

January 25, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

I'd like to bring you up to date on the strategic planning process, its progress over the past semester, and the plans for the next semester.

In September, as part of President Peters' State of the University address, a report was issued entitled *Enhanced Strengths – Evolving Challenges: Strategic Planning Imperatives for Northern Illinois University*. That report laid out the four strategic imperatives that have been developed, and set forth the articulation plan for developing specific goals and implementation strategies that would speak to those imperatives. The first step in that articulation process was a call for concept papers. In response to that call, the university community submitted nearly 300 concept papers that helped to illuminate the opportunities available to the university in pursuing its strategic imperatives. Those concept papers were reviewed at the college or unit level, and then by the Council of Deans.

By design, the concept papers were informal in structure, and did not address resource requirements or evaluation plans. During the Spring Semester, we will move to a more formal process in which those issues will be addressed (See Attachment I). It is important to understand the connection between the informal concept paper stage that has just concluded, and the formal proposal stage that will soon begin. The concept papers have helped to define the lines of development for formal proposals, but individual concept papers will not necessarily serve as the basis for specific formal proposals.

Thematic Conversations

Among the concept papers, there were certain themes that were addressed by numerous authors. Some of the themes addressed issues of university-wide interest, such as curricular innovation; some addressed issues of interest to two or three colleges, such as homeland security or museum studies; and some addressed issues that largely fell within a single college, such as language & linguistics. [A list of all of the concept papers](#) and the thematic foci they came under will be posted on the university's strategic planning website.

Because these themes were addressed by multiple authors from multiple points of view, they present special opportunities to create broad, collaborative proposals that leverage strengths and create exciting new dynamics. To promote the development of such proposals, the Council of Deans will host a series of conversations on these themes. The goal of these conversations is to encourage individuals interested in these themes to develop a smaller set of more inclusive and more fully developed proposals (See Attachment II). The university-wide themes and coordinators of each conversation are listed below. The number of concept papers that have been identified as relevant to each theme are indicated in parentheses.

University-wide Thematic Focus

- Student Learning
 - Curricular Innovations (30)
 - Retention and Student Success (15)
 - Honors (3)
 - Themed Year (5)
- Professional Climate & Faculty Success (15)
- Globalization
 - Language & Linguistics (16)
 - Global Issues (17)
- Education
 - P-20 Partnerships (21)
 - STEM Education (8)
- Environment & Energy (14)
- Health & Wellness (18)
- Organizations & Regional Engagement (12)

Coordinator

Curricular Innovation Task Force
Student Success Task Force
Curricular Innovation Task Force
Curricular Innovation Task Force

Harold Kafer

Chris McCord
Deb Pierce

Lemuel Watson & P-20 Task Force
Lemuel Watson & P-20 Task Force

Promod Vohra/Chris McCord

Shirley Richmond/Rathindra Bose

Denise Schoenbachler/Chris McCord

Faculty and staff who submitted concept papers on a theme will be invited to the appropriate forum, but participation will be open to all interested parties. In each conversation, the participants will be encouraged, but not required, to collaboratively identify a small number of proposals that best leverage our strengths and create the greatest intellectual energy and value. The time and place of these conversation opportunities will be posted on the strategic planning web site.

In addition to the university-wide themes listed above, various themes have been identified that involved faculty from two or three colleges, and that occurred with some frequency among the concept papers. These inter-collegiate themes include arts & humanities, ethics, homeland security, media studies, museum studies, nanotechnology and STEM (science, technology, engineering & mathematics) research. The deans of the appropriate colleges will invite interested faculty to conversations on these themes.

Last, but certainly not least, are the concepts that are within a single college/unit. The deans/vice presidents will be responsible for coordinating these efforts, as well as for integrating the strategic plans that arise from these concepts with those coming from the multidisciplinary university level and inter-collegiate themes to create comprehensive college strategic plans.

