5 March 2019

To: Members of the Illinois Board of Higher Education
Fr: Dr. Marie Ann Donovan, Chair, Faculty Advisory Council
Re: Western Illinois University Layoffs and the Future of Higher Education in Illinois

This week, the Board of Trustees of Western Illinois University announced their intention to lay off over 130 staff, administrators, and faculty. The timing of Western’s decision is poignant for many reasons. One is historical: On 9 December 2008, the Illinois Board of Higher Education unanimously approved the Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success as the state’s blueprint for guiding all P-20 education policy during the ensuing decade. For those not closely familiar with the Public Agenda’s content, its description written by the Illinois State Library’s archivist before electronically preserving it accurately captures the substance of the Public Agenda:

This report encompasses four goals designed to eliminate barriers and foster opportunities for all Illinoisans to achieve their educational aspirations and to build an economically vibrant and competitive state of Illinois.

Reflecting upon Western’s actions and those of other P-20 institutions around our state the last three years in particular, we must ask ourselves:

• A decade later, where are we in reaching the Public Agenda’s goals?
• A decade later, do we even remain committed to achieving these goals? If so, why? If not, why not?
• A decade later, what do we need to know and do in order to reify our collective dedication to providing quality P-20 education across our state?

We, your Faculty Advisory Council, have been devoting significant time this academic year to researching various outcomes of the Public Agenda’s recommendations and implications. We are readying a summary presentation of our findings for discussion at your June Board meeting. I will work beforehand with the Board Chair and Secretary to finalize the logistics of our time together. Before then, we remind everyone that higher education in Illinois is not only part of a system of opportunity—it’s an investment in people, places, and prosperity.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

Marie Ann Donovan