

## Strategic Priorities

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### OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

#### ***Priority 1. Institutional Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes.***

In order to extend the progress UNL has made in programmatic assessment of student learning, a necessary future priority is to further integrate assessment of student learning into the heart of the process through which the institution does business. An expectation of the HLC/NCA accrediting body is that assessment is more likely to lead to improvement of learning when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment of student learning outcomes at UNL is not uncommon; however, assessments primarily tend to occur at the course level rather than at broader program and unit levels. Assessing learning at the program, college and institutional level is needed to generate the kinds of conversations among faculty that can lead to a deeper, more collective understanding about student learning and allow us to make better decisions about how academic and co-curricular programs should be changed to improve that learning. Therefore, we see opportunities for extending how assessment is integrated into current processes at both the college and institutional level at UNL.

At the college level, a better mechanism is needed for increasing the sharing and discussion of assessment practices. To this point, UNL has not had a fully effective means for this sharing and discussion. Although there is a university-wide assessment advisory group, their role has been more policy-oriented. In addition, the OUS website provides examples of “best practices” for assessing student learning outcomes, but the application of those practices is inconsistent and unsupported. A solution is a pilot being conducted by the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and Education and Human Sciences, in cooperation with OUS and with the support of the SVCAA, of a system developed at Colorado State University for program planning and improvement. This system has academic programs specify annually a plan for assessing student learning then supports the plans through feedback by peer faculty reviewers and an the expectation that programs will follow up on their plans by sharing the results of the process with the same peer group. This effort could make a particularly significant contribution to assessment of student learning, at UNL because it requires college leadership and makes assessment a more active, ongoing and widely shared activity among faculty. Dr. Jonson has been working closely with project leaders from both colleges, and we anticipate results and evaluation from the pilot operation to be available to the UNL community by Spring 2006.

UNL was one of 50 (145 applicants) post-secondary institutions selected to participate in the College Learning Assessment 4-Year Longitudinal Survey beginning AY 2005-06 and ending in AY 2009-10. 300 entering first-year students will be assessed each Fall on their critical thinking, analytical and writing abilities, and then again in the spring of their senior year to determine what improvements have taken place over the course of their UNL experience. UNL will recruit its sample of 300 students from the Chancellor’s Leadership Class, Pepsi Scholars, Learning

Communities and NU Connections. Pending approval, testing will take place during October – November 2005. In Spring 2006, 100 UNL seniors will be recruited to take a similar assessment in order to establish an institutional benchmark score at the senior level. For the purposes of the CLA study, UNL has been classified as one of eight ‘national’ universities. UNL will receive its institutional scores as well as the scores from the other seven ‘national’ universities for comparison purposes, as well as consultation from the College Aid to Education Association.

**Relation to core values.**

At the institutional level, increasing the visibility and importance of assessing student learning could occur by insuring that programmatic assessment efforts are part of the new Academic Program Review guidelines and UNL’s Strategic Planning process, particularly when considering teaching and the curriculum. The initiation of the Strategic Planning process and the planned revision of the Academic Program Review guidelines make this an ideal time to meaningfully incorporate expectations for assessment of student learning into institutional planning and review processes so that as an institution we have a better understanding of how our academic programs impact the student learning experience.

UNL will receive institutional feedback on student performance of the CLA longitudinal study as well as institutional data of student performance from comparable peer institutions. Information from this study will be particularly useful as we continue to envision the UNL learning environment, and formulate a new general education curriculum based on desired student learning outcomes.

**Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals.**

Dr. Jonson will continue to work directly with academic units on inclusion of assessment of student learning outcomes in planning and review processes, as well as serve as consultant to the UNL NCA Accreditation team and to the CASNR-EHS on-line assessment project.

OUS will administer the CLA and reallocate funding from state and POE funds to support a graduate student to assist with the administration of the CLA and provide support to Dr. Jonson for her expanding responsibilities. Although the Chancellor has agreed to provide funding for costs involved the CLA study over the next four years, OUS will try to manage costs with its own resources.

**Actions required by others to achieve priority goal:**

The incorporation of assessment into the revision of Academic Program Review guidelines and Strategic Planning are critical for determining how outcomes assessment will be handled at UNL in the future. In addition, the continued support of the senior administration, deans and department heads/chairs is also essential, particularly in light of the 2006-07 HCL/NCA accreditation visit.

**Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success:**

An evaluation of the CASNR-CEHS pilot of the on-line assessment system will be available in Spring 2006 and should provide us with solid information as to how assessment could continue to be effectively incorporated into on-going institutional practices.

## ***Priority 2: Division of General Studies.***

The Division of General Studies (DGS) serves as the advising center for students who have yet to declare a major or qualify for acceptance into an academic program. This division has provided a variety of academic services to students since its inception in 1987. The Division of General Studies Director and staff have also been responsible for developing and overseeing two very successful university programs, NUSTART and Supplemental Instruction. The Director has also been instrumental in the success of the UNL Learning Communities, serving as the college contact for planning for the co-enrollment of the LC students in first year classes.

