SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS
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This self-study has provided the University of Northern Iowa with the opportunity, first, to gather and critically examine evidence of meeting external (NCA) criteria for accreditation and, second, to identify and address challenges for the future, including ways in which it can improve as an institution of higher education. Much of the report focuses on evidence that indicates UNI is meeting the criteria for NCA accreditation. The Introduction provides essential information about UNI both for applying the accreditation criteria and for locating potential improvements. The General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) completed for the self-study also are useful for describing various facets of the University and its operations. This final part of the report summarizes key features of the self-study and draws conclusions from its findings.

Summary

Institutional Context

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions, the University of Northern Iowa is identified as a public, comprehensive university. The University's primary focus is on undergraduate education, but it also awards a significant number of master's degrees in three or more disciplines and two doctoral degrees—an Ed.D. in education and a Doctor of Industrial Technology (DIT). Within Iowa, UNI has a history and mission distinct from those of the other two Regent universities (University of Iowa and Iowa State University), the community colleges, and the private colleges and universities.

Over the past 125 years, UNI has evolved from a normal school to a state teachers college, a state college, and a state university. In addition to the education of teachers, school administrators, and other education specialists, the University now offers professional programs (undergraduate and graduate) in business, industrial technology, social work, and other fields. The liberal arts are at the heart of the University's educational programs and are recognized as valuable for all professional careers and as essential for all educated persons.

The University intends to serve well all 13,700 graduate and undergraduate students, most of whom come from Iowa and are of traditional age and backgrounds. At the same time, the University also is committed to increasing the diversity of its student body and the students' international and intercultural experiences. The University's priorities, reflected in the UNI strategic plan for 2001-2006, are clearly focused on creating conditions that will personalize and enhance high-quality student learning and development.
Self-Study Process

The University of Northern Iowa self-study process involved participants from all facets of the University—academic affairs, academic support, administrative support, and external relations. A steering committee composed of faculty, students, staff, and administrators represented these different constituencies in leading the self-study activities, which are summarized briefly below:

• Participating in self-study briefings and related sessions at the North Central Association Meetings held January 1999 and January 2000 in Chicago
• Drafting, receiving NCA review of, and revising a self-study plan
• Forming and implementing a steering committee for the self-study
• Framing questions that reflect the five major NCA accreditation criteria for gathering evidence of institutional performance
• Gathering, assessing and interpreting data from academic departments, academic support, administrative, and external relations units throughout the University
• Analyzing the data as evidence of the degree to which UNI has met the NCA performance Criteria
• Preparing a draft of the self-study report and related documents for campus-wide review
• Revising the draft report based on feedback from reviewers throughout the University
• Distributing the final draft of the self-study report to the on-site visitation committee, the NCA liaison, and UNI constituencies
• Planning and preparing for the on-site visit during February 2001.

The main findings from this self-study process can be summarized in two categories: evidence of meeting the criteria for NCA accreditation, and identifying challenges for becoming an even better University.

Evidence of Meeting the Accreditation Criteria

The University of Northern Iowa has established both long-range and short-range goals guided by the following statement of mission found in the 2001-2006 strategic plan:

The University of Northern Iowa is a comprehensive institution committed to providing a diverse, dynamic learning environment, founded on a strong liberal arts curriculum and characterized by excellence in teaching, scholarship and service. The university focuses on undergraduate education that emphasizes a personalized learning environment and selected masters and doctoral programs that provide students with specialized professional educational experiences. UNI programs incorporate scholarship and service to individuals, communities and organizations throughout the state, the nation and the world.
Undergirding this mission are basic University values also made explicit in the 2001-2006 Strategic Plan:

- Excellence in all its endeavors
- Intellectual vitality
- Intellectual and academic freedom, dialogue, and the free exchange of ideas
- Individualized learning
- An ethical, caring, and diverse community
- The well being of its students, faculty, and staff
- Service to the citizens of the State of Iowa, the nation, and the world.

The University mission and basic values are embodied in eight strategic goals to be pursued over the next five years:

**Goal 1:** Provide intellectually stimulating and challenging experiences for students that broaden and deepen their perspective and awareness.

**Goal 2:** Support creative and intellectually rigorous teaching and scholarship.

**Goal 3:** Expand the involvement of the University in addressing critical local, state, national, and global needs that also enrich the educational experiences offered by the University.

