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TO: Lou Hencken, President

RE: Management Letter

DATE: August 9, 2006

As a follow up to the overarching goals I articulated for the Academic Division at the start of this past academic year, I have asked each of my deans to give me a report on their units' work on the goals thus far and a short summary of the plans they have for the next year to advance them. I also thought it would be useful for me, for you, for the members of the Board, and for my own managers to have me expand a bit on these goals in the form of my own management letter. This represents the third such letter I have provided to you since I became provost. Not only do I believe it will help others understand the agenda I have proposed and its rationale, but writing such a letter forces me to be clear about what I truly envision. As I have shared previously, I am trying to foster regular and thoughtful discussions of my division's future directions in the various forums available to me, and I also am trying to generate thoughtful discussions about the future within each of my operating units. I will not try to summarize all of these discussions and activities, but will focus on expanding my vision and identifying those items on which I will devote my own energies in the coming year.

General Observations

By way of background, the last several years have been extraordinarily positive ones for Eastern. In many ways, the institution has developed into a more mature university with an infrastructure of policies and procedures and a developing institutional culture to match. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of this came as a result of our re-accreditation review by the North Central Association. Preparation of the Self-Study on which this review was based began in the spring of 2003, and we hosted the visiting team on campus in February 2005. Final action by the Higher Learning Commission occurred in August 12, 2005 at which time we were continued in accreditation for ten years. Certainly, all of us associated with this process were very confident that the institution would be favorably reviewed. The final results, however, were far more positive than even the optimists among us expected. The Visiting Team's Report offered many laudatory comments and perhaps even more significantly no concerns on which we would have to provide subsequent reports. As stated by the visiting team chair, Dr. Carol Anderson of Winona State University, at the time of the exit interview, it was the most favorable report with which she had ever been associated. Among the favorable elements cited by Dr. Anderson were

the strong focus on our students and their educational attainment, the effective use of resources within the overall climate of fiscal stringency, the developing culture of assessment, and the stability of leadership.

In fact, I might argue that the report was too positive. Certainly, Eastern was and is a very strong institution, but even the strongest of institutions always have some things which can be honed further. For example there are elements of our infrastructure, policies and practices, and our overall level of self-confidence and comfort which can be developed further. Nevertheless, I think it fair to assert that Eastern was as well positioned to move to the next level of accomplishment, the next level of esteem, the next level of prestige as it had ever been in its history. Indeed, it was because of this favorable positioning, this level of readiness that induced me to assert that we were ready to aspire to be the “best” regional comprehensive university in the Midwest. As last year began and I engaged in discussions with my senior academic managers on how to advance strategic discussions and planning within their various academic units to achieve this, their request was that they have some additional specificity as to what directions they might pursue to meet this overarching aspiration of being the “best.” These requests led me to promulgate my six overarching goals. There, of course, can be many ways to define “best.” What ways would be most appropriate for Eastern? Those I chose to articulate were really a distillation of those I had heard stated in various forms during my five years at Eastern, and hence, I believe they are consistent with the shared understanding of many if not most members of the Eastern community. In fact, there has been virtually no disagreement or challenge to any of them, and they have been a useful guide during the past year.

As we moved through this past year, there was one suggested action from our visiting team which we did pursue and which has improved further upon our ability to move forward. Specifically, it was suggested that a campus dialog regarding our institutional Mission Statement might be constructive. The extant statement was over 10 years old. While it served us well, the process of review and reflection in and of itself can help reconnect all members of the campus community to our mission – our shared understanding of whom we are. We, therefore, engaged in such a comprehensive reflection, and at the May 2006 meeting of the Council on University Planning and Budget, a revised statement was accepted for future presidential and Board consideration. My own assessment is that the revised statement is an improvement over the previous statement. It still holds true to most of the strategic elements included previously, but it is updated and modernized to reflect better the mission of Eastern today as an outstanding regional comprehensive university.