The issue has been raised as to whether or not UNL should offer a Bachelor's degree in General Studies for those students who cannot decide on a major, are not eligible for admissions to the college of their choice, or who want to develop their own program of studies. Merely moving students into a college of General Studies could be viewed as a default mechanism that serves no academic purpose. The OUS priority is for the Division of General Studies to remain as the home of undeclared students; however, there needs to be an institutional limit on the number of hours students may take before they are forced to declare a major. The 2004 Transitions to University Task Force Report (TUFT) noted the growing numbers of students with accumulated hours equivalent to junior and senior standing in General Studies (18% of 2200 General Studies Students) and a recommendation was made in the report to force students to select an academic major once they have completed 60 hours of coursework. As noted in the TUFT report, perhaps it is time to change the name of the Division of General Studies to reflect its very important mission of advising undeclared majors.

At the same time, OUS will work with the Office of Admissions to increase visibility of the Division of General Studies (DGS) as a viable temporary option for prospective students who are not sure about what they would like to major in at UNL. This in itself, is an important recruitment mechanism for attracting undecided students. The quality of advising and individual student support offered by DGS staff is unsurpassed at UNL, and this has been confirmed through numerous national and campus recognitions awarded the DGS Director and advising staff.

A second priority action is for the Dean of OUS, in conjunction with the SVCAA, to begin to explore general four-year degree programs offered at other research universities. There are general degree programs at other universities that are innovative, intellectually rich and serve the needs of a group of students who may not have a specific disciplinary interest. Consideration of such a degree program requires prudent conversation with and buy-in from academic and student-support services across the UNL campus.

### **Relation to core values.**

Because of the excellent level of advising by DGS staff, students continue to use DGS advising services even after they have declared an academic major. The DGS Director and advisors have received national and campus recognition for the quality of their program, exemplifying the kind of contributions members of the UNL community make to support of a learner-centered environment.

An academically challenging, yet fairly open degree program would be an example of a learner-centered program designed to help those students who have accumulated credit hours that do not count towards any degree program and right now are “lost in the system.”

**Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals.**

1. The Division of General Studies will continue to serve its function of providing advising support to undeclared majors. During Fall semester 2005, DGS will contact General Studies students who have accumulated more than 60 hours of credit hours to date and ask their reasons for not declaring a major.
2. Special efforts will be made by OUS work with the Offices of Admissions and University Communications to make sure that DGS is presented to incoming students and parents as a viable, yet temporary ‘home’ until the student has declared the major.
3. Rita Kean will explore four-year general-degree programs at peer institutions and in collaboration with the Assoc VP for Extended Education and Outreach Arnold Bateman, and provide a report to the SVCAA by January 2006.

**Actions required by others to achieve priority goal.**

It is important for discussions to take place among the Senior Administration Team, the Dean’s Council and the Office of Admissions as to:

1. a name change for the Division of General Studies
2. the impact of a change in existing policy that would require UNL undergraduates to declare a major in an academic college by the time they have accumulated 60 credit hours (in 1988, the Dean’s Council voted against such a policy)
3. the positives and negatives for UNL offering a four-year general-degree program.

**Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success.**

Changes to the existing General Studies program, that is a name change and a time limit on how long one can remain as an undeclared student at UNL, need to be addressed during the 2005-06 academic year . Exploration and discussions surrounding implementation of a four-year general-degree program must be handled very carefully over the next few years so as not to diminish the academic importance of such a program to our students and university.

***Priority 3: Academic Support.***

Through its reporting units, OUS faculty and staff are responsible for the coordination, administration and assessment of a number of orientation and support programs (NUSTART, SIPS, Mid -Semester Check, NUPATH, NU CONNECTIONS, STAC, Supplemental Instruction, University Teaching Assistance Corps, and the STAR Advising Center in Sandoz Residence Hall). Our two major priorities under Academic Support are:

1. to provide more coordinated, coherent academic-support services that are permanently funded for all students with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of transfer and non-traditional students, out-of-state students, minority students, first-generation students and low-income students.
2. to build upon an already highly successful program, Supplemental Instruction, increasing the engagement between the sponsoring faculty member and the SI student mentor.

We will assess the effectiveness of each of these programs in relation to its distinctive mission; yet, at the same time we will look for opportunities to combine expertise and resources to better serve our students.

#### **Relationship to core values:**

- Our goal in OUS is that all UNL students have access to the support they need to be successful, graduate, become lifelong learners and supporters of our university. Reliable, quality academic student support encourages and challenges students to seek new knowledge and experiences, and prepares students for life through helping them form good work habits and learn how to achieve goals that make them successful. The recent Regental resolution to support legislation to allow children of illegal immigrants to attend UNL and pay in-state tuition reaffirms UNL's core value of providing access to higher education to all qualified members of the broader community. These students will make a significant contribution to our core value of creating a learning environment that values diversity of ideas and people; however, this will also necessitate the need for campus-wide support to provide these students with a learner-centered education.
- Programs such as UTAC foster engagement between student and faculty mentor about the learning environment, thus gaining an understanding of how research and creative work are used as the foundation for teaching and engagement.

#### **Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals:**

**1. Office of Academic Support and Intercultural Programs (OASIS).** A major priority is to hire a permanent Director for the Office of Academic Services and Intercultural Support. Discussion about the future directions and responsibilities of the OASIS program was initiated in June 2005 with the SVCAA and the VC Student Affairs and the OASIS staff. Currently, the salary for OASIS Director is funded through the Nebraska Unions. The funding for the Program Coordinators and staff is through OUS state funding.