**Goal 4:** Strengthen a University culture characterized by diversity, collegiality, and mutual respect.

**Goal 5:** Foster a supportive living, learning, and working environment with services and programs that promote individual well being and organizational effectiveness.

**Goal 6:** Enhance the quality, diversity, and number of human resources available to meet the needs of the University.

**Goal 7:** Continue to improve capital, physical, and informational resources at the University.

**Goal 8:** Establish strong, mutually beneficial relationships with external constituencies.

These goals are reviewed and overseen by governance systems at the state and institutional levels. The Board of Regents, whose members are appointed for established terms by the governor, is the governance group for all three public universities in Iowa. At the institutional level, governance groups are in place for faculty (University Faculty Senate), students (Northern Iowa Student Government [NISG]), and staff (three councils for different staff classifications). In addition, the UNI faculty and merit staff have collective bargaining units. Within the University's administrative structure, decision-making processes occur in consultation with the President's Cabinet, the Academic Affairs Council, the Council of Academic Department Heads, and other management groups at the organizational unit (college, school, division, department) level.
Goals, objectives, actions, and performance indicators associated with the University’s strategic priorities are communicated to institutional constituencies in several ways:

- Representatives of University faculty, staff, and students are involved in leading the strategic planning process.
- All University members are encouraged to review and provide feedback for on-line drafts of the strategic plan while it is in progress.
- The final draft of the strategic plan is published for public review and comment before approval by the Board of Regents.
- Annual reports on strategic priorities require the gathering and analysis of information regarding progress toward attaining University-wide goals and objectives.
- New funding priorities developed as part of the annual budgeting cycle are intended to reflect priorities in the University strategic plan.

The University’s educational and institutional goals are reflected in academic programs and support services as well as the interaction among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The University encourages all faculty and staff to be highly accessible to students both within and outside classrooms, and to involve students in experiential learning and cultural activities.

The University’s general education program, which involves faculty from all five colleges, requires 47 semester hours (about one-third of the total credit hours for a bachelor’s degree). These courses are arranged within six categories—Civilizations and Cultures, Fine Arts, Literature, Philosophy and Religion, Natural Science and Technology, Social Sciences, Communication Essentials, and Personal Wellness. The General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate oversees the periodic review of each of the six categories of General Education requirements. The content for each course offered for general education credit is published in the University Catalog, and the overall goals of the general education program subscribe to the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ “Statement on Liberal Learning.” Likewise, programs of study that lead to undergraduate majors and minors are published in the University Catalog, which includes program goals, course content, and requirements for obtaining a degree.

Student outcomes assessment is integrated with program review at the academic department level for majors. Graduate programs of study, which also are periodically reviewed and updated, are differentiated from undergraduate programs in terms of appropriate expectations and standards for student and faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity. For both undergraduate and graduate programs, faculty are accountable for evaluating student learning and granting academic credit.

A variety of professional and career development opportunities support faculty roles in teaching and scholarship as well as public and professional service. In addition to effective academic and personal support services for students, the University stresses appropriate applications of technology that can enhance both learning and teaching.
The University of Northern Iowa recognizes that its primary strengths rest with its people—the faculty, staff, administrators, and students who are the heart of the University. Aggressive recruitment, careful selection, strong orientation and mentoring, and continuing development and support are some of the qualities that the University pursues as part of its commitment to personnel. Similarly, the University’s financial and physical resources are maintained and developed to support the work of its personnel in fulfilling the mission and goals of the University. Particular attention has been given to the design and updating of information systems that will provide current and accurate information for all members of the University community.

The University of Northern Iowa’s vision is to “be the nation’s finest public comprehensive university, known for high quality learning environments and a genuine sense of community” (UNI Strategic Plan for 2001-2006). To achieve this vision, the University recognizes that it must meet the needs of particular constituencies that it serves while, at the same time, creating itself as a model for the larger society. This means that the University conducts itself as a democratic community with respect for and appreciation of diversity in its students, staff, faculty, curriculum, and institutional environment. Equal access, equitable treatment, nondiscrimination, and affirmative action are key practices for realizing this goal. The University aspires to integrity in all of its internal and external relations, including academic standards, personnel practices, fund-raising, intercollegiate athletics, and business operations.

