

## Qualities for UNI Graduates

### Updated Preface for the 1998 University-Wide Conference

At the inaugural University-wide conference on teaching and learning (October 1995), participating faculty called for a concentrated effort to define the qualities that we would like our students to possess when they graduate from the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). A group of 13 faculty launched the Qualities of an Educated Person (QEP) project in Spring 1996. That project group was expanded in Spring 1997 to 21 faculty, who represented all five colleges, and a staff member from the Division of Educational and Student Services. This faculty-initiated project, endorsed by the President and Provost, was included in the UNI strategic plan (December 1996):

*"Identify the qualities of an educated person that characterize a UNI graduate and integrate these qualities into curricular and co-curricular activities"* (Subgoal IA2a).

The QEP project, designed with five overlapping sets of activities, included four phases to be initiated by the QEP project group and the fifth by the University as a whole:

**Phase 1: An Initial Statement.** The QEP group drafted an initial statement (dated October 4, 1996) to open the conversation and invite extended discussion among UNI faculty, staff, students, and selected external constituencies. This statement was discussed by approximately 200 participants at the October 1996 University-wide conference.

**Phase 2: Further Review and Revision.** QEP project group members hosted department, college, and university-wide meetings in spring 1997 to further discuss the draft statement and to encourage input from individuals throughout the University. Approximately 300 faculty and staff participated in these meetings. In addition, input was received from external constituents who participated in the Presidential Symposium held in April 1997. A revision of the QEP document was completed on June 30, 1997 to reflect responses to the initial draft. This phase concluded with two October 1997 events: a University-wide conference attended by approximately 650 faculty, staff, and students and a QEP planning meeting with 62 representatives of students, faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the University.

**Phase 3: Analysis and Reflection.** With regard to UNI undergraduate education, proposals were solicited from faculty, staff, and students for enhancing and assessing qualities expected for UNI graduates. Proposal developers were encouraged to draw upon University databases, practices, and student experiences in both curricular activities and activities that fall outside the formal curriculum. In addition, five student groups were involved in developing essays that critiqued and applied the proposed qualities for UNI graduates. This phase began in FY1998.

**Phase 4: Planning.** Initially, ten proposals were selected as pilot projects for better understanding and developing practices in undergraduate education that foster qualities expected of UNI graduates. It is expected that another round of projects will be supported following the October 1998 University-wide conference. This phase continued into FY1999.

**Phase 5: Implementation.** This phase encompasses (a) approval of proposed new courses and other programs through appropriate decision processes, (b) beginning implementation of continuing and new projects that are approved, and (c) the collection and use of feedback to guide improvement and to document impact. This phase is anticipated to begin in FY1999.

The current "Qualities for UNI Graduates" document (dated October 1997) is a revision of the working draft dated June 30, 1997, which itself was a revision of the initial draft. The current version of the document represents input from faculty, staff, and students throughout the University. Special recognition is given to those members of the project group who initiated and contributed to the activities that led to this latest version of our working document.

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**Qualities for UNI Graduates**  
**A Working Document for Field Testing**  
(October 1997)

The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) has been successful in providing an affordable, accessible undergraduate education while also being recognized for its attention to quality. UNI graduates have found their undergraduate experience valuable for multiple purposes, including: employment within their fields of study; preparation for graduate or other advanced education; pursuit of individual learning interests; and involvement in family, community, social, and civic life. Nonetheless, UNI strives to continuously enhance the educational experiences of students. The Qualities of an Educated Person (QEP) project is an effort to renew the University's commitment to students and to undergraduate education of the highest quality.

**Goals, Perspectives, and Assumptions**

The development of this working document was guided by several goals, perspectives, and assumptions which are highlighted below.

1) The ultimate goal of the QEP project is to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience at UNI. An important step in assessing the need for improvement is the creation of a compelling vision for UNI undergraduate education which focuses on the qualities expected of students who graduate from UNI. Although this description is contextual for UNI and does not address qualities of educated persons in the abstract, it is reasonable to expect that many of these qualities are shared among educated persons in other places and circumstances. This description of qualities will require periodic University-wide review and updating if it is to contribute to the long-term improvement of UNI undergraduate education.

