Experimental Projects
Qualities of an Educated Person (QEP) Project

Success UNI: A Nine-Week, First-Year Experience for UNI Freshmen

Drake Martin (Residence Education)

> To make the freshman connection, institutions must adopt the concept of FRONT LOADING: putting the strongest, most student-centered people, programs and services in the freshman year. We must put freshmen in direct contact with the institutional resources that are most effective in promoting personal, social and academic adjustment. As a result of his study on student competencies and the institutional outcomes of student learning and persistence, Forrest's first recommendation (Forrest, 1982, p. 44) was that "the single most important move an institution can make to increase student persistence to graduation is to ensure that students receive the guidance they need at the beginning of the journey through college to graduation (Upcraft and Gardner, 1989, p. 79).

Johnny Carson, the comedian, jokingly repeated on *The Tonight Show* that he could not operate the VCR at his home. It was just too complicated, a pain to use, worthless.

Institutions of higher education are, for many students, the Johnny Carson VCR of life: too complicated and frustrated to be worth the time it takes to learn how to use them. Many college students give up before the beginning of their second year. At UNI the current trend is for about 20% of entering freshmen to leave the institution by their second year.

If nothing changes, the accompanying trend—approximately one-half of all entering freshmen won't persevere long enough to obtain a degree within five years—will continue as well. Additionally, for student who "stick it out," there is often a stunning lack of understanding of why they are still attending AND how to succeed at it.

University life used to be simpler. Fewer options meant doing what you were told on the way to getting "the degree." Now, students have so many choices in so many areas: special programs, majors, courses, jobs, internships, recreation, housing, transportation, relationships, parking, study locations, etc. At the same time, students often have little or no understanding of one's reasons for being at the university other than getting a degree and a job, the resources and opportunities available, and the best ways to succeed academically and personally.

For new students at UNI, guidance about how to best "use" this marvelous new place comes in the form of such things as nice publications, a day-long summer orientation program, the first house meeting in their residence hall, and a handful of syllabi. It's not that orientation, the publications, the first house meeting, and course syllabi don't "orient" new students very well; they do. It's just that they don't do what's really needed: equipping new students to be more fully engaged in the life-changing potential of a quality undergraduate education at UNI.

The result for many students is an aimless first semester or year (or more). For many students this lack of focus leads to bad decisions about drinking, drugs, sex, studying, picking a major, organization involvement, making and spending money, etc. As noted above, for nearly one in every five new students it also currently means never making it to their sophomore year at UNI and about 50% do not graduate within five years.

The issue here is larger than simply providing instructions about how to operate a new gadget; we are talking about fulfilling an institutional responsibility to do our best to assure that new students are as fully engaged as possible in their education at UNI. New students must be challenged and supported FROM THE BEGINNING to know the institution better, to know themselves better, and to understand the potential each has for the other.

Across this country hundreds of colleges and universities are attempting to fulfill this responsibility through institutional "first-year experience" programs. UNI joins those ranks this fall, with a non-credit, nine-week "first-year experience" pilot effort called “Success UNI.” Our conference session will convey what this new experience is designed to do, who is participating, how it is being accomplished, and what plans are being considered for expanding it in the near future.

In anticipation of attending this session, participants should reflect on their own "first-year experience" and those of freshmen with whom they have interacted: What went well? What didn't? What was missing? What do they wish they had known that first year?

These reflections will inform the group's primary task during the session: providing concrete ideas for the development of a comprehensive, effective, University of Northern Iowa "first-year experience" for the next century. Perspectives and ideas from the newest to the oldest member of the University of Northern Iowa community will be welcomed at this session!

Bonuses

An outstanding first-year experience at UNI would yield additional bonuses, beyond those for freshmen. Faculty and staff would have more focused, engaged, scholarly citizens as students in their classes, at their athletic events, in their programs, living in their residence halls, working in their offices. Parents would feel more confident about their offspring, knowing that they are being challenged and supported by caring faculty and staff in the vastness of academe. The public would find itself with more and better college graduates who are able to discern earlier in their lives how they might best contribute their unique talents to the needs of society.

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Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Integrating Skills and Knowledge in a General Education "Cluster" Course

Mary Bozik (Communication Studies), Scott Cawelti (English Language and Literature), Jerry Soneson (Philosophy and Religion), Karen Tracey (English Language and Literature)

Professors Bozik, Cawelti, Soneson and K. Tracey have developed a thirteen-credit hour "cluster" course which will be offered experimentally to 25 UNI freshman during Fall Semester 1999. The course will consist of Humanities II (Soneson), American Civilization (Cawelti), College

Reading and Writing (Tracey), and Oral Communication (Bozik)—to be taught as an integrated subject for 13 contact hours a week: 12-3 MWTH, 12-4 Tuesday.

In our discussion for the design of this cluster course, five goals evolved that set the course apart from the typically distinct four courses that students would normally experience in general education (GE). First, we seek to enhance the means by which students meet the goals of specific general education courses. GE courses intend to engage students with subject matter that may or may not be related to their area of interest, and to do that in such a way as to connect with their lives as citizens and as human beings. We believe this cluster approach allows both faculty and students more opportunities to make the subjects both engaging and relevant.

Second, we want our cluster course to respond to the QEP project statement that an undergraduate education should "create a learning community that enables students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to live thoughtful, creative, and productive lives." We see the cluster course as a potentially ideal means of creating a learning community and a way to connect knowledge and skills, with values implied throughout the whole course.

Third, we seek to provide faculty and students intense intellectual stimulation by making a variety of connections among historical movements, intellectual themes, and communication concepts and practices. Because we will be working together in flexible time blocks four days a week, we wish to have multiple opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas in both the subject matter and communication courses. For example, when Soneson discusses European feminism, Cawelti will discuss American suffragists and the evolution of the women's movement in America.

Fourth, we seek to help students understand the role of communication in structuring, shaping, and changing the world. To us, this is a critical goal for any general education course. General education students must learn and practice reading, writing, viewing, speaking, and listening. By integrating these communication skills with complex subject matter, students can both learn the subject matter more thoroughly and learn to communicate about it more effectively than they might in separate courses.

Fifth, we seek to encourage faculty interaction and development through working together on a common teaching project. By discussing a variety of issues related to teaching processes and the subject matter, we are developing a much stronger bond among our group. We expect that this will enhance our own teaching, as well as engage students more fully in our subjects.

Advantages of the Cluster Course Approach

As we proceeded, we also realized the need to explain the cluster course in order to make it an attractive learning and teaching option. Hence we developed these eight potential advantages of a cluster course approach to general education:

1. A cluster course offers an opportunity to become a member of a learning community; learning becomes more engaging as students work together in four interrelated courses as learning teams, and in writing and speaking groups.

2. A cluster course generates additional opportunities to see connections among American and European history, including intellectual trends, cultural developments, artistic and philosophical movements, and major figures and events.

3. A cluster courses allows faculty to consolidate learning concepts—such as research strategies, organization of ideas to inform and persuade, recursive relationships among reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing—so that such concepts only need to be taught once and can be applied in several different situations, making learning more efficient.