In order for the OASIS unit to establish its campus role as a visible and active partner with academic units, there are issues to be addressed. The primary issues are establishing permanent financial support for programs, central coordination and fusion of program responsibilities with other programs serving minority, first-generation and low-income students, evaluation of program effectiveness and providing adequate space for program delivery. The OASIS staff and its programs are working well; however, with new leadership, clarification of the roles and expectations of the Program Director and Coordinators is necessary in order to provide effective performance measures for both the Program and the Coordinators.

NU Connections, SIPS, NUPATH. Funding for programs comes from a variety of sources, some permanent, some not. The issue is as expenses increase, the funding for these programs remains static and in some cases, the continued source of the funding is questionable. This is of particular concern regarding SIPS, NUPATH and NU Connections, which primarily serve first-year minority, low-income and first-generation students.

The Office of Admissions has been very effective in attracting diverse students from both in-state and out-of-state. Institutional commitment needs to be reflected in permanent funding for academic support for students once they arrive on campus. An agreement was made two years ago with the Admissions Office that when minority students were offered certain scholarships, they would participate in the NU Connections program for a two-year period. NU Connections is a program whose purpose is to provide students with a family of mentors, thus providing connections to different parts of campus life. NU Connections Student Mentors, under the guidance of two graduate assistants and the responsible Program Coordinator, Cameya Ramirez, provide academic support to students four evenings per week so as to improve the first and second-year retention rates. Of the 52 students who completed NU Connections during AY 2003-04, 46 students received a GPA of 2.0 or better (25% received a GPA of 3.0 or better) and 41 are still enrolled at UNL. The retention rate for NU Connections students is 78% as compared to 73% for minority students.

NU Connections has been funded through \$50,000.00 in diversity funds from the Office of Equity, Access & Diversity and, in September 2004, when the OASIS programs were transferred to OUS, the diversity funding was also permanently transferred to OUS. Partial support for the graduate student who assists with the SIPS and NUPATH programs and expenses for NUPATH also come out of these funds. The number of NU Connections students doubled to 80 students during AY 2004-05. We project with the increase in minority student scholarship recipients and its move to a two-year program, that NU Connections will serve over 200 students during the AY 2005-06 at a projected cost of \$80,000.00.

The \$86,000 in yearly funding to support the SIPS program has been permanently transferred from the University Book Scholarship Fund to OUS; however, unless there are state appropriations for increases in operating expenses, these funds will remain static. The operational expenses for SIPS have risen to the point that we will have to either obtain additional funds or cut back on the numbers of students served.

### **Specific Internal Actions.**

Working as a unit over the next year, the OUS faculty and staff will examine how we can more efficiently and coherently offer academic support throughout the student's UNL experience. However, to meet immediate needs and continue to offer these effective programs as well as the other programs OUS is responsible for, the following internal actions are proposed:

1. Review and assess the role of the OASIS program Director, establish a clear set of responsibilities and expectations and move towards permanently filling the Director position. Currently, the Director's salary is funded through the Nebraska Union. State funding transferred

to OUS in 2004 covers salary and benefits; there are no operating dollars through Academic Affairs to support OASIS programs.

2. With the addition of a new OASIS Director and as the numbers of students who participate in OASIS programs increases, we need to re-evaluate and clarify the roles and expectations of the Program Coordinators in relation to programming responsibilities and needs.

3. In AY 2003-04, the decision was made to close the University Foundations program as of May 30, 2005. This program was supported by state funds totaling \$65,000.00. As of July 2005, these funds were permanently moved into OUS operational funding to provide additional support for NU Connections, SIPS and other OUS student programs.

4. Space for the NU Connections students is also an issue. They have outgrown the space currently allocated to them in the Nebraska Union. We are currently looking for space to house the numbers of students projected to participate in NU Connections.

**2. Supplemental Instruction/ UTAC.** In 1991, the Director of DGS assumed responsibility for the operation of the UNL Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, a nationally acclaimed program designed to enhance students' study skills, and in turn, their classroom performance. Students who have received a grade of A in large, general-education courses, are competitively selected, trained in SI methodology, regularly attend their SI assigned class and hold regular study sessions with students. Since 1991, over 11,000 UNL students have participated in Supplemental Instruction. The average grade point for those participating in SI ranges from .5 point to 1.0 point higher than those students in the same class who did not participate in SI.

During AY 2004-05, a parallel program to SI, the University Teaching Assistance Corps (UTAC) was successfully piloted. The purpose of this program is to provide SI trained peer mentors, yet require much more engagement between the faculty member teaching the course and the student peer mentor. The faculty mentor agrees to serve as a mentor to the student, similar to the UCARE faculty role. Faculty response to the UTAC program is best illustrated by a faculty member who wrote,

“Having also worked with the successful Supplemental Instruction (SI) plan I wanted to write this memo to you to encourage the continuation and expansion of the UTAC model. First, meeting once per week with the UTAC student leader not only provided direct connections for the leaders to our goals and plans, we instructors additionally gained input from the student leaders. At our weekly meetings we could ask our UTAC leaders what students seemed most confused by; or, which topics received the most questions; or, since the leaders were veterans of the course, what comments about the actual lecture would they like to make. In turn, the UTAC leaders could see the “behind the scenes” planning and how our specific daily plans for each lecture were sequenced and connected. This gave them insight as what to emphasize in their sessions and at what point would be most effective to introduce certain concepts.”

