

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT SPRINGFIELD

Office of the Chancellor, PAC 556
P.O. Box 19243
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9243

May 18, 2001

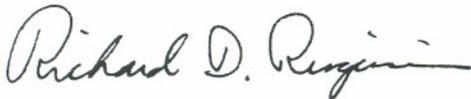
Karen Kietzman, Associate Director
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602-2504

Dear Karen,

I am pleased to forward the University of Illinois at Springfield's institutional response to the February 12 - 13, 2001, Focused Visit Report.

As previously indicated by Associate Vice Chancellor Berman, UIS is choosing the Readers' Panel review process. Materials are being sent to the panel members.

Sincerely,



Richard D. Ringeisen
Chancellor

RDR/ct

Attachment

cc: H. Berman
J. Miller
S. Hedman
J. Anderson

UIS

University of Illinois at Springfield
Institutional Response to a Report of a Focused Site Visit
February 12-13, 2001

An evaluation team of the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission conducted a focused site visit at the University of Illinois at Springfield on November 12-13, 2001, for the purpose of addressing NCA concerns from the institution's 1997 comprehensive visit. Those concerns were 1) graduate education, including the Doctor of Public Administration degree; 2) strategic planning; and 3) the implementation of a focused lower-division undergraduate program, the Capital Scholars Program.

We would like to thank the evaluation team for their thoughtful consideration of these issues and for the guidance they offered us. In particular, we appreciate the team's recognition of the progress the campus has made in strategic planning and in the administration and governance of graduate education.

In keeping with the Commission's process, we offer the following response to the report, which outlined three institutional challenges.

**Creating an Environment That Fosters and Promotes
a Strong and Unique Doctoral Program**

Although UIS offers eighteen master's programs, we offer only one doctoral program – the doctorate in public administration (DPA). The team noted the challenge the campus faces in creating an environment that fosters and promotes a strong and unique doctoral program. In discussion, a team member commented that institutions offering only a few or, as in UIS' case, a single doctoral program cannot establish the beneficial doctoral student culture found at larger institutions.

We recognize this limitation and will work within the realities of our situation to provide a supportive environment for our doctoral students. The hiring of a new DPA director creates the opportunity to increase the attention toward this challenge during the next several years.

We would like to note, however, that despite the absence of opportunities for interacting with doctoral students from other programs, UIS offers rich opportunities in the area of most concern to students pursuing doctorates in public administration. Specifically, DPA students have the opportunity to participate in the many applied research and training projects conducted through the Institute for Public Affairs. These projects afford students the chance to develop close working relationships with faculty active in this type of research, as well as with the state agency personnel who commission such studies. Along the same lines, students have the opportunity to interact with the dean of the College of Public Affairs and Administration, who currently serves as the president-elect of the American Society for Public Administration. By virtue of her leadership role, the dean is able to shepherd DPA students into the profession and acquaint them with national trends relating to public policy issues and to the field of public administration. Finally, many DPA students hold positions of considerable responsibility in state agencies while pursuing their studies on a part-time basis. These students will contribute to the creation of a distinctive culture that will evolve over time for the DPA program.

Successful Implementation of the Capital Scholars Program

It is hard to imagine an activity that has greater priority for the University of Illinois at Springfield at this juncture in the campus' history than the successful implementation of the Capital Scholars Program. UIS has been a senior institution (third and fourth year of college and master's degrees) for thirty years, principally serving a commuting student population. Beginning in Fall 2001, the campus will admit its initial class of first-year students. This will begin a process that will continue for the rest of the decade – the process of substantially increasing the proportion of traditionally aged, residential students in the overall mix of students served and establishing UIS as a leading public liberal arts university.

The team's report correctly notes the progress made as of the date of the focused visit in addressing the host the tasks associated with such a change. The report also noted several challenges: 1) attracting a critical mass of students; 2) providing adequate on-campus housing, 3) establishing an effective interdisciplinary curriculum, 4) developing and using an assessment program to impact budgeting and planning, and 5) improving and increasing student life programming. We are aware of these challenges and will continue to address them throughout the initial years of the program and beyond.

Developing and Implementing an Assessment Program for the Capital Scholars Program and the Doctorate of Public Administration

As is the case with institutions around the country, UIS is working toward the development and implementation of processes for the assessment of learning outcomes. The Capital Scholars Program and the Doctorate in Public Administration Program are included in this activity.

Capital Scholars Program. The Capital Scholars Program is not a degree granting unit. Rather, its curriculum constitutes, in effect, UIS' approach to lower-division general education. Therefore, the challenge we face in assessing the learning outcomes associated with the Capital Scholars Program is the same challenge faced by all institutions seeking clarity on the effectiveness of their general education. This challenge is to determine whether the rhetoric about improving writing skills, increasing critical thinking, inculcating a sense of the value of learning, etc., matches the reality of what students learn in their general education courses.

Capital Scholars faculty are committed to providing an innovative general education curriculum that reflects the best contemporary thinking about what can and should be accomplished in the first two years of college. Faculty are also committed to being able to demonstrate the value of this curriculum through assessment of learning outcomes. To that end, an assessment plan for the Capital Scholars Program is being developed under the direction of the program's associate director, working in conjunction with a consultant who is a nationally known authority in the assessment of interdisciplinary programs.

Doctor of Public Administration. The assessment of learning outcomes for the doctorate in public administration poses a different sort of challenge. With the DPA the challenge relates to both the small size of the program and the very limited number of students likely to graduate over the next several years. Nonetheless, the dean and program faculty are committed to instituting an assessment process that is distinct from the evaluation of a given student's course work and dissertation.

The campus looks forward to reporting on progress made in assessment of learning outcomes for the Capital Scholars Program and the DPA in the report we have been asked to submit in June 2004.