

Annual Evaluation of the President of Northeastern Illinois University
Conducted by the Board of Trustees
for the period of 2020-2021

The Covid-19 pandemic changed every aspect of life at Northeastern Illinois University. Its effects profoundly altered the focus and efforts of Dr. Gloria Gibson, president of NEIU, as it did of the university's students, faculty, and staff. This evaluation of President Gibson, consequently, is similarly deeply affected by the virus. We the Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University have considered her performance against the four goals defined in her contract and the additional Areas of Focus identified in her previous evaluation within the context of the challenges presented by the pandemic.

From the outset we acknowledge the efforts of President Gibson in addressing a crisis unprecedented in NEIU's history while keeping a focus on teaching and learning. Her days were typically long as they went back and forth between pandemic-inflicted emergencies and more traditional tasks of setting the academic agenda for a higher education institution. She, her cabinet, and indeed all the NEIU team is to be commended for their work in running a university and serving students in the midst of a healthcare crisis.

We consider this challenging context as we observe that President Gibson did not meet mutually agreed upon targets for three of the four contractual goals. Additionally, we saw inconsistent attainment in the Areas of Focus.

We turn now to the four goals and six Areas of Focus.

Four contractual goals

Recruitment (agreed upon target for FY21 not met)

Enrollment of first-time/full-time students at most all Illinois public universities is down, however, NEIU's numbers are below the average. There is general consensus among the board that the numbers could have been stronger if the president had enacted more leadership in this function and made adjustments to roles and responsibilities for employees within that department more quickly. We hope the tuition initiative and new leadership in enrollment will improve performance in this crucial area. We commend the host of initiatives that have been created to boost enrollment. As well, the new CRM system should make a positive impact, however, we also recognize the need to continue building relationships with local feeder schools. We are extremely pleased with the increase in graduate student enrollment.

Retention (agreed upon target for FY21 met)

Retention continues to be a bright spot for the university. High percentages of students are enrolling in success programs, and particularly in cohort programs. Those programs are succeeding as students continue to show measurable improvement in retention. As well, professional development has surely contributed to our improved retention numbers. We are pleased that retention has improved among Latino and African American students.

Graduation rates (agreed upon target for FY21 not met)

We continue to use the declaration of a major as a proxy for the graduation rate. This percentage dropped slightly this year.

Fund raising (agreed upon target for FY21 not met)

The university's development efforts were clearly impaired by the pandemic. This was keenly felt in the area of event fund raising. As of the writing of this evaluation the development office has numerous development opportunities in motion. However, notwithstanding an unexpected and exceedingly large donation NEIU will fall well short of its goal for the year. This goal, moreover, was flat compared to the prior year.

Areas of Focus

- Strategic leadership: the pandemic certainly required a focus on immediate challenges, which were numerous and constantly evolving. There is, however, among the board and staff interviewed a deep desire to see the president articulate a strategic vision for NEIU. We hope this can come into focus in the coming year. The university's existing strategic plan ought to form a starting point for this work.
- Communicating strategic agenda: interviews of staff demonstrate that the president has yet to effectively communicate priorities to senior leadership and even more to the broader university community. This impairs their ability to further those priorities as a part of their roles and responsibilities. The numerous town hall meetings, on the other hand, certainly improved dialogue with the university community. As well, communications regarding the pandemic were handled quite well.
- Execution on tasks and objectives: numerous trustees as well as staff commented on conversations held with the president where specific actions were discussed, but seemed to not come to fruition. Even if an item is delayed in being addressed, it is imperative that the person(s) concerned with the issue be informed as to status.
- Work to resolve larger challenges: the president showed strong leadership in bringing forward resolutions to our properties on Bryn Mawr and at El Centro. As well, her efforts to improve occupancy in the Nest and to improve its financial position have been creative and positive.
- Building of leadership team: the president made progress in achieving greater diversity in her senior staff.
- Improve NEIU's fiscal stability and growth: the president is correct in identifying enrollment growth as fundamental to improving the university's financial position. We will need her leadership and that of the new VP of Enrollment to drive success in this area. The president did well in maintaining relationships with legislators and thus improve our state funding.

June 10, 2021