Specific actions are:

1. Continue to support the SI and UTAC program using the combined POE funds (\$100,000) and VCBF funds (30,000).
2. In Spring 2005, faculty who participated in SI have been notified of the success of the UTAC pilot year and given the choice of participating in either the UTAC or SI programs for AY 2005-06.
2. Formally assess both the SI & UTAC with the goal of replacing the SI program with the UTAC model by AY 2008-09.

### **Actions required by others to achieve priority Goal 3.**

OASIS. Discussions need to be held regarding the funding sources for the OASIS director and operating dollars to support basic programs. We also need space to accommodate an additional 50 students per evening.

### **Specify timeline to achieve goal 3 and measure success**

1. OASIS. The plan is to have the OASIS Director's position filled by fall 2005, as well as an agreed-upon set of performance measures for evaluation of the Program Coordinators.
  - OUS will finish its assessment of its academic support programs by the end of AY2005-06. Success will be measured by the development of a plan that accounts for the increasing demand for programs by students and meshes expertise across programs.
2. UTAC. The UTAC model will replace the SI model by AY 2008-09. Success will be measured through assessment of faculty and students involved in the program delivery and through keeping records of student grades in the SI/UTAC sessions.
  - Retention and graduation rates for students involved in all its academic support programs will be monitored and we expect to see an increase in retention rates for program participants of 5-10% by 2008-09. Increased satisfaction with the undergraduate experience will be reflected over the next five to six years as seen in the results of UNL's bi-ennial participation of National Survey of Student Engagement.
  - Finally, our benchmark results of these academic support programs should reflect the commitment and talent of a diverse group of faculty and staff all working towards the same goal of helping our students succeed, graduate from UNL and be productive, contributing members of our society.

### **Priority 4: Learning Communities.**

Learning Communities (LCs) are small groups of first-year students who share similar intellectual interests, are co-enrolled in 2-3 classes, and are guided by a mentor from the sponsoring academic unit. In existence since 1999, LC's have been well received by incoming students and academic units. The Division of Housing has been a very supportive collaborator over the years, often funding LC co-curricular activities and renovating space to fit needs. Our analysis of LC respondents from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement validated that

the actual benchmark scores for enriching educational experiences was equal to what is predicted for an institution like UNL. For senior responses, the actual benchmark score for enriching educational experiences was higher than what is predicted for an institution like UNL.

Over the past five years, academic units have had to shift learning community responsibilities from faculty to staff or graduate students due to budgetary reductions and turnover in faculty. Housing has also had to eliminate extra funding support due to budget cuts and declining revenue. In some colleges, LC sponsorship is viewed as part of a faculty member's appointment; in others, faculty are provided a stipend and yet, in most instances, faculty or staff work with LC students on an overload basis. The strength of the LC's that have sustained and grown is the intentionality and quality of faculty interaction with the students. Therefore, our first goal is to continue with our assessment of existing learning communities and provide support to academic units who sponsor them. Currently, we are working closely with academic units on the development of three new first-year learning communities in the academic units of Environmental Studies, Spanish, and Criminal Justice.

Our in-depth assessment of LC's through focus groups, analyses of retention data and the NSSE data indicate that LC's are accomplishing their purpose of helping students transition to college. However, we believe it is time to move to the next level with the LC concept; that is, LC's should offer students a community characterized by experiences designed to build upon and enhance their intellectual and academic experiences. Our second goal is the development of "second generation" learning communities that create and maintain the overall goals of academic engagement and adjustment to campus while broadening the populations served. In fall 2005, we will inaugurate a first-year scholars community based on the E.N. Thompson Forum on World Issues. This LC will be composed of high ability students who have an interest in global issues. Another second-year learning community will be established in Psychology devoted to students who show promise as researchers. The recently established Jones Scholars LC reflects the successful efforts of a group of faculty and staff that have provided leadership to a diverse group of entering first-year students from various academic units who have elected to join a LC that "promotes academics, leadership and community."

### **Relation to core values.**

Learning communities provide first -year students the opportunity to first observe, and then become legitimate participants in the learning environment. Through carefully designed initial interactions, coupled with adequate support, the student grows in stature and capacity from passive recipient to an actively engaged learner. Lessons of community, cooperation and responsibility form the foundation for learning through interaction. Our core values challenge us to serve every member of the university community. It is time to begin developing robust LC structures that accommodate learners beyond the first year and for those living in residence halls. All these reasons are consistent with our commitment to excellence.

### **Internal Actions and Resources.**

1. The Academic Learning Communities Coordinator (ALCC), Dr. Deb Mullen will meet with the academic sponsors of each community to determine level of departmental support,

desire for continued involvement, level of resources available to support program. She will review the NSSE data and GPA data for community with each sponsor to determine student progress.

2. As of AY 2005-06, we have established the OUS Learning Community Advisory Board, chaired by the ALCC, to serve as resource concerning issues involving Learning Communities.
3. Faculty and staff in the Department of Modern Languages, Environmental Studies and Criminal Justice programs have agreed to support their communities which will be funded through the program fee. The second-year Psychology community will be funded through a corporate sponsor. The team of Deb Mullen, Linda Major, Patrice Berger and Patrice McMahon received an ITLE grant for development and initial funding of the EN Thompson Scholars. There are 19 EN Thompson Scholars in the AY 2005-06.
4. An annual report on UNL Learning Communities will be shared with administrators, sponsoring academic units and other stakeholders through posting on OUS website each August.

