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Office of the Provost

Key Issues Template and Guiding Questions
2024-25

What are "Key Issues"?

The Key Issues document is a high-level overview of the critical issues and/or strategic priorities facing the department in the next several years. The Key Issues will be explored in more detail in the Self-Study. The issues may take the form of known challenges that the department currently faces or critical questions to consider and on which it would like feedback. It is important that the list of issues generated by the department corresponds with the department's strategic priorities. The Key Issues are identified early on in the process in order to guide the focus of the review. The Key Issues document should be one to three pages and contain no more than five key issues. Key Issues are shared with the Provost, Dean, and Faculty Advisory Council for feedback in advance of the department writing the Self-Study. The Provost and/or Dean may also identify additional Key Issues to be included/addressed in the Self Study.

Broadly, Key Issues generally cluster around the following areas.

- **Faculty:** Recruitment and hiring strategy; retention challenges; mentoring of junior faculty; department culture/climate; faculty diversity; faculty engagement
- **Governance:** Department structure; committee structure and decision-making processes (i.e., faculty hiring, student admissions, etc.); leadership and succession planning
- **Research:** Current areas of research focus within the department; new/emerging areas of research in the field; research funding; research centers and institutes
- **Teaching and Learning:** Undergraduate and graduate curricula (i.e., current curriculum and any potential adjustments to future approach); student success; career placement and program outcomes; program rank and reputation
- **Internal and External Collaborations:** Improving existing collaborations and/or developing new collaborations, both within Northwestern and within the discipline more broadly
- **Departmental Support:** Staff support; graduate student support (TAs, RAs, etc.)
- **Facilities and Operations:** Space (as it relates to the academic/research mission); IT; classroom support

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Guiding Questions for Faculty Discussion of Key Issues

The Working Group may want to share a list of guiding questions with faculty prior to any brainstorming sessions or requests for feedback on potential Key Issues. Sample questions the department might pose to faculty to support this idea generation are listed below.

- *Faculty:*
  - How has the makeup of our faculty changed since the last review?
  - What are our upcoming hiring plans and how do they support the department's research priorities and goals?
  - What faculty retirements and new hiring can be anticipated in the next five years? How will the department approach these opportunities?
  - How does our department mentor junior faculty? Are there any areas for improvement needed here?
  - How does the department foster and promote intellectually-rewarding collaborations among faculty within the department?
  - Is the department's faculty diverse, in regard to gender, racial and ethnic diversity? How does the department monitor and assess progress towards its goals?
- *Governance:*
  - Does the current governance structure support the department's goals? Are there any areas for improvement?
  - Does the current committee structure represent the breadth of the department? Are the committees functioning effectively?
  - Does the department do a good job of engaging diverse faculty feedback on important decisions (i.e., faculty hiring, student admissions, etc.)?
  - How are service assignments determined? Is the current approach equitable?
- *Research:*
  - What are the department's main areas of research strength? Where are the department's gaps?
  - How has research in the department changed since the last review? Are there any new/emerging areas of research in the discipline that the department should prioritize in hiring?
  - Relative to other top departments in the discipline, how does the department compare? What most impacts the department's relative position?
- *Teaching and Learning:*
  - Is the current curriculum meeting the needs of undergraduate and graduate students? Are any changes needed in the near future?
  - Are student learning outcomes on par with intended outcomes? How are learning outcomes assessed in the department?

- o What can the department take away from its teaching evaluations?
- o How does the department recognize outstanding teaching?
- o Outside of the classroom, how does the department support academic experiences like student research?
- *Internal and External Collaborations:*
  - o How does the department collaborate with other units across Northwestern?How could these relationships be improved? Are there any new units the department wants to collaborate with?
  - o How is the department a leader in the field more broadly? How does the department collaborate with faculty at other institutions, through associations/organizations, etc.?
  - o How does the department engage with communities outside of Northwestern/academia?
- *Departmental Support:*
  - o Is the current staff structure aptly supporting the academic operations of the department?
  - o Are there any potential issues related to faculty support in other areas (e.g., RAs, TAs, curriculum support staff, etc.)?
- *Facilities and Space:*
  - o Are there any major facilities or space concerns that need to be flagged in the upcoming review? How do these issues impact the academic operations and success of the department?

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**Key Issues for <mark>{Department Name}</mark>
2024-25**

1. **Key Issue 1**
   a. 2-3 paragraphs providing high-level overview of key issue

2. **Key Issue 2**
   a. 2-3 paragraphs providing high-level overview of key issue

3. **Key Issue 3**
   a. 2-3 paragraphs providing high-level overview of key issue

4. **Key Issue 4**
   a. 2-3 paragraphs providing high-level overview of key issue

5. **Key Issue 5**
   a. 2-3 paragraphs providing high-level overview of key issue