Learning Dimension Report
University of Northern Iowa

Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution’s philosophy and mission. Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

Foundations of Excellence
Final Report - Learning Dimension
March 26, 2009

Committee Members

- David M. Grant, co-chair, Asst. Professor, Department of English Language and Literature
- Jean Neibauer, co-chair, Director, Office of Academic Advising
- Patricia Beck, Asst. Director of Marketing and Conferences, Department of Residence
- Gina Burkart, Instructor, Department of English Language and Literature
- Katheryn East, Asst. Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations
- Deanne Gute, Writing Coordinator, Academic Learning Center
- Chad Heinzel, Asst. Professor, Department of Earth Science
- Mark Jacobsen, Instructor, Department of Computer Science and Program Assistant Department of Mathematics
- Larry Kaplan, undergraduate student
- James Kelly, Professor, Office of Student Field Experiences
- William Koch, Instructor, Department of English Language and Literature
- Marilyn Mercado, Dean and Assoc. Professor, Rod Library
- Andrew Morse, undergraduate student
- Christopher Neuhaus, Reference Librarian and Associate Professor, Rod Library
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- Patti Rust, Senior Associate Registrar
- Joan Smothers, Assistant Director, College of Business Administration Undergraduate Programs and Support Services

Abstract

Dimension Grade: C
Overall, the University of Northern Iowa does an adequate job with respect to efforts aimed at student learning in the first-year. While there are many places of excellence, these are neither coordinated nor shared in any systematic manner. As a result, student learning can be a "hit or miss" opportunity. The committee felt that several areas required institutional attention to improve overall student learning in the first year: greater attention to writing across the curriculum and in the disciplines, support for faculty development, better assessment of learning and mechanisms for feedback to students, a more user-friendly system to identify students at risk of poor grades, and appropriate placement for all students, not just those at the ends of the academic achievement spectrum.

I. CURRENT SITUATION

PI 1: Learning Goals

1. Established Common Learning Goals: Though learning goals exist for various programs and courses, there is still no established set of universal learning goals and learning outcomes for first-year students that is clearly and routinely being applied campus-wide.

For the high-enrollment Liberal Arts Core courses that focus on the first-year student:

- The Oral Communications program states learning goals to be implemented by all instructors teaching these courses.
- College Writing & Research provides learning objectives for first-year students to all College Writing & Research instructors. It is not evident that these are universally shared across all sections.
- The UNI office of Academic Advising has outlined academic advising outcomes for first-year student programming based on national CAS Standards for academic advising.
- Three individual "Introduction to Psychology" syllabi (Adam Butler, Cathy DeSoto, Linda Walsh) with Course Objectives
- One "Humanities I" syllabus (James B. Robinson) with Course Objectives
- UNI Intake Model for Freshmen
42% of the 2008 freshmen class in select majors from three of the five university colleges are advised in a pilot intake model through the office of Academic Advising. Advisors from Academic Advising work with departments to develop an advising syllabus outlining outcomes, expectations, and resources for the freshman year. Students participate in both pre- and post-assessments.

- Freshmen are assigned to departmental advisors at the end of their freshman year.
- The Liberal Arts Core Committee has posted Competencies (goals) as working documents at http://www.uni.edu/morgans/lacc. We could find no evidence that these learning goals are annually or universally applied to all courses attended by first-year students.
- The LAC Core Competencies are only recommended during the first year, however they are not required. Therefore, there are no courses that are truly first-year courses.
2. Documented Outcomes for Common Learning Goals: There are currently no established campus-wide learning goals for first-year students.

- The MAPP (Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress) testing is currently in place for assessing student learning in the Liberal Arts Core. The NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) is also currently used to assess Liberal Arts Core student outcomes.

- The learning outcomes measured by MAPP and NSSE are those for the Liberal Arts Core and not specifically for first-year students, though as stated by the UNI Office of Academic Assessment:
  - "Beyond its use for the LAC, NSSE provides data on student experiences and perceptions that can be useful to a wide range of academic and student affairs departments and offices across campus."
  - "MAPP data is also being considered for inclusion in the student learning outcomes section (page 5) of the UNI College Portrait."

- The Liberal Arts Core Committee has posted Current Outcomes and Assessment Methods at http://www.uni.edu/morgans/lacc/. We could find no evidence that these learning goals are annually or universally applied to all courses attended by first-year students.

- The UNI Office of Academic Advising, working in cooperation with various colleges and departments, has outlined explicit academic advising desired outcomes for first-year students.

**PI 2: Engaging Students**

**Grade: D**

There is no documentation of instructional methods used in each course at the institutional level with the exception of the Academic Program Assessment (APA), due to the Task Force by March 1, 2009.

- No results are available for review at this time. The APA includes these relevant dimensions:
  a) Quality of Teaching dimension, with one discretionary (not required) item pertaining to engagement: "Identify creative or innovative teaching strategies, learning activities, and course assignments used in the program. If possible, provide evidence of the impacts of those innovations on student engagement and learning." The only "required" documentation includes percentages of each effectiveness rating from Student Evaluations of Teaching in each program.
  b) Outcomes Assessment dimension, requires a program to provide a copy of its Student Outcomes Assessment (SOA) plan, if any. A description of how the plan has been used to improve the program is optional.
  c) Optional "Opportunity for Distinction" category, which requests documentation of any "cutting edge" teaching or research accomplishments.
  d) An "Outreach and Engagement" category, whose dimensions relate to faculty and student involvement with "external audiences, constituents, and target groups."

- Departments informally document instructional methods through instructor evaluation, syllabus collection, and so on, but none are aware of at this time do so for the purpose of evaluating student engagement. Some departments require uniform course syllabi and textbooks for consistency with philosophy and instructional goals (e.g., Communication Studies), but instructional methods are usually documented for the purpose of faculty tenure and promotion rather than direct attention to student outcomes.

- Midterm reporting is not mandatory at UNI; D's and F's are important indicators of engagement and can be used to initiate preventive action against academic suspension or withdrawal. UNI's policy suggests a "no need to know" stance.

- Most of the evidence available to this group consisted of large-scale surveys (e.g., NSSE, FOE Faculty/Staff, FOE Student surveys) unrelated to the five specific courses with high DFWI rates. Other than the Assessment Office's posting of data and organization of workshops for interested faculty and staff, UNI makes no systematic use of the survey data.

- An engagement survey of students in multiple sections of 620:005 is being conducted by Gina Burkart. Informal surveys have been conducted by Deanne Gute in 620:002 (see Gute & Gute, "Flow Writing in the Liberal Arts Core and Across the Disciplines: A Vehicle for Confronting and Transforming Academic Disengagement" http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_general_education/toc/jge.57.4.html). Both point to academic relationships, including instructional methods faculty employ, as highly significant factors in students' engagement or lack of engagement.