Specifically, it reaffirms that we are a regional, comprehensive institution with a deep tradition in teacher preparation and an emphasis today on an array of liberal arts and sciences programs and professional programs appropriate for our region. We focus on teaching undergraduates effectively, on having appropriate Masters and post-baccalaureate programs, on our students, and on contributing to our regional communities. In addition, it speaks to the services we provide our students. While it does NOT say anything about our future (after all it is our mission statement and not a vision statement or some other future oriented statement) a good deal about our future can be surmised from it. For example, it suggests that we will not get caught up in so-

called mission creep and seek to become something we are not such as a doctoral granting institution. It also suggests that we will maintain our overall size at such a level that we can continue to provide the unique elements of the Eastern experience: a special relationship-driven educational model where faculty and students can interact and learn from one another. Finally, it suggests that an Eastern education is grounded in the larger world and will prepare its students to be contributing citizens in that world.

With the progress made thus far by having units consider how to advance my six overarching goals and with the collective affirmation of a revised Mission Statement, we remain in an excellent position to advance to the next level of institutional accomplishment and become recognized as the best regional, public, comprehensive university in the Midwest.

Strategic Goals

While I have referenced my ultimate aspiration and six specific albeit overarching goals, let me restate them with a bit of contextual background. This is important because I intend to focus and work toward their realization over the next several years. To move the academic division forward as I have proposed is not a one-year project but will take several years of sustained work. Concentration on a few important targets is necessary rather than becoming distracted with too many smaller changing ones.

To restate: **The ultimate aspiration for Eastern Illinois University is to become the BEST comprehensive university in the Midwest** by building on the acknowledged strengths as identified by the North Central Association and focusing particular organizational energy on accomplishing the following:

- **Become a showcase for teaching and learning at a regional comprehensive university with an emphasis on relationship-driven education.**

We are clear that we are an institution which places a particular emphasis on our instructional mission. Our faculty are very skilled, committed teachers; however, it is my aspiration that we will hear faculty at sibling institutions say they need to find out what Eastern faculty members are doing that they should emulate. We have augmented our faculty development efforts. Perhaps, we need to do even more. The second element of this objective, an emphasis on relationship-driven education, is a reference to one of the strengths of Eastern, the close and supportive relationships which students develop with their faculty and the learning that takes place through their interactions with class peers, graduate students and others. This is a real difference between an Eastern education and one available elsewhere. It is an element of our distinctiveness worthy of intentional emphasis.

- **Have the most active and highly regarded student research/student scholarship program of any Illinois public comprehensive university. Where possible this will include undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty working together.**

This follows from the focus on relationship-driven education. As I have articulated at length previously, we engage our students quite a lot beyond the lecture hall; however, with this target, I am challenging us to raise the bar even higher. Not only should we engage our students, but also the rest of the state should know and envy us for it!

- **Evaluate all academic programs with an eye to having each degree program be identified as the “first-choice” program for students considering that major at an Illinois public comprehensive university.**

We all know that in most cases, we do not and will not compete directly with elite institutions for our students; however, we can aspire that for those students who are looking to further their education at a public comprehensive university, we are their first choice. There are fairly straightforward ways to measure this (have we met our enrollment targets, do students report that Eastern was their first choice, do we have the students we want to have, etc.?). The real work, however, is to identify those program elements that would lead students to see them as first-choice programs (undergraduate and graduate programs, programs focused on traditional and non-traditional students), and act to ensure that our programs have these elements.

- **Become known as the university of choice for Honors College/Programming among the state’s public comprehensive universities.**

We have a great tradition with our Honors programming. Still we know that for many prospective honors students a couple of our sibling institutions’ honors programs catch their eye. One way to state this challenge might be to aspire to have our Honors College and honors programming seen as the program of choice for those students interested in such programming who are located north of Interstate 80. There are, of course, other formulations of this challenge that might be more appropriate as well.

- **Increase the portion of students participating in Study Abroad programs with the long-term goal being to have the highest rate of student participation in these programs among the state’s public comprehensive universities.**

The University of Wisconsin at La Crosse has one of the highest participation rates in the country for its study abroad programs. As an institution, however, it is not that different than Eastern, and I am not suggesting (yet!) that we attain its level of student participation. I do aspire to have Eastern do better than our in-state peer institutions.

