

*Draft of  
February 11, 2016*

**For Discussion Only**

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS**  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN • CHICAGO • SPRINGFIELD

**The Public's University:  
A Framework for the System Strategic Plan**

## Context

The University of Illinois (U of I) has evolved since its founding in 1867 to comprise three unique and distinctive world-class universities: the original “Big 10” school at Urbana-Champaign, the urban-serving comprehensive research university in Chicago, and a regional liberal arts university at the State capital in Springfield. In addition to these three universities, the System has several regional campuses and a major extension program with State-wide presence. Together, these components make up a world-leading and pioneering institution of higher education, one that adheres strongly to its central missions of excellence in teaching; research and scholarship; and public service and economic development through innovation and outreach.

In the next decade, the U of I, working as a *System* will build on this magnificent tradition and our world-class faculty, students, and staff to become the model for the *very best* in research-intensive public higher education to be found anywhere. A single and powerful impulse will be our guide: *optimizing impact for public good*.

## Strategic Goals

### I. A Healthy Future for Illinois

The U of I has been “the public’s university,” - the leader in higher education and an engine for economic growth and improvement in the quality of life for all Illinois citizens. The University’s achievements and impact are now recognized worldwide and represent an enormous return on the public’s support and commitment. We are grateful for this trust and, mindful of the responsibility that comes with it, will continue to serve the State’s needs in the following ways.

#### 1. Prepare a “Next Generation” Workforce

U of I will identify the most critical current and future workforce needs of the State and build programs to prepare our students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to meet this demand while satisfying their professional and life goals. By effectively matching employers with highly prepared and adaptable employees, we will help keep our talented graduates in Illinois and encourage others to return to the State after honing their skills in positions nationally and worldwide. In particular, we will:

- Establish a program that encourages degree completion for the 1.3 million Illinois residents who have some college credit.
- Develop lifelong learners – individuals who possess the fundamental critical-thinking and problem-solving skills to adapt to the changing demands of the workplace and who seek to develop their skills and intellect throughout their lives.
- Prepare students with the innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities that will allow them to build their own businesses and create jobs.

## **2. Enable Powerful Research and Development Partnerships across the State**

The University System will “scout” the State’s private, public, nonprofit sectors, as well as its universities, and identify, convene, and enable potential partners – matching faculty expertise with the needs of these external entities. By incentivizing and enabling research and translation collaborations among these groups, we will stimulate economic growth and heighten its impact on the most pressing needs of Illinois and the critical challenges of the region and nation. In particular, we will:

- Create a comprehensive database of U of I research, accessible to all members of the University community and selectively to potential external partners.
- Develop a dynamic “Innovation City” within Chicago – an urban, mixed-use neighborhood comprising interdisciplinary programs, innovation partnerships, industrial joint ventures, incubators, and potentially U of I education partners from K-12 schools, community colleges, and other public universities. The “IC” will provide our students and faculty short- and long-term opportunities for experiential learning in a vibrant setting that will include retail and entertainment establishments, creating a spirited 24/7 experience in the City of the Big Shoulders.
- Expand and enhance technology commercialization. The economic benefit of technologies and businesses discovered and commercialized at the U of I will become even more important to the University and to the State of Illinois in the years to come.

## **3. Build Strong Civic Engagement Among Students, Faculty, Staff and the Citizens of Illinois**

To create a citizenry for the State, nation, and world, we will teach civic values and responsibilities, build enduring connections with community organizations across Illinois, and connect the people of the University with opportunities for service. The University System will bring together the expertise, empathy, and commitment found in its universities in service efforts that enhance quality of life for Illinois communities and citizens. We will:

- Identify the most significant community/societal challenges facing Illinois and establish a subset of them on which the U of I can have significant impact in a relatively short period of time.
- Explore how every activity of the University – coursework and pedagogy, research experiences, service-learning, co-curricular activity – can be connected to civic engagement and civic education.
- Build on existing elements to create a world-class public policy research and development center, capable of informing decision makers on issues such as matters of public policy related to higher education, publicly funded research, federal/State and local governments and the issues that they face.

#### 4. Extend U of I's Presence Across Illinois as an Engine for Regional Economic Development

One cannot drive much more than a dozen miles in Illinois without seeing evidence of U of I – not only our universities and regional campuses but also the numerous University Extension sites across the State. The Extension is rooted in Illinois' historical economic foundation of agriculture and associated industries. However, as the State's economy and demographics have changed, the Extension has been challenged to serve the emerging needs of new and legacy business sectors in different parts of Illinois – small towns, Chicago's urban neighborhoods, and our many other metropolitan and suburban areas.

We will expand on this foundation in two ways – first, by adapting the Extension and extending its services to a large number of communities in Illinois, and second, by establishing a new entity, *the University of Illinois Polytechnic*, not a new U of I campus or a new set of degrees to be offered on our existing campuses but rather a set of virtually connected innovation clusters across the State of Illinois. We will:

- Adapt the U of I Extension system by leveraging technology to reach more Illinois citizens regardless of their location and expanding Extension services in healthcare and health education, youth development, education, financial literacy, digital literacy, career planning, food/nutrition, and agriculture (both rural and urban).
- Establish the University of Illinois Polytechnic, beginning with innovation clusters in Peoria, Rockford, Quad Cities, southern Illinois, etc. – communities and regions that are homes to key industries that drive Illinois' economy as well as academic and research programs that highlight the strengths of each of U of I's three universities.