4. In a cluster course that uses communication skills, students will develop papers from their speeches and vice-versa, thus enhancing student understanding of the relationships between written and oral texts.

5. A cluster course offers a range of interesting and challenging topics for developing intellectual skills, and both the writing and oral communication teachers need not spend class time helping students develop topics from personal experience.

6. A cluster course offers a variety of written and oral communication activities to enhance understanding of intellectual content in American and European culture and history.

7. A cluster course offers opportunities for experiential learning through field trips to explore artistic and cultural aspects of a major urban area as well as local sites. Currently we are planning a three-day trip to Chicago to visit a variety of sites and other local trips to enhance learning of specific issues and concepts.

8. A cluster course creates opportunities to observe differences among faculty attitudes toward a variety of intellectual concepts and historical movements, prompting students to discuss the significance of intellectual disagreements. Faculty disagreements, when discussed and debated openly, can offer students opportunities to understand that there is no one objective "right" approach or answer.

Challenges in Developing and Implementing the Cluster Course

As we continue developing our course, we are challenged daily by a variety of issues. We do have compatible personalities, but even so, we are finding a few areas of disagreement that persist and that could become problematic. With a bit of humor and discussion, we are working them out, but faculty compatibility can hardly be overestimated in developing a cluster course.

Another issue of constant concern is scheduling. How to find time in our schedules to prepare and plan this approach? The QEP grant gave us a start, but the course will take extra time for further planning as it proceeds, and students also have to be scheduled into a thirteen-hour block of time all together. We remain concerned that this problem may be more difficult to solve than any other.

In developing the course syllabus, we found that we all need to be flexible, which includes changing our approach occasionally so that we can coordinate course material. For example, Cawelti teaches American Civilization using concepts such as ideology, war, gender, and race, whereas Soneson teaches Humanities II chronologically. Differences such as this one require adjustments in order to create a unified, integrated syllabus for the cluster course.

Another challenge: How to find students who have most of their afternoons free for 3-4 hours. We need thirteen contact hours, and we settled on Monday-Wednesday-Thursday from 12-3 and Tuesday from 12-4. During the spring semester, we will attempt to attract 25 incoming UNI freshmen who have the time and interest in trying this approach.

We also realize that the University may be losing student credit hours. Humanities II and American Civilization are normally offered for 35 students, whereas both communications courses are offered for 25. Hence we can only offer the course for 25 students. This means that both Soneson and Cawelti will be teaching 10 fewer students than they would normally be teaching in their courses, raising the potential objection that the course is more expensive to teach.

Finally, we continue to discuss ways of accurately assessing students taking the course, as well as the course itself. Currently we plan to give separate grades for each course component, but work together grading some mutual projects. Also we plan on assessing student learning in this course and comparing the outcomes with students taking two or more related, separate courses in the same semester in order to determine the effectiveness of the cluster approach.

Implications of Cluster Course for GE

As we continue developing the course (currently the syllabus is written, Soneson will be visiting Cawelti's American Civilization Course this fall, and Cawelti will be visiting Soneson's Humanities II Course next spring) , we offer these questions for general discussion:

(1) Shall we move toward broadening this cluster course approach so that most GE offerings at UNI are taught in this fashion? Is this desirable and possible?

(2) Might we develop communication "sections" that can be connected to any GE course, so that College Reading and Writing and Oral Communication (either or both) can be made an integral part of any GE subject matter course?

(3) Other than the “cluster course” approach, are there other teaching models that might work to make GE more efficient and effective?

Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Enhancing Imagination and Thinking Skills in a Capstone Course Through In-Class Theater

Kamyar Enshayan (Physics)

The recent well-intentioned move towards digital classrooms and distance education has, in the name of “educational technology,” diverted our attention and a huge sum of public education dollars away from many other ways of learning. It is important to remind ourselves of some fundamental learning processes that are recently neglected in the midst of a rush for high-speed, but not necessarily meaningful, information.

If we know one thing for sure about education, it is this: the most robust and enduring form of learning and knowledge comes from *direct interactions* and *experiences in the natural world* (physical, biological, social, emotional, political). It is in this context that meaningful information can be generated or gathered. And that is what “the other educational technologies” are all about.

Some Forsaken Educational Technologies in Need of Rekindling

Drama/Theatre. Drama and theatre are, in a direct way, technologies of engagement. They can involve students in pretending, imagining, and empathizing; they are very powerful tools, but also involve much time and planning. I have been fortunate to work with several theatre students and professors in using drama to explore issues for which plain logic and reasoning have been insufficient. We have dramatized interrelated issues such as conservation, democracy or lack thereof, civic participation, and long-term human prospects. Some specific examples include:

- *Presentation flubs*. With the help of a few of my students we generated a list of commonly made mistakes in the presentation of group projects, and then we dramatized them.
- *Democracy and powerlessness*. Students in class were placed in a position where they had no power to affect their communal well-being. Examples of the context for these activities included the uncontrolled expansion of hog lots in some counties in Iowa and the use of pesticides around us on campus.
- *A culture of overconsumption*. We have developed (not tried out yet) two dramatic activities to explore the psychological and cultural roots of overconsumption.

The process of drama has helped us bring to life many dimensions of interrelated social, economic, and environmental issues that simply cannot be "given" to students. Drama methods can enrich many courses. We can provide in-depth workshops in drama approaches in education which can help many of us integrate drama into our courses.

Storytelling. We all tell stories to our students in various styles and forms. I am not talking about this in the context of a folklore class only. There are many stories in fields as widely scattered as biology, economics, health education, and geography. Stories, like other technologies of engagement, can create wonderful situations in class that will be remembered for life. Once a story is told, it can be referred to throughout the semester and everyone becomes familiar with it. Have you been to a storytelling workshop for college professors lately? I personally would like to see as many storytelling workshops on campus as there are workshops on how to do "distance education" or how to establish web sites.

Field trips and field work. These can be rich experiences if done well. My students want more of them, but it is not easy to fit field trips into the current schedule structure. Field trips and projects outside the classroom can be part of any field of study. How about reserving several Fridays a semester, university-wide, for field trips? What are the ingredients of a good field trip, or meaningful field work? Can we have a few workshops on designing and integrating field work into our courses? Do we value and fund this particular kind of educational technology?

Apprenticeship. The most meaningful aspects of my education have involved apprenticeship of some sort with mentors in the field. I know many of our students hunger for it. We, as educators, should strive to create or identify situations where our students can learn by doing. This is so essential and it is worth funding. What are the ingredients of a good apprenticeship situation, and how can service learning or community service be part of it?

Discussion, dialogue and debate. How can we lead good discussions? How can we encourage dialogue and debate about critical issues related to our course content? What are the ingredients of good class discussions? There is good literature on this theme, but how many of us discuss and practice it? The art of discussion, as basic as it is to the democratic process, is one of those hard-to-find educational technologies in need of rekindling.

