

Annual Evaluation

Susan Koch
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Vice President, University of Illinois System
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August 23, 2019

Dear Susan,

I thank you, once again, for your thoughtful memo summarizing your activities and those of your University and campus during the past year. As always, I particularly appreciate the clarity of your stated priorities for the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) and your enthusiasm to being an integral part of the larger University of Illinois system. Congratulations on all the hard work that has gone into the new “strategic compass”. I greatly appreciate our continuing partnership. Since you have had another excellent year of leadership and accomplishment, many of the comments below will be repeats from earlier evaluations.

UIS remains in very good hands. During the eight years of your leadership UIS has grown in reputation and the campus has seen significant and quite beautiful upgrades. The student union, now in its second year, the new presence in downtown Springfield, the acquisition of a facility “on the water”, the encouraging increase in freshman enrollments this year, the progress in athletics, - and, of course, the banner philanthropic year achieved in FY 2019, are among the recent developments of which you are rightfully proud. You have built quite a legacy. It is exciting to observe how you have been fully embraced as a natural leader by the Springfield community.

You are also to be congratulated for your tenacity, forbearance and effort in weathering the budget impasse, without leaving irreversible damage to UIS. The new Master Plan and Strategic Compass have engaged the whole campus community productively. Graduate enrollments, particularly for international Masters students, have dipped, due to various factors beyond local control. I am very pleased to see however, the robust freshman enrollment growth this year, particularly since you have made it such a priority and have worked very hard to create the successful new programs in, for example: Nursing, Information Systems Security, and Exercise science. Also, the new programs in Biochemistry, Digital Publishing, and Data Analytics are building capacity and interest.

A major successful effort of yours this year has focused on staffing. The successful strategic recruitments of the first two UIS Distinguished Professors, Ken Kriz and Graham Peck, augurs well for the future of the academic standing of UIS. Provost Papini has hit his stride and is well regarded across the University. The addition of a strategic enrollment lead is very important and your work to improve ACT scores and boost the diversity of the student body are notable.

The success of intercollegiate athletics this past year has been simply remarkable. Congratulations!

Your work on the community engagement front is nothing short of “stellar” (to coin a phrase) and I note the continued effort to engage deeply with the city and region. The philanthropic campaign is going extremely well and you have a small, but highly energized and productive advancement team. You will continue to have my full support in these important efforts.

During this year, you had to deal with several difficult personnel issues, as well as with the aftermaths of a faculty strike and the abrupt departure of an Athletic Director. You navigated these difficult matters extremely well. I acknowledge, in particular, your strong commitment to full dialog and communication with my office, as well as with the Board of Trustees as you dealt with these events. I appreciate the work you have put in to welcome new Board members and introduce them to UIS. The dinner in the Auditorium was very memorable.

Overall, Susan, this has been an excellent year of performance and I congratulate you once again and thank you for all the hard work!

You list many specific accomplishments in your report and I want to highlight some of them in my response. I want to start with the continued beautification of the campus, which has been great! The Abraham Lincoln statue (with the president portrayed as a younger man), the Shakespeare garden, and the wonderful, light-filled hearthstone of the campus (as we both like to put it) - all serving as great iconic additions to the physical beauty of the UIS campus.

The acquisition of Innovate Springfield and all the resulting developments, still ongoing, are of tremendous significance to UIS and your clear vision and drive have opened opportunities for UIS students and faculty that simply were not on the drawing board a few years ago. The support for the system DPI/IIN initiative has been unflagging and I appreciate the manner in which you have jumped in to optimize, not just the opportunities for UIS faculty and staff, but the whole state-wide vision. You have developed capital plans that have been successful in bringing forward new opportunities and I look forward to working with you on next steps in this regard.

The developments in the Brookens Library and the Arts and Humanities initiatives, the plans for the Center for Lincoln Studies and the relevant faculty hire - are all just great.

Your emphasis on fundraising has been successful and UIS is more than 75% to the ambitious goal of \$40M. Your relationships with community members are strong and, I both enjoy and appreciate the monthly “perspectives” column that you write for the local newspaper. Your efforts to build a supportive community within Springfield are clearly evident each time I visit.

Your leadership at the local, regional and national levels is significant: the top-ten status in the U.S. News and World Report ranking as a regional public university in the Midwest is great. Your participation in the leadership activities of the AASCU (American Association of State

Colleges and Universities) and COPLAC (Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges) programs yields opportunities to help shape national higher education policy. The growth and quality of UIS Online are both remarkable features and assets of UIS and these offerings have clearly had national and international impact.

You successfully recruited Dennis Papini as the UIS provost, following a rigorous national search, in which I participated at the interview stage. Dennis has made an impact and has led the development of the new “Strategic Compass” planning effort. The new PAC Director, Brian Rives, is another very impressive addition to staff.

I applaud your work in mentoring and staff development. You continue to nominate staff for awards and participation in development programs and I appreciated your listing many key UIS leaders and award winners by name in your materials.

Your leadership, working with the local community and others, to incorporate the downtown business incubator into UIS and then to develop it into the first downstate “hub” for the Illinois Innovation Network truly represents a “leadership lived” contribution. This is important work that will continue to expand over the next year. I appreciate all your efforts to involve UIS in system initiatives such as the IIN and Discovery Partners Institute (DPI). These efforts help bind our system together in productive ways, but they will also provide important opportunities to new generations of UIS students and faculty. Well done!

I thank you for your efforts with the Alumni Association reform that took place last year, leading to the new Alumni Alliance and a building up of the three University-specific Alumni Associations. You were pivotal to that sensitive transition moving forward, leading one of the key system-level committees. The “advancement model” that you pioneered at UIS continues to gain strength and will position the entire U of I system well for the upcoming campaign and the associated needs for better branding across our units (that you correctly highlight).

Your focus on facilities has led to much recent progress that should also be acknowledged. The new Child Protection Training Academy, upgrades to the Academic Success Center, new classrooms for the Exercise Science facility, and the new recreational facilities are all supportive of the student experience. The Innocence Project and the focus on ADA compliance upgrades are also important activities that demonstrate a commitment to social equity.

I have a few thoughts and suggestions for the next few months:

1. Your goals for next year are appropriate and, as always, focused on the three priorities of your strategy (enrollment, faculty and facilities). I greatly appreciate how you weave the Strategic Framework into your work, demonstrating effective alignment with our state-wide priorities.

