Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher

Report from the Transition to University Task Force
December 2003

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In 2000, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched their multi-year initiative, *Greater Expectations: The Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College*[1]. A major outcome of the AAC&U Initiative is the 2002 National Panel Report by the same name.[2] This document urges all persons—inside and outside of the academy—to reflect on the present undergraduate experience and formulate new ideas of what the learning environment should be in the 21st century.

As stated in the report, the new world economy is based on knowledge, creativity, and the ability to evaluate and integrate information from a variety of sources. The intellect, principles and skills necessary to address 21st century societal complexities requires a strong liberal education grounded in content, experience and reflection.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), both the *2020 Vision Report: The Future of Research and Graduate Education at UNL* (*Report)* and the 2003 *Report on Intellectual Engagement and Achievement at UNL* (*Blue Sky Report*) call for UNL to raise the overall intellectual engagement and achievement within the institution by 2020.

Common to both reports is the phrase ". . . a great university is characterized by an uncompromising pursuit of excellence in both good times and in difficult times."[3, 4] Although the focus of the *2020* Report was on research and graduate education, the report stressed that …… excellence in research and teaching are complementary. The skills required for strong research are very similar to those required for outstanding teaching . . . fundamentally, higher education involves developing essential research skills of critical thinking and creativity in our students, developing in them an understanding and appreciation for research."[5]

I. Transition to University Task Force: Purpose and Mission

The Transition to University Task Force was appointed in May 2003 by Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Richard Edwards to review and assess the effectiveness of first-year undergraduate orientation programs and courses. This review was to result in a proposed framework or plan for coordinating and supporting these separate programs.

As a foundation for its deliberations the Task Force was instructed to review several recent reports that address the present and future state of the university. These included: *A 20/20 Vision*, the *First Year Learning Task Force Report* (1999), the Blue Sky Committee Report (*Intellectual Engagement and Achievement at UNL),* the *UNL Institutional Indicators of Quality*, results from the 2002 *National Survey on Student Engagement* of first-year and senior UNL students, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers' "White Paper," and the Noel-Levitz Consultation Recruitment and Retention Recommendations. In addition, the Task Force further investigated the first-year experience by exploring other institution's first-year programs and through formal discussions with UNL students, faculty, and staff.

> "Task Force members believe all students entering UNL, whether in their first year of college or transfer students, would be best served by a core educational experience that orients them to UNL academically and socially."

Task Force members believe all students entering UNL, whether in their first year of college or transfer students, would be best served by a core educational experience that orients them to UNL academically and socially. Our major recommendations focus on a content-based, first-year core course, New Student Enrollment, and academic support and advising activities. The implementation of the recommendations must penetrate all levels of the institution to be successful. Also, their effectiveness must be measured by improvements in retention rates and the successful completion of a baccalaureate degree.

Finally, the Task Force believes it is time for all UNL entities to make a joint and sustaining commitment of talent and resources to achieve our vision of a UNL undergraduate education that is:

A thoughtful, innovative and meaningful integration of the university's research, scholarly and creative activity into the undergraduate experience to provide the most dynamic, futuristic, and passionate participatory learning environment for our students.

II. The Student Voice

In order to gain a better understanding of the undergraduate experience at UNL, the Task Force invited students to offer their perspective on their college experience, with particular attention focused on first-year students. Our interest coincided with a recommendation of the *Blue Sky Report* to conduct student focus groups.

A series of 12 focus groups was held with over 150 undergraduates during fall 2003.[6] Students were encouraged to speak openly about their early social and academic experiences at UNL. The students were asked questions relating to their transition from high school to the university, about their expectations of college prior to coming to UNL, and the kinds of experiences they have had or were having.

Some focus group outcomes did not surprise the Task Force, as many students related positive experiences, particularly when they had made personal connections with other students, staff and faculty through participation in the Learning Communities, NUSTART, Summer Institute for Promising Scholars (SIPS), the Culture Center, the Greek system, and organized activities

1. Orientation

- The *Blue Sky Report* emphasized *the disconnect* between New Student Enrollment (NSE) and student expectations of what the campus life is like. Our focus groups of students and discussions with faculty who work with first-year students confirmed this. New students have little recall of that information when they return to campus in August. NSE and advising resources designed to provide students with information that they need to be successful in college may not be fulfilling their goals.
- Many of the students of color were disappointed with the lack of diversity on campus. Students who had attended Red Letter Days and

NSE designed for students of color were rather rudely awakened to the scarcity of people of color on the UNL campus in contrast to the significant appearance of diversity they found during their pre-enrollment and orientation visits.