## **II. An Institution of and for Our Students**

The State's investment in U of I is a commitment to students and, thereby, the future of Illinois, as our graduates go on to become the State's business leaders, inventors, policymakers, and engaged citizens. We are thus accountable to our students first and foremost. We will ensure that faculty work in partnership with them as teachers, mentors, and colleagues so that students leave the U of I with the knowledge, adaptability, and empathy to succeed as individuals and members of their communities.

### **1. Build a Diverse and Inclusive University Community**

We believe the benefits of diversity accrue from not only the number and variety of different people and cultures present at U of I but also the quality and depth of their interactions. We will create an inclusive community that reflects a vast range of human differences and develop academic and co-curricular programs, settings, and expectations that encourage formal and informal exploration of these differences. We will:

- Bring to bear U of I's diverse expertise on the grand societal challenge of race, ethnicity, and inequality in America.
- Build strong connections between our universities and their nearby immigrant and minority communities.

### **2. Develop a Coordinated Enrollment Strategy**

U of I will examine Illinois demographic trends; identify the academic and career goals of prospective students throughout the State; and consider these in light of the academic, human, and financial resources of all of our institutions.

We will work with our universities to develop a System-wide enrollment plan that will enhance student access, degree completion, and success in the years beyond. Such a plan will leave decision-making in the hands of our individual universities while identifying strategies for the matriculation and successful completion of the greatest number of students. The plan will also emphasize increased and sustainable revenues without sacrificing affordability, academic caliber, or the quality of the student experience at any university. Components of this strategy may include:

- University-wide student recruitment approaches to inform prospective students about the full range of our institutions and programs and help ensure that applicants not admitted to their first-choice U of I institution consider enrollment in another university in the System.
- Development of a more "seamless" transfer program that provides students with predictability of credit transfer among U of I institutions and greatly streamlines the transfer process, while leaving admission decision-making in the hands of the respective universities.

### 3. Reinvent Student-Focused Teaching and Learning

We will bring together the many individuals engaged in pedagogical innovation among our universities and regional campuses to identify innovative current approaches that might be brought to scale across the entire University System, provide incentives for the development and testing of new learning approaches, and serve as a national resource on effective teaching and learning. In particular, we will:

- Create programs, tools, and information that extend the full resources of the University (courses, research opportunities, service-learning experiences, etc.) to students regardless of their “home” university, making Illinois a next-generation model for the distributed public university system.
- Develop online tools similar to that used for degree auditing that provide automated progress tracking of such things as career development; academic and personal advisement; preparation for graduate study, and the like.

### 4. Provide Rich and Varied Cultural Experiences at Home and Away

U of I is distinctive in comprising universities that span a world-class city, smaller metropolitan areas, and iconic mid-western rural locations. At the same time, we are home to an exceptionally large and diverse population of international students. We will take full advantage of these attributes to ensure that our graduates possess cultural competencies and experiences that span rural, urban, international environments. In particular, we will:

- Ensure that our students experience both vibrant on-campus life and experiences that connect them to the communities and cultures surrounding their universities – as well as to similar communities worldwide.
- Develop strong global competencies among our students through on-campus academic and co-curricular programming, study and living experiences abroad, “internationalization at home,” and foreign language study in strategic areas.

### 5. Grow and Diversify Experiential Learning and Career Guidance

The scope of the U of I’s connections with employers across the State and all sectors offers our students extraordinary opportunities to explore numerous career possibilities during their education. To enhance these opportunities, we will:

- Develop a University-wide database of internships, co-ops, service-learning options, volunteer roles, and short- and long-term employment opportunities that can be easily accessed by students at all of our universities and campuses<sup>1</sup>. This will include the capability for students to create online resumes/portfolios and identify their job and volunteer interests, and for employers and volunteer-seeking organizations to provide specific criteria and be matched with students who meet their needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Some may question consistency of terms. The aim here is to use campus term to denote physical space rather than defining individual university. There are regional campuses within the system.

- Actively promote the capabilities and job preparation of our students to employers in Illinois and beyond the State's borders.

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### **III. An Accessible, Networked, “24/7” University**

Our reach is expansive: two major research universities, a comprehensive liberal arts and sciences university, two regional medical campuses, as well as numerous local extension offices, research parks, and a University hospital that provides more patient care than any other public healthcare organization in Illinois. We will take full advantage of these complementary and distinctive strengths. We will leverage technology to create a complex yet accessible network among our institutions and deepen our connections with other organizations, institutions, agencies, and businesses across the state. In this way, the U of I will become a system far greater than the sum of our physical campuses.

