

Review of the Adlai Stevenson II Center for Community and Economic Development

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 90.4506
Research and Service Center: Economics

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Adlai Stevenson II Center for Community and Economic Development to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks Stevenson Center for a concise yet thorough, well-organized, and forward-looking self-study report. The committee acknowledges navigation by Stevenson Center leadership through the challenges to its initiatives resulting from staff turnover, actions by the federal government, and the worldwide pandemic and recognizes the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report accomplished during these times. The report shows involvement of Center stakeholders in the review process (through discussions, surveys, and focus groups) and evidence of the integration of program evaluation in the ongoing work of the Center.

The committee commends the Center staff for their many varied contributions to support the mission and vision of the University. We note the unique interdisciplinary collaboration developed and nurtured by the Stevenson Center for the benefit of students interested in becoming leaders in public service who serve communities and organizations through the field of community and economic development. We note that the Center accomplishes this through a unique combination of interdisciplinary coursework, research, professional practice, and community collaboration. We commend the staff for their maintaining a highly successful program that has many partner entities (internal and external to the University), across dozens of non-profit and public sector agencies. Through the work of its student fellows, staff, and faculty, the Center continues to contribute to the economic well-being and livability of communities across the state and nation as well as abroad.

The committee recognizes and thanks the Stevenson Center for the proactive and measured way it has responded to recommendations resulting from the prior review in 2017. The committee recognizes work done by the Center to maintain relatively stable relationships with participating graduate programs during the challenges presented by the pandemic. We commend the Center and its staff for the implementation of the Peace Corps Prep program which has served 76 participants since its inception as well as the development of a new registered student organization (Friends For Peace) that further supports the mission. The committee encourages the Center to continue to monitor effectiveness of the new initiative in preparing students for the Peace Corps application process. It is evident from the self-study report that the Stevenson Center has developed and continues to implement excellent assessment practices for their services and programs and that Center staff continues to analyze the data collected to modify those activities. The way assessment has been integrated with strategic planning continues to enhance the value of both to the organization.

The committee recognizes that most Center initiatives continue to be funded primarily through external contributions (only 21 percent come from general revenue from the University), including payments from partner organizations that fund graduate assistant stipends (from FY 2017 through FY 2022 stipends paid to students totaled \$937,722, and an additional \$308,302 was paid by host organizations to match and supervise student professional practices). Over the five years since the last program review, grants from AmeriCorps, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and Workforce Development Services generated \$237,610 in indirect costs for Illinois State University. Additionally, the Center has four endowed accounts that are used to support student travel, professional development (e.g., anti-racism training), equipment, and other program support and events.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee thanks the Stevenson Center staff for the opportunity to provide input regarding the Center's objectives and outcomes, contributions to student learning, and fiscal sustainability at Illinois State University through consideration of the submitted self-study report. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with the Stevenson Center staff. In the next review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2026, the committee asks the Center staff to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Continue to engage in strategic planning. The committee commends the Center staff for their development of a new strategic plan to guide the Center's activities. We further applaud the development of a separate Equity,

Diversity, and Inclusiveness Strategic Plan. We recommend that the program continues to treat the planning documents as living documents, that are revisited often and may be adapted to stay nimble and responsive to changing world that its mission serves.

Continue to look for avenues for expansion of program partnerships. The committee encourages Stevenson Center staff to continue to pursue new, innovative programming to foster connections with Illinois State University through effective use of faculty and staff experience and the involvement of students. The committee agrees that a high priority for the Center should be recruiting students into the existing ACED sequences and placing them in internships. We suggest that the program examine current structures and practices that may constrain the size of the program and consider opportunities to grow its size and scope. We support the Center's goal of developing additional partnerships with academic units as a method to expand the program (e.g., Nursing, the new Masters of Public Health). We suggest that the Center staff consider exploring options that don't require departmentally funded assistantships. We also suggest exploring additional kinds of post-bachelor's community development experiences to qualify for the program (especially for international students). Finally, the committee noted that the comparator programs selected were typically much larger programs and suggest that the Center staff consider adding additional comparators of size and scope closer to its own.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the Center staff develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around student success by defining the program's goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recommends that the program continues monitoring student retention and graduation rates.

Continue to work to raise the research profile and impact of the Center. The committee notes efforts by the staff since the previous program review to raise the research profile of the Center. We commend the use of ISU ReD as a platform. The committee encourages the Center to continue this practice, to further investigate other approaches including showcasing works related to community and economic development by faculty affiliated with the Center.

Continue implementing and refining the comprehensive assessment plan. The committee recognizes that the Stevenson Center leadership and staff have developed a formalized comprehensive assessment plan and are collecting data. We recommend that the Center staff look for procedures that increase the inclusion of participating academic program partners in the assessment. For example, the committee suggests that the pre- post- survey be expanded to include a third capture point following student completion of the first year of the program. We further encourage the Center to explore collaborations with University Assessment Services to support their assessment goals.