- **Have the Doudna Fine Arts Center become known within the region in a fashion similar to that of the Krannert Center.**

The new Doudna Fine Arts Center will be an enormous building and a striking addition to

this campus. Once open, it is important that the “footprint” of the Center be as big programmatically as it is physically. It cannot be simply a nice building for three academic departments. Certainly, the departments deserve such quarters, but we must find ways to make it much more than this. Ultimately, we need wide-ranging conversations to realize fully the promise this investment holds for us.

Moving Forward

As stated, during this past year, my ultimate aspiration and my six slightly more specific overarching goals have been well received generally, and the units have expended a good deal of energy working on them. To continue this progress, however, will require the academic division generally and the many individual academic units specifically to concentrate even more seriously on identifying how they can respond and move forward to implement the initiatives identified thus far. This will require the manager of each unit to focus on real long-term planning. Unfortunately, planning has too often been an exercise in which unit-level managers developed expenditure “wish lists” for their superiors to fund – or not fund, as has more typically been our reality. Given the absence of new funds in recent years, even developing such wish lists has been seen as a largely futile endeavor and not pursued actively. Moreover, simple budgetary planning is not the same as future oriented, strategic planning. It will be my task to move planning initiatives across the academic division to a new level of sophistication, focus and creativity; to leverage those resources and tools over which I have influence to promote these activities; and to seek the fullest engagement of the faculty and, where appropriate, staff and students, in them. As the leader of the division, I see working on this to be a primary task for me.

That said, let me sketch a few of the initiatives and actions taken and planned across the division to move this agenda forward.

1. Showcase for teaching and learning with an emphasis on relationship-driven education.

- Continue to emphasize program assessment at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Different units are at different stages of maturity in their assessment efforts. One useful approach for thinking about this is to challenge each unit to improve to the next level of maturity as defined by our institutional accrediting organization, the NCA. At its best, assessment is a means to determine systematically whether a degree program is meeting its stated learning objectives. Having such information provides a basis for considering program adjustments and is essential for determining how to make programmatic improvements.
- Augment the fledgling faculty development initiative with a particular emphasis on providing resources for those working on the teaching and learning process. Good teaching is both an art and a science. In addition, providing stimulating learning opportunities is a constantly evolving process demanding a high level of creativity on

the part of the instructor. Our faculty should be instructing faculty from other institutions on how to do this.

- Related to the previous item is the continuing development of effective faculty mentoring programs especially for newly hired faculty. The Faculty Development Office as well as the colleges have been working on these in the last year, and they will be challenged to do more. Not only are such programs important for retention, but they lead to more productive faculty.
- Increase the stature and quantity of our scholarly contributions on teaching and learning. As first and foremost a “teaching institution,” it is reasonable and valuable for Eastern to have meaningful faculty activities focusing on this form of scholarship. It represents a valuable contribution to each of the disciplines. The next contractually prescribed cycle of DAC revisions offers one opportunity to increase the emphasis on this legitimate form of scholarship, and there are other internal activities that can do likewise in the meantime.
- Lift up and recognize innovative and effective instructional contributions including those that extend the teaching paradigm and provide effective strategies for expanding the concept of relationship-driven education. Specifically, those strategies and techniques that engage our students to work together with their faculty and graduate students, as well as their peers in the learning process should be recognized and fostered.
- Associated with the previous item, continue the engagement of technology in the instructional mission in ways that are consistent with the Eastern mission and our established uniqueness. This will include additional distance-delivered offerings which still meet our relationship-driven expectation as well as intensive use of web-delivered enhancements to our more numerous face-to-face instructional offerings.
- Implement the service learning/volunteerism initiative wherein Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will collaborate to realize these two related but distinct elements. The service-learning element will begin as a pilot under the stewardship of Dean Irwin and has the potential to grow into a truly distinctive element of an Eastern education.