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It has been said that "fiber optics and computers challenge the educational structure of the university as we know it." But field trips, drama, storytelling, apprenticeship, and many other practices also challenge and can transform the educational quality of the university for the better. If "fiber optics in schools are inevitable," let us insist that field trips, drama, and storytelling across the curriculum are inevitable as well.

These "softer" and more "humanistic" educational tools, processes, or technologies have several things in common: they all involve first-hand experience; they can fully engage our students' talents and imagination; they all require time and planning; and, they are rarely taken as seriously as computers are. We can change that if we want.

Some selected literature related to this topic:

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Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Teaching Thinking Across The Curriculum

Jerry Smith (Management)

The QEP document identifies many characteristics of an educated person. Most of these attributes are typical, but a few are truly definitive of what it means to be an educated person. Being able to think effectively is a defining feature: One cannot imagine an educated person who was unable to think effectively. Though the importance of effective thinking is widely acknowledged, few higher education institutions have resolutely taken up the challenge of teaching students how to think. In higher education the teaching of thinking receives large amounts of lip service and little focused instructional effort. This session of the conference is concerned with the general topic of teaching people how to think, and with the more specific issue of what UNI should be doing in this regard. The following are some of the questions that will be addressed.

What mental activities are encompassed under the notion of effective thinking? Thinking has been studied and taught under various labels, including reasoning, critical thinking, creativity, decision-making, and problem-solving. Most broadly, for purposes of this conference session, we are concerned with higher-order thinking—the conscious, directed use of the mind to achieve human goals. We are less concerned with lower-order cognitive activities like perception and attention. And we only address relatively specialized thinking activities—mathematical reasoning, for instance—insofar as they involve generalizable skills and strategies.

Are there general thinking skills, or is all thinking content-specific? Some authorities contend that there are no general thinking skills since all thinking must be adapted to the specific topic or domain under consideration. Consequently, from that perspective, programs aimed at teaching general thinking skills are a misguided waste of time and thinking should only be taught in the specific content area—for example, law or the physical sciences—that one is being trained to think about. This claim has aroused considerable controversy, and has been forcibly rebutted. It will be argued that while some thinking skills are domain-specific, many are general and can be learned outside of traditional domains of academic content.

Why should students care about learning to think? Good thinking promotes effective action. Think well and you are more likely to achieve your personal and professional objectives. To further motivate students, they can be shown how sound thinking facilitates success in such practical endeavors as buying a car, negotiating a lease, repairing home appliances, and resolving interpersonal conflicts. Indeed, practical affairs can be viewed as a domain of thought that draws on virtually every significant thinking ability.

What are the major elements of a course on effective thinking? Most thinking skills programs are too narrow. An adequate program must be constructed on foundational material drawn from epistemology, psychology, language, and logic. It must identify appropriate thinking attitudes and dispositions, skills and abilities, methods and tools, as well as mental mistakes that thinkers often make. Special attention must be paid to the thinking required for scientific inquiry, for argumentation and debate, and for practical problem-solving and decision-making. In the course of such a program, one will learn how to reason effectively, to generate creative ideas, to recognize the kind of thinking task one is faced with, and the knowledge and mental strategies that are appropriate for different thinking tasks.

What are some specific things one must know to think effectively? Good thinkers know a lot about thinking. For instance they know that there are different kinds of questions—for example, empirical, conceptual, and ethical. They are sensitive to vagueness and ambiguity in the terms used to express ideas. They are alert to fallacies—begging the question, for instance—in their own thinking and arguments made by others. And they know when a "weak" problem solving strategy, like hill-climbing, might be useful or when one is better off trying to work backwards from an identified goal.

Can effective thinking be taught? The unimpressive results of past attempts to teach thinking are grounds for concern. Arguably, most failures can be attributed to inadequacies in program design and/or implementation. Some of what needs to be taught is factual knowledge that, assuredly, can be taught. More important and pedagogically challenging are thinking skills and dispositions, of varying degrees of abstractness. Considerable evidence supports the claim that students can be taught to think effectively, but only through thought intensive programs that are well-conceived and carefully implemented.

Can thinking skills be assessed? Can we measure changes in students' thinking abilities and ascertain whether educational efforts have been effective? Again, the answer suggested by the literature is, "Yes, but not easily!" Though multiple-choice tests have been used to measure critical thinking abilities, the validity of such tests is suspect. A variety of other tests and measures, more qualitative and subjective in scoring, have been employed. Assessing an individual's thinking is like evaluating teaching: No simple, well-structured scoreboard can be devised to capture objective measures of every important attribute, and yet reasonable people are usually able to reach an acceptable level of agreement about the relative merits of different performances.

How can we insure that acquired thinking skills are retained and applied beyond their original learning contexts? Thinking skills programs have been plagued by "transfer of training" difficulties. Students learn and apply thinking skills in class, but do not employ them in other classes or in their daily lives, so acquired skills are soon lost for lack of use. Research suggests that there are two keys to the retention and transfer of thinking skills. First, skills must be taught explicitly so students are aware of them, understand them, and consciously incorporate this knowledge in their mental repertoires. Second, skills must be exercised and reinforced by opportunities for use in other settings, both personal and professional. These requirements can be satisfied by an appropriately designed program for teaching thinking skills.

What have other colleges and universities been doing in this area? We will review some of the programs that other institutions—Alverno College, for instance—use in trying to teach students how to think. This will suggest the variety of ways in which thinking can be taught, as well as what is required of faculty and administrators for such programs to be effective.

What should be done at the University of Northern Iowa? In concluding the session, a thinking skills program will be proposed for UNI. The proposed program includes a dedicated course in general thinking skills, supported by an "across the curriculum" strategy for enriching and reinforcing student thinking abilities in other general education courses and in courses in the different colleges and majors.

Some selected literature related to this topic:

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Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Achieving Learner Centered Education

J. C. Turner (Communication Studies), Richard Varn (Information Technology Services)

Key Questions

Is a student's learning style an important factor for classroom success? Should we be taking a learner-centered instead of teacher-centered approach to instruction? Is the Carnegie unit still a valid basis for our educational system or should it be eliminated to make way for a new paradigm? Does the information technology that forms a basis for much of our economy require a shift in the nature of higher education and, if so, should we change? These are among the significant questions facing higher education today. How should UNI respond to these questions and the challenges they represent? Consider the following from the November 1995 *Change* magazine article entitled "From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education," by Robert B. Barr and John Tagg:

> In the Instruction Paradigm, the teaching and learning process is governed by the further rule that time will be held constant while learning varies. Although addressing public elementary and secondary education, the analysis of the National Commission on Time and Learning nonetheless applies to colleges:
>
> > Time is learning's warden. Our time-bound mentality has fooled us all into believing that schools can educate all of the people all of the time in a school year of 180 six-hour days. . . If experience, research, and common sense teach nothing else, they confirm the truism that people learn at different rates, and in different ways with different subjects. But we have put the cart before the horse: our schools. . . are captives of clock and calendar. The boundaries of student growth are defined by schedules . . . instead of standards for students and learning.
>
> Under the rule of time, all classes start and stop at the same time and take the same number of calendar weeks. The rule of time and the priority of parts affect every instructional act of the college.

