Planning and Feedback Session
Group: Council of Chairs   Date: April 7, 2011   Tool: Focus Group Discussion
Location: Booth 4440 Facilitators: John Dively and Kathy Reed   Headcount: 15

1. What would make EIU first choice for faculty, staff and students?

   Faculty:

   - Enhance funding for research, travel and publication opportunities through the university not through the departments or college
   - Travel funds
   - Salary and benefits
   - Different faculty need different things – cannot bring anything to the department that would benefit everyone
   - Better facilities and labs – unable to recruit top scholars in some departments
   - First impressions….the look
     A. professionalism, friendliness, people are present and approachable
   - An atmosphere and environment that allows faculty to feel comfortable, like who they’re working with, a humane environment
   - Overall idea that people matter – that you have the opportunity to grow and develop and have support
   - Survey recent hires to see what makes it attractive
   - Better local community – more things to do
   - Still disagree with Graduate School First Choice criteria…

   Students:

   - Usually we aren’t first choice…ISU, U of I and others are first choice
   - The momentum we’ve built for first choice should be accentuated
   - Emphasize our unique programs...make what we have unique
   - Guarantee the four year graduation…this used to be a plus
   - Class sizes used to be a plus…not anymore in many departments
   - Safety is an issue
   - Cost effectiveness
   - Facilities are important….McAfee/Science Building are detrimental to first choice
   - Better facilities/labs – unable to recruit top students in some departments
   - Promote more program opportunities beyond the classroom…through integrative learning processes
   - Programs need to offer opportunities that go beyond the classroom
   - An atmosphere and environment that allows faculty to feel comfortable, like who they’re working with, a humane environment, good student services
   - Overall idea that people matter – that you have the opportunity to grow and develop and have support
• Active student organizations – continuous involvement with faculty
• Residential life

Staff:

• An atmosphere and environment that allows faculty to feel comfortable, like who they’re working with, a humane environment
• Overall idea that people matter – that you have the opportunity to grow and develop and have support
• Staff – have relied on fact that EIU is big employer, changes in civil service system – too rigid

2. What can be done to improve academic quality and scholarship across campus?
• Better facilities
• Better quality/better prepared students
• Will we be pressured to lower standards to increase enrollment?
• Raise our standards – we are recruiting minorities that tend to be unprepared – we need to offer remediation and be honest that not everyone is prepared and it may take them longer to graduate. Our retention rate is lowered by accepting unprepared students.
• Either raise the standards and recruit accordingly, filling the university with people ready to go or expand the pool and provide support for what we’re getting in. The Success center is a good start, but it’s not enough; may need to put different resources in the high school if that’s where the learning/teaching is failing
• Create an Academic Support Center for mentoring that would provide academic assistance for instructors….more than just brown bag lunches and mentoring
• We need to address poor student writing and critical thinking skills…not being addressed system-wide. Develop a culture of revision with regard to student papers. All we are doing is assessing that they aren’t writing /thinking…we aren’t addressing the real issue. We need some sort of a campus-wide initiative (Writing Across the Curriculum program) that would coordinate solutions to writing deficiencies.
• Writing portfolio – should be done in the beginning to identify poor writers early
• Students no longer read, particularly active reading – which promotes scholarship, love of learning; in the past students who loved reading are the ones who went to college, now it’s everyone
• Time – have the time and ability to interact, if forced to teach more courses/larger class sizes the faculty run out of time, resulting in less interaction – both faculty and students need time to read and think
• Students are discouraged from buying textbooks (due to resale value) and are not developing their own library; use online books that students will be able to highlight and keep
• Textbook rental is a benefit to EIU
• We need to solve problems associated with the academic technology program. We have college tech/ITS/CATS…..we need some guidance about who to call and who is responsible.
• There needs to be greater human resources available to address tech issues at the department level.
- Department budgets. Why do all of these initiatives? You are going to get the same amount no matter what you do. There is no incentive. There needs to be funding tied to quality.
- Funding
  - We can’t fund all of this….everyone is getting there little pot of money and are developing initiatives without any additional money.
  - At the graduate level there are many things that could be done if we had the funding and faculty to support it.
- Facilities/equipment/labs need to be updated
- Scholarship---this can be promoted through interdisciplinary collegiality….This needs to be done through department to department collaboration rather than just professor to professor
- There needs to be more CU relief to promote more scholarship
- Quality---In some departments, class sizes have gone up from 23 to 41-45 The quality of the instruction can’t be the same with a smaller class
  - Class size should not be dictated by upper level administration….this is a decision that should be made with real input from department chairs based on the needs of the department.
  - New faculty lines need to be provided for departments who are innovative and who have room to grow. There are programs that could increase enrollments, but they are constrained by faculty lines.
  - There are graduate programs that could be much more productive, but they can’t because faculty hiring driven by undergraduate needs.
  - Maintaining the status quo doesn’t achieve quality and greatness
  - It seems as though we don’t ever want to make anyone mad, so we maintain the status quo. If you want to be great you’ve got to understand that you can’t stay the same.
  - If we are going to promote integrative learning….there should be sufficient independent study CUs to promote and encourage undergraduate research.
  - Faculty doesn’t really get anything for research. Most are overloaded with teaching responsibilities. In these cases, scholarship suffers.
  - If we allow undergraduate programs to drive graduate hires it prevents some grad school programs from reaching their potential.
  - We need to prune off the unnecessary limbs (initiatives) and focus our resources on those that make a difference. We have all of these initiatives from the Provosts, Deans, Honors College, Philanthropy, Graduate School Deans and the President that compete for limited resources of time and money. We need to focus our efforts.
  - We have some dead limbs that need to be pruned.
  - Once we decide what initiatives to focus on there needs to be funding to go with it.
  - Some initiatives need to be dropped.
  - All of these entities and initiatives need to be coordinated from the top, and can’t be allowed to function independently without a focus.

