

Summary of Remarks by President Joseph White Council of Academic Professionals 1-12-06

President White began his discussion by thanking all Academic Professionals for their work across the university. Prior to answering questions, the president explained some of his basic philosophy. He feels strongly that the U of I is the state's most valuable asset and the university is pledged to insure a maximum opportunity for a good education for the citizens. His feeling is that the U of I provides a \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year education for a cost of about \$8,000 – a great value.

The president pointed out that the U of I attracts approximately 600-million research dollars each year and uses that to create a better world. He added that faculty and staff have done a tremendous job of maintaining the quality of the institution through tough economic times. He said that, while it would be a mistake to bet the university's future on increases in state funding, he did believe that one day the General Assembly would recognize the institutional stewardship that maintained quality while the state's attention was focused elsewhere.

President White indicated that there is still much untapped financial and emotional support for the university. He has found there are many wonderful people who love the university and the institution needs to do a better job of reaching out to them.

In general, President White believes that universities are well-positioned to be communities of life-long associations and affiliations; that universities are in ascendancy and need to make it easy for people to sustain a long-term, multiple-form relationship.

In response to specific questions:

President White stated a group of Deans and Directors will be commissioned to short-track an effort to streamline the organization and bureaucracies within the institution.

The president repeated this is not a good time to extend benefits (relative to expanding tuition waiver benefits to retirees and notice benefits to 50-100% APs). He said was not saying “never” but now is not a good time. The university will continue to rely on tuition with an emphasis on academic quality, access and infrastructure.

The president said one of the largest interest areas emerging from the strategic planning is better positioning of the university to expand online delivery. The desires of students and prospective students relative to alternative delivery methods must be taken into account; the U of I must aspire to be the leader among research institutions in online delivery. At the same time, the university must be flexible and adaptable regarding the delivery of certificate, professional advancement and other non-degree programs. He is encouraging initiative and innovation in this area at the school and college level.

Regarding unionization, President White stated that when employees vote to unionize and when that unit is legally recognized the university needs to work with the organizations and individuals involved to reach a fair agreement.

In response to a question about formalizing lines of advancement for APs, the president said it is hard for large organizations to satisfy employee desires for advancement without growth. While it is certainly possible to engage in an effort to sort out titles, paths, etc., growing is a better way to provide opportunity. He feels that some growth opportunities for some Academic Professionals have been lost in not being in the forefront of online delivery. He acknowledged an important challenge in “keeping people in body and in spirit.”

As President White completes his staff and as important hires are made across the campus, the president expressed a goal of hiring people who are capable of a deep commitment to the university. He also wants to develop true leaders in our community, mute the “caste system,” focus on the value of the individual and teamwork, and give people reasons to be proud. Anything that says we are “winners” has value, including the tremendous publicity generated by last year’s basketball team.

And finally, the president said he wants to help the community understand the origins of “Illini” and “Fighting Illini,” but he is steadfast in leaving discussion of the future of Chief Illiniwek in the hands of the Board of Trustees.