2. Advising

- Advising was a much-discussed issue in the student focus groups. All students voiced a need for someone at UNL to take a personal interest in them and help them convert vague aspirations into clear, but flexible goals. While several students spoke of positive experiences with advising, particularly where their advisor showed genuine interest in the student's academic program, others expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with their advising experiences, both at NSE and within the academic units.
- Our focus groups confirmed the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement results that tell us that although close to half of first-year and senior students use their college and departments as their primary advising source, the other half use the undergraduate bulletin, friends and family, instructors, and the resident assistants on their dormitory floor.

3. Student Expectations and Academic Engagement

- Student engagement is a key issue, especially engagement with the course content and with the instructor.
- Instructors "set the tone" for the class. If the instructors are interested and enthusiastic about the subject matter, students are more likely to respond positively as well. Furthermore, students believe they are capable of judging the difference in quality between those course instructors who are merely entertaining and those instructors who have deep passion and command of the knowledge and actively engage the student in the learning enterprise.

4. Exploring Academic Interests

- Students requested an opportunity to have a guided exploration of a discipline in which they are interested during their first year.

Specific suggestions include taking courses in academic disciplines that they are interested in instead of all general education courses, or being involved in practicum and apprenticeships where they could get a sense of what the field was really like.

5. Communication: Understanding the Value of a UNL Education

- Most students in our groups could not name a first-year course that served as a benchmark in their development as a learner in a research institution.
- Many students viewed faculty teaching and research roles as very separate. The involvement of their professors in research was viewed as a ***distraction*** from faculty's teaching role, which students interpreted as a significant ***detraction*** from their education.

III. The Faculty Voice

It is apparent that there are already impressive efforts underway by UNL faculty in several units to providing first-year students with both intellectual challenge and academic support. The Task Force met with a group of two administrators with faculty rank, and eight faculty members known for their exemplary success in teaching the most heavily enrolled first-year courses. The purpose of the discussions was to gain additional perspectives and reflect on the first-year experience in relation to the three core course experiences identified by the Task Force:

> "Instructors 'set the tone' for the class. If the instructors are interested and enthusiastic about the subject matter, students are more likely to respond positively as well."

— Create an environment that inspires first-year students to take on the role of active learners/participants in the discovery of knowledge.

— Support first-year students in taking on the role of an active, independent, and self-reliant learner.

— Develop meaningful opportunities for students to act on that role, to understand the value of their accomplishment beyond simply a grade.

- The faculty recognize that first-year students are in a transition period. Students need information about how to navigate a new kind of learning environment—one in which students are expected to be self-reliant, active learners.
- An impediment to the class environment is the large percentage of upper-division students in these first-year courses who, in many cases, expect the course to be easy and tend not to contribute positively to the "ethos" of the learning environment.
- Instructors in large enrollment classes are not given any special support in their efforts. They expressed frustration with the lack of recognition and reward given to faculty who teach first-year courses.

IV. Recommendations

The recommendations offered in this report are the products of the Task Force's investigation of other institution's first-year programs, review of significant UNL documents, and discussions with UNL students, staff and faculty. The Task Force recommends a concerted and coordinated effort to better and more efficiently support first-year students' transition to the culture of intellectual engagement and high achievement that is the hallmark (and benefit) of study at a Research I institution.

A. First-year Core Course Experience

Clearly, no single strategy across campus is either possible or appropriate, but within the context of a department's instructional responsibilities and resources, we strongly recommend that first-year students have access to a course providing a rich initial academic experience at the university. This course should 1) challenge students academically and provide student academic support to achieve success, and 2) emphatically fulfill the intent of the first-year experience whose ultimate goal is to create an excitement among our young students for discovery of knowledge that will, in turn, initiate them into the university's academic culture.