> Thus it is, for example, that if students come into college classes “unprepared,” it is not the job of the faculty who teach those classes to “prepare” them. Indeed, the structure of the one-semester, three-credit class makes it all but impossible to do so. The only solution, then, is to create new courses to prepare students for the existing courses: within the Instruction Paradigm, the response to educational problems is always to generate more atomized, discrete instructional units. If business students are lacking a sense of ethics, then offer and require a course in business ethics. If students have poor study skills, then offer a “master student” course to teach such skills (p.19).

Whither the Carnegie Unit?

Clearly, some scholars (including Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) expressed strong beliefs that the Carnegie unit—a credit-hour and seat-time measure of quality—has outlived its usefulness. In support of that position, consider the conditions within which it was adopted: during the early 20th century when the assembly line was the dominant organizing metaphor. The industrial economy of the time was based on natural resources; the Taylor school of management dominated the organization of business. Taylor believed one should manage people in the same way that one manages inanimate assets and the machines on which people work. The Carnegie unit was tailored to fit these systems and such beliefs about human nature: when the bell rang, the product (student) moved to the next station (class) in the assembly line.

The industrial nations used the Carnegie and Taylor systems, in combination with compulsory public schooling and growing access to higher education, arguably to great success. If the economic basis for those approaches is now invalid and our assumptions about human nature have changed, should we not also change? Even more important, if we know that by intelligent application of information technology we can enhance learning, do we not have a duty to change?

In changing higher education, should we not also make the learner the focus of our efforts? To do so, we would need to move away from a “sage-on-the-stage” approach of filling the empty vessels that are our students. Instead we would offer a mix of synchronous and asynchronous presentation, computer-based instruction, independent and group learning, learning by doing, simulation, and discussion. In this mix, the student takes as much responsibility for learning as the teacher does for teaching. Finally, student-teacher time would become an opportunity to do what they do best together: argue, inspire, bond, relate, excite, shape, expound, synthesize, analyze, and realize, just to name a few. We need to let machines do what they do well to free people up to do what they do best.

Using information technology, we can customize, modularize, and contextualize education in ways we could never afford with conventional methods. The Carnegie unit is antithetical to these capabilities. Information technology, by its very nature, is non-linear, non-sequential, distributed, time-and-place-shifted, and a la carte, and does not fit in a Carnegie-based system, ruled by time and credits.

The Carnegie unit stands between the learner and the learning. We must replace it with a quality assurance system and a social vision of qualities of the educated person, both of which are consistent with modern tools, realities, values, and economies. We must be willing to accept competency, mastery, or portfolio-based diplomas from the K-12 system and be willing to offer the same. We must not only send such graduates on to further learning and jobs, but also to meet their lifelong learning needs.

Technology and Change

Information technology is key to this change and higher education is woefully behind. Why? We do not have the same imperatives for technology adoption in higher education as there are elsewhere. Moreover, we pass on what we know the way we learned it. Our traditional methods give continuity and preserve the values and lessons of the past. These are not without merit, but it means that we are not positioned to be early or even middle technology adopters. It seems oxymoronic that the places of greatest creativity, which inspire new thought and change, cannot change themselves. Higher education should not be where we passionately and methodically search for new insight into how the brain functions, how we learn, how to use technology, and the factors and methods of human organization and success, just so we can ignore such insights when it comes to our own programs.

Conclusion

Information technology is helping to mutate our institutions, jobs, and maybe even our species. The opportunity to effect change through these tools is unprecedented. We can use them to smash barriers of time, space, country, status, age, ability, and so on. We can and are reshaping our world. We in higher education must be addressing the effect of these changes on our institutions. We must be asking:

- What is it we are really doing, and what is really important to do?
- What is it that we want to do with the most powerful tools ever placed in the hands of the many?
- As educators, what is our new role in the information society?
- How can we change and yet still preserve the essence of our valued traditions while assuring educational quality?

As individuals, we are all struggling with the same practical issues: how to ration our time to adopt new approaches to teaching and learning, to keep up with changing technology, and to make a real difference in students' learning. We must turn to each other for the collaborative activities that can keep us afloat. We need more early adopters in higher education—ones who we perceive as being "like us"—to show us the models and the mistakes to be avoided.

Coping with this transformation parallels many historic crises, such as wars, disease, or natural disasters. We have successfully dealt with the big problems only when we put aside our smaller differences and work together on the big solutions. Only extensive collaboration and focus among faculty members and institutions make feasible this massive transition from industrial-age to information-age education.

Faculty and educational leaders must question the Carnegie unit as the basis for academic quality. Without systemic changes of this type, technological innovations and new methods for improving learning and better serving our students are stifled and limited. UNI administrators need to start and lead the discussion regarding what our response will be to new competition from virtual and traditional institutions that *have* broken from the Carnegie unit, such as the Western Governor's University. We all must address how UNI can use a new economic paradigm, powerful information technology, learning research, and new markets for education to become a leader in learner-centered education.

Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Midwestern Culture and Community

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Kamyar Enshayan (Physics)

If we do not know one another's stories, how can we help each other?
Wendell Berry

Ninety-four percent of the students at the University of Northern Iowa come from Iowa, and more than 70 percent stay and work in Iowa when they graduate. UNI is thus preparing students for Iowa's workforce and citizenry, its taxpayers and community leaders. "The state is our campus," therefore, is far from political phrase making. It has substantial meaning in terms of UNI's unique identity and mission. And what of the remaining 29 percent of UNI students who find work outside the state? A great many of them live and work within the Midwest.

If we follow the U. S. Census and define the "Midwest" as including Ohio in the east, the Dakotas and Nebraska in the west, Kansas and Missouri in the south, and Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan in the north, we might ask ourselves: Is there really such a thing as Midwestern culture and, if there is, would it be of value to our students to have **knowledge** of this culture, to be **skilled** in interacting with this culture, and to appreciate its **values**? Is Midwestern culture and community part of knowing oneself and one's world?

In seeking an answer to the first question, "Is there such a thing as Midwestern culture?", we might start with our own experiences and then look at other sources. What images come to mind when you hear the word Midwest or Midwesterner? The famous "American Gothic" painting of a farmer, his wife, and the pitchfork by Iowa's own Grant Wood? The world of the movie *State Fair* drawn from Iowan Phil Strong's 1932 novel—and all the associations it evokes: of county fairs and Cattle Congress; of people who know what "4-H" stands for and for whom words like *co-op* and phrases like *helping hand* and *a long row to hoe* have not lost their meaning? Is the Midwest what easterners and westerners fly over and disregard, or is it instead the "field of dreams" (literally in Iowa—or is that Heaven) ?Are Midwesterners "provincial" hicks and hayseeds or hard working, sober, sometimes stubborn, practical people?