It should be noted that not all concept papers fall under these topics, and there are many important issues that may not have been addressed by concept papers at all. Therefore, the next stage of the strategic planning process, while largely guided by the work to date, it will not be

limited to these thematic topics, nor is participation limited to those who submitted concept papers. Overall, this stage in the strategic planning process is designed to produce relatively small sets of high impact/transformational goals at the college, inter-collegiate and university levels that would be advanced by complementary/synergistic sets of strategies. The initiatives that will be selected for final inclusion in the university plan should advance NIU's strategic imperatives and make a major difference in the future development of the University.

Proposal Formats

For all proposals, whether emerging from one of the thematic conversations or not, there are two proposal mechanisms available:

- **Strategic Planning Proposals:** Most proposals will be submitted to the appropriate deans and/or vice presidents, using a common proposal format that is detailed in the accompanying RFP.
- **Multidisciplinary Research Cluster Proposals:** Proposals whose primary focus is on the creation or enhancement of a multidisciplinary research cluster will be dealt with through a separate proposal process, based on an RFP issued by the Division of Research and Graduate Studies. Proposals developed in this format will be submitted to the VP for Research, who will present them to the Graduate Council for evaluation, and will also be submitted to the appropriate deans.

Proposal Submission

The deadline for all proposals will be April 4. After evaluation within the appropriate units, all proposals will be considered by the Council of Deans that will prepare recommendations to the Provost and President for final approval. The routing of a proposal depends on the nature and scope of the proposal:

- Proposals that involve a single college should be submitted to that college.
- Proposals that involve multiple colleges should be submitted to all of the relevant colleges.
- In addition to being submitted to the appropriate colleges, research cluster proposals should also be submitted to the VP for Research.
- Proposals arising from the activities of the *Task Force on Student Success* or the *Task Force on Curricular Innovation* will be developed and prioritized by the respective task forces and submitted to the Provost's Office.
- Proposals not falling in the previous categories from units outside of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs go directly to the appropriate vice president.

Resources

The outcome of the strategic planning process will be a prioritized set of goals and strategies for achieving those goals. Those priorities will in turn inform decision-making and resource allocation for the university. Strategic priorities will intersect with resource allocation in a variety of ways:

- Some strategic priorities will be resource-neutral, involving policy changes or changes in practices to better pursue our mission.
- Some strategic priorities will require a one-time investment to enable a change or to seed ongoing external funding.

- Some strategic priorities will require permanent university funding.

Each of these sets of requisites will require a different approach to resources, with the greatest attention required for those requiring significant permanent funding.

In his State of the University address, President Peters made the following statement about resources:

“Preliminary funding for the key initiatives I’ve mentioned, as well as other initiatives under discussion, has been identified, and over the next several months I will be exploring other sources with our Board of Trustees and each of our vice presidents. In addition and where appropriate, private donations will also be applied to key initiatives, and donors will be made aware of specific ways in which their dollars can support our strategic planning initiatives. All told, I am confident that we can, over the next five years, identify and direct as much as \$60 million in reallocated funds, gifts and contracts and new dollars to implementation of our strategic plan.”

The development of new resources and funding opportunities is ongoing, but it is important to underline President Peters’ observation that supporting our strategic planning goals will come from the strategic use of existing funds as well as the infusion of new funds. Some university funds will be dedicated to directly advancing strategic planning goals, through seed money for multidisciplinary research clusters and through strategic planning initiative grants. The bulk of strategic plan funding will be allocated through the normal budgetary processes to colleges/units. The performance of strategic plans and the needs for additional resources for strategic initiatives will be reviewed annually with college/unit leadership for consideration of future strategic allocations/reallocations.

Initiative Grants

As part of the funding for the implementation of strategic planning, there will be a special opportunity for Strategic Initiative Grants. This opportunity will provide small grants (\$5,000 to \$20,000) that can either fully implement a proposal that only requires modest one-time funding; or fund a demonstration project that can serve as a “proof of concept” or pilot project for a larger initiative. Strategic Initiative Grants are not intended to fund research projects. Proposals for Strategic Initiative Grants will be solicited through a separate RFP issued by the Office of the Provost in February. Strategic Initiative Grant proposals will be due April 15, with awards announced by May 15.