- It is recommended that all entering students participate in a substantive content-based, core course during their first year, offered by academic units that choose to identify existing courses that meet the core courses' learning outcomes. *We encourage academic units to select from their existing stock of first-year courses, one course that would support the transition of first-year students to the academy.*

There are several first-year programs and courses already in place that meet the spirit of the first-year core course. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, AGRI/NRES 103, the College of Arts & Sciences Alpha Learning Communities and the University Honors Program Seminars are outstanding examples of content-based courses designed to help students transition to the UNL. Although other academic units might offer orientation-type courses, these are clearly information-oriented about the discipline and do not provide for the undergraduates' academic transition to the University. The Task Force suggests the following be considered by both the academic units and course instructors as they think about and discuss a first-year core course experience:

> "Faculty who teach first- year courses should be our most skilled and most accomplished."

1. Unit-based Considerations

- Faculty who teach first-year courses should be our most skilled and most accomplished.
- Course content should be based on desired learning outcomes (see Appendix A for suggested learning outcomes).
- Acculturate the student into the intellectual life of UNL and help students experience the power of intellectual work.
- Core courses should be open to any first-year or transfer student with no more than 30 credit hours of completed course work.

2. Course-based Considerations

- A first-year core course should be content-based and substantive in scope.

- In lieu of a separate Library 110 course, work with UNL Library faculty members to incorporate appropriate components of the Library 110 course into the course curriculum. One component should address current problems of plagiarism and copyright violations.
- Introduce students to the discourse and methodologies of the discipline.
- Focus on active learning—a feature of active intellectual work is the opportunity to develop it in a critically alert and committed context and share with others for peer review and feedback.
- The course should be credit-bearing (1-4 hours) and count toward fulfilling program requirements, as well as General Education course requirements.
- Engage students in exploring and understanding the naivety of their assumptions about others who come from different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and geographical backgrounds.
- The course should take different forms, such as a large lecture with small recitation sections, seminars, mini-courses, or modular units.
- Departments should consider using student peer mentors who assist the course instructor, meet with students for a recitation period in which they will guide discussions about course materials, invite active student participation by forming small study groups, and address a variety of topics regarding student adjustment to the institution.
- Finally, the Task Force believes that every person of faculty rank (including administrators) should engage first-year students on a regular basis either through responsibility for teaching (or team teaching) a first-year course, or relieve another faculty member in the department from another course to teach a first-year course. We recognize that for many scheduling might be an issue; however, one could be expected to teach an undergraduate course on a reasonable rotation or serve as a guest lecturer.

B. Comprehensive Education Program

- Students in the focus groups told us they do not understand the rationale or connections between the courses in their General

Education requirements and their program of study. Based upon the information extracted from the student focus groups, a review of the purpose and philosophy of General Education courses is in order. Undergraduate students should be equipped with an understanding of the connection between their required general education coursework and their academic program of study.

C. New Student Enrollment, Academic Orientation and Advising

1. New Student Enrollment

- The NSE staff does an outstanding job meeting the institutional purpose of NSE to present a snapshot of what student life is like at UNL and to guide students in their initial registration for university courses. We should, however, reconsider student needs at that point in time, and reduce the time spent on skits focused on social adjustment to the new environment, which would allow students to spend more time with an advisor than the 15 minutes currently allotted.
- We encourage greater involvement of tenured faculty who recognize NSE activities as a vital point of initial contact with our incoming students. This is an opportunity for faculty to interact with students. Faculty can discuss not only the academic skills needed to meet explicit expectations for success in first-year courses, but also the support and resources available to students.
- Because NSE takes place over the summer, we can only encourage nine-month faculty to participate in the implementation of the NSE activities; however, at the very least, we do recommend that tenured faculty have a more active role in planning NSE.

