

QIP PROPOSAL: DIVERSE AND CIVICALLY ENGAGED CAMPUS

SIGNIFICANCE/RELEVANCE

The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report¹ study of 30,000 college graduates found that the likelihood that graduates will have great jobs and great lives doubled if:

“graduates had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams,” and

“graduates had an internship or job where they were able to apply what they were learning in the classroom, were actively involved in extracurricular activities and organizations, and worked on projects that took a semester or more to complete.”

Relationships with professors both in and outside of the classroom and opportunities to apply what has been learned in classrooms to research projects and extra- and co-curricular activities were key. Only 14% of respondents indicated that opportunities existed to develop those important relationships with professors and only 6% indicated they had a meaningful chance to apply learning outside the classroom. Only 3% experienced all of these factors.

Given the centrality of engagement to student success in and out of the classroom, this QIP proposes to create the conditions whereby UNI can develop a diverse campus culture of civic engagement that beats these national statistics. Engagement with professional research and projects, the campus, community, state, nation, and world should be approached intentionally, systematically, and developmentally.

We believe student opportunities for engagement with communities, people, and issues should be expanded. Engagement—cultivating a commitment to civic responsibilities to others—is at the heart of public education. Although a commitment to engagement and professional readiness should work in tandem, we emphasize civic engagement to foreground the role public universities play in cultivating a *public* good. Given Iowa, the United States, and the world is composed of diverse communities, people, and issues, any approach to engagement must center diversity.

DESCRIPTION

Our vision of diverse engagement calls for attention to diversity (including attending to the diverse social locations our students inhabit as well as to the diverse communities in which UNI is situated) and a commitment to community involvement. We seek to expand engagement with diverse communities. To achieve this, we propose a series of actions:

1) Conduct an engagement inventory: We should generate a snapshot of student experiences, faculty activities, student affairs initiatives, and resources that support them. An inventory also would induce the campus to come to agreement about what is, and is not, an engagement activity.

A) Develop a definition of diverse engagement: Before we can assess whether we are a campus that produces students able to engage with diverse communities, we need to come to an agreement on what constitutes diversity and engagement. As starting points, we offer these definitions:

- i. Diversity: We embrace UNI’s definition of diversity: “Diversity describes the rich differences that people bring to the University of Northern Iowa community. It can refer broadly to culture, identity and ideology, or more specifically to age,

¹ <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/gallup-purdue-index-report-2014.pdf>

gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, gender identity, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, marital status, national origin, or veteran status. Diversity is a dynamic concept, shaped by history, and changing as our understanding of the world and its people evolves.”

- ii. Civic engagement: We endorse a definition of engagement that foregrounds a civic orientation and community involvement. For example: “Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. . . . A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.”² To be clear, service learning can be part of this initiative, but a diverse engagement initiative is far broader than incorporating service learning into classes.
- B) Survey the UNI seniors and recent graduates to determine where UNI is succeeding in these areas and where areas of improvement exist. We could use the Lumina survey to identify whether students are receiving the quality engagement experiences that survey identifies.
 - C) Collect and evaluate existing data on student engagement at UNI (e.g., NSSE, National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement, departmental or student affairs survey and reports).
 - D) Have each department/college/student affairs inventory its engagement activities. This might result in identifying some departments that excel at developing professor-student relationships and others that excel in applied learning experiences. We should seek to use our own experts when possible and not assume bringing in an outside expert or consultant is the first step.
 - *Have each department/college/student affairs determine how it can best improve student-professor engagement.
 - *Have each department/college/student affairs determine how it can expand reflexive application opportunities through co-curricular activities, internships, and/or projects.
 - *Have Student Affairs, NISG, academic administrative offices inventory their mechanisms of support for co-curricular engagement.
 - *Determine what forms of co-curricular engagement will work with a student population that tends to balance work and school.
 - E) Inventory resources (offices, initiatives, programs, IAF, etc.) on campus that support diverse engagement.
- 2) Develop a narrative about the centrality of diverse engagement to public education. This offers the campus a chance to think about its identity as a public institution and to develop the vocabulary and stories we can use to make clear to students why diverse

² Thomas Ehrlich, ed., *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 2000).

engagement matters – to themselves, their communities, their professional readiness, and the public at large.

- 3) Create structures of accountability to encourage expansion of diverse engagement initiatives in the classroom, residential life, and in co- and extra-curricular activities. This includes considering how diverse engagement activities factor into merit and P&T review.
- 4) Provide support to enable colleges/departments/offices to develop engagement initiatives tailored to their students' needs. This can include offering professional development activities to faculty (e.g., funding for travel to conferences, course releases), providing support for department initiatives, etc.

Engagement can take a variety of forms, including involving students in research initiatives, curricular innovations, creating a campus culture of deliberation, and considering intergenerational obligations related to the environment. However, the core emphasis should be on engagement that cultivates appreciation of and a commitment to diversity and community.

PURPOSE AND DESIRED IMPACT

The purpose of this initiative is to re-center *public* in our public university. The end result of this initiative should be structures of institutional support, reward, and accountability that enable and encourage faculty and staff to provide an education that builds professional readiness, offers a chance for personal development, *and* fosters students' civic orientation. Improvements in engagement can be measured by assessing students' engagement experiences and departments' engagement efforts. Progress toward this goal can be assessed by comparing the engagement inventory done at the beginning of the process (item 1B) to results 3, 5 and 7 years into the initiative. The goal is to beat the national averages, or exceed them by even greater margins if we are already better than those averages.

POTENTIAL FOR INVOLVEMENT AND COMMITMENT ACROSS CAMPUS

This proposal offers a model of intentional engagement that is decentralized and tailored to majors. Both campus buy-in and engagement success will be greater if we keep professors at the center of this project. Because the Lumina study notes a close relationship with a professor and the application of what is learned in classrooms is important, it seems best to keep engagement initiatives closely tied with classroom experiences.

The success of this initiative depends on a commitment from all levels of the university and administrative flexibility so that all departments and offices see themselves in this initiative. Item 1, the diverse engagement inventory, likely would be overseen by the Provost's office and the Office of Institutional Research. Item 2, defining diverse engagement, would require campus-wide conversations similar to the ones recently concluded on the mission and vision. Items 3 and 4 require some administrative actions, but ultimately will work best if diverse engagement activities are kept closely linked to the faculty's curricular activities. We do *not* recommend the creation of an Office of Engagement or the appointment of a Chief Engagement Officer. Resources could be better spent to reinforce the "front lines" of more faculty, advisors, support staff and resources. And, if the university is to have a campus-wide commitment to diverse

engagement, it needs to be worked into the warp and weft of every department. We recommend that the resources made available for this initiative be focused at the college and departmental level.

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