- 2004/2005 Exit surveys identifying "lack of sense of belonging" as main reason for non-persistence; FOE Student Survey, the "Transitions: Making Connections" Factor (5 questions) identified as below goal and needing improvement. Connections are identified as a "low-impact" factor, contrary to the same factor being identified as the primary reason for student non-persistence on the Exit Survey for two consecutive years. Evidence points to several factors that may help create a sense of disconnection between students and others at UNI and suggest room for improvement in the way faculty and staff build their instructional/advisory/supportive/personal relationships with students.

Themes that emerged from the survey data but were not specifically asked by FoETech include the following:

- Relationships (with fellow students, faculty, advisors); Sense of Connection. Evidence: 2004/2005 Exit surveys identifying "lack of sense of belonging" as main reason for non-persistence; FOE Student Survey, the "Transitions: Making Connections" Factor (5 questions) identified as below goal and needing improvement. Connections are identified as a "low-impact" factor, contrary to the same factor being identified as the primary reason for student non-persistence on the Exit Survey for two consecutive years. Evidence points to several factors that may help create a sense of disconnection between students and others at UNI and suggest room for improvement in the way faculty and staff build their instructional/advisory/supportive/personal relationships with students.

  a. Attitudes
  NSSE: 11% of first-year students rated instructors a 7, the highest rating for being "available, helpful, sympathetic," 31% a 6, 34% a 5, and 15% a 4, 6% a 3, 2% a 2. Administrative offices received slightly lower positive ratings.
FOE Faculty Survey: faculty scored below the mean in belief that the institution assured first-year students individualized attention from faculty/staff (3.04).

b. Academic Instruction & Feedback
It is important to note that "relationships and connections" DO NOT refer strictly to affective dimensions; student engagement requires more than friendliness and sympathy. NSSE: Under half (44% of first-year students, 34% of seniors) received "prompt oral or written feedback from faculty on your academic performance." Feedback is a crucial part of sustained engagement in any activity, particularly for first-year students who have not yet "learned the ropes" and fine-tuned their ability to assess their own performance. 

Burkart's survey of 57 students enrolled in 620:005 (36.8% in a Humanities course; 17.5% in Intro. To Psych; and 10.5% in Oral Communication):
"Greatest positive impact on engagement: 64.9% peer relationships; 47.4% class size; 45.6% resources (Library, Writing Center, Career Services, etc.)"
"Greatest negative impact on engagement: 36% methods of instruction; 28% class size; 22% relationships with professors"

In open-ended comments, students indicated that anything done too much negatively affected engagement, including lecture, PowerPoint, doing presentations, and movies.

c. Differential Attention to Different Student Groups
FOE Faculty Survey: While it is encouraging that we were above the mean in this category, a breakdown of the score (3.65) is more telling. For a variety of reasons, some programmatic, some extra-institutional, a significant number of faculty members perceive that different students receive different attention. The FoE Faculty survey scores in this area show athletes with 4.09, honors students 3.79, physical disability 3.59, learning disability 3.49, racial/ethnic 3.46, academic deficiency 3.30. Faculty and student surveys suggested that there is room for improvement in students' exposure to different cultures. More data is necessary to determine if these factors point to insufficient understanding and engagement of diverse learning styles.

Faculty and Institutional Priorities
FOE Faculty Survey: Faculty Involvement: faculty scored 3.39 in viewing their work with first-year students as important. Breaking down this number by different levels of faculty shows first-year faculty believe that department head/leaders value work with first-year students the most (3.53), then colleagues (3.37), with institutional leaders (3.29) showing the least concern with first-year work. Since engagement depends on relationships, engagement might not be as high as we would like because faculty do not see as much importance in their work with first-year students as they should.

Faculty Development
FOE Faculty Survey: Faculty indicated lack of excellence in the teaching of first-year students, where the score was well below the mean at 2.43. This may correlate with relatively low rating of professional development available to first-year faculty (2.10). Faculty also noted a lack of recognition and awards for instructors who work with first-year students.

Differences between Faculty and Student Perceptions/Self-Reported Activity
FOE Faculty Survey: Standards of Behavior: On the survey, faculty scored the institution below the mean (3.17) in communicating to students the standards of academic honesty, how to give credit to outside sources, principles of ethical conduct, and the appropriate behaviors of an academic community. Student survey placed UNI above the mean, 3.98

FOE Faculty Survey, Learning: UNI faculty believe (4.17) that in first year courses they encourage students to ask questions, make themselves available outside of class, communicate academic expectations, manage student behavior, encourage participation in out-of-class events, and initiate communication early in the term with students who are performing poorly. While encouraging questions is good, the survey provides no additional information about types of activities or methods used to teach the first year LAC courses. "Encouraging" questions does not necessarily equate with small and large group instruction or other teaching methods that improve engagement. Additional data suggesting that students are not as engaged as we think they are/we want them to be:

The Activities of Engagement
NSSE: 45% "sometimes" asked questions in class, 31% "often" asked.

NSSE: 61% of first-year students reported "sometimes" coming to class without completing readings or assignments, 13% "often." It would be more difficult for more students to come unprepared to classes that demand a high degree of engagement over anonymity.

NSSE: Under half (44% first-year, 45% seniors) did "quite a bit" of synthesizing info. into "new, more complex interpretations or relationships" (same for analyzing, a lower-order skill, and making judgments, a higher-order skill)

NSSE: 32% of first-year students read no books on their own.

Writing
The Learning Dimension Group as a whole has expressed concern about inadequacy of opportunities for students to engage with ideas through writing. Survey instruments focus only on student self-perception of UNI's contribution to their writing and speaking skills. NSSE: 72% of first-year students on the NSSE think UNI has "very much" contributed to their "knowledge, skills, and personal development in writing clearly."

Other data would give pause to anyone familiar with effective writing and writing habits.
NSSE: 18% of first-year students reported that they had never done college writing projects involving 2 or more drafts, and 58% had only done 1-4.
The mid-semester term grade information is voluntarily reported for incoming freshmen and seniors along with the NSSE. MAPP is limited in its power to assess writing proficiency, focusing mainly on surface features. It does include items relating to organization, source incorporation, and recognition of effective sentence revision. UNI students were on par with an ETS comparison group at Level I proficiency, but only 52% of first-year students (66% of seniors) scored at "proficient" levels. At Level II, only 16% of first-year students were proficient, 53% not (17% and 42% for seniors). At Level III, only 8% of first-year students and 9% of seniors were proficient.

**PI 3: Course Outcomes**

*Grade: C+

Overall, UNI does an adequate job documenting and evaluating student learning outcomes across all sections of each course. There is, however, much room for improvement.

- Syllabi across sections of the top 5 first-year enrolled courses generally showed consistent statements about desired course outcomes. These courses are:
  - 620:005, College Research and Writing
  - 48C:001, Oral Communication
  - 400:001, Introduction to Psychology
  - 970:040, World Geography
  - 680:021, Humanities I

- LAC has stated goals for each category as well as working documents on course outcomes and assessments for each of the categories of courses (http://www.uni.edu/morgans/lac/outcomes.html).

- The Humanities Program has a list of approved goals for all humanities courses.