2. Mid-semester Checkpoint

- The Task Force recommends a follow-up orientation session to NSE at five to six weeks into the first semester. This would allow NSE to focus on those things students need to know for the immediate start of the academic year. The timing of the mid-semester checkpoint would give students a grace period, or an opportunity to figure out daily life issues that initially overpower their academic issues. Our student focus groups documented the

need for a timely review of academic responsibilities and college and major requirements once students were on campus. The Task Force recommends a mid-semester checkpoint be coordinated through the Office of Undergraduate Studies, with assistance from the undergraduate colleges, Student Involvement and the Office of Academic Support and Intercultural Services (OASIS) and Student Involvement (see Appendix B for desired learning outcomes).

- It is recommended the Office of Undergraduate Studies provide a FAQ Web page for students with information about support services and deadlines for adding and withdrawing from courses.
- The newly established OASIS provides students of color advising and academic support; however, these programs do not have high visibility on campus. We encourage both OASIS and the Office of TRIO Programs to initiate a campaign to educate the campus about its programs aimed at addressing the unique needs of students of color on a predominantly white campus.
- Many first-year students spoke of their course experience to date as "13th grade." They did not understand how to intellectually prepare for their coursework, and as of early November, many had either just taken their first exam or had not taken any exams yet in their courses. We recommend that faculty give an exam or another form of assessment early in the semester (first three weeks) as a means of helping students gauge their progress in the course and seek academic support earlier, rather than later in the semester.

3. Advising and Academic Support Services

Academic advising was a major issue among the student focus groups. Advising takes many forms at UNL and we question the efficiency and effectiveness of so many models. Whatever strategies emerge from careful consideration of student needs and institutional possibilities, we are uniformly committed to the idea that *academic advising, whether in a central advising office or in a faculty office, is a critical element in assisting students to achieve success and in formulating a coherent academic plan to meet graduation requirements and the student's professional goals*. Our recommendations are:

- The Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs appoint a task force to investigate how other large, public research universities

handle first- and second-year student advising, to be followed by an external review of UNL advising processes.

- The development of a system to monitor student progress in the first year. Some examples for consideration are:
  - — Mid-term grade reports for all first-year students that would alert advisors to academic difficulties in a timely manner.
  - — In some institutions comparable to UNL, PIN numbers that allow students to register for courses are issued only after the student has met with an academic advisor, either a faculty advisor or the college's central advising office.
  - — An alternative the task force examined was to place a block on students registering for their second year of classes if they had not earned a 2.0 grade point average in the first semester. The block would only be removed after the student had sought academic advisement.
- First-year course instructors should encourage students to visit with them outside of class during office hours and then be available and helpful when they visit. This is an important source of academic support identified by all students. Even simple strategies like learning student names and answering student questions patiently and directly make a large difference toward student perceptions' of faculty.
- As a whole, UNL students do not take great advantage of the support services provided by UNL to help them perform at their best in their courses. Seeking help is interpreted as "remedial" by students and in some instances, this is reinforced by faculty. Supplemental Instruction and Math EXCEL, which are both national, award-winning programs to support student success, are viewed by many faculty and student as remedial. Yet, UNL students who have participated in both these programs have achieved a higher grade-point average for the course (range +.1 to +1.0) than students enrolled in the same course who did not participate. It is recommended that additional resources be directed to provide academic support based on the SI and Math EXCEL models to all sections of first-year courses, using advanced student peer mentors who regularly interact with the faculty member and facilitate small group work.

4. Division of General Studies

The Division of General Studies is a major portal for first-time students to UNL. A commonality among Division of General Studies students is an uncertainty about academic or career interests. The Task Force supports strongly the General Studies mission to guide lower-division students as they explore the curriculum and identify a suitable college and major, but we are equally convinced that General Studies should not be a "waiting room" for upper-division students. We make the following recommendations that we hope will ease the burden of the Division of General Studies responsibility for advising 2,117 undergraduate students, of whom 18% qualify for junior standing or above. We recommend:

"The Task Force supports strongly the General Studies mission to guide lower-division students as they explore..., but we are equally convinced that General Studies should not be a "waiting room" for upper-division students."

- Credit-hour limitations be instituted for students in the Division of General Studies. These students must be required to complete the process for declaring a major by the time they have completed 60 credit hours of work at UNL.
- Consideration should be given to a change of name for the Division of General Studies. Does the name *General Studies* imply a 'lack of focus' or serve to trivialize the importance of the foundation coursework of an undergraduate degree? What might be implications of a name change?

