

RENA COTSONES, Ph.D.

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Political Science Northern Illinois University
Dissertation: "The Town-Gown Relationship: Collaboration in University Communities"

Master of Public Administration Northern Illinois University

Bachelor of Science, Mass Communication Illinois State University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE SUMMARY

Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL **1999-present**

- Associate Vice President for Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development, 2016-present
- Associate Vice President for Engagement and Innovation Partnerships, 2014 – 2016
- Adjunct Faculty, Public Administration, 2013-present
- Assistant Vice President for Regional Engagement, 2009-2014
- Executive Director, Community Relations, 1999-2009

Rockford (IL) Area Chamber of Commerce **1994-1999**

- Executive Vice President, 1998-1999
- Vice President, 1996-1998
- Director, Organizational Development, 1994-1995

University of Illinois at Chicago College of Pharmacy **1992-1993**
Director of College Advancement

University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford **1989-1991**
Director of Community Relations

American Hospital Association, Chicago **1987-1989**
Public relations associate

Rockford (IL) Memorial Hospital **1986-1987**
Assistant Director, Public Relations

WIFR-TV 23 **1984-1986**
Reporter/Anchor

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE DETAIL—Northern Illinois University

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, 2016-present

Create and lead collaborative initiatives with internal and external stakeholders to advance NIU's role as the region's premier partner for educational attainment, economic and workforce development, and innovation. Develop new opportunities to link and leverage NIU's expertise and resources with those of the region to address local challenges and to maximize opportunities. Lead university-wide projects at the direction of the president and serve as the president's liaison on regional initiatives. Direct ambitious portfolio of regional engagement activities and manage staff in DeKalb and Rockford.

Selected initiatives and accomplishments

NIU Engineering @ RVC

Built a regional coalition of university, community college, industry, and economic development partners to create a community-based, industry-integrated workforce development solution for regional aerospace cluster.

- Negotiated MOU with community college to host faculty and jointly recruit students
- Wrote case statement and helped raise \$7.5 million locally for facility, faculty and scholarship support
- Started the program (years 3 and 4 of BSME) with 18 students in Fall 2016; Spring 2019 enrollment is 48 (full and part-time)
- Won *Award of Excellence in Talent + Place* from University Economic Development Association, 2017
- Continue to maintain coalition momentum through weekly team meetings
- Ongoing management of the program with NIU engineering and community college administrators and faculty

Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence (NICNE)

Identified opportunity and managed acquisition of Rockford-based agency that promotes innovation and excellence in the nonprofit sector and social change in the region, serving 1,600 individuals, 220 organizations and 16 counties through educational and leadership development programs, consulting services and collective impact training and management. Manage staff and lead efforts for university integration, regional expansion and self-sufficiency.

Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability Steering Committee

Developed proposal for new multi-disciplinary research, teaching and engagement center in collaboration with the vice president for research, resulting in a \$15 million state appropriation to establish the center as part of the new Illinois Innovation Network.

Institutional Partnership Survey

Designed and implemented annual university partnership survey to establish a baseline for institutional goals for partnership growth and sustainability.

Engaged Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Conference

Created a biennial conference highlighting student/faculty/community engagement and university partnerships with the assistant vice president for student engagement.

Carnegie Engagement Classification Task Force

Leader of 2019 Engaged Institution re-designation process (original designation, 2009).

APLU Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Designation

Wrote 2018 5-Year Interim Report for NIU's IEP designation; leader of 2013 team that prepared original application and won the inaugural *Place Development* award.

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ENGAGEMENT AND INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS

2014-2016

Originated a shared position to help align the missions and activities of the Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development and the Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships to connect NIU more effectively with regional partners.

Selected initiatives and accomplishments

NIU EIGERlab

Identified opportunity and managed acquisition of Rockford-based business incubator/accelerator to add to NIU's innovation portfolio. Expanded student and community access to product development and small business support services. Manage staff and lead efforts for university integration, regional expansion and self-sufficiency.

- Repurposed underutilized library and computer lab space at Rockford regional education center to create coworking and small business incubation services for innovators and entrepreneurs
- Developed new track in annual Fast Pitch competition to engage students
- Helped College of Business faculty establish DeKalb-based Fast Pitch competition

Regional engagement with DMDII

Created national model for regional engagement for Chicago-based Digital Manufacturing Design and Innovation Institute (DMDII), to help translate U.S. Department of Defense-funded research opportunities and outcomes to small and medium manufacturers.

- Generated high-level visibility for NIU and the region; announcement news conference featured Congressman Dick Durbin and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos
- Represented NIU for two terms as elected member of DMDII Executive Committee

IDEAL Industries-NIU Intrapreneurship Program

Collaborated with local industry and NIU faculty to create cross-disciplinary student intrapreneurship program for market research and product development.

- More than 30 students participated with faculty and industry mentorship
- Seven students have been hired by the company

NIU Office of Innovation

Consolidated tech transfer and innovation activities into a single office and developed new methodology for determining ROI for commercialization activities. Encouraged broader engagement with industry partners and nurtured the creation of new narratives about basic and applied research activities.

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT, REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

2009-2014

Created and implemented a comprehensive engagement strategy for NIU in Rockford, a community 45 minutes northwest of DeKalb. Initiated and developed university collaborations with key regional stakeholders to achieve results in educational attainment, economic development and workforce development.

Selected initiatives and accomplishments

Office of Regional Engagement-Rockford

Created and continue to direct the university's first and only community-based engagement office outside of DeKalb.