- The Coordinator of Writing Programs has developed a recommended list of course outcomes, however syllabi from 620:005 suggest a range of outcomes and pedagogical practices.

- There is currently no staff orientation or regularly scheduled staff meeting for 620:005 instructors to foster parity between sections.

- NSSE and MAPP survey data (see p. 2) suggest students do not sufficiently engage in reading and writing, as follows:
  - NSSE data: 18% of first-year students reported they had never done college writing projects involving 2 or more drafts; 58% had only done 1-4.
  - MAPP: 52% of first-year student and 66% of seniors scored at level I proficient levels.
  - MAPP: 16% of first-year students were proficient at level II; 53% for seniors.
  - MAPP: 8% of first-year students were proficient at level III; 9% of seniors.

While there is a single semester of required college-level writing instruction (620:005 or 620:015), the NSSE data may suggest little attention elsewhere to writing as a process involving several drafts. The MAPP data regarding the Level II proficiency is promising, however, the percentages at Level III are a concern.

- Additional questions regarding writing proficiency will be administered with NSSE test this spring which will provide additional insight.

- Syllabi for 48C:001 reflect close coordination of course outcomes across each section with reference to the LAC outcomes as well as exact repetition of expectations across sections.

- While such statements of outcomes can assist students who complete the LAC requirements on campus, it does not affect students who transfer in with LAC credit from different institutions.
  - The average freshman student from high school transfers with 12 credit hours.
  - The university cannot guarantee the outcomes of these courses and as a result, appears to have a significant number of students who are not sufficiently prepared to achieve academically.

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**PI 4: Courses with High DFWI Rates**

*Grade: C

UNI does not currently have a system in place to identify the causes of high D/F/W/I for specific courses. The DFWI rates were examined for the following courses: College Writing and Research, Oral Communication, Humanities I, Introduction to Psychology, and World Geography.

- If a student completely withdraws from the university prior to the end of the semester, at the time of the withdrawal the student is asked for a general reason for leaving the university, which is coded into the student information system. But for individual courses we do not collect or store a reason in our system. What we do know is that the top 5 high enrollment courses with the highest percentage of D/F/W/I are all in the liberal arts core. Four out of the 5 Moderate to Low Enrollment Courses that have high DFWI rates are also liberal arts core courses.

- For individual courses, we do have many steps in place to attempt to identify and correct problems of students who have D/F/W/I. Most efforts are focused on identifying problem areas at mid-semester and providing resources to assist students experiencing difficulty.

- D/F reporting is not mandatory. Current statistics show that mid-term grade information is voluntarily reported for 72% of course sections. Students whose instructors report a D or F grade at mid-semester have the opportunity to take steps to rectify the situation.
  - Faculty are requested to submit midterm D and F (D+, D, D-, and F) grades for all students receiving such grades at that point in the semester.
  - Students reported as receiving a D or F grades by their instructors are notified by e-mail and through MyUNIverse (UNI's web-based portal).
  - The mid-semester grade report includes advising as well as other resources available to assist the student.
Advisors also have the ability to view the mid-semester grade reports of their assigned advisees, and authorized academic department and college staff have the ability to view mid-semester grade reports for students with majors in their department or college. There is no data available regarding what percent of advisors and authorized department staff members across campus actually access the reports. However, it is known that all of the advisors in Academic Advising who support 42% of the 2008 freshmen class through the UNI Intake Model for Freshmen do access and follow up on the mid-term D and F grade reports of all of their advisees.

Various other departments on campus request reports on students receiving mid-semester D and F grade reports to do their own follow-up.

- The Department of Residence sends mid-semester letters to all students living in the residence halls encouraging them to utilize on campus academic services and explore other services on campus to support their academic success.
- Academic Advising also follows up with their assigned advisees who received mid-semester grade reports.
- At times, a joint effort by the Provost and Dean of Students has resulted in a personalized communication to the student receiving mid-semester D and F grade reports, expressing concern for the student's situation and offering references to resources for assistance.

Other advisors for special populations contact faculty on behalf of their advisees to obtain attendance and performance information at some point during the semester, typically prior to mid-term grade collection. Faculty response to all of these requests is voluntary.

- The Athletic Department is one group that contacts instructors directly with their own questionnaire that meets NCAA requirements and provides a mechanism by which the athletics academic advisor can gather information and respond to student needs accordingly.
- Student Support Services is required by their federal grant to state in their plan of operation the number of contacts they will have with each student (5-8 contacts). Coordinating a plan of action for students who receive D and F grades is required for their program. These contacts are typically earlier than the mid-term reports.
- Academic Achievement and Retention Services also sends out their information requests prior to the campus wide mid-term process.

Several academic and student affairs departments support students in the pursuit of academic success as a measure to prevent DWFI.

- The PAIR (Peer Advisors In Residence) Program is offered jointly by the Department of Residence and Academic Advising Services.
- The Educational Success Assessment can help students evaluate the factors that may be contributing to their current level of educational success at UNI.

The offices of Student Support Services and Academic Achievement and Retention Services encourage their students to take a 2 credit hour Strategies for Academic Success.

The Academic Learning Center offers the above services (Student Support Services, Academic Achievement and Retention Services) as well as:

- A Math Center: Develops students' understanding of math concepts through free small-group instruction, tutoring, and problem-solving techniques.
- A Writing Center: Offers free services to undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff. Facilitates the use of writing as a method of practicing critical thinking, developing creativity, and fostering full engagement in academic processes and topics.
- A Reading and Learning Center: They provide free 4-week workshops for all students on Effective Study Skills and Speed Reading. They also coordinate free tutoring for all LAC courses on-campus and many other courses.

Services such as those described above are important to student engagement and success. However, according to the FOE Faculty Survey: First-Year Structures (3.10), the breakdown of this overall score shows faculty to believe that resources (personnel and fiscal) are inadequate for academic support services for first-year students. Additionally, faculty believe that the institution performed below the mean in assuring that students receive academic support outside the classroom. A survey of FY students at the 6-week mark indicated that at orientation, they learn about support services "somewhat" 48.5%, "very much" 31.4%, and "not much" 9.1. NSSE: 80% of students felt UNI "very much" or "quite a bit" provided needed academic support.

While there are a variety of efforts under way to provide support and assistance for students experiencing difficulty, there is a little evidence regarding the efforts of academic departments working toward improving success in their classes for what might be considered problem courses or courses with specific sections that appear to be problematic. Exceptions include College of Business Advising Center tutoring efforts specific to College of Business courses, and Academic Learning Center tutoring efforts specific to Liberal Arts Core courses.