5. Summer Read: *The Nebraska Colloquium*

The Task Force commends the intention of the Summer Read program, but recommends we adopt a different format to reach the same goals of introducing students into the academic culture of the University.

The Summer Read might be of greater value if it were more closely associated with ongoing academic experiences, via *The Nebraska Colloquium*, rather than being an isolated and momentary event the day before the beginning of fall semester (See Appendix C for proposed details). One possibility might be to connect the book read with the E.N. Thompson Forum on World Affairs[7].

6. Academic and Residence Life: Learning Communities and Staff Preparation

UNL Learning Communities have been very successful, and have had a very positive impact on retention rates for returning first-year students. The Task Forces recommends:

- A formal assessment of the Learning Communities be conducted with sponsoring academic units, housing staff and learning community students.
- A small task force be appointed by the SVCAA to discuss next steps involved in the development and expansion of the learning community concept, particularly in relationship to the level of academic emphasis.

The Division of Housing has been a long-standing partner with academic units in providing academic support to UNL students. RAs were mentioned as an important link for facilitating socialization among students living on the same residence hall floor, as well as helping first-year students navigate through the first few months of their academic experience. Although RAs are well-trained and several of them regularly take the initiative to inform students of academic policies, deadlines and protocol, We recommend:

- A more coordinated effort be made between the Offices of Undergraduate Studies and Residence Life to insure RAs have needed information and can deliver it in a timely fashion.
- OASIS should expand its collaboration with Housing to develop a strong relationship with UNL's Residential Learning Communities. An OASIS program coordinator will be available to help facilitate social and intercultural programming as well as study and life skills workshops with residence hall staff and the newly formed Jones Scholars Learning Community.

7. Enrollment Management Practices

- Academic units need to give more serious attention for planning first-year courses and appropriate numbers of sections. We recommend the Enrollment Management Council take a serious look at course demand during NSE, and how entering students are accommodated.

8. Faculty Recognition and Support

Ongoing institutional recognition of faculty, as well as support and commitment to the professional development of faculty, is crucial to establishing the kind of learning environment we envision for our undergraduate students. We recommend:

- Exemplary teachers of first-year courses should receive institutional as well as unit recognition for their impact on the students' learning environment. *It is the "engagement" of these teachers in capturing their students' interest and developing their understanding of the discipline and its methodology that is most likely to encourage the students to become more "engaged" learners themselves*.
- We encourage all faculty to take advantage of :
  - — Institutional, unit, and professional society development opportunities to improve instruction, and
  - — Institutional (Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies, and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies) and unit support for developing curriculum development proposals for external funding.

V. Summary

The *Greater Expectations* report underscores the need for colleges and universities to guide students toward becoming *intentional* learners. Intentional learners adapt to new environments, are informed, integrate knowledge across a wide spectrum, and are responsible for their own actions. Most importantly, the intentional learner is equipped to deal with the unknown or what has been referred in the *Greater Expectations* report as "unscripted problems."

"The Task Force work was guided by a simple question: How do we better prepare our students to be intentional learners?"

The Task Force work was guided by a simple question: How do we better prepare our students to be intentional learners? Understanding the challenges that first-year students face as they make the transition to college life allows us to identify key resources and strategies that will ease that transition and, hopefully, connect students with the energy

of the university's intellectual environment and prepare them for their life's work.

We affirm the faculty's critical role in making the initial contact with students as they embark on their new experience: To engage students intellectually in first-year core courses and others, to interact with them in a meaningful way as they share their passion for discovery, to introduce students to a culture of academic rigor, and to start them on the path of developing from dependent to independent learners. *Faculty members should consider what kind of legacy they want to leave with undergraduate students, and use that as a guiding philosophy as they craft the learning environment.*

> "...we affirm in the strongest terms our belief that our students will be best served as they are associated with a culture of academic exploration, discovery and diversity...."

We recognize the need to provide a supportive environment for all our students but understand how essential that commitment is to our entering students, particularly to the considerations that must be given to issues of students of color on a predominantly white campus. Whether at NSE or at the mid-semester checkpoint, we must provide our students with the information they need to understand expectations and requirements and have the information necessary to make informed decisions about their academic direction. Here again, these resources equip our students to be responsible for their experiences on campus.

