scholarly and curricular initiatives

B. Thinking Broadly and Deeply

Tactics:

- Gather baseline data that enables the institution to communicate the current state of the value
- Expand UNIV 101 to include a more academic focus
- Establish an inquiry/problem-based seminar requirement within general education
- Establish a capstone requirement in all majors
- Establish a “learning to teach to learn” requirement for all graduate programs
- Establish outcome-based goals and objectives for students learning at all levels
- Facilitate and expand collaborative teaching within and across colleges

Metrics:

- Percentage increase over specified time of students experiencing seminars and capstones
- Percentage increase over specified time of the number of graduate students with certified presentation skills for either the classroom or the boardroom
- Percentage increase over specified time of students meeting or exceeding learning outcomes

C. Embracing and Expanding Diversity

Tactics:

- Gather baseline data to enable the institution to communicate the current state of the value
- Establish a multicultural seminar requirement within general education and academic majors
- Establish university-wide strategies for attracting and retaining a diverse faculty and student body
- Expand community outreach with a learning or scholarship component (service learning and other models)
- Expand 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)

Metrics:

- Percentage increase over specified time in faculty/student diversity
- Percentage increases over specified time in community engagement in diverse settings
- Percentage increases over specified time in multicultural knowledge of students

- Percentage increase over specified time in the growth of opportunities for global engagement
- Percent increase over time in participation in opportunities for global engagement

D. Conversing about Ideas

Tactics:

- Establish a “Themed Year” at NIU
- Incorporate the theme into the curriculum, the co-curriculum, NIU materials and activities, and the campus community
- Establish 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
- Establish an annual lecture/residency by a figure of national or international stature relative to the theme
- Establish a protected time within the weekly or monthly schedule that allows the campus community to gather as a whole
- Establish a university forum for faculty mentored student research

Metrics:

- Percentage increase over specified time of the number of participants in voluntary themed reading
- Growth in curricular participation in the theme monitored over specified time
- Percentage increase over specified time of the number of faculty mentored student research projects on campus
- Other metrics to be developed

Summary

The members of Work Group I believe that a commitment to the mission of the WGSJ and its four values can have a profound impact for the future. We believe they provide an overarching context for the other work groups of the NIU Strategic Planning Task Force and a plan for moving the process forward in a manner that is engaging and focused, yet flexible enough to elicit the best thinking of the campus community. The mission and values build on existing strengths yet call for new directions. We believe that they have the potential to create a university that knows its mission and role and has a clear vision of its future.