**Undergraduate Education in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

**Current Status & Successes**

The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences is distinguished among UI colleges by the broad spectrum of disciplines it houses. This broad scope already positions CLAS to address challenges that require interdisciplinary collaborations, multiple perspectives, flexible methodologies, and creative approaches to understanding our complex world and solving our most challenging problems. CLAS provides leadership in nurturing cross-disciplinary teams that bring together faculty from multiple units for exciting innovations in the classroom. Such teams also model interdisciplinary work for students.

CLAS has two active standing committees for the review and development of curriculum: UEPCC and GECC. UEPCC is an elected group that works with the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs & Curriculum and advises and assists the Dean and associate deans in formulating policies and procedures relating to the College’s educational mission, curriculum, and teaching. GECC is an appointed committee that makes recommendations to UEPCC and to the Associate Dean on General Education issues, including proposals for courses with GE status and GE course reviews. Together these committees review and approve new proposals as well as carry out regular review and assessment of programs, policies and certificates. Thus, proposals for new GE courses undergo two approvals (GECC and UEPCC). GECC also conducts large-scale oversight of the GE program to ensure courses meet the educational needs of students new to UI. UEPCC also oversees policies related to teaching such as the use of Undergraduate Teaching Assistants and information to be included on syllabi. Both committees include a student representative, and they serve as a point of access for student advocates and student-led initiatives.

Recent work by UEPCC includes reviews of the Event Planning Certificate, the Geographic Information Science Certificate, and the Digital Arts Certificate; in all cases feedback provided by UEPCC led to improvements in these new certificates. A major accomplishment of the CLAS GE Program in the last few years has been to add a requirement in the area of Diversity and Inclusion (DI). This change was motivated by a request from undergraduates to have more opportunities in the classroom to reflect critically on their own social and cultural perspectives and to increase their ability to engage with those who have backgrounds different from their own. The process took several years, with input from many faculty and students. Examples of recently approved DI courses are wide-ranging and mirror the rich academic diversity within CLAS: *Diversity in American Culture*, *Race, Gender and Sexuality on Screen*, *Inequality in American Sport*, *Understanding Video Games*, *Romany (Gypsy) Cultures of Eastern Europe* and *Printmaking and the Politics of Protest and Representation*. The GE Diversity and Inclusion outcomes allow CLAS undergraduates to be at the forefront of a 21st century liberal arts education.

**Future Vision: A Culture of Teaching-Scholarship in CLAS**

1. **Building Community – CLAS Student Center[[1]](#footnote-1)**

We envision a CLAS Student Center focused on student learning and inclusiveness. We think EPB would be an ideal site for this Center for two reasons. First, every first year student takes Rhetoric and Interpretation of Literature, and thus spends several hours per week in EPB[[2]](#footnote-2). Second, the 1st floor of EPB houses the Writing Center (rooms 110-112) and IDEAL (room 108), a multimodal resource and printing station for students; the Speaking Center is also located in EPB (4th Floor) and the Conversation Center is nomadic but based in EPB. We think it would be feasible to make the first floor of EPB into a Resource Corridor or a CLAS Student Center, one that is convenient for students and is already on the daily itinerary for most first years students. The classrooms in 102, 104 and 106 would be excellent sites for the Speaking Center, the Conversation Center and a social space, making the whole corridor a center for student resources. A satellite of this Student Center could be housed in Phillips Hall where students also take their required courses in Languages. Another possibility would be to include a Teaching-Learning Center where CLAS faculty and graduate students might hold office hours, have CLAS faculty learning communities, and work on collaborative projects around teaching and learning.

1. **Incentivizing the Teacher-Scholar - The CLAS Academy and Advisory Board**

We envision several ways to elevate and extend a culture of teaching-scholarship among CLAS faculty:

***CLAS General Education (GE) Academy:*** The Academy will meet once each semester and function as an undergraduate advisory board, discussing GE requirements, outcomes, assessment, and best teaching practices, with members from each undergraduate college invited to attend. GE policies and requirements will also be discussed. The goal of the Academy will be to emphasize the common goals and outcomes of the GE Program across the colleges and to encourage participation and communication in and about all aspects of its values and management. The Academy will participate in group learning activities, through the invitation of guest speakers, alumni, and current students. Topics of interest include, for example, the central role of writing and speaking in GE; preparation of admission to the professional colleges; facilitating computer literacy throughout the curriculum.