**PI 5: Placement**

**Grade: B-**

**Overview**

The student survey for Dimension Six: Learning (Q73-74), suggests between 51%-63% of the students indicated their level of preparation was appropriate to meet necessary the requirements for: reading skills, writing skills, library research skills, mathematical, and computing skills. Open-ended responses from faculty indicate concerns regarding individual development, academic skills, and UNI information. (Q49-51)

Entering freshmen register for first semester courses after currently enrolled students. While some efforts have been made in the past to reserve spaces in the Liberal Arts Core, freshmen are not the University’s first priority when planning for the allocation of courses. If we placed a focus on determining the best schedule for first year students with adequate sections reserved for levels of ability, students’ perceptions of their placement might be different.
Placement is important throughout a student’s academic career, placing added importance on effective advising beyond initial orientation advising. The Undergraduate Advising Council to the Provost conducted surveys of students and faculty in 2007-2008 to determine needs for advising at UNI in order to implement campus-wide advising efforts to meet the stated campus advising mission/vision/goals and outcomes. Academic advisors at UNI have expressed a desire to have an online advising handbook, ongoing advisor development, and a campus association of advisors to keep up to date on campus advising. The Undergraduate Advising Council is planning to implement this advisor support in the 2009-10 academic year. This will have an overall impact on the placement and advisor/advisee relationships.

1. To address deficiencies in academic preparation

Effect of Advising on Placement
Academic advising is a key component in student placement. Students scored academic advising at or higher than the goal of 3.5 in discussing:
- what it takes to be academically successful
- helping to select courses
- explaining the requirements for academic majors
Academic advising scored lower in discussing future enrollment plans (3.15)

According to the FOE Student Survey, students rated their experience as Below Goal (3.07) on Learning: Course Placement, and Transitions. In the Open-ended Questions, students expressed the need for more information about classes, advisors "who care/know something," and for more faculty involvement in advising/better approachability and one-on-one time. Yet NSSE shows positive data on advising across the colleges. FOE Faculty Survey: Faculty believe that they help first-year students choose and register for courses, plan for future enrollment, understand what it takes to be academically successful, and that they are well trained to provide this advising.

NSSE data and student climate survey data indicate some different results concerning student attitudes about advising. The following tables compare freshmen and seniors and also how UNI advising compares to cohort institutions. They also compare perceptions on advising by special populations.

Student Attitudes Toward Advising

NSSE Data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Item</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
<th>Cohort Institutions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10a. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor</td>
<td>16% often or very often talked about career plans</td>
<td>35% often or very often talked about career plans</td>
<td>FR 28%; SR 38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10b. The extent UNI provides the support needed to help succeed academically</td>
<td>78% report receiving very much or quite a bit of support</td>
<td>75 % report receiving very much or quite a bit of support</td>
<td>FR 70%; SR 67%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Evaluate the quality of academic advising received at UNI</td>
<td>82% report excellent or good</td>
<td>69 % report excellent or good</td>
<td>FR 71%; SR 64%</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Item</th>
<th>Athletes</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10a. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor</td>
<td>39.5% often or very often talked about career plans</td>
<td>32.7% often or very often talked about career plans</td>
<td>38.9% often or very often talked about career plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>10b. The extent UNI provides the support needed to help succeed academically</td>
<td>79% report receiving very much or quite a bit of support</td>
<td>73.4 % report receiving very much or quite a bit of support</td>
<td>77.8% report receiving very much or quite a bit of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Evaluate the quality of academic advising received at UNI</td>
<td>86.8% report excellent or good</td>
<td>72.3 % report excellent or good</td>
<td>83.3% report excellent or good</td>
</tr>
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Foundations of Excellence Student Survey Data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>White/Non Hispanic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed Future Enrollment plans</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Explained requirements for specific academic majors</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
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<td>Helped select courses</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussed what it takes to be academically successful</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
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UNI Student Climate Survey 2001-02/ Student Satisfaction Survey 2003-08
(5.0 Scale Approximately 25% of respondents indicated no opinion which could lower the numbers)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality Academic Advising</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Quality Mentoring</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Faculty</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
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Reflections on the data:
Overall the quality of academic advising appears to remain in the same range over time. There is a discrepancy in the perceptions of freshmen and seniors which may reflect well on our first-year efforts. A lower rating in NSSE on discussion of career plans with faculty and advisors may indicate the immediate concerns of freshmen with making a positive transition to college and the freshman idea that career plans may denote career management activities such as resume development.
and job search. It may also indicate an opportunity for faculty development in the area of academic advising needs for upper class students.

NSSE and Foundations of Excellence surveys indicate that special populations (athletes, and non-white) rate advising higher than white students do. The university has hired advisors to provide additional support services to both athletes and non-white populations through the Athletic Department and the Academic Learning Center housing Student Support Services, Academic Retention Services, and Jump Start along with support learning services. Both athletes and students in Jump Start and Student Support Services have a freshman seminar. Recruited freshman athletes are required to attend the NCAA CHAMPS Life Skills course taught by the athletic academic advisor. Students in Student Support Services are required to enroll in Strategies for Academic Success in their first semester.

These statistics and recommendations from our Foundations of Excellence self-study support efforts to institute campus-wide programming with intentional services focused on first-year students involving classroom instruction, advising services, and student affairs services.

**Effects of Course Availability on Placement**

Currently, the core question about what the best courses are for first year students has to be couched in the availability of resources to staff and fund the first-year courses, especially in difficult economic times. The struggle to provide a sufficient number of sections of courses for the first-year student is an ongoing issue each summer. New freshmen register last during the summer. Different strategies are employed annually to stretch course selections to meet the demand. Sections are set aside for Jump Start and Student Support Services first-year students. The office of Academic Advising works with academic departments, deans, and provost to determine courses to ask for funding for additional sections so that students have a distribution of courses. At the end of summer orientation, advisors may struggle with providing appropriate course selection to students with deficiencies in academic preparation.

Students who have not completed UNI minimum admission requirements of 4 years of English (including one year of composition) and 3 years of Mathematics (including the equivalent of algebra, geometry, and advanced algebra) are required to take a course to meet these deficiencies:

- 620:002 College Writing Basics
- 800:004 Intermediate Algebra

While few students are admitted that are required to take these courses because they did not take enough core courses in high school, we do not offer enough sections to meet the needs of students who do not meet ACT college readiness benchmarks in English and mathematics.

Since preparatory writing and algebra courses are regarded as remedial, they are not seen as a priority when other course funding is limited.

The university should fund additional sections of each course (620:002, 800:004), to be taught by Practicum Adjuncts (PAs) or Teaching Adjuncts (TAs) who are retired school teachers with appropriate backgrounds or recent graduates who are continuing on with their graduate studies. This program could be housed in the Academic Learning Center where advisors and teachers could be mentored. The director of the Center would act as the liaison between the Center and the academic departments.

620:002 College Writing Basics and 800:004 Intermediate Algebra courses may also be used to supplement student deficiencies when ACT writing/math scores indicated more preparation is required, or when COMPAS exams are administered (Jump Start and Student Support Services Programs.) International students who are preparing for majors requiring mathematics background and who do not have adequate preparation may also enroll in Intermediate Algebra.

**Supplementary Courses for Student Placement**

- **1. 170:055 Strategies for Academic Success (2 hours)**
  Most of the enrollment is from Student Support Services and Jump Start freshmen. This is the one course at UNI which most closely matches a typical freshman seminar.
- **2. 170:050 Career Decision Making (2 hours)**
- **3. 440:059 CHAMPS/Life Skills (2 hours)**

Supervised by the NCAA. The UNI athletic department participates in this program and offers a first semester course for recruited freshman athletes to assist them in developing and balancing their academic, athletic, personal and community responsibilities.