3. What is one thing we need to change at EIU that would enable us to be a great institution?
   - Raise admissions standards? This goes contrary to our mission.
   - First impressions…it doesn’t seem to be as strong as before
• Now we can’t really talk about small class sizes to prospective students…we can’t get to great with these kinds of class sizes…We have graduate classes with 38 in them.
• We need to get out of the mindset of you have to do more with less. There comes a point when this isn’t possible.
• Better facilities
• Staying up to date with labs and equipment…..funding matters.
• Day care center – more resources for single parents – students can’t get financial payment for day care unless they work
• True shared governance – we currently don’t know where the resources are going and there isn’t much transparency. We need to allow other people to help make decisions.
• The upper administration has to be in tune with departments…this is the foundation of the university.
• There are too many uncoordinated initiatives being started by upper administration. There needs to be leadership at the top that coordinates all these. Administration doesn’t understand how much of this lands on department chairs’ desks and the problems it causes when you have all these initiatives being started simultaneously. At the same time, the old initiatives remain in place.
• “If I have to find another research poster for another session…I’ll go nuts.”
• The leadership in Old Main doesn’t understand this disconnect/there is a disconnect between upper administration and academic departments.
• Long-time Chair….What has changed is the number of responsibilities that have fallen down to departments…e.g. registration.
• One example, the Graduate School Alumni Awards are the same night as the Legacy Awards…upper administration doesn’t understand how these sorts of conflicts impact departments.
• The foundation of the university is the academic department. These support the walls and the roof. If the foundation is undermined, how stable can the rest be?
• Chairs are being asked to perform the impossible….another flaming hoop to jump through.
• A place for everyone to gather and share, instead of everyone separating, where faculty as a whole can become an academic unit
• Flex time (for support staff), people will be willing to work harder/longer
• Integrative environment – more to life than punching clock, expand the philosophy to entire enterprise
• Are we trying to do too many things – trying to be all things to all people – do we need to pull back?

4. What about our history and traditions do we need to remember and preserve as we plan for the future?
• First generation students….accessibility…..we are aimed at the masses.
• We have a university atmosphere with a personal touch.
• Personal touch
• EIU has always been more teaching oriented and student centered
• In the past that meant small classes with Ph.D. professors.
• If focus is on students, focus has to be on maintaining smaller class size, interaction with professors, relationship between faculty and student – encourage environment where that works well
• The value of the educational experience – small classes, interaction
• Quality of education – look at the percentage of students who are highly successful upon leaving here
• Faculty/student relationships that go way beyond graduation….if we lose that we lose something significant.
• Residential experience
• Online courses can’t offer the same experience – walking across campus, sitting in union, talking with students from various places
• Continue to develop a sense of community
• Small community – you’re not far away, fewer people work fewer hours allowing them to participate more in university – not commuting from parents’ home
• Bring back Billy panther (instead of Prowler)

5. What are 2 emerging issues that you can anticipate, that we will have to deal with effectively if we are going to thrive in the future? (e.g. role of technology in the classroom, retirements, tenure, demographics, online education) -

• Funding is the biggest issue.
• Less money, less state support, funding
• Benefits to attract faculty….already lost people because of what Illinois doesn’t offer in terms of benefits.
• Faculty hired in early 80’s are retiring now
• Better facilities
• Historically we’ve been reactive…..let’s define who we are and do it….proactively….this takes leadership at the upper levels
• Positioning ourselves going forward to compete. We need to consider a combination of traditional and on-line courses.
• We are being driven by fear and not moving with courage with regard to on-line opportunities
• Have to figure out where online course fit – eventually almost all summer courses will be offered online
• Remaining current…..the way we’ve always done it doesn’t relate to this current generation…..must remain flexible
• Digital books, changing technology – textbook rental system will collapse under its own weight
• Look at the changing student population…transfers, international, commuter, and nontraditional students.
• Demographic trend – we are becoming a finishing school, students transferring– has impact on lower division courses, has already had an impact on upper division courses
• State-wide retirement program changes will have an impact on our ability to attract and retain
• Anticipate population changes….Latino and African-American. How can we attract and retain?
• Placement of continuing education within the whole university – feel like we’re running a parallel university
• Branding issue for higher education in general – we will fail if we continue to market ourselves as an economic purpose, we need to foster idea that we can provide something to the state, such as teachers. We are giving the students something that will change their lives, allow them to become better citizens

6. What is the most vital core value that EIU should preserve?
• Relationship between students and faculty – small classes, faculty relationships with students
• A quality standard of education…concerned with some of the retention and admission initiatives….don’t want to be pressured to admit them and keep them here if they are not qualified. Need to establish that quality standard and maintain it. This is our standard and that is what we are going to stick with.
• There needs to be respect from all stakeholders…for all stakeholders.
• Ethical behavior in decision-making.
• Socialization/role-modeling