The above images hint that tension may exist between how others see the Midwest and how Midwesterners view themselves—a tension deep-rooted in Midwestern culture and identity. The 1990 census tells us that Midwesterners in the 1990s, by and large, trace their ancestry to northern and central European nations. In this sense, Iowa itself mirrors the demographics of the United States as a whole, with its largest ethnic group being German, followed by those of Irish and then English descent; however, there have been and remain in Iowa Dutch communities, Scandinavian communities, Czech communities, Native American communities, African American communities, and Hispanic communities as well. Paradoxically, therefore, studying Midwestern culture provides a close-to-home entree to multiculturalism and diversity!

Save for Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Cleveland, the Midwest is a region of small towns and rural landscapes. Only four of Iowa's cities boast populations of over 100,000 (Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport/Bettendorf, and Cedar Falls/Waterloo). The majority of the state's communities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, and this demographic picture is repeated throughout the Midwest.

But does all this matter?

We believe it does. We believe that a rich sense of one's cultural identity and of one's "place" (literally) in the world is essential for the fullest development of one's gifts and for the fullest contribution of these gifts to society. Indeed, we maintain that without a deep knowledge of one's own culture, one's own landscape, one's own community it is impossible to have a frame of reference for understanding other cultures and communities. In this way self and others, self and world are inextricably related.

"A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest," writes Joan Didion (1979, p. 146). We make no special brief that Midwestern culture and communities are in any way superior to other regional or national cultures. We only say they are our own. They are our reality. Meaningful QEP experiences in Midwestern culture and community, we believe, will provide our students with the knowledge, skills, and values to become native to and care about, not only the Midwest (should they come to live and work here), but about whatever region or nation they come to call home.

Thus we are calling for QEP experiences in Midwestern culture and community to enter the curriculum and the UNI undergraduate experience in higher profile than they have in the past—keeping with the unique character of UNI's student body. We believe it just makes good sense for students who are from and/or are likely to live and work in the Midwest to know Midwestern culture and to have experiences in Midwestern communities or rural landscapes. This will give them a jump-start on their post-UNI lives and work. In point of fact, one of the goals of UNI's Strategic Plan is to "extend University expertise to serve the needs of Iowa and beyond." In keeping with this goal we believe that a variety of QEP learning projects related to Midwestern culture and community would meet three critical needs: (1) Iowa and Midwestern economic needs; (2) Iowa and Midwestern rural and community needs; and (3) students' needs and desires to know their own heritage and link their home and community life with their university experience.

All too often when students come to college an unnatural split develops between their home and community experience and their university "education." Minnesota farmer and writer Paul Gruchow, who grew up in southwestern Minnesota and now lives and farms in southeastern Minnesota, describes this split vividly in describing his own education:

> The schools in which I myself was educated were by most standards first-rate. But they were, as our schools generally are, utterly indifferent to the place and to the local culture in which they operated.
>
> Among my science courses I took two full years of biology, but I never learned that the beautiful meadow at the bottom of our pasture was a remnant virgin prairie. We did not spend, so far as I can remember, a single hour on prairies—landscape in which we were immersed—in two years of biological study.
>
> I took history courses for years, but I never learned that one of the founders of my town and for decades its leading banker—the man who platted the town and organized its school system, its library, its parks, and its fire department—was also the author of the first comprehensive treatise on Minnesota's prairie botany. I can only imagine now what it might have meant to me—a studious boy with a love of nature—to know that a great scholar of natural history had made a full and satisfying life in my town. I did not know until long after I left the place that it afforded the possibility of an intellectual life.
>
> I read, in the course of . . . English instruction, a great many useful and stimulating books, but I never learned that someone who had won a National Book Award for poetry—his name was Robert Bly—was living and working on a farm only thirty miles from our house. The countryside was full of writers, I would later discover, but I did not meet anybody who had written a book until I went away to college. I had not imagined—or been encouraged to imagine—that it was possible to live in the country and to write books too. Nor did I suspect that it was possible to write books about our countryside. We read Sir Walter Scott, John Steinbeck, and Robert Frost, but not O. E. Rolvaag or Black Elk, Lois Hudson or Thomas McGrath, Meridel LeSeuer or Frederick Manfred. We did not read them at the University of Minnesota either. I was left to unearth by my own devices, years later, the whole fine literature of my place. . . .
>
> Nothing in my education prepared me to believe, or encouraged me to expect, that there was any reason at all to be interested in my own place. If I hoped to amount to anything, I understood, I had better take the first road east out of town, as fast as I could, and, like so many of my classmates, I did (Gruchow, 1993, pp. 7, 8).

We agree with Wendell Berry who writes that "Underlying the idea of a university—the bringing together, the combining into one, of all the disciplines—is the idea that good work and good citizenship are the inevitable by-products of the making of a good—that is, a fully developed— human being." The inescapable purpose of education, Berry insists, "must be to serve and pass on the essential human means—the thoughts and words and works and ways and standards and hopes without which we are not human. To preserve these things and to pass them on is to prepare students for life. . . . .There must . . . be love of learning and of the cultural tradition and of excellence. And this love cannot exist, because it makes no sense, apart from the love of a place and a 'community'" (Berry, 1987, pp. 77, 88-89).

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Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Enhancing the Quality of UNI Undergraduate Education Through International Learning Experiences

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International travel or study, either before or after graduation, has long been an accepted accompaniment to a liberal education. For much of the history of U. S. undergraduate education, however, such experiences were limited to those with the time and monetary resources to engage in them. The experiences themselves were viewed more as nicety than as necessity, a valuable addition to classroom experience, but supplemental rather than integral.

Conditions in the world that await today's graduates may well require that international experience be moved beyond such a peripheral role in undergraduate education. The notion of a global economy has become practically a truism. We take for granted that organizations, profit and nonprofit, will operate and be influenced by conditions across international lines; that professional careers will involve, if not travel and some residence abroad, at least regular contact with those from nations outside of our own. News coverage through television, radio, and the Internet has made information on international political, business, and sports events ever more available. The Internet, the World Wide Web, and videoconferencing technology have made communication, collaboration, and research across national boundaries both commonplace and expected.

Research has found that students change in knowledge, skills and values as a result of international experience. Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver (1992) suggested that study abroad helps students develop intellectually not only through language study and courses in their majors, but also that they add to their knowledge in broad, general ways and change in their perceptions of the host culture, their own culture, and global understanding. *Study Abroad: The Experience of American Undergraduates* (1991) compared students with and without study abroad experience. Results showed that international experience affected not only academic development but also personal and social development; students with international experience scored higher than the comparison group on cultural interest and peace and cooperation indicators.

The increasingly global quality of personal and professional lives, and the potential for international experience to develop the qualities of an educated person, suggest questions whose answers will require our best thought as members of a university community: What learning do students expect and receive from international experiences? How does international experience relate to the development of the qualities of an educated person? Is international learning experience itself sufficient to result in learning? Which factors related to the structure, timing, and evaluation of international experiences enhance learning and teaching? What roles should the University play in making international experiences accessible to more students?

