NORTH DAKOTA AND GENERAL EDUCATION:

BY TOM STEEN, DIRECTOR OF ESSENTIAL STUDIES

This summer, North Dakota was named as the sixth partner state in “Liberal Education and America’s Promise” (LEAP). LEAP is a national initiative that seeks to strengthen undergraduate learning and general education through statewide or system-wide collaborations. Initiated and supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), LEAP States bring together their institutions of higher education to promote a college education that is designed to prepare students “to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world.” (AAC&U Statement on Liberal Learning).

UND has been a part of the state’s LEAP work since it began, and we continue to play an important part in the North Dakota general education collaboration as it moves ahead. We are also involved in national level conversations with other states as part of the network that the AAC&U has developed to support LEAP. Since many of you may not have heard a great deal about this work yet, the purpose of this article is to brief you on recent events and future directions related to UND’s participation in the state and across the country.

What’s Been Happening?

Since the fall of 2008, general education leaders from UND have been meeting with representatives of the other colleges and universities in our state. The initial focus was to share with each other information about our various general education programs across the state, with particular attention given to schools that were revising or upgrading. Having just implemented our new Essential Studies program in August 2008 and having been recognized with a national award (the “Improvement in General Education” Award, from the Association of General & Liberal Studies), UND received a great deal of attention from the other schools. In addition to our work, Minot State University, Dickinson State University, and the University of Mary were also engaged in general education program reviews, and several other institutions were starting to think about program reviews of their own.

After an initial meeting here in Grand Forks—North Dakota’s General Education Summit I—we’ve held three additional Summits, with the most recent at Bismarck State College in September 2010. Summit V is planned for spring 2011 at North Dakota State University, and a long-range plan for future statewide conferences and meetings is in the planning stage.

Participating institutions at the first meeting represented all 11 of the North Dakota University System. For the second meeting, at Minot State University in September 2009, an invitation was extended to all of North Dakota’s tribal colleges and the private institutions. Since that time, the number of institutions participating in the North Dakota collaboration has increased to 16. The goal is to develop a collaboration that includes all 18 of the state’s colleges and universities.

What Does This Mean For UND?

Those of us who have taken part in the North Dakota Summit activities believe that this new collaboration is very positive for UND. First, we now have a forum for statewide general education (continued on page 2)
discussions. This is vital since we are working with a large number of students who come to us from these institutions. Approximately 40% of our undergraduates are now transfer students, and their number is increasing. Many of these transfer students are coming to us from other North Dakota institutions, and much of the work that they want to transfer in to UND is in general education. Through the statewide meetings, we have an ongoing opportunity to discuss a wide range of transferability issues. Without such a forum, there is very little shared problem solving around the challenges associated with receiving transfer work (e.g., do students with good grades in coursework on written communication come to us with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to be successful writers here at UND?).

Secondly, the state work has helped to increase our understanding and vision. As a “receiving institution,” UND tends to see problems of transferability as one of adequate preparation, as in the example above. However, our “sending institutions” have different concerns—are their students going to be well taken care of as they move on to receiving schools like UND (and NDSU), and to a lesser extent, other 4-year institutions such as Minot State, Dickinson State, and Valley City State). Both perspectives are ones that need to be raised and aired, but in a way where the problems cannot only be heard but actually addressed and solved. Up to now, we have not provided intentional opportunities in our state for these kinds of conversations to take place. Since general education coursework is the predominant kind of work that is transferred, it makes sense to focus the discussion on general education. Being able to participate in the state meetings has been a terrific learning experience for UND leaders in a variety of areas affected by transfer issues: advising, assessment, student records and registration, curricular planning, and enrollment management.

Third, this collaboration helps us tune our Essential Studies program. Up to now, most of the work in planning and implementing our general education revisions—Essential Studies—has concentrated on issues within our own institution (e.g., modifying courses, developing ES capstones, assisting advisors, clarifying requirements). Yet with a significant and growing number of transfer students, we cannot overlook the effects on our program that stem from reviewing and accepting coursework from other institutions. Coming together in the North Dakota General Education Summits has provided us with an opportunity to deal firsthand with these issues face-to-face with colleagues from across the state. Being able to do this has helped us understand these issues better, and it has given us a deeper knowledge of the challenges that we need to address as we continue to improve our own program in Essential Studies. Furthermore, these opportunities have also helped build greater trust between us and our partner institutions, something that will be a vital long-term benefit as our own program matures.