Our conversation returned again and again to the vital role of academic advising in assisting students to make proper choices and to formulate a coherent academic strategy to achieve their goals. Of equal importance to the academic engagement that students will experience in their early classes is the relationship they develop with professional and faculty advisors who will articulate for them the value of general education courses and their connection with their chosen major. While the colleges' general advising offices play a key role initially guiding our students' course selection, we praise highly the investment of time and talent that our faculty make in the advising enterprise. Every effort should be made to establish clear responsibilities between the different levels of advising to achieve a seamless path through the students' academic career.

We reaffirm our support for campus engagement among our students who find co-curricular and extra-curricular activities of value in developing a sense of place in our large community, and we appreciate the contributions made by the campus office of Student Involvement and OASIS. Residential units, whether on campus or off, have provided essential social and emotional support especially for our beginning students. We recognize the investment that University Housing staff have made to the delicate process of adjustment our students make to campus life, particularly in their efforts to reinforce the academic responsibilities our students face.

And finally, we affirm in the strongest terms our belief that our students will be best served as they are associated with a culture of academic exploration, discovery and diversity, as they participate in substantive conversations about significant issues, as they engage in many cultural opportunities that our community offers, as they are educated to reflect on their undergraduate years as more than a preparation for whatever work they may undertake after graduation, but rather as an invitation to a life of continued discovery and intellectual excitement. To achieve the goals that we set for our students will require the concerted commitment and investment of our entire community, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Within the spirit of commitment and collegiality among all members of the UNL community, we propose that we measure our success against our guiding vision:

> If the institutional philosophy is based on our vision of a UNL undergraduate education that provides… *a thoughtful, innovative and meaningful integration of the university's research, scholarly and creative activity into the undergraduate experience to provide the most dynamic, futuristic and passionate participatory learning environment for our students*… then the proposed programs and initiatives, as well as the allocation of resources to support them, should be measured against this vision.

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APPENDIX A:

Intended Learning Outcomes of a First-Year Core Course

Outcome 1: Value the process of scholarship by recognizing how to acquire, transmit, and increase knowledge during the undergraduate experience.

Outcome 2: Learn to present and organize ideas both orally and in writing.

Outcome 3: State a student's role and responsibility in the learning process and identify how students can actively engage in that learning.

Outcome 4: Think about ideas in a reasoned and informed way where knowledge is applied when thinking about significant issues in a discipline and considering new contexts.

Outcome 5: Appreciation for the importance of obtaining a broad-based liberal education.

APPENDIX B:

Mid-semester Checkpoint

This subsequent orientation would concentrate on the following learning outcomes:

Outcome 1: Identify how college education differs from their high school education.

Outcome 2: Understand advising resources including what assistance they can expect to get from their advisors and the type of questions they can ask.

Outcome 3: Gain a better sense of what courses to register for and their future after graduation through an exploration of career interests and academic program options.

Outcome 4: Learn to manage and prioritize the variety of time demands they are encountering both inside and outside the classroom.

Outcome 5: Recall the resources available for academic and social success.

Outcome 6: Create strategies for building friendships with other students and relationships with faculty.

Outcome 7: Determine where to go and how to handle those social and emotional low points in the college experience.

APPENDIX C:

The Nebraska Colloquium

Several years ago the university introduced a Summer Book Read. First-year students in the University Honors Program and those registered for University Foundations courses were given a book to read as they participated in the early summer New Student Enrollment. The purpose of the Summer Read was to introduce students to the academic culture of the university, involving not only the responsibility to read and understand a text without extensive guidance but also to participate in a serious conversation with fellow students and faculty focused on major issues. An additional benefit of the Read was to give incoming students a common experience that might serve to begin community-building among them around a shared conversation.

It has become clear over the years that the hopes embodied in the Book Read have seldom been realized. On occasion, both students and faculty have questioned the choice of the reading. More significant, though, was the very structure of the project, expecting participants to invest time and mental energy in a conversation lasting 40 minutes at best at a particularly busy time for all. The great expectation of introducing students to a culture of learning and exploration in fact resulted in a level of disdain and proved counter-productive.