**Actions required by others:**

1. Consultation with Dr. Jonson, university-wide assessment coordinator, regarding NSSE and other appropriate assessment techniques
2. Active participation by LC faculty from each sponsoring unit on the Learning Communities Advisory Board.

**Timeline to achieve goal and measurement of success.**

1. The ALCC will meet with each academic sponsor prior to the close of the Spring 2005 semester. During June she will review GPA's by community. The NSSE data has already been reviewed
2. The Learning Community Advisory Board will be created at the beginning of the Fall 2005 semester. Members will be selected from each of the colleges and selected departments of Student Affairs.
3. A mid-year report will be submitted to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies no later than January 30, 2006. The report will consist of first to second semester retention data, first-semester GPA's by community, a summary of activities by community, survey data focusing on academic student experiences in the learning communities.

**Additional measures of success**

1. In the years when the NSSE is administered, the learning communities will be sampled to provide additional data.
2. GPA and retention data will be tracked throughout the students' careers.
3. Each spring, focus groups will be conducted with each group of learning community students to determine how living in the community affected their UNL student experience, with particular emphasis on the academic dimension.

### ***Priority 5: NU Honors Program.***

The goal is to provide curricular support for the Program by increasing the 1) number of special seminars funded by the Programs instructional budget and 2) honors courses offered by academic departments. The Honors program has experienced a 10% increase from AY 2004-05. The 2005-06 AY entering class is the highest ever, 549 students. Ten percent of the entering class are students of color. We must plan for the growth in the number of students in the NU Honors Program that will continue in the future and to provide those students with the academic opportunities promised them.

#### **Relationship to core values:**

The Honors experience at UNL is a combination of a rich academic experience, close professional relationships between students and faculty, opportunities for mentored research, and participation in a culture of academic excellence. The multi-talented students in the Program embrace the challenging academic experience provided by faculty who develop a rigorous intellectual environment in a variety of venues. It is the exchange of ideas, the confrontation of conflicting interpretations, the encouragement to view issues from a variety of perspectives, which are the distinctive characteristics of the Honors culture on our campus. It is the engagement in scholarly exploration undertaken by student-faculty partners that yield exceptional results attested too by our students' sophisticated research achievements. Throughout the Honors experience, students and faculty model active learning made possible by their close working relationship in class and in research that builds on the talent and energy they bring to their work. The remarkable success of our students in competing successfully for prestigious scholarships further attests to their commitment to academic excellence, their investment in academic research, and their eagerness to develop the strongest credentials for future success.

#### **Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals.**

From 1997 to 2004, the entering class in the NU Honors program has grown by 22% and the graduation rate of Honors students has increased to over 60%. The population of first-year Honors students of color for AY 2004-05 is 9%, which is very close to our goal of 10% representation of first-year Honors students of color. In 1998, the Honors Program increased its program requirements raising the number of Honors hours required for graduation from 18 to 24 hours and strong encouragement to complete a research /creative project by the creation of the UCARE program. More than 50% of students eligible for graduation complete all Program requirements. The majority of Honors seminars (189H and 395H) and departmental-sponsored honors courses are offered at the lower-division level. During AY 2004-05, 20 of the 189H seminars (limited to 20 students), 19 of the 395H seminar (limited to 15 students) and 42 sections of "H" designated academic courses were offered. Honors Program students are found in all academic colleges (see OUS Enrollment Management Template), with the greatest representation in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences (A&S), Business Administration, and Engineering and Technology. A&S offers the most extensive array of Honors courses at the lower-division level through its general-education courses and the extensive Math Honors sequence. Excluding the 395H seminars, 85% of the Honors classes offered in A&S in 2004-05

academic year were lower division courses. The majority of Honors classes offered at the lower division level were offered by three departments in A&S.

The dearth of Honors opportunities at all levels while we continue to require students to complete a stated number of Honors credits each year has led to the proliferation of the “contract” Honors scheme to which Program students have access. During AY 2003-04, 761 honors “contracts” were completed. The contract was conceived to allow students and faculty with focused interests to work together on an issue and to allow students to fulfill requirements in areas that may not have sufficient numbers of Honors students to justify separate classes or seminars. Students are allowed to “contract” for Honors credit in any academic course with the instructor’s permission. The numbers of Honors “contracts” has increased considerably and while the “contract” is a convenient way to address Honors requirements, it diminishes the value of a dedicated Honors class in which a number of students will engage the subject matter and participate actively in class discussions. At the same time, the contracts, by their very number, place a burden on faculty which has led to more frequent refusals on their part to participate in this manner. There is an increasing need to offer additional Honors program seminars (395H) and courses by academic units at the upper division level.