There is a side benefit of UND’s involvement in the state general education collaboration: a major opportunity for leadership, both at the state and national levels. Because we were “on the ground floor” of campus general education revision, other North Dakota institutions want to learn about our experience in developing Essential Studies. Because we received the AGLS award recognizing our work, state colleagues have been interested in consulting with us on issues such as assessment, faculty development, and curriculum. Because we are in a relatively small state where we have the capacity to bring together all our institutions and because North Dakota already has one of the best systems for transfer in the nation, we have received a good bit of national attention for our general education collaboration. Those are some of the key reasons for our being invited to become the sixth LEAP state. And those are some of the reasons why we are being invited to participate in discussions with other state collaborations in Oregon, Wisconsin, California, and Utah and why we are being invited to write and speak about our experiences by organizations such as the AAC&U and the AGLS. Not only does a leadership role bring increased visibility, but it also brings more opportunities for us to learn from schools within our own state and across the country. In other words, these are opportunities for us to improve our work.

**What Does This Mean for North Dakota?**

Having a formal means to bring together all institutions of North Dakota higher education is crucial in developing a statewide vision for general education. It also means that we can become better at “sharing” our students and sharing our expertise. Institutions tend to be better at competing than at cooperating. Perhaps that is, at least partly, a response to the fact that we do not often work in partnership with respect to what our students are learning and what we are teaching them. This new collaboration on general education gives our state a chance to do just that.

Obviously there are challenges. Just as UND does, each institution will want to hold onto its own uniqueness—in mission, location, students, future direction, etc. The
Working out smoother transfer and working out better, we go forward working together on general education and maintaining the kind of trust across the institutions as long run. That respect and support is crucial in developing qualities of each of our schools if it is to be successful in the long run. The group’s commitment is to support the interest of each institution, and in so doing, create a “bottom-up” organization. For example, in a recent discussion about essential learning outcomes and LEAP, the group looked at the outcomes that each of the institutions wants to support on its own campuses. Examining outcomes that 100% of the schools hold as essential to their campus programs indicates the outcomes that we hold essential as a state. This is one example of how the state group is working together to develop a statewide program, but at the same time, maintain the autonomy of each of the member institutions.

Down the road, the work in the North Dakota General Education Council (its new name) will lead to improvements in student learning statewide in general education. That’s where the LEAP initiative will be very helpful. LEAP seeks to help all member states to step up the quality of undergraduate education and provide a “new general education” that prepares students for work and life in a world that is rapidly changing. LEAP also is leading a shift in the way we think of general education—from the old vision of a general education that is valued for its own sake and disassociated with career and a life’s work to a new vision of a general education that partners with what students learn in their majors. The new general education—focused on developing essential skills, knowledge, and habits of mind—combines with major concentrations to form the two pillars of a quality undergraduate experience. This is the vision that underlies our new program in Essential Studies, and it is the vision that the North Dakota General Education Council is aiming for as we move ahead as a state.

Next Steps

There is now a proposal to form a permanent North Dakota General Education Council (NDGEC). This semester each of the participating schools is reviewing a proposed constitution for the NDGEC, and they will be asked to ratify the constitution by March 2011. The results of the ratification decisions will be shared at Summit V, to be held at NDSU in April. Here at UND, the Essential Studies Committee is reviewing the proposed NDGEC constitution now; if approved by the ESC, they will bring it forward to the University Senate and the Provost.

Previous discussions on essential learning outcomes in general education will continue in future Summits. The goal is to explore the essential learning outcomes that all the institutions hold in common. The in-common outcomes can then be viewed as a vision of North Dakota’s general education—across the public, private, and tribal colleges in our state. The AAC&U, as part of the LEAP initiative, has been holding similar conversations with business leaders across the country.

UND’s Participants in NDGEC Summits
Lisa Burger, Director-Student Success Center
Sherrie Fleshman, Department of Languages & Chair-Essential Studies Committee
Joan Hawthorne, Director-University Assessment & Accreditation
Anne Kelsch, Director-Office of Instructional Development
Steve Light, Associate Provost-Undergraduate Education
Lori Robison, Department of English & Member-Essential Studies Committee
Tom Steen, Director-Office of Essential Studies
Ryan Zerr, Department of Mathematics & Co-Chair-Undergraduate Learning Working Group

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On Teaching Lunch Seminar on December 1

Join us for the final lunch seminar of the semester, “Engaging Students in an Online Environment,” on Wednesday, December 1 in the Badlands Room of the Union. Register at oid.und.edu by noon on Monday, November 29.
NOTES FROM A FACULTY WRITING GROUP

This semester’s University Writing Program faculty writing group has been meeting weekly since the end of September. The seven members have discussed drafts on a variety of topics, from weather modification to contemporary Norwegian literature. Steve Finney, Chris Gjesfjeld, and David Delene agreed to share their experience as members of the group. In addition to keeping their own writing projects moving forward, members also see connections between their writing group experience and their teaching.

