



Northern Illinois  
University

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June 30, 2017

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, Board of Trustees, and  
Douglas D. Baker, President

FROM: John R. Butler, Board Chair

**Subject: 2017 Presidential Evaluation**

For your review and consideration, this memorandum is intended to document the 2017 evaluation of President Douglas D. Baker at the close of his fourth year of service. During the course of that evaluation, Dr. Baker and the Board reached a mutual agreement that affected the transition of the NIU presidency. Nevertheless, the Board was able to conduct a review that assisted us in defining short- and longer-term strategic needs for the University.

The presidential evaluation process used by the Board is a hybrid process that combines obligations discussed in the President's employment agreement, and provisions for annual presidential evaluation outlined in the *Regulations* and *Bylaws* of the Board of Trustees. Taken together, these provisions offer a clear mandate for an annual evaluation to take place in June of each year, with provisions for information gathering and exchange to occur beforehand. Dr. Baker's employment agreement calls for him to initiate the annual evaluation by self-assessing initiatives undertaken since June 1st of the previous year. Dialogue with Board members often generates additional observations relevant to the self-assessment, and results in requests for additional data and refinements. The President's employment agreement also calls for him to propose goals and objectives for review and consideration by the Board for the one-year period beginning June 1st. Board *Regulations* outline further guidance as to the focus and intent of the review and evaluation process.

In addition to the annual performance evaluation, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 was the penultimate year of the Dr. Baker's 5-year employment agreement, which was set to expire on June 30, 2018. Under the terms of the agreement, the Board and the President are to "meet for the purpose of discussing the renewal or non-renewal of [the] Agreement no later than June 30, 2017 or as otherwise mutually agreed to by the parties." Thus, the Board commenced the presidential evaluation aiming to determine whether an extension of Dr. Baker's service was appropriate. This prompted efforts to review presidential performance over the course of four years of service, gauge the perspectives of the campus community concerning the presidency, and contemplate aspirations and likely effectiveness beyond the initial 5-year term.

## **Data, Insight, and Engagement**

For the 2017 evaluation, the Board considered President Baker's performance relative to his goals, the University's performance relative to peer institutions, and feedback from a broad public about Dr. Baker's effectiveness.

Relative to the public feedback component of the review, the following detail is provided.

### ***360 Review***

A "360 degree review" was completed to garner feedback from across the University community. That review was conducted by Greenwood/Asher & Associates, Inc., an executive search, consulting and training firm with extensive expertise and experience working within education and nonprofit environments. Greenwood/Asher consultants have deep roots in higher education, enabling them to aid the Board in understanding what has been successful, what potential exists for growth, and what improvements need to be made.

Under the terms of the University's engagement with Greenwood/Asher, an assessment pool included Board members, direct reports, and deans, and representatives of constituencies, including faculty, administrative and professional staff, operating staff, students, and external stakeholders (the NIU Foundation, Alumni Association, and local officials). Interviews with representatives were conducted over a three-week period and feedback was analyzed by the consultants. Additionally, the consultants considered information provided by Board members concerning prior years of service. The consultants also met with the President using a methodology that is standard to their practice.

The 360 results were presented to the Board during closed session on May 18, 2017. The consultants consolidated feedback according to themes of what Dr. Baker has done well during his tenure as president *and* opportunities that Dr. Baker could consider going forward with his presidency. Board members questioned the consultants to derive a deeper understanding of the component compliments, aspirations, and concerns that informed the feedback. A written executive summary of the information the consultants prepared for the Board is **attached**. This summary was prepared by Greenwood/Asher and no alterations were requested by NIU leadership, including the Board, prior to its receipt as a suitable summary of 360 feedback.

### ***Engagement on Major Subjects***

In the process of our review, the Board also engaged Dr. Baker concerning the future of NIU through discussion and analysis of the following major subjects:

- How the President defines NIU's current state environment, including what he believes are the essential characteristics of the present moment in terms of higher education nationally and within Illinois, and – more specifically – the institution's most significant threats, strategic resources, and opportunities for effectiveness.
- The relative ability of other Illinois universities to operate within this context, focusing on NIU's performance within a similar environment on key measures such as enrollment, new freshman, new transfers, first year retention rates, graduation rates, and financial stability – as well as important distinctions in mission and scope among some of NIU's peers.

- The President's areas of focus and expected outcomes compared with some of the expectations and goals Board members believed were critical.
- Key expectations Board members had formed over the course of the President's four years of service and, particularly, more recent expectations.

The Board's initial discussion of these subjects surfaced continued concern over declining enrollment but appreciation for improvements in retention rates. Board members reiterated their support for efforts to maintain NIU's fiscal sustainability, and remain sensitive to the unsustainable fiscal model within which NIU is presently operating. We expressed concern that an increase in state support is unrealistic in the short term, that practical and timely strategies to manage an unexpected loss of all or most state support, and anticipated enrollment declines, should cause us to consider all available options. We discussed price elasticity, alternative approaches to articulation, emphasis on international and non-traditional students, scaling up of high-demand programs, financial aid packages that include highly-discounted housing accommodations, and exploration of additional collaboration with Illinois colleges and universities. The Board's focus continues to be on advancing the University and ensuring a positive future despite the headwinds that have been created by the continued absence of a state budget. We continued our call for the development of alternative business models that draw on the knowledge University administrators have developed through the Program Prioritization initiative as well as collaboration with community colleges.