#### **1. Harness technology to increase access, improve pedagogy, support research, build global alliances, and ensure digital literacy**

We will build a technology platform that touches every function of the modern university environment – enhancing communication, reducing unnecessary effort, and increasing nimbleness. Besides viewing technology as a tool, however, we consider it an essential capacity for students – a “language” that we will teach them so that they may make sense of an increasingly digital world. In particular, we will

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for online learning that attracts large numbers of new students who would not otherwise enroll.
- Expand and enhance tools and technologies for on-line learning, research, and service, taking advantage of the many discrete examples on innovation in this domain to create a truly University-wide crucible for innovation in every aspect of the educational enterprise.
- Develop a University System strength in data analytics that draws on the numerous efforts across the universities, informs University planning, and serves as a comprehensive repository easily accessible by all of our institutions.
- Identify digital/computational capabilities critical for student learning and future careers, and develop programs that ensure all of our graduates can maneuver adroitly in a world where huge amounts of information are created, organized, and distributed digitally.

#### **2. Build a Culture of Discovery, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Thoughtful Risk-Taking Across U of I**

We will be a catalyst for creative experimentation among our universities and campus, building a System-wide culture of bold thinking, problem solving, and action. We will convene members of the entire U of I community around issues of common interest; provide incentives that encourage them to cross disciplinary and geographic boundaries; and remove administrative and structural barriers in order to improve efficiency and encourage collaboration. We will:



- Identify and coordinate related research and scholarship across U of I to create critical mass and enhance national recognition and prominence.
- Inventory the full breadth of U of I expertise and make it accessible and easily navigable by faculty, students, staff, alumni, and outside partners.
- Convene faculty from across U of I to identify a set of major sociotechnical challenges - *Grand Challenges* - that the U of I is especially well suited to solve, and map out a plan to bring the full extent of our intellectual capital and infrastructure to bear on these difficult problems with ambition and purpose. Such work should be directed towards new solutions for tough contemporary problems such as: renewable and plentiful low-cost energy generation; transformative innovation in information technology and cyber-security; food and agriculture pathways to serve the growing human population; human health promotion; poverty and disease prevention; socio-economic disparities and racial tensions; mitigating global environmental degradation; new and efficient business models for enhancing societal equity through new goods and services; and the like.
- Celebrate the human condition through innovation and creativity in the performing arts and humanities.

### **3. Build Strong Vertical and Horizontal Connections with Other Educational Institutions in Illinois**

We will establish relationships “vertically” with K-12 schools and community colleges and “horizontally” with the State’s other public colleges and universities to enhance access and success for all Illinois students. In this way, we will build lifelong and “life-wide” learners who engage with education formally and informally, wherever and whenever they wish. We will:

- Lead a State-wide discussion of how best to provide accessible, affordable public higher education throughout Illinois.
- Begin conversations with the State’s the other public universities and community colleges about relationships that might include various collaborations, joint programs, and partnerships to foster and benefit student preparation and learning outcomes.

### **4. Deepen Engagement with Illinois Alumni Worldwide**

We have over 750,000 alumni worldwide. By identifying and strengthening connections with them, we will make our programs and resources available for the lifelong benefit of our graduates; engage them more fully as resources, guides, and mentors to current students and faculty; and enhance their quality of life by connecting them with fellow Illini.

## **IV. Effective Stewardship and Efficient Use of Resources**

The traditional business models of public higher education are being challenged as never before. Policy makers and public officials as well as students and families are raising serious and appropriate questions about the escalating cost of college, unacceptable levels of student debt, the readiness of graduates to enter a rapidly changing workplace, and the management practices employed at every level of the academic enterprise. In short, the *value* of a college degree overall and the return on investment of public monies in state higher education specifically are under intense scrutiny. In this context, it is our duty as the public's university to be responsible stewards of our resources. We must ensure that every U of I student receives a first-class education at a reasonable cost and that the public funding we receive is used wisely and strategically. To these ends, we will:

### **1. Ensure Affordability, Access, and a U of I Degree of Ever-Increasing Value**

- Develop a System-wide strategy for affordability and access, coordinate University responses to state mandates, and create an advocacy plan aimed at Illinois' leaders.

### **2. Develop a University-State Compact**

- Seek an agreement with the State that provides for predictable public funding, reduced regulation, and greater autonomy in return for increased accountability.

### **3. Incorporate Sustainable Environmental Practices Throughout the University**

- Become a model of institutional sustainability by reducing our carbon footprint, incorporating the best environmental approaches, building a System-wide culture of environmental care.

### **4. Define Clear Roles and Distinctive Identities for the System and Our Universities**

- Reach consensus on the roles, responsibilities, and identities of the System and each of our universities in ways that recognize the distinctiveness of each institution and energize the effectiveness and impact of the whole University.

### **5. Streamline Operations and Reduce Bureaucracy**

- Identify and address the System-wide policies and processes that most adversely affect efficiency and hinder cross-institutional collaboration to make U of I a model of institutional efficiency, transparency, and collaboration.

### **6. Build a Strong and Sustainable Financial Architecture**

- Prepare a sustainable long-range financial plan aligned with this Strategic Plan to increase and diversify the U of I's operating income, improve our efficiency, and strengthen our impact throughout the State.