- Conducted a series of interviews and focus groups to inform the creation of a strategic engagement agenda for NIU in Rockford
- Developed consensus and support from government, business and community leaders for NIU's engagement activities in the area

Jobs & Innovation Accelerator Challenge (JIAC) Grant

Convened a coalition of university, community college, economic development and workforce development partners. Focused on workforce development and supply chain growth for Rockford's aerospace sector in collaboration with local economic development council

- Led development of successful \$2.4 million federal grant to recruit students and accelerate innovation and job creation for small and medium-sized aerospace companies in Rockford
- Chaired advisory board and helped initiate Joint Institute for Engineering and Technology-Aerospace (JiET-A), a community-wide student recruitment and mentorship program to encourage students to pursue engineering careers
- Relationships formed and lessons learned from this initiative catalyzed the development of NIU Engineering @ RVC

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY RELATIONS

1999-2009

Recruited by NIU's president to establish a cabinet-level liaison to regional business, community and local government leaders. Worked with the president and other senior administrators to resolve community issues and identify opportunities for NIU administrators, faculty and students to provide regional leadership and service.

Selected initiatives and accomplishments

Huskies on Parade public art project

Convened university, business and community partners to create community-wide public art project celebrating unity between NIU and DeKalb.

- Engaged student and community artists, providing opportunities for paid work
- Raised \$50,000 in sponsorships and art sales for student scholarships

Communiversities Cares

Convened business, government and community partners to create mutually supportive interactions between students and the greater DeKalb community in the wake of a campus shooting.

STATE & NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES & HONORS

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)

Commission on Economic and Community Engagement 2018-present
Executive Committee

Council on Engagement and Outreach (CEO) Executive Committee 2012-2018

- Chairperson, 2016-17
- Vice Chairperson, 2015-16
- Secretary, 2014-15
- Liaison to the Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness and Economic Prosperity (CICEP), 2014-2016

Chairperson, NIU Innovation and Economic Prosperity Task Force 2013-present

- Achieved APLU IEP University designation in 2013
- Received inaugural *Place Development* Award, 2013
- Author of 2018 5-Year Interim Report

University Economic Development Association

Board of Directors 2018-present

Award of Excellence, Talent + Place 2017

Award of Excellence, Talent Development 2014

University of Missouri Advancing Research and its Impact on Society (ARIS) Center

Board of Advisors 2018-present

National Forum of Chief Engagement and Outreach Officers Member	2017-present
Strategic Doing Institute, Agile Strategy Lab, Purdue University Faculty Fellow	2009-present
Digital Manufacturing & Design Innovation Institute (Manufacturing USA Network) Executive Committee Elected member	2015 - 2016
Engagement Academy for University Leaders Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Graduate	2010

SELECTED INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- “Linking and Leveraging: An Agile Approach to Building Connectedness and Achieving Impact,” National Association for Broader Impacts 2019 Summit, Tuscon, AZ
- “New Narratives for Networks: Branding Your Region’s Transformation,” Strategic Doing Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, 2019
- “Moving Ahead after Maria: Reflections on Training Community Leaders in Puerto Rico,” Strategic Doing Annual Meeting, Florence, AL, 2018
- Member of Strategic Doing training team, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2018
- “Working Together: Crafting Regional Collaboration,” (moderator), APLU CEO Summer Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 2017
- “NSB Science and Engineering Indicators: Utilizing a Unique Data Set to Promote Economic and Workforce Development” (panelist), APLU Annual Meeting, Austin, TX, November 2016
- “The New Collaborative Landscape of Talent Development and Retention: Employing Effective Regional, Metro and Statewide Strategies,” (panelist), UEDA Annual Summit, Anchorage, AK, September 2015
- “Target Audience: The Media,” SSTI Annual Conference, Oklahoma City, October 2015
- “Manufacturing Challenges and Opportunities” (panelist), Congresswoman Cheri Bustos’ Economic Summit, Rock Island, IL, September 2014
- “University Role in Supporting Regional Manufacturing Clusters,” SSTI Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, September 2014

“Agile Strategy for University Collaboration and Engagement Roundtable” (panelist),
UEDA Annual Summit, Santa Fe, NM, September 2014

“Regional Engagement and Economic Development,” 10th Annual Pascal Observatory
Conference, Brest, France, October 2012

“Breaking Down Silos: Inter-agency Efforts to Support Regionalism,” Transformative
Regional Engagement (TRE) Roundtable, Washington, D.C., 2011

SELECTED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & HONORS

SwedishAmerican Health System Co-chair, Cultivation Committee, Endowment Campaign	2018-present
Growth Dimensions (Boone Co. EDC) Board of Directors	2009-present
Community Leadership Award, YWCA of Northwestern Illinois	2010
Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors	2004- 2010
Rockford Area Economic Development Council Executive Committee	2007-2011
Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors	1999-present
Rockford Area Economic Development Council Board of Directors	1999-present
Rockford Area Arts Council Board of Directors	2006-2012
Rockford Area Economic Development Council Board Chair	2006-2009
DeKalb Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors	1999-2009
Athena Award for Community Leadership (DeKalb)	2005
DeKalb Co. Economic Development Corp. Board of Directors	1999-2009
DeKalb Co. Economic Development Corp. Board Executive Committee	2001-2009
City of DeKalb Economic Development Committee	2001-2009
Sycamore Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors	1999-2009
YMCA of Rock River Valley Board Executive Committee	2000-2006
YMCA of Rock River Valley Board of Directors	1997-2006