The University Strategic Plan includes language supportive of learning that includes international awareness. Goal Area 1, Intellectual Vitality, reads in part (1A2b): “Strive to ensure that every student . . . has the opportunity to undertake a broad and rigorous general education curriculum. . . that helps students understand and appreciate the shared and pluralistic aspects of American culture as well as *develop a global perspective that includes the understanding of other cultures* [italics added].” Goal Area 2, Community, reads in part (2A5): “Ensure that students, faculty, and staff have opportunities for intercultural experiences, both domestic and abroad.” The stated target for Goal Area 1 is that each student have opportunity for at least one formal learning experience outside the classroom. The performance indicator for that target is the number of students involved in such learning experiences, defined to include international experiences along with opportunities for research, service learning, cooperative education and internships.

“Enhancing the Quality of UNI Undergraduate Education Through International Learning Experiences” is a QEP-funded project focused on beginning to explore answers to questions related to the University role in expanding and enhancing international learning opportunities for our students. Two one-day symposia, held in March and April 1998, brought together UNI faculty and staff interested in and involved with international experiences for UNI students. Purposes of the symposia were to identify international opportunities currently available to our students, to examine ways in which international experiences can contribute to the development of the qualities of an educated person, and to develop strategies for sharing information on international learning opportunities among interested UNI students, faculty, and staff.

During the first symposium, participants explored the interests and concerns of various constituencies related to international learning experiences—students, faculty, parents, university program providers, administrators, Iowa legislature, Board of Regents, and employers of UNI graduates. They also began to consider links between the qualities of an educated person and international experiences and their implications for the development of international programs on campus. By the end of this first discussion, a list of six areas for further consideration and action had been developed. The six areas were:

- the marketing of international experience;
- preparation of students for international experience;
- collaboration with/outreach to departments and office on campuses and to secondary and postsecondary institutions and international sites;
- integration of international—and internationalizing—experiences into UNI curricula;
- establishment of criteria for high-quality, international learning experiences and programs; and
- development of an effective information system for international experiences.

The second symposium extended conversations from the first symposium. Participants examined the variety of avenues now available to UNI students to engage in international learning experiences and revisited discussions from the first symposium related to levels of international awareness and distinctions between international and internationalizing experiences. The group also continued to explore implications of the QEP qualities defined to date for development of international programs on campus. Finally, they began to generate ideas related to development of a campus information system concerning opportunities for international experience: What information could/should such a system include? How might it be organized? How could information be gathered, entered into the system, and kept up to date?

Overall, participants in the two symposia came to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- International experiences have the potential to develop the qualities of an educated person; their potential for adding to learning needs to be taken into consideration as programs are developed and implemented.

- Enhancement of student learning from international experiences can and should be the result of curricular, as well as programmatic, development and decision making.
- There is need for collaboration and communication among various departments and program areas in order to increase the availability of international experiences to our students and to ensure the highest quality experiences.
- The creation of an effective system for information on international learning opportunities needs to be a priority for future action and should be a topic for the next round of QEP proposals.

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Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Rhythm-Based World Percussion for the Enhancement of Community and Personal Health

Randy Hogancamp (School of Music)

The University of Northern Iowa has historically maintained a strong general education program for its undergraduates. Although students are exposed to several areas of study through general education, these courses tend to be introductory or survey in scope. One area of particular importance in today's "shrinking world" is the study and understanding of world cultures. While students may read about the people and customs of another country, the understanding they receive of that culture is one-dimensional, generally limited to the knowledge gained from textbooks. RHYTHM-BASED WORLD PERCUSSION (RBWP) offers participants the experience of learning about selected world cultures through performing ethnic music in a hands-on setting. RBWP addresses the kind of knowledge gained though understanding the complexities and ambiguities of the human experience in different parts of the world.

One of the features common to many world cultures is music. It has a central place in the daily life of the community. Most often drumming is a group experience in which all members of the community participate regardless of age, gender or vocation.

This "community" involvement is a natural and continuing phenomenon that can promote the development of (1) communication skills through listening and conversing musically with others, (2) interpersonal skills in building relationships with other members of the group, (3) citizenship skills in defining the roles of the individual within the group, and (4) conflict resolution skills resulting from bringing the many diverse members of the group into one rhythmic harmony. Affective skills are enhanced as individuals express their emotions through playing, finding ways to relate to the group musically. Artistic skills are developed from the experience of performance.

An additional benefit from the rhythm circle experience is the enhancement of well-being associated with vigorous drumming. Studies by the Rhythm For Life Foundation as well as the San Diego State University Center on Aging Project (1994) indicate that participants in these activities show improved physical, mental, and emotional health as evidenced by music therapists in the treatment of patients with physical, mental, and emotional problems. Reports published in the October 27, 1997 issue of the AMA *Archives of Internal Medicine* indicate that a stress-management program (such as that experienced by members of a community rhythm circle) reduced the risk of heart attacks or the need for surgery by 74 percent. Another study by Duke University (funded by the National Institute on Aging and published in the October 1997 issue of the *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*) discovered a relationship between healthier immune systems and psychological experiences.

RBWP is based on the model of a community rhythm circle that affords participants an opportunity usually not available elsewhere in universities. The experiences that participants gain in learning about other cultures through the development of specific drumming skills also can influence their values regarding self, the community, and the world. They will be challenged in the areas of intellectual openness, adventure, skepticism and curiosity in ways they have perhaps never before experienced in the university setting. Through learning about music from other countries and seeing art from a different perspective, the participants will gain a heightened appreciation of non-Western as well as Western aesthetics. They also may be stimulated to pursue additional study and performance following this initial experience with a rhythm circle.

Many businesses, communities and health organizations now maintain active drum circles for those interested in lifelong learning. Perhaps the most important value of all is that of respect—for oneself, for others (particularly other cultures), and for the individual within the group. RBWP stresses the significant contributions of the individual within the total community experience.

Participants in RBWP have the opportunity to experience an increased awareness, appreciation, and knowledge of selected cultures from around the world through exposure to, study of, and participation in the performance of multi-ethnic, rhythm-based musical instruments. They also have the opportunity to become familiar with the sound and structure of the music from these cultures and the ability to match the instruments with specific countries. Learning the role of the individual in a community rhythm circle will encourage the participants to develop and build relationships within the group. Each also can experience improvement in his/her physical, mental and/or emotional health through increased aerobic and cardiovascular exercise as well as the release of daily stress and tension. Learning to play instruments and music from another culture is a step toward understanding and appreciating art forms. Participants can be stimulated to continue these experiences through sustained inquiry because rhythm is the foundation of the world and each of its parts. (Everything from the planets, moons and stars to the human body to the smallest unseen particles exists in rhythmic cycles. Our senses respond to the tactile stimulation of rhythmic vibrations produced by light, sound and physical matter.) Response to rhythm is basic to human functioning and provides a strong sense of group identity and a feeling of belonging to the participants.

Come prepared to experience and enjoy the creative magic of drumming! Where would you be today without rhythm?