***Core Teaching Fellows:*** We propose a CLAS Core Teaching Fellows Program, with Faculty Fellows designated based on their use of best practices in student-centered education focused on the outcomes of the CLAS Core Program. Instructors, with the approval of their department or unit, may apply for status as a Teaching Fellow, an honorary designation that is accompanied by an annual honorarium. Fellows will participate in a minimum of two workshops per year on the topic of best teaching practices, reporting back to their departments on what has been learned; they will also participate in related conferences or on-campus discussions in future years for new teaching Fellows and students. Fellows will design instructional activities and resources, including online modules on “difficult” or “sensitive” topics, which may be used by all instructors at the University. The Fellows program will be supported by the Center for Teaching and the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology (OTLT). Teaching Fellows would be encouraged to publish on their experiences using best practices from Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

***Emphasis on Best Practices in High-Impact Introductory Courses:*** For high-impact large introductory courses, “intergenerational” teaching teams of faculty, graduate student TAs and undergraduate TAs are shown to be highly effective. In addition, research suggests that more personalized learning and individual options through ICON dashboards support student success and identify at-risk students earlier in the semester. The Offices of Academic Support and Retention and of Teaching Learning and Technology are currently working on these kinds of initiatives. For example, “Elements of Success” – a learning analytics dashboard available in ICON – is being piloted in Introductory STEM courses at Iowa with good outcomes, and we encourage this kind of collaboration among faculty and academic staff.

1. **Interdisciplinary Learning Experiences [[3]](#footnote-3)**

We advocate for interdisciplinary learning experiences to prepare students for today’s complex world. For example, expansion and formalization (with a faculty director and assessment coordinator) of the “Big Ideas” Program would strengthen interdisciplinary learning and teach students to think synthetically. Big Ideas courses – currently 7 being taught in the GE Program – model best student-centered learning practices. As team-taught, interdisciplinary experiences, Big Ideas courses are also focus on inquiry-based learning, often in the TILE classrooms. A goal is to formalize the program and have at least 50% of each entering cohort of first-year students participate in a Big Ideas course. To achieve this goal, we recommend expanding the Big Ideas course offerings from the current 7 courses to 15. Big Ideas courses could be taught cross-collegiately and showcase the broader academic offerings at the University. Big Ideas courses can provide opportunities for students to learn in interdisciplinary environments, modeling the interdisciplinary work of a research university.

1. **Service-Learning and Honing Disciplinary Skillsets – Expansion of Capstone Experiences**[[4]](#footnote-4)

We envision an expansion of the capstone experience, wherein each major in CLAS will require either (1) a capstone course that integrates speaking, writing and critical thinking skills with the content of the major or (2) an internship, practicum, or research experience with similar applied skills and integration of concepts from the major. Expanded connections with entrepreneurial groups, local businesses, and other regional partners will encourage internships and service-learning experiences that prepare UI undergraduates for prospective careers.

1. **Something Old, Something New - The UI Elder Institute**[[5]](#footnote-5)

An additional idea proposed is for a UI Elder Institute to emulate the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Program[[6]](#footnote-6), currently in place at 120 U.S. colleges and universities. The UI Elder Institute would offer non-credit educational programs for adults aged 50 and older. These courses would focus on the excitement of learning and discovering and would emphasize civic engagement. Course leaders would come from a variety of backgrounds; they might be UI emeritus faculty or community members with an expertise in a given subject. The UI Elder Institute would foster intergenerational mentoring and also fulfill one of the goals of the public university in serving all members of the state of Iowa.

1. Aligned with UI Strategic Plan Student Success Goals #1&3 (p.11&13) and BOR SP Objectives 1.1, 1.2, 2.4, & 3.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A recent survey showed that there are 20,000 “student visits” per week to the first floor of EPB. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aligned with UI Strategic Plan Student Success Goal #5 (p.14) and BOR SP Objectives 1.1 & 1.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. High-impact practices (HIPs), capstone courses, and other activities that promote career-readiness are aligned with UI Strategic Plan Student Success Goal #2 (p.12) and BOR SP Objectives 1.1 & 1.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Experiences that promote societal responsibility, community engagement, and an inclusive campus culture are aligned with UI Strategic Plan Student Success Goals #1&2 (p.11&12) and BOR SP Objectives 1.1 & 1.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.osherfoundation.org/index.php?programs [↑](#footnote-ref-6)