## **Outcomes**

The Board is grateful to the many respondents who participated in the 360 review, and wish to assure the NIU community that the feedback will continue to be useful in the Board's formation of its expectations and aspirations for the NIU presidency. The 360 feedback, and insights derived from engagement with the President on the above subjects, will be incorporated into discussions with Acting President Lisa Freeman concerning her goals and objectives. The evaluation dialogue points, at minimum, to the need to focus on the following going forward:

- The execution of a productive recruitment strategy.
- The implementation of cost reduction and program realignment strategies to address fiscal headwinds.
- The development of a shared comprehensive vision that details NIU's value proposition and differentiates NIU from other Illinois colleges and universities.
- The continuation of process improvements and attention to compliance protocols.

These significant challenges and opportunities, and others, will require that NIU leverage the talents and creativity of the University's leaders, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and allies.

Concerning the evaluation of Dr. Baker's performance as president, the Board has discussed his service in a manner sufficient to justify its recent actions related to the presidency, and consider the 2017 presidential evaluation closed. This document, and its attachment, will be made available to the public on the University's website, in compliance with new amendments to the *Northern Illinois University Law*.

## 360-degree Feedback for Dr. Baker's Annual Review

### Background

Greenwood/Asher & Associates, Inc. (G/A&A) was awarded a contract by the Board of Trustees (BOT) of Northern Illinois University to support data collection for President Baker's fourth year review. The BOT's performance assessment was designed to be comprehensive, and the 360-degree review reflects G/A&A's part of the information gathering which will be considered along with other sources the Board planned to review and consider. G/A&A was asked to expand the number of people interviewed to include members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, students, members of the staff, other administrators, local elected government officials, alumni and past employees.

The following 360-degree information was synthesized from over 75 interviews and is provided as input to help inform the Board of Trustees in their efforts to conduct Dr. Baker's annual assessment. The information is provided as summary comments assimilated from all interviewed and is related to five key areas for which Dr. Baker is responsible:

- Development of vision/strategy/goals for the University;
- Selection and development of senior cabinet staff to help lead the University;
- Assurance of effective management systems - to exercise sound management of the operational, financial, academic and reputational aspects of the University in accordance with federal and state laws;
- Development of a collaborative culture with and between University stakeholders and constituents, including, but not limited to, the Board of Trustees, faculty, faculty organization representatives, staff and staff organization representatives; and
- Expansion/protection of resources necessary to carry out the mission of the University.

The follow statements reflect themes of what Dr. Baker has done well during his tenure as President:

- Dr. Baker was credited with bringing clarity to the overall direction of the University when he began his tenure. Many of those interviewed stated that previously the University had operated as siloed departments with a centrally controlled budget that needed increased transparency.
- Dr. Baker's "bold vision" exercise, held during the first year of his administration, was highlighted by many who participated as a breath of fresh air. Several participants stated his comprehensive understanding of higher education and future trends brought a renewed confidence that the University would soon be turning the corner on the declining enrollment trend.

- The goal of student career success has had a significant and positive influence throughout the campus.
- Dr. Baker’s initial goal of a more connected campus was embraced by the faculty, staff and the external community.
- Dr. Baker was widely credited with hiring the leadership necessary to improve the University’s financial systems and beginning to provide more transparency into the budgeting process. Likewise, many appreciated the President’s approach to program prioritization as a demonstration of his commitment to a collaborative governance culture.
- Dr. Baker was highly ranked by his direct reports as providing sufficient direction, resources and time for job assignments. Most all his direct reports stated they were given the autonomy to do their jobs. Overwhelmingly, Dr. Baker was viewed by his direct reports as being a trusted sounding board for new ideas and approaches.
- Dr. Baker has developed a reputation for being a champion for diversity and inclusion.
- Many interviewed stated that Dr. Baker has emerged as an articulate advocate in Springfield with a reputation for being well-prepared and level-headed.

The following statements reflect opportunities that Dr. Baker could consider going forward with his presidency at NIU:

- Dr. Baker and the Trustees have an opportunity to develop a shared comprehensive vision that details NIU’s value proposition and explicit differentiations from other Illinois colleges and universities. Dr. Baker and the leadership team have the opportunity to leverage the program prioritization efforts and to involve the faculty and staff in developing specific strategies needed to support the vision.
- The recent work to build a comprehensive set of metrics to analyze enrollment/retention trends, and internships and scholarship at the department levels provides a firm foundation for the long-term goal of analytical decision-making. Leveraging this work by broadly communicating the impact of ongoing cost improvement and value enhancement efforts could possibly accelerate NIU’s program prioritization strategy.
- The NIU pillar of “ethically inspired” leadership provides a foundation for the continued refinement of an integrated set of management policies and procedures.
- Conflict will inevitably arise as NIU implements cost reduction and program realignment strategies. A highly innovative culture with engaged faculty and staff could offer multiple alternatives for every decision. The opportunity exists to redefine conflict as a healthy process that guides all participants in the determination of the most optimal solution for each decision.
- The selection of a new Vice President for Finance and Administration provides Dr. Baker an opportunity to re-evaluate the placement of the human resource function in the cabinet. Clearly, human resource activities will continue to increase as the organization

goes through budget reductions and uncertainty due to the state budget situation. Staff recruitment and retention will most likely continue to be a challenge. There is an opportunity to align this function in the president's cabinet.

- Dr. Baker has the opportunity, as he fills open positions in his cabinet, to establish and model a highly effective culture of engagement, innovation, recognition and trust. The skills of interactive communication, empathic listening, constructive feedback and team members' accountability, should be considered as part of the leadership teams' onboarding and training process.
- Dr. Baker has the opportunity to build relationships with the members of the new Faculty Union, and further develop his relationship with other organizations including the Supportive Professionals and the Operating Staff representing employees.
- The proximity to the Chicago area, where many alumni reside, provides an opportunity to engage more alumni in academic programs and recruitment efforts. The renewed efforts to reach out to both undergraduate and graduate alumni provide an opportunity to engage over 100,000 alumni.