### **Specific Actions**

1. We have already begun to address the issue and within two years, we hope to have expanded Honors Program offerings and participation by academic departments. The Senior Administration has already demonstrated their support and commitment to the needs of the Honors Program through awarding of Program of Excellence funds to expand its curriculum offerings. Dr. Patrice Berger, Director of the Honors Program and Rita Kean will continue to meet with targeted department chairs, discussing with them the importance and benefits to the department of offering discipline based honors courses. The goal is to identify courses in each college that most students are likely to take and create Honors sections, or at the very least, specific Honors opportunities in those classes.
2. The Program remains committed to broadening opportunities for undergraduate research. In particular, the Program is exploring a suitable format for offering students the option to complete Honors thesis requirements through a research service learning experience beginning in Fall 2005.

### **Actions required by others to achieve priority goal.**

The disciplinary distribution of freshman class of 2004 documented in the OUS Enrollment Management Template strongly supports the need for all colleges to provide honors opportunities in addition to the general education courses offered by the College of Arts and Sciences.

### **Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success.**

The measures of success are easy to establish: a richer Honors curriculum in Program seminars and in college/departmental offerings; more students completing all Program requirements,

including the research project; fewer students having recourse to the contract option. Our target goals are:

AY 2005-06

- increase of 15% in 189H offerings
- increase of 25% in 395H offerings

AY 2006-07

- additional increase of 15% in 395H offerings
- increase of 25% in targeted Department based “H” courses, particularly where there is greatest demand such as Engineering and departments participating in pre-health disciplines, Education and Human Sciences and additional departments in Arts and Sciences.

### ***Priority 6A. and 6B. Undergraduate Research & Fellowships.***

#### ***A. Undergraduate Research.***

Sustain funding to support the UCARE program. Since its inception in the AY 2000, over 1000 students have gone through UNL’s undergraduate research program, UCARE. Close to 400 faculty members and over 69 different departments/academic units or areas (including the University Libraries and the State Museum) have been involved. UCARE is funded through the Pepsi Quasi Endowment Fund (\$400,000.00 per year) and Program of Excellence (POE) Funds (\$200,000 per year). There is no guarantee that the same funding will be allocated yearly by the Pepsi Quasi Endowment Fund Committee. The Pepsi contract is to be renegotiated in 2009. POE funds have allowed more students and faculty to participate in the program. In AY2004-05 close to 350 student projects were funded. The demand for UCARE funding remains high; this last application round yielded close to 400 applications, 70 more than were submitted last year at this time. Formal assessment of this program through focus groups and the National Survey of Student Engagement has confirmed an increased level of faculty- student engagement, excitement among students about first - hand involvement in the generation, application and evaluation of new knowledge, and for many students the experience has provided them professional direction. Seniors with the UCARE experience responding to the NSSE survey reported interacting more frequently with faculty than their peers on several survey items. These activities include working on research or on committees with faculty members outside a course and talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.

The program has been successful because of the strong support from UNL administration, faculty and students. The UCARE program was cited as an innovative program that defines UNL’s commitment to excellence in undergraduate education in the 2002 AAC&U Panel Report, Greater Expectations: A Nation Goes to College. UCARE has gained further national attention through presentations at AAHE, AAC&U, NCUR, and the Reinvention Center meetings. These presentations have given prominence to UNL’s commitment of resources to support

undergraduate research. The Director of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships has been contacted by the University of Missouri-Columbia and University of South Carolina, both of which are interested in modeling the UCARE program at their respective universities. Most importantly, UCARE has stimulated research and creative activities among UNL's undergraduates, serving a number of different objectives. Since 2003, over 90% of undergraduates who have been nominated for prestigious national awards have had UCARE experiences.

UCARE contributes to student and faculty recruitment and retention. It has given students the kind of research experiences that will be critical to them as they further their education in graduate and professional school. It serves both as a powerful recruitment tool for high-ability students investigating what UNL has to offer, and as a significant retention tool for those students who are still undecided about their educational path, allowing them an opportunity for career exploration. Students present their research projects at the annual Undergraduate Research Fair or other appropriate venues. Many UCARE faculty and students collaborate on presenting results of their project at professional meetings or through publication in peer reviewed journals.

UCARE also meets the interests and needs of faculty. UCARE faculty, fairly new to UNL and on tenure track, have told us in focus groups conducted with them that they would not be able to proceed with their scholarship at the same rate without assistance from their UCARE students.

#### **Relation to core values.**

The UCARE program serves to integrate the tripartite mission of the university in a learning environment that joins together students and faculty through active scholarly mentoring relationships. UCARE has the capacity to not only assist with faculty research, but also to create opportunities for student research, thus enhancing and enriching their undergraduate experiences. UCARE also addresses the core value, "preparing student for life through learner-centered education." This career exploration aspect of UCARE has been a key issue for students - How do they know what they want to do in life, until they do it? The program allows students the opportunity to gain experience in the area that they intend to pursue in graduate or professional school.

#### **Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals.**

OUS will continue to allocate \$200,000 (38%) of its yearly POE funds to support the UCARE program. The Director of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships and OUS staff will continue to work closely with students and faculty throughout the year to monitor expenditures, and Dr. Damuth will continue to assess program effectiveness each year in collaboration with the University Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Jessica Jonson.

#### **Actions required by others to achieve priority goal.**

It is extremely important that a multi-year commitment of funds from either the Pepsi Quasi Endowment Fund or a permanent source of funding be identified to continue to sustain and grow this important program.