Sincerely,

Raymond W. Alden III
Executive Vice President and Provost

Attachment I
Division of Academic and Student Affairs
Strategic Planning Timeline

Spring 2007

- University Strategic Planning Task force develops planning framework.

Summer 2007

- Planning framework is finalized and implementation procedures are developed.

Fall 2008

- President Peters announces NIU Great Journeys Strategic Plan.
- Call for concept papers is distributed. Papers are reviewed and categorized thematically by the Council of Deans.
- Presidential Task Forces on Student Success, Curricular Innovation and Environmental Sustainability begin topically focused strategic planning.
- Academic colleges begin strategic planning.

January, 2008

- Provost announces process and RFP for Strategic Planning Proposals (this correspondence).
- VP for Research announces RFP for multidisciplinary research clusters.
- Thematic conversations to facilitate the development of proposals begin.
- Non-academic units begin strategic planning based on concept papers.

February, 2008

- Provost announces RFP for Strategic Initiatives Grants.

April, 2008

- Strategic planning proposals and multidisciplinary research cluster proposals are submitted.
- Presidential Task Force plans are submitted to Provost and President.
- Strategic Initiative Grants proposals are submitted.

May, 2008

- College strategic plans are submitted to Provost.
- College and multidisciplinary plans are consolidated into University level strategic plan.
- Council of Deans makes recommendations for strategic initiative grants and awards for Fall 2008 are announced.

Summer 2008

- College and Unit plans are compared with the University plan for alignment and necessary revision.
- Initial funding decisions on strategic budgetary priorities for first year of the University plan are made.

Fall 2008

- Implementation of strategic plan begins
- Funding begins for the first Strategic Initiatives Grant projects

Spring 2009

- College/Unit and University plans are revised and updated and strategic decision making and strategic resource allocation/reallocation continues for FY09-10
- Proposals are solicited for next round of Strategic Initiative Grants

Attachment II Request for Proposals NIU Strategic Planning

Introduction

In the next stage of the university's process of Strategic Planning, proposals for initiatives for consideration for inclusion in the university's strategic plan will be submitted. The exact format, structure, and vocabulary for the proposal is outlined below. At this stage of strategic planning the proposals will play a vital role in the decisions about which projects will constitute the university's initial action plan. A central concern of the proposals will be to work with your deans, vice presidents and/or task force leadership to identify a specific and meaningful goal or goals (e.g. big picture/important issues such as improving retention and graduation, fostering engaged learning, developing critical knowledge for the global community, etc). Proposal should also identify which of the four Strategic Planning Imperatives set forth by the university the proposed goals address:

- Preserve, strengthen, and extend NIU's teaching and learning environment
- Develop a strategy for investing in multidisciplinary scholarship and artistic clusters
- Strengthen and extend NIU's regional and global impact
- Make NIU an institution of "First Choice" for faculty, students, and staff.

In addition, the Council of Deans and Provost specifically request that, wherever possible, proposals address the issue of advancing diversity, understood in the broadest sense of the word (including but not limited to diversity of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, ability, discipline).

The strategies that are proposed for reaching the identified goals must very specifically indicate how each one will contribute to the achievement of those goals. The proposal should reflect a scope that encourages collaboration beyond individual effort, and other faculty or departments included in the project must indicate their support as part of the proposal.

Opportunities for Participation

It is important to understand the connection between the informal concept paper stage that has just concluded, and the formal proposal stage outlined by this RFP. The concept papers have helped to define potential lines of development for formal proposals, but individual concept papers may not necessarily serve as the basis for specific formal proposals. Thematic conversations will be held at the university, inter-collegiate, and college levels to seek to develop smaller sets of focused initiatives within these potential lines of development. However, proposals will not be limited to these thematic topics, nor will participation be limited to those who submitted concept papers. Overall, this stage in the strategic planning process is designed to produce relatively small sets of high impact/transformational goals at the college, inter-collegiate and university levels that will be advanced by complementary/synergistic sets of strategies. The initiatives that will be selected for final inclusion in the university plan should advance NIU's strategic imperatives and make a major difference in the future development of the University.