Institutional Challenges

Six institutional challenges signifying key areas for improvement were identified during this self-study. Each of these areas for improvement can be recognized as a concern for all of higher education but with particular meaning for UNI.

First, in 1996, with the arrival of President Robert Koob, the University moved from a highly centralized budgetary control policy to a policy of decentralized budget control. Deans and division heads now control their budgets, reallocating funds among budget categories to meet their strategic objectives rather than returning them to the central administration for redistribution. On balance the current model has engendered a greater sense of accountability, responsibility and flexibility on the part of the institutional divisions. A continual challenge will be to maintain adequate budgets in appropriate categories to reallocate across units and to adapt to spikes in expenditures within units.

Second, the University is experiencing a significant transition as a result of the turnover of faculty and staff. Primarily due to the large number of faculty hired during the “baby boom” years, over eight percent of the regular faculty either retired or resigned in 1999-2000 alone. While the turnover of staff has not been so drastic, staff attrition patterns tend to follow that of faculty. The University is committed to having tenured or tenure-track faculty teach at least 75 percent of student credit hours, considering both general education and
major fields of study. New initiatives for both recruitment and retention will be essential for the University to meet this goal effectively. The University presently has a major initiative before the Iowa Legislature.

Third, the University has fallen short of the 8.5 percent minority student enrollment goal established through the Board of Regents. This goal is a high bar, given the size of Iowa’s minority population. To make real progress in meeting this goal, even greater attention (time, effort, and resources) will need to be given both to the recruitment and to the retention of minority students. More focused in-state and out-of-state recruitment activities are needed, as well as targeted activities for the retention and graduation of minority students who enroll at UNI. A Cabinet-level team is assessing the University’s efforts and is now working directly with core minority recruitment and retention staff.

Fourth, we are challenged to make better use of the considerable body of information collected by offices and groups across the University. In addition to program reviews and student outcomes assessment, considerable information is collected through surveys (e.g., Graduating Senior Survey and Alumni Survey), standardized instruments (e.g., College Student Experiences Questionnaire), and locally-designed instruments (e.g., essays administered and evaluated at the department level). Our goal is a more inclusive and systemic review of University data so that they can be considered for instructional, curricular, co-curricular, and environmental improvement. Making data accessible and useful for informing institutional decision-making is a priority for UNI’s institutional research efforts. The institutional research office has been moved to Academic Affairs and is being reconstituted to provide leadership in achieving this goal.

Fifth, the University can continue to improve undergraduate education by renewing its commitment to general education and finding ways both to better communicate its importance and purposes and to strengthen its impact and integration. Some examples of progress made during the past two years, with continuous support from the Provost’s office, can serve as inspiration for future efforts at UNI. As an outgrowth of the Qualities of an Educated Person project, a General Education Cluster Course was initiated and developed by a group of faculty from three different departments that offer general education courses. By integrating the planning and teaching of four courses taken simultaneously by students, substantial progress was made in creating a “learning community” among students and faculty for general education. Another example is the summer institute (Summer 2000) and related activities for faculty who teach Humanities I and II in the general education core (required) courses. As a result of the institute and follow-up activities, faculty have examined and taken action on how, with the use of technology, they can make learning more meaningful and active for students, whatever their field of study. Another example is the guidebook recently developed for faculty who teach the Capstone course, “Environment, Technology, and Society.” From another angle, an important step taken toward better communication about the purposes of general education is the statement on liberal learning.
and General Education category goals found in the new (2000-2002) University Catalog. These examples point toward practices that can renew and enhance the University's commitment to general education for all undergraduate students.

Finally, from a broader institutional perspective, the University community has a shared vision that exemplifies the aspiration to be the finest public comprehensive university in the nation. This vision evolved from our long-standing motto, “Great Teaching Makes the Difference.” We are challenged to understand this vision deeply and actualize it sincerely.

President Robert Koob—addressing the UNI Fall Faculty Meeting on September 11, 2000—suggested the following qualities for a vision that would be consistent with the University's aspiration to be the finest public comprehensive university:

1. UNI students would encounter the best ideas of disciplines represented by the faculty.
   To offer students the best ideas of a discipline, UNI faculty would need to be actively engaged in the development and application of disciplinary knowledge. This would require an appropriate balance and integration of the faculty's scholarly pursuits among teaching, research, and service.

