



# **INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission statement for UIS has provided the framework for its reaccreditation, self-study process. A blending of the HLC cross-cutting themes and the elements of the UIS mission statement produced a self-analysis that not only created a useful and pragmatic approach to the process but also allowed UIS to demonstrate evidence that the institution meets the five accreditation criteria for the Higher Learning Commission. UIS' self-study process resulted in a delineation of its institutional hallmarks and the challenges it faces presently and in the future.

### **Criterion One – Mission and Integrity**

*"The organization operates to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students."*

As documented throughout the self-study report, UIS has emerged from two decades of institutional review and planning with a carefully articulated mission statement that emphasizes teaching and learning, career preparation, scholarship, public affairs, and online education. While traditional components of the institution resonate through UIS' new mission, it also represents UIS' evolving vision and culture. UIS' mission statement represents a commitment to past and future constituencies and to the enhancement of access and diversity through an expansion to a full four-year baccalaureate degree and the launch of online initiatives. The UIS mission is articulated throughout its student learning goals, strategic planning documentation, budget and planning activities, fundraising activities, and communication with constituencies and the community. Strategic plans developed by colleges and units across campus further reinforce the UIS mission in the areas of curriculum development, master planning, student affairs, technological enhancement, and collaborative and community outreach initiatives.

As one of three campuses within the University of Illinois system, UIS is responsive to that larger administrative structure and operates within the oversight of a centralized University of Illinois Board of Trustees. UIS articulates its mission and its position within the system through regular presentation of new initiatives to the Board, including its recently completed strategic planning process. Internally, the institution's governance and administrative structure support and enhance the campus mission. The prominent roles of the Campus Senate, the Undergraduate Council, the Graduate Council, and the recently formed General Education Council demonstrate the importance of shared governance in implementing the new mission. The governance structure plays a critical role in the oversight of academic policies that relate to program review, budget and planning, faculty personnel policy, academic standards, and strategic planning. In addition, several administrative positions have been created and filled that are directly linked to UIS' desire to strengthen both academics and student affairs.

UIS publications and communications represent the institution fairly and accurately to its constituencies. Historically UIS has been closely connected with state government, the Springfield community, and the Central Illinois region, and these relationships have flourished over nearly four decades through long-standing internship programs and the activities of the Center for State Policy and Leadership, as well as through the work of students, faculty, and staff

that connect teaching and learning and student development with community activism. Collaborative initiatives with state government, community agencies, and educational institutions nourish UIS' integrity and help promulgate a coherent identity for the university. UIS is responsive to the needs and concerns of all its constituencies and views their input to be a critical component in the development of the campus.

## **Criterion Two – Preparing for the Future**

*"The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities."*

In the early 1990s, it became apparent to campus leaders that UIS needed to change directions. As an upper-level institution in a world of increasingly competitive markets for transfer students and declining numbers of non-traditional students, expanding to a four-year baccalaureate program became a necessary vision for the future. At that point, UIS began a strategic planning process that spanned the next 15 years, a process accelerated by the integration of Sangamon State University into the University of Illinois system in 1995. As the University of Illinois at Springfield, the institution experienced new opportunities: the ability to create lower division curricula and enroll students directly out of high school, the capacity to enhance the technological infrastructure of the institution, and the option to begin online degree programs. Through regular re-envisioning and sustained strategic planning efforts, the campus was able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by becoming part of a larger university system. UIS has widened its scope and extended educational access to a broader range of students than it ever had the opportunity to do in the past.

In 2007, UIS has successfully implemented a lower division expansion that includes both general education freshmen and an honors program, while sustaining the university's commitment to transfer and graduate students. This expansion has resulted in an increase in traditional-aged students, a significant increase in the residential population, and a more diverse student body. As the student population has become more diverse and residential, infrastructure and support initiatives have been enhanced accordingly. The opening of Lincoln Residence Hall in 2001, the planned opening of a new recreation center in fall 2007, and the designing of a second residence hall are milestones in the campus' preparation for a future characterized by that broader student population. Over the last six years, the campus has experienced a dramatic increase in student life activities, residential programs, and athletic and recreational opportunities. This thriving residential life further enables UIS to attract and recruit prospective students.

Over a decade ago, UIS began to strategically consider the ways that the technological advances seen around the world could be used to enhance the institutional mission. With dramatic changes to its technological infrastructure, UIS developed an online curriculum, online partnerships, and collaborative initiatives with other campuses, both nationally and internationally, and provided curricular and pedagogical support to the online initiative. UIS has built a national reputation in online education, and thriving enrollments in UIS online programs and courses offer evidence for the success of planning efforts in this area.