**Timeline to achieve goal and measure success.**

As the demand for UCARE increases, we should experience continued increases in Institutional Quality Indicators, such as undergraduate participation in a research experience, the number of prestigious national awards received by both undergraduate and graduate students, and if faculty are correct regarding their experiences working with the UCARE students, an increase in the outcomes of faculty members' scholarship.

***B. Priority: Undergraduate Fellowships and Awards.***

The OUS will continue to increase the visibility of the centralized campus effort to coordinate and prepare undergraduate students for nationally competitive fellowships and awards and provide needed staff assistance to the Fellowship Advisor through reallocation of funds from the defunct University Foundations program.

**Relation to core values.**

National recognition of UNL undergraduate achievements contributes to the reputation of the University as an institution that values research and creative work as a foundation for teaching and engagement, values diversity of ideas and people, and prepares students for life through learner-centered education and engagement with the academic, business and civic communities. Many persons are involved in the preparation of the student and the student's materials for submission, thus, providing opportunity for a variety of persons to make meaningful contributions to our core values.

**Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals.**

The Director of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships, Dr. Laura Damuth, assumed the additional role of Fellowship Advisor in AY 2002 -03 and is responsible for mentoring, advising and helping selected students prepare for submission of their materials for the Churchill, Fulbright (both undergraduate and graduate students), Gates-Cambridge, Goldwater, Javits, Jack Kent Cooke, James Madison, Marshall, Mellon, Mitchell, Rhodes, Truman, and Udall awards. During AY 04-05, she met with over 70 students interested in applying for these awards and assisted 30+ students with applications. Helping students to prepare submissions, coordinating and holding mock interview and follow up sessions is labor intensive, usually requiring anywhere from 10-35 hours of advisor-student interaction per application (depending on the scholarship). Many of these awards require coordination with other offices on campus, such as International Affairs and Graduate Studies. In addition, Dr. Damuth developed and is currently teaching two 198H seminar courses, Introduction to Scholarships and Scholarship Works. Dr. Damuth is active in the National Association of Fellowship Advisors (NAFA) and serves on the planning committee. Plans are underway for UNL to host the NAFA regional conference in July 2006. She was recently invited by the Institute of International Education to serve on the national panel reviewing applicants for the Boren Scholarship.

**Specific Actions are to:**

1. As of AY 05-06, reallocate funds to provide Graduate Assistant support to Dr. Damuth with her expanding duties as Director of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships.

2. Contact those students who have been accepted by the Honors Program with information about fellowship and awards opportunities and more importantly, how Dr. Damuth can assist them through the 198H seminar and one-to-one mentoring.

Identify actions required by others to achieve priority goal. We are working with Admissions to not only target students already admitted into the Honors Program, but we are sending out letters to students who are honors-eligible, in hopes that learning about the kind of scholarship advising that goes on at UNL will encourage them to apply to UNL. (So we are not just contacting students accepted, but in fact, are contacting students in the region who are eligible for the Honors Program to encourage them to apply and to come.)

Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success. Our goal is to continue to increase our numbers of applications by 10% per year through AY08-09, thereby increasing our chances of having scholarship recipients

***Priority 7: Transfer articulation and advising.***

Transfer students are a significantly increasing proportion of the UNL undergraduate student population. During AY2003-2004, 28.5% of all new students entering the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were transfer students. The Academic Transfer Coordinator is charged with providing programming and services for transfer students and maintaining transfer course equivalency evaluations for courses originating outside the University of Nebraska system. Due to budget cuts, the Office of Admissions transferred responsibility for articulation agreements with all institutions (local, regional, national and international) to OUS in August 2003 with no additional funding support. Through reallocation of POE funds, the Dean of OUS increased the Transfer Coordinators position from .50 FTE to .60 FTE for purposes of handling the course articulation agreements; however, there is a limit to what can be accomplished. The first goal under this priority is to increase the current .60 FTE Academic Transfer Coordinator position to 1.0 FTE. This will insure proper oversight, maintenance and expansion of the course equivalency tables.

The Transfer Coordinator has already updated a portion of the transfer course equivalencies UNL currently has established with 37 domestic and 19 international institutions. Many of these course equivalencies had not been reviewed in over ten years. Since August 2003, close to 1,000 courses have been evaluated. Between June 1 and December 31, 2004 there were 50 Nebraska Community college course evaluations completed. During that six months a total of 279 course evaluations were finalized. An additional 40 course evaluations are pending. The Transfer Coordinator dedicated at least one hour of time toward completion of each course evaluation.

These equivalencies must be actively maintained. They need to be reviewed on a rotating basis at least every 3-5 years, beginning with our top feeder schools and expanding to institutions in the region where we expect to recruit students. The top few feeder schools are easily identifiable. We receive more students from SCC-Lincoln than any other institution. Of the 832 new transfer students enrolled in the Fall of 2004 eighteen per cent came from SCC-Lincoln. Over half of all

transfer students came from eight Nebraska colleges, listed here with the number of students: SCC-Lincoln (150), UNO (70), Central Community College (59), Metropolitan Community College (47), Northeast Community College (39), SCC-Beatrice (38), UNK (32), and Nebraska Wesleyan (24).