Note: Editing completed by Roger Sell because Randy Hogancamp was not available for review of the final draft before printing.

Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

Reflections on the Professional Education Curriculum in the Development of Student Qualities

Robert Boody, Andrea DeBruin-Parecki, Deborah Deemer, Suzanne Freedman,
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The Professional Education component of the UNI Teacher Education Program has been designed to provide the knowledge base that is foundational to educational practice. This particular sequence of courses is intended to assist students in making sound decisions about becoming a teacher, and developing an understanding of those concepts in human development, learning, and assessment most relevant to teaching. A number of new developments in the field of education (e.g., the push for national and state standards), in the social fabric of the USA (e.g. the increasing number of children living in poverty), and large turnover in faculty have prompted us to examine critically what we do, how we do it, and when we do it. However, giving a collective priority to this task has been difficult in the midst of our ongoing individual obligations. Thus, it was very exciting when the QEP project grant provided us with the opportunity to come together to dialogue about the changes that we envision for the professional education sequence. The QEP document provided a framework around which we focused our dialogue.

Eight faculty responsible for teaching five of the six courses in the professional education sequence participated in this project, with at least two participants from each of the following courses: (a) Dynamics of Human Development [200:030]; (b) Exploring Teaching [200:017, a co-requisite field experience for 200:030]; (c) Natures and Conditions of Learning [200:040]; (d) The Teacher as a Change Agent [200:018, a co-requisite field experience for 200:040]; and (e) Classroom Evaluation Instruments [250:050]. Faculty met periodically during the spring 1998 semester to consider the relationship between these courses and the QEP. More specifically, the group examined the qualities that each of us was intent on fostering in students who enroll in these courses and the extent to which these qualities overlapped across instructors and with the QEP document. Our goals were to identify specific qualities, reach consensus on a minimal set of qualities to be explicitly fostered in the sequence, and examine their curricular and pedagogical implications. Our conversations were audiotaped and transcribed for later review. In this conference session we want to share key aspects of our experiences as a "case study” of process and content issues involved in getting a group of faculty, who have been socialized into a highly individualized work style, to find common ground in their teaching mission.

Early in our conversations, we realized that we all believed that too often students experience the professional education sequence specifically, and the teacher education curriculum as a whole, in a very fragmented manner. Some of this fragmentation seems to arise from structural factors beyond our immediate control. For example, we are generally concerned about discontinuities between the experiences offered by community colleges and UNI since about 40% of the teacher education majors are transfer students. In addition, non-transferred students often do not take the prescribed course sequence because of work load demands, schedule conflicts, and so on. However, considerable fragmentation also occurs as faculty exercise their academic freedom. We all agreed, therefore, that an important value of examining this sequence of courses in the context of the University-wide QEP initiative was the possibilities it offered for redressing fragmentation by providing a linkage through a set of common qualities.

The QEP challenge, however, supposes that we can commit ourselves to teaching a common set of values and to modeling those values. As we searched for that commonality, we came to understand that our initial commitment to the project was not enough. Commitment in this context came to mean a willingness, an openness, to reexamine one's fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning. Because we were working with the QEP within the context of the preparation of school practitioners, we also had to commit ourselves to reexamining the competing theoretical assumptions regarding the sociological, psychological, and philosophical foundations of schooling. Could the conflict theorists among us concede a place for functionalism, and could the phenomenologists among us find common ground with the behaviorists?

As we look back upon our conversations, it becomes clear that although we were willing to share our views freely, the commitment to reexamining our deeply held convictions was not guiding these exchanges. For example, when we read transcripts from the meetings it is striking how all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, early on and repeatedly indicated what we were NOT willing to compromise. But we did not also explicitly state what we were willing to compromise. We were willing to accommodate a collective agenda as long as it did not interfere with projects we had individually defined a priori. Some of us now strongly believe that productive discussions of the qualities of an educated person require first the development of an authentic conversational community in which we are all intent upon pursuing a critical examination of our individual assumptive frameworks. Furthermore, although we came to see a need for reexamination, we still need to further explore the purpose of this reexamination. Are we trying to develop one framework that we can all melt into (homogeneity) or do we want to reexamine our frameworks to see how each other's contributions can be mutually enhancing as we help future school practitioners make sense of schooling?

A second challenge the QEP initiative posed for us was how to take this set of qualities that had been defined for the university as a whole (abstracted from the requirements of any given major) and situate it within the specifics of a particular discipline of study, a particular type of professional who is to work in particular type of cultural milieu. For example, should a more pressing question guiding our curricular choices be, "What does it mean to be an 'educated' teacher?", rather than "What does it mean to be an educated person?" How are these two questions overlapping? How should the qualities we value as a university be weighed against those defined by the set of professional standards specific to the field?

So where did our many hours of discussion get us? A review of the transcripts revealed the following themes that we will continue to explore in further, hopefully more, transformative conversations. First, we are committed to promoting a variety of connections, including connections between the "separate" contents of various courses, between theoretical concepts and actual classroom practices, and among the faculty who teach these courses. One strategy for doing this will be to develop a set of two or three common projects that students will develop across the various courses. Second, we all desire to promote various intellectual dispositions, moving students toward taking an active rather than passive orientation to their own learning and toward course content. Possible strategies for doing this include the development of case-based methods and action research projects. Third, we all seek to facilitate our students' development of a sense of identity as professional educators and good citizens. Although our students are generally committed to becoming "teachers" in the sense of acquiring the requisite content knowledge and teaching skills to promote the welfare of children in their classrooms, we need to do more to help them see themselves as active in the promotion of children's welfare outside the classroom. Strategies for encouraging student development in the area of identity include the promotion of reflection, critical examination of controversial issues in education and society at large, and participation in community-based learning and service projects.

If we are proposing to foster the qualities just listed, are we going to take students in a direction different from the course set by the instructors who taught them before us? Are we adequately preparing students for the demands to be placed upon them by the instructors who follow us? To answer these types of questions we need to subject our proposed qualities to intense scrutiny by our students and by faculty who have taught our students before as well as those who will teach them after us. We also believe that the answers to these questions need to move us beyond generalities, such as the statement "teachers must be reflective practitioners." We need to talk about what exactly do we think they out to be reflecting about (i.e. the technical, the moral, the communicative). Are we to privilege reflection as introspection or are we to privilege collective reflection? Even after we agree on answers to these types of issues, we need further dialogue to examine their implications for scope, sequence, and pedagogy. At this point in our work we see the QEP is a process and a product for reconstructing our identity as individual faculty and as a group who, in collaboration with other groups, is responsible for laying the foundation for teacher education at UNI.

Pre-Conference Briefings for Conference Sessions (cont.)

A Critical Review of QEP-Related Data Sources and Assessment Needs

Gene Lutz (Sociology and Center for Social and Behavioral Research)

Central Issue

The central issue for this pilot project is to suggest how the acquisition of the qualities we seek undergraduates to possess can be assessed. The Qualities of an Educated Person (QEP) project needs a reliable system of assessment to guide its development, to monitor its progress, and to demonstrate its impact. As this pilot effort demonstrates, this does not now exist. What should the system be?