Critical to UIS' success in the implementation of these new initiatives has been the integration of a cycle of continuous improvement. Periodic reviews of student, faculty, staff, alumni, and community performance indicators have provided UIS with an assessment of its effectiveness in meeting the current and future needs of these constituencies. The campus now needs to institute a regular system for data collection and analysis so that change and improvement can be systematically driven by evidence. The Provost's office has begun to develop a database to trace the progress of performance indicators noted in UIS' recent strategic plan.

Despite declines in state support for higher education over the last five years, UIS has continued to build a resource base in support of its new initiatives mainly through increases in student enrollment and increases in tuition and fees. Faculty and staff resources have increased in support of the lower division expansion and online initiatives. The institution has continued to invest in the technological infrastructure of the campus and push forward on housing and recreational expansion as student enrollment has increased and diversified.

### **Criterion Three – Student Learning and Effective Teaching**

*"The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates that it is fulfilling its educational mission."*

Over the last 10 years, the campus has strategically set out plans for its educational mission and successfully accomplished those plans. UIS has created a lower division and a doctoral program in public administration, enhanced the faculty base, structured graduate education, and responded to social change through new partnerships and increasingly globalized curricula. With the educational culture enhanced by greater diversity in the study body, particularly among freshmen, the academic environment has changed to reflect that diversity through coursework, support services, and extracurricular programming.

Excellence in teaching has been the cornerstone of UIS since its inception. A central consideration in the hiring and development of faculty is excellence in teaching. Teaching is evaluated by the institution through retention, tenure, promotion, and merit review processes. Governance committees and college units provide faculty development, mentoring, and oversight of curricular and program review processes. The institution has provided critical curricular, technological, and pedagogical support to online course development through Information Technology Services and the Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning. UIS embraces innovation and creativity in teaching pedagogy, which is evident in the use of interdisciplinary team teaching in the honors program, the integration of a living-learning community in the residence hall, special attention to the real-world applications of education through internships for both undergraduates and graduate students, increasing study abroad opportunities, and an emphasis on engaged citizenship. As the technology infrastructure has been enhanced, faculty have taken the opportunity to find new methods for teaching and helping students to become active learners.

UIS' assessment culture dates back to the late 1980s, when the structure and timing of assessment of learning outcomes was dictated by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and UIS' governing board. Since that time, the nature of the assessment culture has changed considerably. During the last 10 years, the institution has begun to decentralize the assessment initiative so that it is now based in the programs and disciplines. The Assessment Task Force, a group of administrators, faculty, and staff from across the campus, oversee the assessment initiative. Reports on assessment are now incorporated into the program review process, and programs are expected to incorporate assessment results into their curricular review process. Additionally, programs provide annual reports on assessment results and progress to the Assessment Task Force. UIS has successfully made this transition from a centralized initiative to one that is focused at the program level. Nonetheless, the campus continues to work on comprehensively closing the feedback loop. At the institutional level, assessment of student learning and the quality of the academic mission has been reviewed for the past six years using a variety of performance indicators. Both the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory and the UIS Alumni Survey results indicate academics are a source of satisfaction for students at UIS. Further, the National Survey of Student Engagement indicates that UIS compares favorably to national normative data and selected peers: students perceive that campus academics have made positive contributions to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in a variety of cognitive and behavioral areas.

Support of student learning has been enhanced during the last decade in ways that specifically address the more traditional and residential student population and the expansion of the online initiative. This enhancement has included an assessment of the Center for Teaching and Learning, resulting in online tutoring and the initiation of studios for supplemental instruction in general education areas. An Undergraduate Academic Advising Center was initiated to support the advising needs of freshmen and sophomore students. Student Affairs has enhanced services in the Career Development Center and the Office of Disability Services in their support of both on-campus and online students. Further, Brookens Library has initiated support services for online students and continues to use feedback from users to improve services.

Recognizing the need to enhance practices that ensure the quality of graduate education at UIS, the campus created and filled an Associate Vice Chancellor position for graduate education and research. This position provides advocacy and oversight of graduate education at UIS. The university has created policies and guidelines for the designation of graduate faculty, the development of graduate certificates, and the assessment of student learning in graduate programs.

