

President Gloria Gibson 2021 – 2022 Annual Evaluation

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University

Introductory Observations

The Covid-19 pandemic continued as a dominant influence in the past year. The virus, evolving as it did, required continuous attention and shifting responses. In considering President Gibson's performance against agreed-upon goals the trustees considered that the pandemic influenced the day-to-day as well as the mid and long-range priorities of the president and indeed the entire university community.

President Gibson has provided resilient leadership throughout the crisis. She has been visible and made good use of the university's Covid Task Force, which is to be commended for its continued dedication to the goal of ensuring safety for our students, faculty, and staff. The Student Emergency Fund is an example of the concern and responsiveness of the president and the university community for the wellbeing of our most-affected students.

The president continues to receive high marks for her constant good cheer and ability to connect with people. We are blessed to have someone who can relate from her leadership position to the university's many constituencies. We hope these qualities can help to address general morale issues that we have observed on campus.

There were numerous accomplishments in the past year that advanced our educational mission and for which we congratulate President Gibson. Among them we highlight: the Afghan Transition Program; the approval of the new Education Building; the university's credit upgrade by the Moody's Corporation; the adoption of a new CRM system; the hiring of NEIU's first Executive Director for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and the approval of the university's first doctoral program.

Beyond these observations about her general contributions we turn our attention to the four goals identified in her current contract, as well as six additional priorities that were highlighted in the two previous evaluations. These are:

Four contractual goal areas:

- recruitment
- retention
- graduation rate
- fund raising

Six areas of focus

- strategic leadership
- communicating strategic agenda
- execution on tasks and objectives
- resolving larger challenges
- building of leadership team
- improving NEIU's fiscal stability and growth

Evaluation of the president against four contractual Goals and six Areas of Focus

The president and board identified specific targets for each of the four goal areas. In setting them we took into account the challenges presented by the pandemic. Earlier in this evaluation we enumerated numerous achievements of the president in the last year. It is always the intent that the accomplishments lead to the successful attainment of the targets mutually developed by the president and the board. Looking at performance against the four goals, the president fell short against the first three and met the fund raising target.

The board is hopeful for recruitment. “NEIU for You” is a major (and costly) initiative. Looking at past performance, however, first-time/full-time recruitment declined by 13% this year. Also, board members have had direct experience of prospective students receiving poor service from our admissions operation. Applicants have frequently experienced a lack of responsiveness.

The retention rate slipped after several years of improving numbers. The pandemic played a factor. Some students decided to not return to campus and the disruptions they experienced in their learning. The decline surely was affected by the departure of the head of student success and retention. Even still, the dip was a surprise and disappointment after having seen the consistent improvement in previous years.

We have been using declared majors as a proxy for the graduation rate. The president’s goal was to meet the previous year’s level, but the rate of declared majors declined slightly.

The president met her fund raising goal. Including a major grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (for the Truth Telling Project) the university surpassed the \$2,000,000 target. There are additional gifts in the pipeline that will be committed before the fiscal year ends so the fund raising efforts yielded strong results this year.

Other observations and management issues

In speaking about performance against her goals, the president has pointed out that her leadership team has only recently come together. On the other hand, she has largely controlled the timing and process of making these hires. It is not clear why some hires have taken as long as they have. For example, the position of chief marketing officer has been vacant for 1.5 years. That seems like a particularly long vacancy given the importance of the position, especially because marketing can help with the recruitment of students. The board realizes that resignations are affecting employers broadly and that talent is scarce, but senior hires need to be a priority.

It should be noted that the board realizes we have at times been a challenge to work with. There have been mixed messages and changes in direction. These, of course, have not been intentional though that does not lessen their negative impact. We will aim to provide more consistent guidance. At the same time there have been occasions when matters were brought before the board that had not been fully studied or adequately prepared. As a consequence, the board was asked to make a decision without being able to conduct the level of review that the issue required and that the board wanted to give to the issue. Sometimes this meant delaying action while relevant information was gathered.

Regarding the president's performance as a manager, the board has received feedback that the Cabinet needs clarity and alignment on the President's vision and goals. In addition, we continue to feel periodic frustration with the lack of follow-up on requests made by the Board. Various board members cited instances of the President having committed to a course of action and then not following through. The same issue was identified in interviews conducted by members of the *ad hoc* committee on the president's evaluation.

The board was concerned to learn through the staff interviews of the lack of unity within the President's cabinet. Comments made during these confidential conversations revealed that the leadership team is fragmented and not encouraged to collaborate. Instead they feel the President gets bogged down with operational matters and often does not delegate problem-solving by collaborating as a team, which, of course, is a drag on performance as they are working in silos. The President needs to acknowledge the disunity existing between her Cabinet and her, in the role as President, and work toward galvanizing her Cabinet to do the work necessary for the University to succeed.

The board again encourages the President to consider engaging an executive coach, who could help with strengthening her leadership skills and addressing the management issues raised above. In addition, professional team building facilitators can be brought in to strengthen her team to better serve NEIU. Some of these suggestions were made last year and the year before that, as well.