2) The qualities described in this document do not stand apart from the knowledge, skills, and values that students bring to the University or develop following their undergraduate education. Desired qualities for UNI graduates build on students' experiences in family, school, and community before they enroll at the University and contribute to continued learning and development after students graduate.

3) The QEP project is guided by a holistic perspective for undergraduate education. It involves the whole curriculum, including general education, the majors, minors, and professional fields. It includes the whole faculty, because virtually all of our faculty teach undergraduates. It includes the entire staff, because they also contribute to the students' education. It includes the entire undergraduate population and the whole individual student, having both curricular and co-curricular implications. It also recognizes a larger community beyond UNI that collaborates in the learning of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

4) Faculty and staff cannot learn for students; only students can and do learn for themselves. The University's primary responsibility is to provide students with an appropriate structure, support and challenge as needed, and a conducive environment for learning. When the University is viewed as a learning community, teaching and learning are reciprocal. Over time, students acquire and use the knowledge, skills, and motivation to be self-initiated and self-directed learners who take increasing responsibility for their own learning. The qualities described in this document are intended for development within this concept of a learning-centered community.

5) The issues of our time pose profound challenges for contemporary life and portend dramatic changes for the future. The University must be a vital force for both the present and the future. It must prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to deal effectively with both contemporary and futures challenges. It must engage students, faculty, and staff in continuous learning not just to cope with change, but to be active agents in shaping the future. The University environment—its culture, organization, policies, and procedures—must help students, faculty, and staff address the most important questions of our time.

### **The Aim of Undergraduate Education at UNI**

Many, if not most, UNI students expect that a primary result of their undergraduate education should be a job after graduation. However, most students also recognize that career preparation is only part of what an undergraduate education attempts to do. Career development takes place in tandem with other intellectual, personal, and social purposes of undergraduate

education. Some of these other purposes for undergraduate education include: preparation for graduate schools or other advanced education; personal development and the pursuit of individual learning; fulfillment of roles in family, community, social, and civic life. Considering these several purposes together, a singular, most important aim can be stated with regard to undergraduate education:

*to create a learning community that enables students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to live thoughtful, creative, and productive lives.*

Central to achieving this broad aim is the individual development of a comprehensive, personal philosophical perspective which encompasses three broad areas: the *self*, one's identity; the *community*, self in relation to others; and the *world*, self in relation to our larger environment. A UNI undergraduate education in these three broad areas will help to guide and encourage the reciprocal development of freedom and responsibility. It is in this sense that the growth and fulfillment of human potential lies, in part, in the development of freedom with responsibility.

Individual qualities for UNI graduates are closely interrelated and mutually dependent. From a developmental perspective, students cultivate wisdom by combining knowledge with emotion, practical experience, and reflection. Students should be encouraged throughout their undergraduate education to integrate knowledge, skills, and values – each of which is introduced in the following sections.

## **Knowledge**

One of the enduring purposes of higher education involves creating, maintaining, communicating, contesting, and transforming knowledge. Knowledge is more than information and facts. To know, then, goes beyond the recall and comprehension of *what* or *that*; it also includes application, and judgments about *how*, *when*, *where*, and *why*.

Which knowledge is most important for UNI undergraduate education? As educated persons, graduates of UNI would possess the following kinds of knowledge: *acquaintance with the nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge*, including understanding the historical and socio-cultural contexts of knowledge and awareness of the traditions of discourse that historically

define the university, namely the arts, humanities, and sciences; *specialized knowledge* in the context of a field or discipline, that is, depth in a particular field of study as a basis for a career, advanced study, or pursuit of a particular learning interest; *understanding the complexities and ambiguities of human experience*, including patterns of change and stability, dynamics of work and play, similarities and differences among individuals, groups and cultures, interrelatedness of self, others and the world, and interconnectedness of past, present and future; *understanding connections* among knowledge, values, action, and consequences, and an understanding that knowledge should inform action; *integration of knowledge* into a critical and comprehensive perspective that guides actions in meaningful and responsible ways amid changing circumstances.