UNI Currently Engages in Multiple Assessment Activities

UNI is no stranger to assessment efforts. There are at least a dozen processes occurring at UNI that are in some way aimed at assessment. The list includes: annual assessments of teaching by students; student assessments of faculty oral communication competency; annual faculty review of peers through departmental professional assessment committees; annual reviews of faculty members by their department head; a faculty member's annual report of his/her professional activities ("faculty activity report"); a faculty member's annual report of how his/her time has been allocated among teaching, research, and administration; multiple annual institutional reports to the Iowa Board of Regents on such topics as course enrollments and instructional costs; student outcomes assessments performed annually by all departments and programs; routine course evaluations of students; formal reviews (internal and external) of major programs every seven years; annual updates of strategic plans at all levels of the university; and formal accreditation reviews of the entire university every 10 years. We have no lack of evaluation /assessment processes. But how well connected are each of these to furthering the mission of UNI? Do they form a coherent whole that yields a university assessment system? How well coordinated are they with each other to avoid duplication and to maximize their results? Do they enhance learning and personal development for students, faculty, staff and administrators? Do they tell us how we can improve as well as what needs improvement? Do they tell us the extent to which we have developed the qualities we desire in undergraduates? Do they help us understand where we are and how we can advance the development of QEP objectives? Do they tell us how the QEP project contributes to reaching our educational goals?

A Review of UNI Assessment Activities Shows Them to Be Inadequate for the Purpose of Supporting the QEP Process

Among the noted weaknesses of UNI assessment capabilities are: insufficient coordination of activities, unclear uses of assessments, weak methodologies, limited faculty/student support, and incomplete coverage of QEP qualities.

With respect to *insufficient coordination*, there are few linkages among the processes of the various assessment activities, little sharing of data among the activities, but also redundancy in the efforts. How many times should faculty and departments need to provide the same information describing the size and scope of their programs, or should central administration provide the same profile of students to each major or college? If an assessment finds that students are deficient in some defined area, will this be considered when a curricular change is proposed or a new position is being filled? If one unit finds that students have excelled in a particular field of work, will any one outside that unit know this and be able to consider the implications for their unit?

With respect to *unclear uses of assessments*, there is an uneasy mix of summative and formative purposes throughout most activities. It may not be obvious which of many possible purposes apply in a particular instance. For example, are we assessing to demonstrate our worth, suggest our potential, attract more resources, know how much difference we have made, determine how much has been learned, explain why and how something has been learned, or predict how things could turn out more positively next time? Can assessments effectively fulfill several purposes at the same time? These questions need to be answered when assessments are undertaken. There also is a pattern for the more recently introduced processes to be separated from traditional processes of curricular and program review. Where are the linkages? What should be the linkages?

With respect to *weak methodologies*, we find too much reliance on single-item measurements, use of measurements that have no established standards, and use of data collection protocols that do not appear highly rigorous. Astin (1991) argued that assessments should include three essential components: **inputs** (pre-existing characteristics, e.g. high school course work, social background, etc.); **environment** (conditions intended to influence learning at the university, e.g., the educational and student support programs, teaching methods, curricular flow, etc.), and **outputs** (the consequences or outcomes of an educational program, e.g., the qualities developed, the uses made of skills learned, etc.). To the extent that UNI assessment activities do not include all three elements, and most do not, they do not provide the basis for drawing conclusions about what learning has actually occurred or why it occurred.

With respect to *incomplete coverage*, there are extremely few assessments of any of the values-related qualities expected of UNI graduates. While there is greater coverage of knowledge and skills qualities, these are largely concentrated on the areas of economy/work, communication, and various field-specific outcomes. Only sporadic coverage exits for the areas of culture, communities, natural environment, technology, and change.

Speculatively speaking, these problems contribute to a low level of support by faculty and students for all of the activities. Whether or not these are the reasons, faculty are reticent to embrace most assessment processes. Is assessment seen to be entirely, or primarily, as an external accountability activity that can have only neutral or negative consequences? Can a genuine, but latent, interest in using assessment for improvement be made manifest? We need to understand the current culture of faculty views on assessment much more completely than we do now. There does not appear to be a compelling rationale that promotes faculty engagement in assessment. In addition, students, especially, have not been brought into the assessment activities in ways that make these activities important to them. They need to know they have highly valuable contributions to make to assessments for the institution, and that they can use assessments for personal and professional development. Assessment data can help individual students evaluate what they have and have not learned, but also how they learned or not, and how they might become more effective learners.

Alternative Models for Assessment

There are at least two necessary steps to derive useful alternatives for UNI assessment of qualities related to the QEP project. First, we should clearly and explicitly identify the characteristics we want in such an assessment process. Among the desired characteristics are:

(1) the process should foster a culture of active and continuous reflection; (2) more directly, the process should have the capacity to promote self-improvement of individual faculty and students, and of programs and the university; (3) as with all assessment processes at UNI, a QEP assessment should be routinely viewed and evaluated; (4) a QEP assessment process should be fully coordinated the other assessment and change-inducing activities at UNI; and, (5) the bulk of assessment activities should be capable of generating an understanding of the linkages between inputs, environments and outputs so that we can draw reasonable inferences about the effects of our educational programs and can make reasonable predictions about the effects of proposed programs.

A second step is to devise a new system of assessment that fits these criteria, and be bold enough to eliminate old activities that do not. We should not try to patch a system together from the old parts if they do not fit the needs; nor should we "reinvent the wheel."

Recommendations for Assessment at UNI

There are four central recommendations for UNI:

1) *Clarify the goals of all assessment activities*. The majority of these activities should be focused on formative goals of improvement; a few will need to be focused on external accountability.
2) *Provide a support structure for strengthening the conceptualization and measurement of assessments*. Assessments should continue to have a high degree of faculty control, but faculty need the resources of field and method experts to make the necessary improvements. It is too much to assume that every department and program has such expertise in residence.
3) *Using the support structure, assessments should be designed that lead to explanations of program effects, not the mere description of outcomes*. This will necessitate some longitudinal, multivariate designs.

4) *Critically review assessment processes at other universities and adopt, with appropriate modifications, the best of these*. Included in this review should be the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (Indiana University--http://www.indiana.edu/ cseq/), the Penn State Pulse Polls, the Astin American College Freshmen Surveys, and others.
5) *Model the QEP assessment process after the UNI Program Review process*. This would make it routinized, provide for both internal and external review, and offer real uses and consequences for curricular and extra-curricular activities.
6) *Develop student self-assessment via portfolios*. Students must not be viewed as passive data sources. While faculty concentrate on the macro and aggregate levels of promoting the QEP qualities, students should be active monitors and seekers of the qualities at the individual level. Student portfolios organized around the QEP qualities would facilitate these goals, and would give students a more direct stake in the attainment of those qualities and the programs that lead to their development.

Reference

Astin, A. W. (1991). *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education.* New York: Macmillan.