If a theme were decided upon early enough, university colleges and the office of Student Involvement could organize additional events around that year's theme and create, in effect, a unifying dialogue among old and new students, faculty and others, in what might be called the *Nebraska Colloquium*. And if the Thompson Committee and a local organizing committee could plan a rotation of topics over a period of years, various colleges could take leadership roles in planning related events around the common theme.

For instance, one year the colloquium might concentrate on international relations and current events, perhaps with a particular geographical or a thematic focus, for example, the Middle East, health issues, or others, and the College of Arts and Sciences (Political Science, History, Anthropology, and others) might organize additional symposia that are more discipline-based but open to all. The following year, the focus might be on health/nutrition and agricultural issues that would appeal to another set of

colleges for continuing discussion but again, with the distinct possibility of involving a broad audience. Then, the arts and culture in a global setting might draw the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts and the College of Architecture into the campus-wide discussion, presenting musical performances or art exhibitions to better appreciate the major issues. A focus on economic issues worldwide would engage not only CBA but CASNR, Arts and Sciences, and Education and Human Sciences in a collective engagement around the theme. There are many more choices and, no doubt, some colleges—Journalism and Mass Communications—and programs—Film Studies – to name but two quite different units that might choose to be involved in many ways in the annual event.

The possibilities are extensive; they require work, but if the outcome is to knit our campus community in a common discourse from a variety of perspectives, the *Nebraska Colloquium* will have achieved a goal that has been elusive over the years: the creation of an intellectual community engaging students, new and veteran, faculty, and the larger community in an exchange of ideas and reflections from which all will profit.

Daunting at first, the logistics for such a plan should not discourage its consideration. Several existing residential and academic communities already in place (Honors, J.D. Edwards, Learning Communities, Foundations), supplemented by academic departments mobilizing their majors—and in the process getting to know them far better than they might at present—appealing for support from other residential units including Greek houses, all this suggests that working through existing structures would simplify the organizational task.

(Footnotes)

[1] The University of Nebraska was selected as one of 16 colleges and universities cited for its innovative undergraduate programs and was invited to participate in the *Greater Expectations Consortium on Quality Education*, a subset of the Greater Expectations Consortia.

[2] The full report, *Greater Expectations: The Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College*, is available in PDF file format at <http: www.aacu.org>.

[3] *A 2020 Vision Report : The Future of Research and Graduate Education at UNL*. 1999, p.1.

[4] *Intellectual Engagement and Achievement at UNL: Report from the Blue Sky Committee*. March 28 2003 p. 1.

[5] *A 2020 Vision Report : The Future of Research and Graduate Education at UNL.* 1999, p.16.

[6] The students represented all levels from first-year to second year seniors, a wide variety of majors, Nebraska and out of state students, and students in specialized programs such as Honors and Learning Communities. Focus groups were held with groups of African American, Hispanic American and Native American students with the intention of capturing the essence of the experiences of these student populations

[7] Since the Thompson Committee finalizes its roster of speakers for the next academic year as early as January, there would be ample time to select a book or set of readings that relate to one or more of the Thompson lectures. We could invite all or selected incoming students to read a common document during the summer to prepare them to attend the Thompson lectures and participate in a series of campus events organized around the lectures' topics. Not only would the conversation be on-going but the happy prospect of more of our students attending the Thompson lectures would certainly be welcomed by the Forum organizers. Furthermore, if the Thompson Committee were willing to identify a unifying theme in the annual lecture series, the "Book Read" might engage students in a yet broader discussion that could span the entire academic year.

... All members of the Transition to University Task Force contributed actively to the final report. Special thanks are due Thomas Workman, Jake Kirkland, Laura Damuth and, Jessica Jonson for their work with the student focus groups. Laura Damuth and Jessica Jonson provided assistance and support throughout the entire project. Thank you to Patrice Berger who assisted in editing and preparing the final document, Scott Fuess, Gordon Woodward, Deborah Minter, Renita Tyrance and Steven Waller who constructed parts of the report.

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December 2003

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