A significant way that students experience these different kinds of knowledge is through sustained inquiry. Such inquiry is an ongoing process marked by increased understanding of the limits and potentials of different intellectual perspectives. These different perspectives help students to understand the intriguing and complex patterns that prevail among self, community, and the world. Through such understanding, UNI graduates are better able to realize thoughtful, creative, and productive lives.

## **Skills**

Members of the University community use a range of skills in the pursuit of knowledge. Skills and knowledge are closely associated in at least three respects: (1) skills are among the primary means used to create, discover, and share knowledge; (2) skills include operations and tools used to transform information and experience into understanding; (3) in concert with knowledge, skills contribute to understanding and to integrating values within a person's life.

Which skills are most important for UNI undergraduate education? As educated persons, graduates of UNI would possess: *communication* skills (ability to speak, listen, read, write, and view effectively); *information* skills (ability to use appropriate information technologies and to locate, access, evaluate, synthesize, and manage data and information); *quantitative* skills (ability to calculate and to reason mathematically and statistically); *interpersonal* skills (ability to

participate effectively in relationships, groups, and communities as leaders, followers, and team members); *citizenship* skills (ability to understand and participate in democratic processes); *conflict negotiation and resolution* skills (ability to understand and deal peacefully and effectively with our differences and disagreements); *thinking* skills (ability to reason creatively, critically, reflectively, systemically, and imaginatively about complex problems and human endeavors); *affective* skills (ability to acknowledge and understand emotions and their relationship to action, knowledge, and values); *artistic* skills (ability to appreciate the processes and products of the arts with aesthetic understanding and sensitivity); *field-specific* skills, including ability to use methods, procedures, and tools appropriate for particular disciplines or fields of practice in order to prepare for a productive role in family, community, or work.

These skills allow us to discover, understand, interpret, reflect, and appreciate in complex ways. Active participation in a learning community aids the development of these skills within the context of guided practice.

## **Values**

Education that helps students develop knowledge and skills is incomplete without considering values. Students need opportunities to develop a coherent framework of values shaped by ethical considerations.

Priorities and choices arise from values—reasons why and how things are done. Values shape and reflect feelings, both positively and negatively. Because values are at the heart of purposeful behavior, it is important that students and faculty inquire and reflect about larger value issues. Bringing values into a context of intellectual inquiry helps to comprehend better the meanings, consequences, and worth of these matters in our lives and to develop our own coherent value systems. A UNI undergraduate education should help individual students develop a comprehensive philosophical perspective and a coherent value system, based on critical reflection, which guides choices and connects to some larger meaning or purpose, including an awareness of the consequences of holding particular values.

Values also are implicit in the ways we conduct ourselves as a university – from the contents and processes of teaching, research, and service to administrative policies and procedures and to our physical environment. As members of this University community, we choose to make our values explicit and to exemplify values that are consistent with our collective vision of undergraduate education at UNI. These values include: intellectual openness and adventure, skepticism and curiosity, including a willingness to deal with ambiguity; an appreciation of arts and aesthetics; personal responsibility, integrity, and self-respect; a desire for lifelong learning; compassion and a sense of moral consciousness, justice, equity, and responsibility; respect and empathy for others; respect for the natural world and a desire to act responsibly toward it; respect for individual and group accomplishments, the value of effort, and self-discipline; and commitment to civic participation.

### **The Whole UNI Graduate**

Each section on knowledge, skills, and values describes an aspect of qualities for UNI graduates. While each of these three sets of qualities is important, a broader vision of a UNI graduate is someone who: seeks increased self-knowledge and understanding of others and the world; is able to integrate knowledge, skills, and values into a comprehensive perspective; uses knowledge and values to guide conduct and inspire inquiry in meaningful and responsible ways; and strives for the attainment of wisdom with joy and hope for the future. The UNI graduate who possesses these qualities, indeed, will be prepared to live a thoughtful, creative, and productive life.

### **An Invitation**

The goals of the QEP project are (1) to identify those qualities that characterize UNI graduates as educated persons and (2) to translate those qualities into curricular and co-curricular activities. You are invited to join and contribute to this project. The results will add to our vitality as a learning community and will further the University of Northern Iowa as a leader in strengthening undergraduate education.