To provide sufficient academic challenge for above-average students:

- **Honors Program** http://www.uni.edu/honors/index.shtml
  - Qualified students are identified based on an ACT composite of 27 or above (SAT-CR&M of 1210 or above), and top 10 percent high school class rank
  - Regents Admission Index of 330 or above for Fall 2009.

- **Honors seminars are restricted to sophomore level and above.**

- **Contracting for an honors class** is available if an honors student can make arrangements for a professor to offer additional honors level work for a course not identified as an honors section.

- **The Honors Program awards 20 Presidential Scholarships** a year to high school seniors with records of outstanding performance. Each scholarship is worth $32,000 over four years, or $8,000/year
3. Additional Considerations: Liberal Arts Core Course Placement
The Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act (PSEO) in Iowa has impacted the institution's goals and purposes in providing a common liberal arts education unique to UNI. 53% of freshmen have pre-college course credit, with only 8% of that being AP or CLEP credit. The original intent of the PSEO was for high ability high school students who had exhausted rigorous high school courses to access college coursework.

Currently students are taking college courses to satisfy core high school curriculum requirements as well as earning college credit. These courses are free to high school students, paid for by the school districts, and often offered in the high school setting by high school teachers who meet minimum requirements for community college teaching. While some students meet the original intent of PSEO, others may not understand that they are taking a college course and creating an academic record that may be blemished before they even start college. There is great pressure on the school districts to facilitate this program because of the economic benefits to families. Students may begin courses at UNI with unrealistic ideas of the rigor of courses and academic expectations.

Guidelines for placement in the Liberal Arts Core:
ACT has normed guidelines for success in college courses. Advisors begin placement conversations with students with ACT scores and high school academic experience.
- During Freshman Orientation students are placed in some Liberal Arts Core courses based on ACT scores. These Liberal Arts Core courses are identified in the 2004 Liberal Arts Core Advising Guide in the Evidence Library.
- The LAC recommends that students complete the writing, oral communication, and math components, known as the core competencies during their first year at UNI.

NSSE data indicate that UNI should make efforts to raise the level of writing across the curriculum to incorporate writing as an essential element of learning. 18% of first-year students reported that they had never done college writing projects involving 2 or more drafts, and 58% had only done 1-4.

4. Alternatives for Satisfying Liberal Arts Core Requirements
Students may satisfy Liberal Arts Core requirements through transfer credit determined by our articulation agreements with community colleges, or through evaluation of credits by Admissions record analysts in consult with academic departments. Students may also utilize the Advanced Placement Examination program, and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP).

5. The Modern Language Graduation Requirement
Modern Language, although not a Liberal Arts Core requirement is a graduation requirement which may be satisfied through two years of the same language in high school, with a C- or higher in the final semester, or two semesters of the same language in college. The university utilizes the Computer Adaptive Placement Exam (CAPE) to place students in the first five semesters of college-level language study.

6. Course Placement by Major/ Interest Area
Each major has entry-level courses which many freshmen enroll in during their first year. These courses are found in the First-Year Student Handbook pp. 10-17.

6. Out of Classroom Learning
Out of class learning is a growth opportunity for the Student Affairs Division. First year housing, peer academic advising, assessment of norms and programming to promote citizenship and scholarship all contribute to development outside the classroom. Assessments of performance and perception are not completed consistently; Department of Residence is an exception.

Currently, the university's student affairs initiatives and functions (other than residence life and academic advising) are without sufficient documentation specific to the learning outcomes of first year students. It was found that one function, new student orientation, and one initiative, recent NSSE data, did provide some, but still limited insight regarding the learning outcomes of first-year students at UNI. First year housing, first year intake model advising, peer academic advising, assessment of norms and programming to promote citizenship and scholarship all contribute to learning outside the classroom, however assessments of performance and perception are not completed consistently throughout the university.

Student Affairs Functions
- NSSE data: 75.5% (1107) of students surveyed who attended an orientation session indicated that they felt either somewhat (43.2%; 634) or very much (32.3%; 473) informed about co-curricular and/or extra-curricular activities during the orientation process.
- 70.6% of respondents indicated that, after the start of their time as a student, they were either very (20.9%; 305) or somewhat (49.7%; 725) successful at getting involved on campus.
- 41% of students indicated that they had spent between 1 to 5 hours per week participating in co-curricular or volunteer activities.
- There are over 250 student organizations, as well as a leadership center, and many other resources outside of residence life aimed at providing students with co-curricular learning experiences. There exists no data about participation specifically by first-year students in student organizations, the leadership center, and athletics and music events. Data from these sources would provide a better understanding of what exactly is meant by first-year students when they say that they were "successful" or "somewhat successful" at getting involved on campus.
- The office of Academic Advising has assembled a clear and thorough summary of outcomes and assessments for freshmen advised through the Intake Model utilized by select academic departments in four of the five colleges.
first-year freshmen are advised through the Intake Model.
- Aside from research data, the university does not provide other relevant documentation regarding first-year student learning outcomes in student affairs initiatives/functions other outside of the residence halls.

**Department of Residence**
The Department of Residence has a deliberate and research-based plan for education in the residence halls. The primary focus is on social success, citizenship, and scholarship. This is done through residence education programs, residence education plans designed by residence life coordinators, strategic work plans, timely reflection and measurements of success. All are well documented on summaries prepared by Drake Martin. Calendars are comprehensive and include social and academic support programming.

- 90 percent of first year students live in on-campus communities.
- Springboard communities are for freshman, only, and programming is targeted to this group in transition.
- Bulletin Boards, programming, community service outreach and individual counseling are all used to engage students in their capacity to be successful at UNI and as a citizen of the community and world.
- Parents are kept informed through newsletters to share information and guide conversations about topics important to first year students such as time management, study skills, on-campus employment, transition in social relationships, etc.
- Peer Advisors In Residence (PAIR) are assessed with entry and exit surveys.
- Success of first year students is measured by Educational Benchmarking assessments, house surveys and PAIR advising assessments.

There are a number of Academic Affairs programs and initiatives that, although not course-based, offer students in these two categories additional support:

**Rod Library:** [www.library.uni.edu/instruction](http://www.library.uni.edu/instruction)
The Rod Library Reference and Instruction Department provides research consultations, database and information retrieval instruction, online research guides, and tutorials in various web and video formats.

**Academic Advising at UNI:** [www.uni.edu/advising](http://www.uni.edu/advising)
Academic advising throughout the University considers the academic background of individual students in placing them in coursework. Support for academic advisors is available through the "Working With...Series" on the Office of Academic Advising web site. [http://www.uni.edu/advising/advisors/index.html](http://www.uni.edu/advising/advisors/index.html) Topics include: advising process and procedures, Liberal Arts Core, Students in Academic Difficulty, Involvement and Experience for Students, and making student referrals.

