



President's Foreword

President's Foreword

While I am clearly a biased commentator, I believe that Eastern Illinois University is an extraordinary institution. Told several years ago by a legislator in Springfield that Eastern was the “best kept secret in the state,” we took that not as the compliment it was intended to be but as a challenge to spread the word about the special educational opportunities offered by this institution. As a regional, comprehensive, master’s-level university, Eastern out-performs our peers across many dimensions of educational attainment– in some cases significantly so. Our graduation rates and retention rates exceed those of our peer institutions, and we are told our graduates are very well prepared in their various disciplines for entry into the workforce. We have spread and are continuing to spread the word about Eastern Illinois University.

As a thirty-eight-year veteran of this institution, I have a deep knowledge base and keen sense of institutional history. This accreditation review comes at a pivotal time for Eastern. The past ten years have been eventful ones. In many ways we have matured as a university while staying focused on our mission and vision as a comprehensive institution. Unlike some other institutions, we did not divert our energy and resources seeking to become a different kind of institution. We are proud to be an excellent comprehensive university. We are looking to become even better. There have been many challenges, of course. We have seen total enrollment decline by over ten percent in the late 90s and then recover by an almost equal amount in the last three years, giving us fresh opportunities to refine our admissions practices. Major strides have been made in the care and improvement of our physical infrastructure including technology, and yet there is much to do. Salary levels, particularly those of faculty members, have improved, although there is still need for further improvement. Most importantly, the university has weathered extraordinarily difficult financial times while maintaining its unique educational features: special mentoring relationships among students and faculty, unique student involvement in the intellectual work of the faculty, vital partnerships with our local community and region, and an environment in which students are our primary focus. Continued financial stress, however, poses great risk to these special features.

Engaging in this self-study process has allowed us to consider our achievements, continuing challenges, and future goals in an organized, systematic, and comprehensive fashion. As we have reflected on the seminal elements of the institution, our focus on “partnerships” in various contexts describes, infuses and, of course, enriches all that we do. The challenges ahead are those shared by many of our peers: ensuring the adequacy of personnel resources, technological resources, physical resources (both facilities and equipment); continuously examining the currency and effectiveness of our educational programs; and seeking excellence in all that we do. In these pursuits, we are wrestling with the difficult changes and choices which are required of us both as an organization and as individuals. The concluding chapter discusses these issues in more detail.

I am proud of Eastern Illinois University, of its dynamic processes, and of its tremendous potential. We accept the challenges of moving to the next level of excellence.

President Louis V. Hencken