2. Have the most active and highly regarded student research/student scholarship program

- Showcase student projects (research/scholarship/creative activity) in each academic department. Supplement this with a means to showcase such student initiatives University-wide. Major research institutions often have great difficulty connecting undergraduates to the intellectual work of the faculty. As a teaching institution with an abundance of more applied research, Eastern has an opportunity to engage our undergraduates in this work in particularly meaningful ways. This should be one of

the signatures of the education we provide.

- Ensure that there are active departmental honors programs in as many degree programs as humanly possible. These programs require and, hence, have a particularly strong record of engaging undergraduates in research and scholarship. There are, of course, other good reasons for having active departmental honors programs, but engagement of students in scholarly activity is certainly one of them.

3. First-Choice Degree Programs

- While defining the elements that make a degree program a first-choice program is challenging, agreeing on the “measures” by which to assess attainment of first-choice status should be less so. Are we seeing enough applications from interested students to meet the enrollment target; do these applicants meet our academic expectations; do these applicants choose to come here even when they have alternatives; do these applicants come in spite of less bountiful financial aid packages? These sorts of questions can be posed and then measured. It is not simply having lots of students, but having the students we want.
- As noted, the more challenging task is to identify features of first-choice programs and then have programs actively pursue achieving them. There, of course, is not one simple set of features that will apply to the entire breadth of our degree programs. There also will have to be some “customizing” of the list for specific applications. Nevertheless, a generic listing of features to consider is a task on which our various councils must focus in consultation, of course, with unit leaders. In addition, these features must become incorporated into on-going review processes including but not limited to IBHE program reviews and accreditation reviews. These reviews should include an assessment as to whether the program has achieved sufficient distinction to be a first-choice program within the context of Eastern and our competitor programs. Finally, successful progress in achieving first-choice status will follow from effective program assessment. Do our students learn from their program what they desired and needed to learn?
- Using the features identified for first-choice programs, unit and program leaders will focus on identifying initiatives to move toward first-choice status. Deans, department chairs, and other academic leaders will need to engage all their faculty members to help identify and implement such initiatives.

4. Honors programming of choice

- Ensure that there are active departmental honors programs in as many degree programs as humanly possible. One reason for this, encouraging student engagement in scholarship, has already been mentioned. Another reason is simply to provide honors opportunities to attract and retain talented students in each of our undergraduate degree programs.
- Seek to make the honors programs at Eastern unique and distinctive. The dean of the Honors College, Dr. Bonnie Irwin, has given a good deal of thought to both the need to do this and how to do this. She has moved to embed student research, study abroad, participation in the national Honors Conference, and service learning in ways that enhance the educational experience and differentiate the program from the other honors programs available to students in Illinois.
- Mentor students for national scholarship competitions. Honors students are not the only population of students who should consider entering national scholarship competitions, however, a large share of honors students should consider this. Ultimately, of course, only a few will succeed, but the experience of competing for this recognition is an education in itself. The esteem that is cast on an institution which has success in this regard is, of course, substantial as well.

5. Study Abroad

- All departments will be charged with increasing study abroad activities for their programs and majors. With the administrative hurdles largely overcome and the support structures now in place, assertively promoting study abroad experiences broadly across the academic units is now the order of the day.
- Develop study plans for each major which integrate semester-long study abroad experiences without extending the time to degree. Ensuring that participation in study abroad opportunities advances the student toward his/her degree objective without “penalizing” him/her is essential to making study abroad appeal to a broad range of students.

6. Doudna

- Charge all colleges with identifying interdisciplinary collaborations with Fine Arts programs to enhance the programmatic impact of the new Doudna Fine Arts Center.
- Develop a plan to offer programming in the new Doudna that comports with the stature of the building. This will require some staffing additions as well as financial underwriting neither of which will be easily provided. A plan and a vision for this is

the current order of the day. So too will be fundraising specifically dedicated to support of this programming.

