

Annual Evaluation

Janet Gooch
Chancellor University of Illinois, Springfield
Vice President, University of Illinois System
January 7, 2026

Dear Janet,

I thank you for the thoughtful, candid, and comprehensive memo summarizing activities for the period July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025. I appreciate your use of the suggested template, and I look forward to our in-depth discussion regarding your accomplishments and plans.

This year has been another critically important one for you and for UIS, with significant challenges, personnel changes, and budget concerns. The federal environment has been transformed over the year in ways that have adversely affected morale, student enrollment, and university finances. Your strategic, transparent, and evidence-based decision-making process appropriately occupies much of your annual report. Your valuable “NorthStar Initiative” change management process is well underway. It has certainly not been an easy year for you to navigate!

With all of this (externally forced) turbulence, you have risen to the various and multifaceted challenges facing our university in the State’s Capital with poise, integrity and effectiveness. You have grown in your role as chancellor and vice president over the year. And you have excelled in your multifaceted personal leadership capacities (student-centeredness, marketing, communications, outreach, fundraising, planning, participation, etc.) in many palpable ways! Congratulations on an excellent year of personal accomplishment and progress.

You are still managing important personnel and cabinet transitions, although your second-in-command has helped stabilize this situation and reviews of Dr. Schwab are very positive. You also conducted successful searches for the new Chief Financial Officer, Jill Wilberg, and a Vice Chancellor for Advancement, Gabe Cagwin – two pivotal appointments. The initial efforts of Gabe, in particular, have been demonstrably successful, with major increases in all the key advancement metrics year-over-year. The improved cadence and vitality of the fundraising efforts this past year are commendable and an encouraging portent for the future.

In continuing to build your permanent team, and in articulating a vision and implementation approach for UIS (through the NorthStar Initiative), you are making steady progress. You have established a whole fresh outlook for UIS, with a newly emerging leadership team that is working well together under your supervision.

You have managed a process to restructure the finances of UIS to deal with chronic structural deficits. In doing so, you continue to collaborate well with the System offices and have taken advantage of central shared services and expertise. Unfortunately, external policy decisions have negatively affected the UIS budget. You have, however, communicated well with faculty and staff regarding these challenges and have developed, through appropriate collaborative mechanisms, a five-year plan to eliminate structural deficits as required by policy. This past budget year was a disappointment, given the tuition revenue at the international graduate level in decline, but there are positive signals for the future too, with growth in first-time freshmen. You have an opportunity to revisit plans and marketing approaches, with the retirement of long-serving (and very effective leader) Vicky Cook, as well as promising marketing efforts to be shepherded through by Kelsea and Adrienne, working together.

The recent news about enrollment gains, highlighted in your report, are truly thrilling to see! It is abundantly clear that, in Vickie Cook, you have had an innovative and creative leader of the Enrollment and Retention Management program. You have filled open positions and completed important reorganization tasks, including adding a new unit for Admissions Processing. I particularly applaud the obvious new levels of resolve and energy evident in student recruitment processes (including financial aid), and the creative new pilot program for in-state tuition pathways for students from nearby counties in Iowa. The gains documented in summer enrollment and the year over year increase in first-time freshmen. Fall of 2025 put UIS firmly on a constructive path. In all this hard work, you have demonstrated a level of detailed knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of academic support processes - and have already made major improvements. I have greatly appreciated your willingness to work closely with system leadership, taking advantage of shared services and international enrollment thinking over the year.

UIS's ranking in the U.S. News and World Report puts it securely, once again, as the top university in its category in our State. You have developed strong and important links with the Springfield community and you successfully used recent fundraising event efforts to develop and propagate a clear set of institutional priorities that have been warmly embraced by both internal and external stakeholders.

Significant campus upgrades are in the works, with many refurbishment and new facilities planned, including downtown. These will continue to consume your time and energy and, as you know, significant challenges remain. I appreciate your leading involvement with the Presidents and Chancellors group and encourage you to be a prominent spokesperson in that venue (for all the U of I System) as a vice-president. You are an ever-engaged colleague in the "3+2(3)" team of system leaders and bring important insights and ideas to my team. I have greatly enjoyed working together with you, for example, on the recent State Tour.

Your plans for next year are appropriate and timely and I continue to urge you to move forward developing your goals assertively. Your work to implement the modern budget process for the university is very important, and I applaud the positive and transparent manner in which this critically important effort has been initiated.

Your emphasis on building a sense of wellbeing and support across campus remains incredibly important and, I believe, strongly supported on and beyond the campus. I also applaud your emphasis on student retention and strategic communications. I appreciate what appears to me to be a significantly more robust social media presence. I look forward to hearing more about all these initiatives and plans.

There is no question that you continue to face a number of quite tough issues. Faculty morale has been questionable for many years, given the evolution of state support, enrollment erosion, and other factors. I share the wide sentiment that you have done an excellent job in stepping up to address many long-standing and complex challenges, including the aftermath of the pandemic and national policy changes. You have provided both stability and perspective throughout, and I acknowledge these important contributions. Please know that I, and many of our colleagues, are deeply appreciative of the selfless and thoughtful manner in which you have taken on these challenges. You have made significant progress and have put many (if not most) of the long-standing difficult issues on a healthful forward course, with energized leadership and momentum. Of course, as you point out, there is much more to do! As mentioned above, I look forward to our discussions about ways to take advantage of the state-wide "platform for performance" that we now have.

I have a few thoughts and suggestions for next year:

1. Your detailed deficit reduction plan is well thought out and moving forward with the three mutually supporting goals of: 1) supporting strategic growth in enrollment, research and advancement; 2) seeking efficiencies; and 3) down-scaling some of the less effective programs. Obviously, the tricky third goal will require your resolve over the next year, and I stand ready to assist in any way appropriate.
2. Continue to develop and take advantage of your regional leadership standing and role. This is a major asset for us!
3. Please continue to work closely and collaboratively with the University System leadership. UIS can help lead the way for the System and your voice is critically important.
4. Continue modeling a visible and effective partnership with me in my role as system president, and with Adrienne, Jay, Nick, Paul and others in their respective roles.
5. Continue your focus on Philanthropy and the planning and implementation of the IIN Hub, which continues to gain momentum.
6. Continue to work effectively with shared governance, extending and supporting our base of faculty excellence. Careful development of existing and new faculty and deans will be a major ongoing emphasis moving forward.
7. Down-scaling must be managed thoughtfully and transparently, but structural problems, such as those you have identified, cannot fester over time. The system stands ready to help.
8. Student recruitment and faculty development go hand in hand and, I believe that both require serious attention in the next year to preserve and extend our leadership positioning within and beyond the state.
9. Janet – I look forward to congratulating you in person for your hard work and for your many wonderful accomplishments this year! I look forward to future discussions about directions, approaches, problem areas, challenges – all focused on how to build and take advantage of the many opportunities for progress at the University of Illinois. Thank you for your support.

 1/8/26

Timothy L. Killeen Date
President

 1/7/26

Janet Gooch Date
Chancellor and Vice President