In addition to coordinating an intake model for first-year freshmen, the office of Academic Advising works Residence Life Coordinators who serve in as advisors for 10-15 new freshmen each year as well as supervising, training and coordinating the Peer Advisor In Residence students activities in the Department of Residence. The two departments collaborate in developmental activities to meet the goals and outcomes of both areas.

**The Academic Learning Center:** [http://www.uni.edu/unialc/](http://www.uni.edu/unialc/)
- Student Support Services is designed to increase the retention and graduation rates of participants, increase the transfer rate of eligible students from two-year to four-year colleges and foster an institutional climate of supportive of their success.
- Jump Start Program [http://www.uni.edu/admissions/orientation/jumpstart.html](http://www.uni.edu/admissions/orientation/jumpstart.html)
  Jump Start is a special orientation program designed to provide new students from ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to make a smooth transition to UNI.
- Academic Achievement and Retention Services aims to inspire students to achieve academic success and empower them to develop their personal and professional strengths.
- Reading and Learning Strategies courses through the Academic Learning Center: Speed Reading and Effective Study Strategies. Both are non-credit.
- Math Center: Provides math tutoring (group and individual) especially in the Liberal Arts courses. [http://www.uni.edu/unialc/math.html](http://www.uni.edu/unialc/math.html)
- Writing Center: Provides group and individual writing assistance to students. [http://www.uni.edu/unialc/writingcenter/](http://www.uni.edu/unialc/writingcenter/)
- GPS (Gaining Panther Success) Mentoring Program offered through Academic Learning Center and Center for Multicultural Education.
- After the Game Program: Voluntary tutoring program connecting honors students with student-athletes.
- Academic Learning Center publishes a brochure, Tutoring Services at UNI, summarizing tutoring services at UNI; updated each semester.

**II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**
UNI has several opportunities to implement institutional measures that ensure learning in the first year. While some measures already occur, they appear largely at the departmental level, with a notable exception of the LAC. However, the learning goals articulated within such institution-wide programs such as the LAC do not always explicitly connect with a consistent rationale for an undergraduate education in the first year. While there does seem to be an attempt to form courses around at least implicit goals, there is a need for greater coordination between course goals and other forms of data, such as Student Outcome and institutional assessments. Such institutional attention to learning will evidence a
commitment to UNI’s mission of putting "students first."

An overall pattern in the data is that here does not appear to be much motivation for faculty to engage first-year students or to teach courses within the LAC, despite continued slogans and an emphasis on education and learning as central to UNI’s mission. Likewise, there is an opportunity to strengthen all disciplines and departments through encouragement of interdisciplinary groups, discussions, programs, rationale, and issues related to an undergraduate and/or first-year curriculum. Given the current economic constraints on the university, this committee feels the best opportunity is to use the talent that already exists on campus rather than launching any new initiatives.

**Writing and Reading**

As a whole, the Learning Dimension subcommittee identified Liberal Arts Core Competency 1A, "Reading and Writing" as a core area of opportunity in providing a relatively low-cost (because already largely existing), largely first-year, foundational instruction and orientation for students coming to campus.

The Learning Dimension Group as a whole has expressed concern about inadequacy of opportunities for students to engage with ideas through writing. Survey instruments focus only on student self-perception of UNI's contribution to their writing and speaking skills.

According to the student survey feedback, this is not a regular practice among faculty. Indeed, it seems that the SOA and FOE faculty/student surveys to better understand specific sites of disengagement, such as the five DFWI courses.

Graduation, since non-institutional assessment procedures for the Liberal Arts Core are at this point, almost wholly disconnected from any kind of feedback mechanism, resulting in high DFWI, and social work majors have a course reduction for administering the two First-Year Writing courses, 005 and 015. While this time is often spent in daily WPA (Writing Program Administration) tasks, it appears insufficient to fully cover the time needed to coordinate with various constituencies: Office of Advising, Liberal Arts Core committee, Provost's Office, Writing Center, Office of Assessment, Faculty Senate, etc. Moreover, other administrative duties are split between the Coordinator of Writing Programs and the Chairperson of the English Department. This is due to non-funding of LAC 1A requirements and the "service" provided by the Department of English Language and Literature in offering up to 40 course sections in this area.

Opportunity and challenge, then, is to examine UNI's limited writing requirements and lack of systematic assessment in the context of both budget constraints and conflicting faculty/administration/student beliefs about assessment and content of required writing experiences. However, it is possible, and the committee feels it is desirable to implement a stronger Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program in regards to the first year that ultimately leads to a later effort with Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

**Feedback and Assessment**

A third area of opportunity is with the use of institutional assessment. Other assessment initiatives and the Placement (PI 5) group have documented the many inconsistencies, overlaps, turf issues, and inefficiencies in the various advising functions at UNI.

However, as mentioned above, there are few connections between courses and feedback mechanisms such as SOA and institutionally-sponsored assessments. The challenge and opportunity here is to conduct more targeted, information-rich surveys, such as a) an improved, more regularly-administered exit survey of students who have not persisted to graduation, since non-persistence is the ultimate expression of disengagement and b) surveys to follow up on the NSSE and SOA faculty/student surveys to better understand specific sites of disengagement, such as the five DFWI courses. According to the student survey feedback, this is not a regular practice among faculty. Indeed, it seems that the SOA procedures for the Liberal Arts Core are at this point, almost wholly disconnected from any kind of feedback mechanism, either to students or from them.

Follow-up data collection should be localized to classroom settings when the learning context is most relevant, and should include focus on a) instructional methods and & feedback-giving (instructor to student and student to instructor); faculty approaches to academic advising; determining whether differential attention to different student groups is perception or reality; assessing how the "campus of difference" treats all types of difference (ethnicity, learning style and readiness to learn, etc.) in the classroom; evaluating funding and utilization of tutoring and other academic support services and
evaluating means by which students learn who and where these providers are.

Faculty Development and Support
A fourth area of opportunity is the professional development of faculty. Better institutional motivation, incentives, and funding for professional development could improve the instruction first-year students receive and, as a result, better engagement of first-year students in LAC courses. Budget is a perennial challenge (as seen in the latest tabling of the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching project), as is the delicate line between mandating and "encouraging" faculty development. So far, UNI has been "hands off" when it comes to communicating the expectation that educators should participate in continuing education. Moreover, there are many places around campus where instruction is excellent, yet they remain isolated from the wide campus community.

Faculty development efforts should be sensitive to students' needs as well as faculty workloads, tenure requirements, etc. Indeed, the data suggests that many faculty do not see engagement with first-year students as a high-priority or as even desirable for their work. If institutional leaders placed a higher priority on first-year students, UNI might see faculty attitudes and methods change, which could result in improved student engagement.