Academic excellence at UIS is recognized through the professional accreditation of many of its academic programs. Not only have these accreditations been maintained but new accreditations have been achieved during the last decade. Most noteworthy among new accreditations is the spring 2007 approval of the entire College of Business and Management through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

#### **Criterion Four – Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge**

*"The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission."*

UIS supports the professional and educational development of its faculty, staff, and students. Achievements in these areas are recognized through scholarships, awards, and regular personnel evaluation. UIS sponsors numerous professional development workshops, speakers series, and co-curricular activities in support of a culture of learning.

The Center for State Policy and Leadership plays a pivotal role in the institution's mission in support of scholarship. It makes significant scholarly contributions through its applied research, publications, engagement of students, training, public lectures and forums, and collaborations with agencies and the community.

Historically, UIS has embraced a broad definition of scholarship (including theoretical, integrative, applied, and pedagogical scholarship) that supports the pursuit of the UIS mission. Further, UIS encourages the teacher-scholar model that values faculty engaging with their disciplines and sharing their work with students and others. The Faculty Personnel Policy and the faculty awards system recognize the important role of scholarship in faculty development. UIS must now find ways to help faculty manage sufficient time for scholarship at an institution that values teaching and the service that comes with shared governance.

UIS has revised its undergraduate student learning goals and competencies to ensure that the UIS graduate is competitive in the contemporary workforce. In developing these goals and competencies, the campus recognizes the need for graduates to think and reason in a world where technology, diversity, global issues, and social responsibility are central. UIS' curriculum is regularly assessed through program and academic standards reviews, and the policies and guidelines of these activities ensure that courses parallel the UIS mission and institutional learning goals. The National Survey of Student Engagement provides evidence that the UIS student is obtaining scholarly knowledge and skills at or above the rate experienced at other peer institutions.

Brookens Library is the academic core of the institution and provides critical support for scholarship on the UIS campus. The resources and services of the Library are regularly assessed and are positively evaluated by students and faculty, and they compare favorably to the resources and services of libraries at peer institutions. Ensuring that resources are allocated toward maintaining and expanding this critical part of the campus infrastructure and academic mission is a strategic goal for the UIS campus. A further challenge that is already being addressed is making library services fully accessible to online students.

## **Criterion Five – Engagement and Service**

*"As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both valuable."*

UIS has a strong tradition of being involved in public affairs, experiential learning, and community service. Campus facilities (e.g., recreational facilities, the Sangamon Auditorium, conference rooms, and classroom areas) are regularly used by the Springfield community, state agencies, regional schools, and state and regional organizations. Recently developed or enhanced programs in music, theatre, and art now actively engage the public in the cultural and artistic life of the campus. The Center for State Policy and Leadership sponsors workshops, training, speaker events, and forums throughout the year that play a critical role in connecting UIS with both internal and external constituencies. In addition, the Center for State Policy and Leadership's print and broadcast media services, including the radio station and the magazine *Illinois Issues*, create critical forums for community and region-wide discussions of public policy and American culture.

Experiential learning at both the graduate and undergraduate levels has a nearly 40-year history of excellence at UIS and remains a key element in the educational experience. Recently this experience has been enhanced with the creation of a service-learning unit and the integration of service-learning into the general education curriculum. The campus sponsors a number of graduate internships and assistantships with agencies in state and local government. These programs are well-respected and have been able to sustain or increase funding from external sources. Experiential and service-learning plays a critical role in maintaining and promoting the visibility of UIS to external constituencies.

Evidence of UIS' responsiveness to external constituencies can also be viewed through its numerous collaborative initiatives. These initiatives can be found in programs of the Center for State Policy and Leadership, exchange agreements in the Global Experience Program, institutional collaboration with the Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning, COPC (Community Outreach Partnership Center) and GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grants that supported community outreach, and training for state government officials and others. The strength of this institutional commitment is evidenced by the recent establishment of a Collaborative Projects Council and the hiring of an external consultant to assist in the expansion of efforts in this area.

In sum, the University of Illinois at Springfield has experienced a decade of intense and dynamic change. In spite of state funding cutbacks, the institution has rallied its resources and launched several major initiatives that are responsive to its mission, strategic planning efforts, and constituency needs. While UIS has met its own strategic goals, it has also prepared itself for meeting the expectations and needs of its future constituencies. In meeting the Higher Learning Commission's criteria for reaccreditation, UIS has demonstrated that it is prepared to meet its challenges of the future and continue to serve its constituencies with excellence and integrity.