In this stage of the strategic planning process, there are two proposal mechanisms available:

- **Multidisciplinary Research Cluster Proposals:** proposals whose primary focus is on the creation or enhancement of a multidisciplinary research cluster will be dealt with through a separate proposal process, based on an RFP issued by the Division of Research and Graduate Studies.
- **Strategic Planning Proposals (See Attachment II):** All other strategic planning proposals should be addressed through the present process.

Proposal Format

All proposals, except those that involve multidisciplinary research clusters, should use the following format:

1. **Goals.** [A concise 1-2 sentence goal statement followed by a brief explanation of not more than 2 pages] Provide a statement of the goal or goals. The statement should explicitly indicate the expected outcomes envisioned as the object of the project. As far as possible, the proposal should specify how the goals could be quantified.

2. **Champions.** [3 page maximum] As many goals will seek outcomes that reach across unit boundaries, different units may share the same goal. Proposals should identify the individual, group of individuals, or units that will be actively engaged in the implementation of the project. The specific expertise and roles of all partners and exactly what they will contribute to the goals and strategies of the project should be identified.

3. **Imperatives.** [2 page maximum] Indicate how achieving the goal would advance one or more of the strategic imperatives.

4. **Strategies.** [[3 page maximum for each strategy] Goals can be thought of as the ends or outcomes and strategies as the means or processes used to achieve those ends. Proposals must explicitly identify the series of steps and activities necessary for the implementation of the goals. Multiple strategies may be pursued independently, either simultaneously or sequentially. The description of each strategy should include:

- a) A coherent set of **Action Steps** that when executed successfully will achieve or make substantial progress toward the goal;
- b) A **Timeline** that specifies the series of action steps, the person responsible for each step, and the time period within which each is to be accomplished;
- c) A set of **Requisites** that indicate what is needed to successfully implement the strategy. These requisites could be policy or practice changes, or resources of personnel, travel, equipment, consultant fees, or other funding. Be as specific as possible about all requisites and indicate whether they could be phased in over time.
- d) A **Rationale** explaining how the strategy contributes to the stated goal.

5. **Diversity.** In all cases where applicable, explain in what way the strategies will enhance the diversity of the university community.

6. **Evaluation Plan.** [2 page maximum] Each goal must have a clear plan for assessment that will be used to determine if the goals have been achieved. The plan should include at least the following matters:

- a) **Milestones.** Identify key steps in the process of implementation whose completion can track progress towards achieving the goal.
- b) **Performance indicators.** Identify numerical quantities that can be compared across time, across units or across institutions to show progress towards goals. Meaningful benchmarks from peer institutions should be considered for establishing targets for performance indicators.
- 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.

7. **Supporting Documentation.** Proposals must include supporting documentation indicating that all designated partners, both individuals and units, are aware of the goals and strategies of the proposal, will contribute to them in the manner indicated, and have considered the implications of their support. Proposals must include a letter from each partner unit, indicating their commitment to engage in the implementation of your proposal. Further supporting material may be requested.

Proposal Submission

Proposals must be submitted by **April 4, 2008**. Proposals should be submitted in electronic form, preferably as a Word or pdf file. The routing of a proposal depends on the nature and scope of the proposal:

- Proposals that involve a single college should be submitted to the dean's office of that college.
- Proposals that involve multiple colleges should be submitted to the deans' offices of all of the relevant colleges.
- Proposals arising from the activities of the *Task Force on Student Success* or the *Task Force on Curricular Innovation* will be developed and prioritized by the respective task forces and submitted to the Office of the Provost.
- Proposals not falling in the previous categories from units outside of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs go directly to the appropriate vice president.
- Proposals for research clusters prepared in response to the parallel RFP should be submitted to the VP for Research, as well as to the deans' offices of all of the relevant colleges.