

## Board of Trustees

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### To: University Community

From: Board of Trustees, Eastern Illinois University

Date: June 18, 2026

Subject: **2026** Performance Evaluation – President Jay Gatrell, 2025–2026 Academic Year

### Evaluation Summary

President Jay Gatrell continued to demonstrate strong leadership guiding Eastern Illinois University (EIU) through a challenging higher education environment marked by enrollment pressures, changing visa policies, major facilities planning, and ongoing fiscal challenges across the sector.

The President achieved or remained on track on all eight goals, and the evidence reflects steady, measurable progress on major institutional priorities and continued alignment between his leadership and the University's mission. He continues to lead EIU with energy, vision, and a deep commitment to the institution's mission and values. Feedback from internal and external stakeholders is overwhelmingly positive. President Gatrell continues to have the complete confidence of the Board.

### Key Strengths

- **Leadership and Strategic Direction**

President Gatrell advanced a clear agenda centered on resource stewardship, facilities improvement, academic restructuring, and enrollment management. The Board approved reorganization plan consolidates seven academic departments, reduces the number of colleges from four to three, and is projected to generate at least \$500,000 in annual savings by June 2027, while strengthening shared governance and operational efficiency.

- **Fiscal Stewardship and Financial Strength**

The FY25 audit reported a Composite Financial Index of 4.55, continuing a sustained climb from  $-0.71$  in FY16, and FY26 is projected to remain in the Higher Learning Commission's "Above the Zone" category. Credit rating upgrades from Moody's in 2024 and 2026 and an improved S&P outlook reflect sound financial oversight amid negative sector forecasts for Midwestern higher education.

- **Facilities and Capital Progress**

Following Board approval of bond and loan documents, the Thomas Hall project is advancing toward a Fall 2027 reopening. The University completed five active-learning enhancements this year, finishing its multi-year "hub initiative"; advanced the Integrated Science Building to the bidding phase with groundbreaking anticipated in 2026–27; and continued development of Panther Commons.

- **Enrollment Strategy and Pipeline Diversification**

Student FTE declined approximately six percent from Fall 2024 to Fall 2025, driven largely by a reduction in international enrollment. The President responded proactively with a multi-channel diversification strategy: three new corporate education partners (66 students enrolled across 13 partners), the new Talent Awards program (82 Fall 2026 deposits), re-engagement of more than 110 stop-out students through ReUp, revised military tuition policies, and new housing scholarships for high-achieving students.

- **External Funding and Institutional Recognition**

EIU recorded \$16.4 million in extramural grants and contracts in FY25, an institutional record, and

secured a five-year, \$1.52 million renewal of its federally funded TRiO Student Support Services grant. U.S. News & World Report ranked EIU the #1 public regional university in Illinois and #1 nationally among Illinois public regional universities for social mobility.

- **Student, Campus, and Community Engagement**

The President maintained a visible, student-focused presence through regular community office hours, sustained engagement with student organizations, completion of the First-Gen Hub, and the launch of The Village Project's summer immersion program. His active civic involvement, including the Special Olympics' Polar Plunge, Scouting America, Rotary, and expanded regional and corporate partnerships, continues to enhance the University's visibility and reputation.

### **Areas for Continued Focus**

- **Fundraising and Campaign Execution**

As the University approaches the silent phase of its comprehensive campaign, continued attention to donor cultivation, campaign planning, and long-term philanthropic strategy will be essential, including leadership continuity within University Advancement following the Vice President's departure.

- **Enrollment Recovery and International Recruitment**

Reversing the recent enrollment decline remains the institution's most significant challenge. Continued innovation in domestic recruitment, partnerships, online delivery, and international strategy will be critical to meeting PLAN 2028 objectives.

- **Implementation of the Academic Reorganization**

With Board approval secured, careful implementation will be important to ensure operational continuity, faculty support, and realization of projected savings and efficiencies.

- **Facilities and Space Planning**

As multiple capital and space-planning efforts move into implementation, continued oversight will be necessary to align facilities investments with institutional priorities, student needs, and available resources.

- **Faculty Staffing and Student-to-Faculty Ratio Goals**

The University has begun making progress toward its 17:1 student-to-faculty ratio goal, which reflects right-sizing instructional capacity to enrollment while protecting academic quality. This area will continue to require thoughtful management as staffing decisions, enrollment shifts, and academic needs evolve.

### **Overall Assessment**

President Gatrell's performance during the 2025–2026 academic year exceeds expectations. He continues to lead with energy, strategic clarity, and a strong commitment to Eastern Illinois University's mission. The progress reflected in financial stewardship, campus planning, academic restructuring, enrollment strategy, external funding, and advancement readiness demonstrates thoughtful and effective leadership during a complex period for higher education. The Board remains confident in his ability to guide the institution forward.

### **Closing Notes**

The Board of Trustees extends its appreciation to President Gatrell for his continued service and dedication to Eastern Illinois University. The Board has also reviewed goals for the 2026–2027 academic year, continuing the annual evaluation cycle, and looks forward to supporting continued progress in the year ahead.