Transfer System
We also feel the university faces a big challenge in the transfer system, namely that students can take dual-credit HS/community college courses that transfer into UNI (evidence #89). The university cannot guarantee the outcomes of these courses and as a result, appears to have a significant number of students who are not sufficiently prepared to achieve academically. The original intent of the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act has changed since its inception, shifting from an opportunity to ensure more rigorous academic opportunity to a means of double-counting community college credit for high school requirements while satisfying university course requirements resulting from existing articulation agreements. The Board of Regents along with the Iowa Board of Education should examine this policy to ensure that Iowa is providing high academic standards at every level.

Institutional Structures
Helping students develop appropriate learning skills requires a coordinated effort across the divisions of Academic and Student Affairs. The decentralized nature of everyday operations at UNI create silos of redundancy, turf issues, and questions of academic freedom which make collaboration challenging. However, strengths exist in DOR programs, Academic Advising, Academic Learning Center, and among individual faculty. The problem seems to be a lack of communication and coordination among these strong areas in order to better the institution as a whole. Greater communication and shared goals between institutional structures are needed as well as institutional leadership to continue such conversations.

There also exists a need for more repetitive and audience-savvy ways of introducing students to supportive services, as well as better timing, neither limited to orientation when new students are bombarded with information of all kinds, nor limited to students who are already at risk of probation or suspension. These services must be adequately funded to end the current "catch 22" situation: if the services market themselves too heavily, they have insufficient staff to meet student demand (example: the Writing Center's perennial waiting list after midterm).

It is important to note that there is often an overlap between race/ethnicity and socio-economic class and students' need for help or consideration of unique learning styles in the classroom. Faculty may have trouble seeing past preconceptions of what college students "should" be like, and some students resist adapting to what college is like. Both should be challenged to be flexible, and both supported in making changes.

DFWI
Related to both institutional structures and assessment, current processes and the configuration of our Student Information System limit our ability to identify individual and aggregate patterns in student learning. We are exploring a new student information system on campus which may have the potential to increase the data we collect related to high D/F/W/I rates. For example, the system might allow us to ask students to identify a reason for dropping a course at the time they are dropping it. This could help us to develop a better understanding why students are withdrawing or failing the course.

It might also be helpful if a new system could, at the time the students are issued a mid-term D and F grade report, provide the students with an opportunity to interact with us and at that time identify reasons they feel they are experiencing difficulty, such as unpreparedness, time management, teaching style, etc. This could provide valuable insight as to the challenges first year students are facing.

Placement
Although UNI does an adequate job of placing students at the low and high end of academic achievement, we do not take advantage of learning opportunities in grouping freshmen in the middle of the range. Student and faculty surveys show agreement among perceptions regarding the adequacy of placement. The challenge here is that the LAC is not funded to provide the opportunity for structured learning experiences. Only one writing course is required and, as mentioned earlier, many incoming students are not required to take this course. Additionally, there is no requirement for taking LAC courses in the first year, as is the case at the State University of Iowa and, since first-year students take available LAC sections at the end of registration periods, no opportunities exist for coordinated, structured learning experiences within the LAC.

The Post Secondary Student Enrollment Options Act may also create academic challenges to first-year students without a strong academic background because students may have already taken entry level courses in high school and are placed in more challenging courses during their first semester in college.

Additionally, academic advisors at UNI have expressed a desire to have an online advising handbook, ongoing advisor development, and a campus association of advisors to keep up to date on campus advising. The Undergraduate Advising Council is planning to implement this advisor support in the 2009-10 academic year. This will have an overall impact on placement and advisor/advisee relationships.
Out of Class Learning

The University of Northern Iowa provides myriad and ample student affairs initiatives and functions outside of residence life for students to learn and develop. Also, if students do not feel that they have the right opportunity to become involved with the campus community, there exists an easy process to develop that interest through working with the Northern Iowa Student Government to allow that student to pursue their interest. Because of the opportunities already available and the possibility for individuals to pursue their unique interests, there are many opportunities for growth to occur in the area of assessment of first-year student learning outcomes in this area.

The university should develop a centralized mission for first-year student learning outcomes in student affairs initiatives and functions that will transcend to all appropriate departments and entities on campus. The university should start a culture of assessment in student affairs initiatives by developing assessments that would help the institution plan, coordinate and carry out more effective programming efforts to provide for reflective practice, insuring that current practices are reviewed and new initiatives are implemented to meet the needs of first-year students. Since there is no common mission, goals, and outcomes for first-year student learning at the University of Northern Iowa, student services functions and the Department of Residence operate in silos, unaware of each others’ efforts and the possibility of collaboration for the benefit of students.

Successful efforts with first-year students in the Department of Residence could serve as a foundation to extend the first-year programming to all students. Examples of opportunities include:

- Additional mentoring with upper class students.
- Additional presence of academic activity, such as classes meeting in the residence halls.
- Group scheduling that would enable communities to share an academic experience and benefit from group support.
- Additional partnerships with academic units to strengthen the tie of campus life's shared goal of academic and social success.

Challenges include staff time and institutional commitment to extending the residence life education function.

In addition, the university could hire a first-year student coordinator or build such a position into the job requirements of a current employee at the university to ensure that a smooth, organized progress is being made to develop a mission for first-year students at the university and a plan of action.

Additional Challenges

Instructional methods should be considered part of relationship-building for instructors because the majority of the time they spend with students is in conveying subject matter. These methods either help nourish students’ sense of connection with their instructors, and therefore the course material, or disconnect students form both. Academic freedom means faculty freedom to instruct, assess, and provide feedback as they please (or not); yet, this underestimated aspect of engagement is important enough that feedback-giving techniques should be promoted and modeled for faculty with both large and small classes. Faculty development efforts should be sensitive to students’ needs as well as faculty workloads, tenure requirements, etc.

We recognize that these things will have a cost attached to them and in the current budget crisis, these may be difficult to fund. However, compared to larger-scale administrative layers, such options utilize the skills, knowledge, and talent already present at UNI rather than creating a new center, office, or bureaucratic layer.

Similarly we recognize that there will be resistance to change among some involved faculty and staff. However, we also sense that such leadership will be welcomed and appreciated even as discussions evolve over which academic area should be responsible for which curricular effort and who benefits for service.

Similarly, UNI has the opportunity to re-examine its procedures to identify and target under-achieving students. This will also require resources, but they should lead to greater faculty participation rather than discouragement.

III. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Establish mission, goal, outcome statements, and assessment procedures for first-year learning to serve as a foundation for a coordinated first-year experience.
2. Promote the centrality of written communication to thinking, learning, and feedback, not just in the form of written products for assessment, but in multiple forms as tools for engaged learning.
   a. Support a genuine Writing in the Disciplines effort coordinated by a University Writing Committee.
   b. Provide faculty release and development opportunities to create a coherent, coordinated, and fully funded writing program.
   c. Support and encourage faculty development in writing pedagogy and theory.
3. Focus on the Liberal Arts Core.
   a. Explore the options for a tiered Liberal Arts Core to provide the opportunity for linked courses and learning communities.
   b. Take action to have LAC competencies universally applied before the HLC visit.
   c. Direct all LAC courses to implement common learning objectives and methods to measure learning.
   d. Identify which aspects of the LAC competencies students are expected to accomplish in their first year; identify, develop, and implement common experiences to assure students have opportunity to meet those objectives.
   e. Fund the current Liberal Arts Core so students are able to complete the core competencies of writing/reading, math, and oral communication in their first-year as recommended.
   f. Develop a consistent and holistic philosophy for the Liberal Arts Core that goes beyond a menu of compartmentalized competencies and that integrates knowledge, student identity formation, and institutional expectations.
4. Explore the options for a tiered Liberal Arts Core to provide the opportunity for linked courses and learning communities.
5. Support faculty professional development initiatives to provide incentives for collaboration and design of first-year courses.
6. Explore a first-year "cornerstone" course.
7. Create courses, programs and curricula based upon data-driven decision making.
8. Promote the idea that faculty development and instructional innovation and success are as valued as research output. Back it up with affordable incentives in addition to teaching awards.
   a. Amend tenure processes to better reflect respect for classroom success.
   b. Connect effective teaching with pay and promotion incentives.
   c. Fund a Center for the Enhancement of Teaching/Center for Teaching excellence, or other entity that ensures opportunities for faculty development and focuses on instructional innovation.
9. Require a minimum standard of training for departmental advisors who may wield considerable influence on student scheduling as they progress into major coursework.
   a. Include academic advising responsibilities as an extension of teaching and not a service function.
   b. Implement an online advising handbook, ongoing advisor development, and a campus association of advisors to provide the means for advisors to keep up to date on campus advising.
10. Fully fund academic support services to increase their visibility and ability to serve large numbers of students.
11. Institute mandatory pre-midterm reporting to identify students who need help before it is too late.
   a. Streamline the process so faculty are not asked to complete multiple forms for the same students.
12. Institute mandatory monitoring and follow up by academic departments to improve success in their classes for those first year courses and/or course sections where 25% or more of the students are not successfully completing the course.
13. Support a plan currently being developed by the Academic Learning Center to comprehensively assist students who disconnect from the learning process at UNI for any of the reasons outlined in this report. These students may be near or on warning or probation or returning from suspension. The Academic Learning Center, with its one-stop advising and learning assistance programs, is in the best position to match mentoring, tutoring, and advising strategies to students’ individual needs, help them earn good academic standing, and help them persist to graduation.
14. Fund additional sections of 620:002 and 800:004 to be taught by Clinical Instructors or Practicum or Teaching Adjuncts who are retired school teachers with appropriate backgrounds or recent graduates who are continuing through graduate school. Such a program could be housed in the Academic Learning Center and the center’s director would act as liaison between Center and academic departments.
15. Begin a discussion at the state level involving the Board of Regents institutions and the State Board of Education to examine the impact of the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act on the educational levels of high school students.

Recommended Grade: C

Recommended Action Items:

- Develop and implement common learning goals for all courses taught to first year students. *(High priority)*

- Focus on the Liberal Arts Core *(High priority)*

  4. Focus on the Liberal Arts Core.

  a. Explore the options for a tiered Liberal Arts Core to provide the opportunity for linked courses and learning communities.

  b. The university take action to have LAC competencies universally applied before the HLC visit.

  c. The university direct all LAC courses to implement common learning objectives and methods to measure learning.

  d. The university identify which aspects of the LAC competencies students are expected to accomplish in their first year; identify, develop, and implement common experiences to assure students have opportunity to meet those objectives.

  e. Fund the current Liberal Arts Core so students are able to complete the core competencies of writing/reading, math, and oral communication in their first-year as recommended.

- Develop a Coherent Approach to Writing Instruction *(High priority)*

  UNI’s approach to writing instruction is structurally incoherent. The Writing Center is not joined with the First-year composition program and neither of these are joined with the LAC. In addition to the Director of the Writing Center, there is one WPA (Writing Program Administrator) in the English Department who is allotted one course reduction. More administration is needed to coordinate and link these various parts of writing instruction, to support faculty understanding of writing instruction, to assess student writing, and to develop plans and initiatives for integrating writing throughout the curriculum, especially from First-Year Composition to the various disciplines.

- Explore a first-year "cornerstone" course *(High priority)*

- Create courses, programs and curricula based upon data-driven decision making. *(High priority)*
Create levels in the Liberal Arts Core - Level I for entering freshmen (High priority)

Since we do not identify courses specifically for freshman in the Liberal Arts Core, it is challenging to deliver a coherent targeted program for freshmen. Without spending a lot of extra money, could we create first, second, and third levels in the LAC, reserving the first level courses for new freshmen. This could also be an opportunity to create bridged courses in learning communities. Departments could designate their best faculty to teach these courses and attract majors to their departments.

Establish mission, goal, outcome statements, and assessment procedures for first-year learning. (High priority)

Support faculty professional development initiatives (High priority)

- provide incentives for collaboration and design of First-year courses/ experiences.
- Promote the idea that faculty development and instructional innovation and success are as valued as research output. Back it up with affordable incentives in addition to teaching awards.
- Amend tenure processes to better reflect respect for classroom success.
- Connect effective teaching with pay and promotion incentives
- Fund a Center for the Enhancement of Teaching/Center for Teaching excellence, or other entity that ensures opportunities for faculty development and focuses on instructional innovation

Articulate clear, achievable outcomes in Articulation agreements (High priority)

Examine the impact of the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act (High priority)

Begin a discussion at the state level involving the Board of Regents institutions and the State Board of Education to examine the impact of the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act on the educational levels of high school students.

Fully fund academic support services to increase their visibility, ability to serve students (High priority)

Institute mandatory pre-midterm DFWI reporting. (High priority)

- Identify students who need help before it is too late.
- Streamline the process so faculty are not asked to complete multiple forms for the same students.

Fund additional sections of 620:002 and 800:004. (High priority)

Can be taught by Clinical Instructors or Practicum or Teaching Adjuncts who are retired school teachers with appropriate backgrounds or recent graduates who are continuing through graduate school. Such a program could be housed in the Academic Learning Center and the center's director would act as liaison between Center and academic departments.

Institute monitoring of courses with high DFWI to improve student success. (High priority)

Institute mandatory monitoring and follow up by academic departments to improve success in their classes for those first-year courses and/or course sections where 25% or more of the students are not successfully completing the course.

Require a minimum standard of training for departmental advisors (High priority)

Advisors may wield considerable influence on student scheduling as they progress into major coursework.

- Include academic advising responsibilities as an extension of teaching and not a service function.
- Implement an online advising handbook, ongoing advisor development, and a campus association of advisors to provide the means for advisors to keep up to date on campus advising.

Support the ALC retention plan (High priority)

Support a plan currently being developed by the Academic Learning Center to comprehensively assist students who disconnect from the learning process at UNI for any of the reasons outlined in this report. These students may be near or on warning or probation or returning from suspension. The Academic Learning Center, with its one-stop advising and learning assistance programs, is in the best position to match mentoring, tutoring, and advising strategies to students' individual needs, help them earn good academic standing, and help them persist to graduation.