A second goal is to establish an on-line course equivalency table for prospective students interested in transferring to UNL. Up-to-date transfer equivalency becomes both a recruiting and retention tool. As consumer oriented students transfer to UNL, their biggest concern is how credits will transfer. Many students attend a community college with the intent to transfer to UNL and that number is expected to rise. One of the most important recruiting tools is an electronic course equivalency table such as the University of Miami-Ohio's Course Applicability System (CAS), available through a license or subscription fee. The cost of the license is based on student headcount (\$1.15 per student up to 15,000, then \$1.00 per student following. Or, the CAS system license can be subscribed to for \$7500 per year. The CAS system interfaces with the UNL Darwin Audit Degree System (DARS). Expanded, updated course equivalencies can bring more students to UNL. This will be extremely important as UNL offers more undergraduate courses through EEO and attracts students currently enrolled at other universities.

The third goal for serving transfer students is to hire a professional advisor in the Division of General Studies who would serve prospective students one day a week at Southeast Community College – Lincoln, Southeast Community College – Beatrice and Metropolitan Community College – Omaha. OASIS has requested professional advising assistance from DGS. This individual could spend the equivalent of one day per week at OASIS to meet with students who need academic advising and the other day would be spent in the Division of General Studies at UNL, helping to alleviate the amount of advising done by the DGS for all students from all colleges.

#### **Relation to core values.**

If we truly are an institution that values its commitment to excellence, as well as value the diversity of ideas and people, we affirm those values whenever we deal with transfer students, as well as through the quality and relevance of our transfer articulation agreements with community colleges and other post secondary institutions.

#### **Internal Actions.**

1. As of July 1, 2005 the current .60 FTE Academic Transfer Coordinator position was increased to 1.0 FTE. The funding for the .40 FTE came from internal reallocation of University Foundations program funds.
2. An ambitious project to review and update the courses from community colleges in Nebraska has begun and plans are to have this project completed by fall 2005. The review of courses from other Nebraska colleges, and then out of state colleges will continue, prioritized by the number of students we recruit from each institution. In addition, all colleges will be contacted for copies of any 2 + 2 articulation agreements they currently have in place, as it makes sense for this documentation to be archived with the course equivalency documents, so that all transfer of credit information is centralized.

3. The DGS Director and three staff persons currently serve students from across campus on a walk-in advising basis and staffing the STAR Advising Center in Sandoz Residence Hall. In addition, they are providing oversight for Supplemental Instruction, UTAC and NUSTART programs. An advisor from General Studies will be at SCC one day per week (on a trial basis) during AY 05-06. This service would clearly send the message that UNL welcomes students from community colleges and provides assistance to them regarding specific coursework in academic majors even before they enroll at UNL.

**Actions required by others to achieve priority goal**

1. OUS recommends the University invest in an online credit evaluation system such as CAS for prospective transfer students.
2. DGS has agreed in cooperation with SCC, to assign an advisor on a ‘trial basis’ to be at SCC once a week to assist potential transfer students.

**Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success.**

We should see a marked increase in the numbers of evaluated and approved transfer courses within one year after increase the current position of the Transfer Coordinator to 1.00 FTE. An on-line system, such as CAS should be convenient and attractive to prospective transfer students who will learn that UNL is transfer “student–friendly.”

***Priority 8. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).***

The Assessment Coordinator, with assistance from OUS staff, will continue to manage UNL’s participation in the NSSE survey and the analysis of survey results. We have been through two rounds of the NSSE survey and in 2004, increased our base sample to accommodate academic units. Our next survey will be AY 2006-07.

**Relationship to core values.**

NSSE is one of the most effective tools for determining at an institutional level whether undergraduate education at UNL is learner-centered for these reasons:

1. NSSE is specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience. The instrument represents student behaviors that are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes associated with the college experience.
2. NSSE offers a tool for gathering in with a wide range of uses and provides an important occasion to re-frame our conversations about collegiate quality. Results are expected to be useful in improving undergraduate education. For example, the data are useful to UNL in gauging the degree to which we foster practices that improve performance consistent with characteristics and commitments. It has proven to be a useful to the work of university wide task forces and committees dealing with the undergraduate experiences and colleges have used it to examine their own undergraduate’s experiences.

**Internal actions and resources to reach priority goals:**

The university-wide Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Jessica Jonson, will continue to manage UNL's participation in the NSSE survey and analysis of results. Dr. Jonson holds a .75FTE of which 25% is dedicated to the NSSE project. OUS funds the initial \$1500 investment for obtaining the base sample and provides student worker assistance to helping Dr. Jonson prepare both institutional and unit based results.

**Actions required by others to achieve priority goal:**

1. Continued funding for UNL's participation in the NSSE survey. In 2002, the SVCAA made a commitment to provide funding (\$10,000) to OUS for UNL's continuing participation in the NSSE on an every three-year basis.
2. Encouragement by senior administration of campus-wide use of NSSE results to improve the undergraduate experience and expectations that academic units will use relevant survey data for planning and academic program review purposes.

**Specify timeline to achieve goal and measure success:**

We have been through two rounds of the NSSE survey and in 2004, increased our base sample to accommodate academic units. The 2006 administration will be important because it will allow the comparison of first-year students who responded in 2002 to their responses as seniors in 2006. To measure the contribution of the NSSE survey, will continue to document what was learned about UNL undergraduate experience from each set of results, construct comparative data bases and use the information from the NSSE results in our planning for more effective programming to support our students.