

Northeastern Illinois University
Evaluation from the Board of Trustees of President Gloria Gibson

Overview of General Performance

In her first two years as President of Northeastern Illinois University (“NEIU”), Dr. Gloria Gibson addressed fundamental needs in ways that should provide a foundation for future accomplishments. The President arrived in July 2018 to a campus that had experienced a challenging transition period in leadership, as well as stress related to the two-year budget impasse that affected all of Illinois. The university community needed a leader to bring unity and to lessen tensions, and President Gibson has accomplished this in her first two years.

Special mention needs to be made at the outset of this evaluation about the dedication and concern the President has shown in leading the university’s response to the many challenges presented by the Coronavirus outbreak. The President mobilized her Cabinet and assembled a Task Force to work with her in looking to the safety of all the NEIU family. As well, she has interacted with the leadership of the State of Illinois and her peers at other Illinois public universities to coordinate NEIU’s management of the situation in alignment with the State’s directives. Through it all she has kept the Trustees informed of developments surrounding the pandemic. We commend her on having risen to the ongoing challenges presented by this grave situation.

The President has a gift for connecting with people. Her calm and joyful demeanor immediately puts others at ease. She is known to be a good listener, another skill that helps her to connect with individuals on campus and in the community at large. President Gibson’s is a consistent presence at campus events, be they student gatherings, campus celebrations, or alumni events. The President has also been exceptionally dedicated: her long days have been noticed by students who appreciate her commitment. Through her manner and presence President Gibson has brought optimism and stability to the campus. Morale has improved, particularly among the faculty as they see and interact with a campus leader who makes time to get to know her colleagues.

President Gibson’s collaborative style has helped NEIU to establish new partnerships with feeder high schools and create outreach initiatives. Her focus on people and collaboration was evidenced by her visiting area high schools to improve matriculation from those schools to NEIU. She and her leadership team have expanded NEIU’s dual enrollment relationships and the university now has eight partnerships with high schools.

We commend the President and various segments of the NEIU community for completing labor agreements in the past year. Under President Gibson’s leadership new collective bargaining agreements were signed with the University Professionals of Illinois, Local 4100; the International Union of Operating Engineers (AFL-CIO), Local 399; the NEIU Police Force, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1989.

We note that while operating under the guidance of President Gibson, the accomplishments of the past year are shared by the broader NEIU community. NEIU's faculty has contributed far beyond its classroom achievements. For example, the President helped to engage the faculty in attracting and enrolling new students to NEIU. Under the encouragement of President Gibson the staff and administration of the university have similarly extended themselves in pursuing central goals around student success and fiscal responsibility. The accomplishments of the past year are owned by many dedicated members of our NEIU community.

We now turn our attention to the four goals defined in the President's employment contract: recruitment; student retention; graduation rate; and fund raising. In our February 13, 2020 Board meeting, the Trustees of NEIU together with the President established targets for each of the four goals. This benchmarking was a first for the university. We regret that targets were not established until the midpoint of the current 2019 – 2020 academic year. On the other hand, we have established an evaluation process that going forward will deliver goals and targets at the conclusion of an academic year for the upcoming year.

Recruitment

The Trustees are pleased that President Gibson and her team met the recruitment goal for the current academic year: holding enrollment flat after a precipitous decline in the prior year. This was accomplished while building the school's infrastructure to support recruitment.

The university had a steep drop in enrollment just as President Gibson arrived to campus. Recognizing the importance of the recruitment function, the President acted with vigor in replacing the leadership of enrollment management. She worked with the new leadership in creating a much needed infrastructure to support the recruitment function. Systems were put in place. Recruitment tools were created. Staff was increased and reorganized. This foundation for NEIU's recruitment efforts is expected to yield benefits for years to come.

Partnerships have been established, such as the outreach effort centered on Roberto Clemente High School where NEIU faculty are now teaching courses to students for college credit. The President visited high schools, reaching out to principals and college counseling personnel. This personal investment of the President in recruiting from feeder schools was a first for the university and sent a clear message that NEIU will work hard to build enrollment. Other initiatives positively affecting enrollment include the IFEEL partnership that will bring MBA and computer science students from India as transfer students to NEIU.

The recruitment function was centralized across NEIU's three locations: the main campus, El Centro, and the Carruthers Center. The Trustees and the NEIU community await the results of this centralization effort. As well, the Trustees anticipate the formulation of a well-articulated strategy to increase enrollment, in addition to the enrollment steps outlined above. This strategy would begin with a clear understanding of the profile of an NEIU student, i.e. who is our target market? Several Trustees would like to see greater effort put into recruiting from schools outside of Chicago, e.g. the collar counties and even central Illinois. It is believed that success in recruiting from these areas will also increase occupancy in the Nest, NEIU's housing for students.

Student Retention

This has been another encouraging development for NEIU under President Gibson's leadership. NEIU met its target for the year, increasing student retention by 5 percent over the previous year while driving the university's retention rate to 59 percent. Additionally, the Fall-to-Spring retention rate for first-time, full-time students rose to 82.5 percent in January 2020, its highest level in the past five years. We particularly appreciate retention having improved among the university's under-represented minorities. This is especially important because of NEIU's status as an Hispanic Serving Institution. Student success programs played an important part in achieving these retention rates. In the Fall of 2019 fully 75 percent of incoming students participated in student success programs compared to 43 percent one year prior. We are also pleased with the professional development opportunities that have been created for professional advisors.

Graduation rates

Given that the President in her short tenure has not yet guided a cohort of students through four years of NEIU coursework, we used the following as a proxy in assessing graduation rates: percentage of students with 45 or more credit hours who had declared a major at the end of the Fall term. Using this measurement, 88.7 percent of eligible NEIU students had declared a major by the end of their Fall term. Again, the university, under President Gibson's leadership, met its performance target for the current year.

As the President enters her third year, the Trustees look forward to soon using the more traditional and accurate assessment of the four-year and six-year graduation rates.

Fundraising

The target for fundraising in the current academic year is a 5 percent increase in annual giving over the previous academic year. The Trustees and President could perhaps have been more aggressive in determining a target for fundraising. As of the writing of this evaluation the university is poised to meet its goal: 89% of the \$1,890,000 goal has been reached. Additionally, pending gifts and grants would bring NEIU to 99% of its goal. We also look forward to the President leading the university in designing and successfully carrying out NEIU's next capital campaign.

Areas for Focus

While recognizing the talents and accomplishments of President Gibson, we, the Trustees of NEIU, also identified areas to focus on. The chairman of the Board, on behalf of the full Board, spoke with the President about these areas for focus:

- provide strategic leadership to strengthen and define NEIU's future;
- communicate the strategic agenda to the broader university staff and faculty;
- execute on tasks and objectives;

- work to resolve larger challenges, including real estate matters and university housing (the Nest);
- build a leadership team that better reflects the composition of the student body; and
- improve NEIU's fiscal stability and growth, as well as anticipate and address the Board's fiscal concerns.

Note: NEIU's Trustees followed a newly established process for writing this evaluation. The process included interviews conducted by Trustees with various university leaders representing the faculty, staff, and administration of the university. After President Gibson submitted her self-evaluation the chairman held a phone conversation with every Trustee to gather their input for the Board's evaluation. He and the Executive Committee prepared a draft of the President's evaluation. This draft was shared with all Trustees with an invitation to provide feedback on the draft. Final revisions were made by the chairman and the draft was shared with President Gibson. Taking her observations into account the Board chairman produced a final version of the evaluation, which was adopted on this date by the full Board.