Other Matters To Which I Will Devote My Time

- Implementation of the RN to BS in Nursing Completion Program

To date we have received all program approvals to move ahead with this new degree program and have hired a capable founding director. Before we can admit a single student, however, there is an enormous amount of work to be done. Dean Mary Anne Hanner has direct supervisory responsibility for the director and is working closely with her to attend to the details of launching this program with a target of having our first admitted students for the Fall 2007 Semester. This is an ambitious target which will be pursued vigorously. Concurrently, it is imperative that we continue to seek funds for this program aggressively. Private donations and public support are all being pursued and are certainly needed.

- Continue to Refine Admissions Processes/Manage Enrollment

Over the last two years under the guidance of our Director of Admissions, Brenda Major, we have continued to update the means and strategies used to recruit our future students and make effective use of technological tools to identify and communicate with prospective students. Along with bringing modern practices to the recruitment and admission of our students, we are trying to become more intentional about selecting those students who are ready for the academic challenges at Eastern and those who will be a “good fit” at Eastern (for example, those students who desire and will thrive in our relationship-driven environment). Specifically, while we are not making any dramatic changes in our admission requirements, we are not simply accepting everyone who applies and meets the minimum standards. We are being conscious about choosing our students, rather than accepting anyone who is merely interested in us. Trying to make such a change in institutional perception in the eyes of all of the high school guidance counselors is no mean feat however.

It also is essential that we actively manage our enrollment to match the resources (physical, human and financial) available to us. Currently, our total enrollment realistically is at its maximum. Any substantial addition would alter the nature of the education we offer if it could be accommodated at all. On the other hand, we will soon be graduating students from our very large entering classes of four and five years ago. This makes it likely that our total enrollment will decline in the immediate future. While some relief is timely, enrollment cannot go into a tailspin like it did almost a decade ago. It is imperative that we achieve and then stabilize an acceptable overall enrollment level.

- Reintegrate Enrollment Services/Take Advantage of the Opportunities Offered by ERP

The move to a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, the Banner System, on which Eastern has embarked, both requires and gives us an opportunity to re-evaluate many of our internal processes. Now that we have begun the process of implementing the student portion of the Banner System, we are carefully examining and, where appropriate re-engineering our enrollment services processing. It is my expectation that we can reconceptualize how we provide enrollment services to our students.

What I hope we can ultimately achieve is a re-integration of the various pieces of student enrollment services “virtually,” and live up to the accolades we received from the NCA regarding our pervasive student focus. Having these services spread across several divisions at times has worked against integration and coordination. We need to reconnect these services from the “consumers’ perspective” if not from the organizational perspective. Students do not wish to go to three or four offices to complete their enrollment business. Nor should they have to go to three or four different windows in the same office. Students should be able to avail themselves of these services “anywhere, any time, any place.” If in the unusual case where a personal visit is necessary, it should be handled at a single point of contact.

Finally, looking beyond my division’s responsibility, I will continue to advocate for a more coordinated, strategic approach to handling our student financial aid resources. We are limited, of course, in the extent of institutional funding which can be diverted to such aid. We can, however, be more intentional in using what we do have for strategic enrollment purposes. That said, I continue to be an advocate for additional financial support and more intentional coordination.

- Collaborate/Cooperate with External Relations in Developing New Private Funding Sources

With our largest benefactor, the State of Illinois, increasingly unreliable in providing adequate support, we all know that more must be done in the area of fund raising and development. This has been an area where we have struggled both within my division and more generally. It has not been for lack of effort, but we still do not have the infrastructure to undertake the kind of aggressive fund raising we need. With the recent advice of a fund raising consultant suggesting that we need more institutional direction and coordination, it is timely to renew divisional efforts to collaborate and coordinate with External Relations to improve our overall effectiveness. Clearly, the academic affairs division has extensive needs for additional funding and a few (emphasis on few!) resources to bring to the overall institutional effort. We also recognize the need to be a part of the team in the endeavor and will do so.

Conclusion

I do not believe that the admittedly aspirational statement that we become the best regional comprehensive university in the Midwest is at all far fetched. Eastern is already recognized as among the best such institutions, and I believe we are well positioned to move to this next level. If we can make reasonable progress as I have outlined herein, we will achieve this goal. I look forward to the challenge and the journey!