2. UNI students would value and learn from both academic (“classroom”) and social (“out-of-classroom”) experiences. UNI faculty and staff would work collaboratively to create meaningful and powerful experiential learning opportunities that combine classroom and field experiences, from local to global in scope.

3. UNI students would hold high expectations for their educational opportunities, their own learning and development, and their potential contributions to vocational, community, and personal pursuits. UNI faculty and staff consistently would practice high but reasonable standards for their own performance as well as for student achievement. Students, as well as faculty and staff, would receive timely and useful feedback about accomplishments and ways to continue to improve in attaining their pursuits.

4. UNI students would have access to a diversity of ways and tools for learning that respond to individual learning needs and styles, and that reflect a commitment to each student's success. UNI faculty and staff would demonstrate their commitment to each student's success by creating instruction and support services that personalize the student's educational experiences. Particular attention would be given to different ways of learning and teaching as well as how to combine individual and group pedagogy, including appropriate and effective uses of technology.

5. UNI students would be assured that the University is proactive in securing and developing resources (human, financial, physical) to maintain and improve its programs and the institutional environment for serving them. UNI faculty and staff, with administrative support, would communicate effectively with students and other constituencies about its abilities to meet their needs. These communications also would convey which actions are being taken to maintain and strengthen the University's resources in order to serve them effectively now and in the future.
This beginning of a unified vision for the University of Northern Iowa is just a first step. A series of forums is scheduled throughout the 2000-2001 academic year in order to engage faculty in dialogue, reflection, and further development of a shared vision of the University as the finest public center for learning in the nation.

**Conclusions**

Through its self-study process, the University of Northern Iowa has generated and communicated substantial evidence that it meets all five Criteria for Accreditation:

- Has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education
- Has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes
- Is accomplishing its educational and other purposes
- Can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness
- Demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships.

The self-study process, however, involves more than demonstrating compliance with external standards. An essential collateral purpose of the self-study is to identify where and how the institution can improve. Six key areas have been identified for institutional improvement, each of which is reflected in portions of the UNI Strategic Plan for 2001-2006:

- Integrating strategic planning, budgeting, program review, personnel development and evaluation systems, curriculum development, and other institutional decision-making functions that define and support institutional priorities
- Attracting, developing, and supporting outstanding faculty, staff, and administrators who have the ability and commitment to realize the goals of the University
- Attracting and retaining a greater portion of minority students for both undergraduate and graduate education
- Further developing and implementing information systems associated with all key goals of the University, including student outcomes for undergraduate and graduate programs
- Reinvigorating and strengthening general education and its relationship to student learning and programs of study throughout the University
- Creating and actualizing a vision of the University as the finest public comprehensive university in the nation.

Taking place over a period of almost three years, our accreditation review is much more than a compliance activity. It requires enormous amounts of energy in the form of people's time, good will, talent, collaboration, and endurance. While each university wishes to uplift its outstanding accomplishments and to be recognized for its strengths, critically
constructive reviews must balance an emphasis on achievements with attention to shortcomings and needed improvements. It is not easy to look into the mirror and rediscover who we are and how we can become an even better university. This goes far beyond compliance in meeting external standards established by an accrediting association. It calls forth the enlistment and commitment of students, faculty, staff, and administrators who represent all aspects of the institution and who are willing to strive for the ideals of what the university can become.

As a reflection on the self-study process and this report, the following lines by T. S. Eliot seem appropriate:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.


Request for Continued Accreditation

The North Central Association has accredited the University of Northern Iowa since 1913. The most recent reaccreditation was received in 1991.

This Self-Study demonstrates that the University of Northern Iowa continues to achieve a high standard in all areas of teaching, research, scholarship, creative activities, and service.

Through this Self-Study, the University provides the evidence that it meets all NCA Criteria for accreditation and that it fulfills all General Institutional Requirements. The University of Northern Iowa has not changed its status as a public institution offering programs leading to the Bachelor's degree (arts and sciences curricula), the Master's degree (arts and sciences curricula), the Specialist's degree, and the Doctor's (research and professional curricula) degree. Therefore, the University of Northern Iowa asks that the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools continue the University's accreditation at the Doctor's (research and professional curricula) degree-granting level.