Steve Finney (Languages, University Writing Program): While I’ve belonged to writing groups in the past, this is the first faculty writing group I’ve joined. I know from past experience that a good group can provide a number of things for its members (not the least of which is a deadline). It can offer encouragement, some fresh eyes to relieve the writer’s own weary and jaded ones, and a source of thoughtful, honest feedback. The members of the group I’m in now come from different disciplines and backgrounds. All of them are careful readers, and all seem to approach each piece with the right combination of tact, honesty and good will. The diversity means that group members might notice different things about a piece. It also means that when all the group members agree on a particular point, the writer had better pay attention.

Because I don’t do a lot of research writing myself, hearing the other group members’ questions and comments has helped me adjust my focus to the sorts of things a piece of research writing needs to do. For the writing I’ve worked on with the group (fiction translation), the feedback I’ve gotten so far—both the encouragement and the suggested improvements—has been extremely useful and will result in a better finished piece.

Chris Gjesfjeld (Social Work): The writing group has helped me examine the logical flow of my writing. In teaching, if I make a poor transition between two topics or pass over a concept too quickly, students often look puzzled or turn to their classmates. These gestures, often nonverbal, give me signs to slow down or explain something in a different way. If I pick up on these signs, I teach more effectively and engage students in their learning. The writing group functions in a similar way. Left to myself, I often find it difficult to see which sections of a particular manuscript need work. Through the feedback from the writing group, I am challenged to clarify and improve specific sections of a manuscript. Like the nonverbal feedback from puzzled students, the writing group’s expressions of confusion and uncertainty help me to improve the clarity and focus of my writing. If we wouldn’t think of teaching to an empty classroom, why would we consider writing in isolation?

David Delene (Atmospheric Sciences): Students obtaining degrees in the Department of Atmospheric Sciences are expected to be able to effectively communicate both verbally and in writing. Undergraduate students have to complete a research project during their senior year, part of which is a written paper. Graduate students have to complete a written thesis. In addition to a solid science background, students need to master the mathematical and computer tools used to solve atmospheric science problems. This does not leave much time devoted to developing critical writing skills. One of the objectives of the Measurement Systems graduate course I teach is to improve student’s professional writing skills. Students practice writing by doing 5-6 reports on labs they perform during the semester.

By being involved in the faculty writing group, I am able to see what writing techniques transcend fields and listen to trouble that faculty have in their writing. This enables me to better understand, help, and motivate my students with their writing. It is interesting to listen to discussions on writing outside my field because it clarifies what is important.

The University Writing Program will sponsor a writing group in the spring semester. If you are interested in participating, contact Kathleen Vacek at 7-6381 or kathleen.vacek@und.edu.

New Website for the Writing Center/WAC Program Features Resources for Faculty

The University Writing Program has a new website, writingcenter.und.edu. UND students, faculty, and staff will find it even easier to access the Writing Center schedule to reserve an appointment time. First-time Writing Center visitors can access the site to learn what to expect when they meet with a writing consultant. This new site also serves as the online home for the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program.

The completely redesigned site features several new resources for faculty. Faculty will find tips on encouraging their students to use the Writing Center, including basic Writing Center information that can be copied and pasted onto a syllabus. Faculty can learn about the class visits and in-class workshops offered by the the Writing Center and WAC and submit a request online for more information. In addition to introducing faculty to WAC, the site will announce upcoming WAC workshops and faculty writing groups. Another new feature is a WAC Library page, where faculty can browse descriptions of a selection of books from the library and submit a request to borrow a book. These new resources will help faculty take advantage of the University Writing Program’s many offerings.

We hope you’ll take a look at the new site and see what it can do for you and your students. Visit us at writingcenter.und.edu
OID has a number of programs that offer faculty summer support to work on their teaching. Deadlines for those programs will be coming up quickly in the spring. On the OID web page (oid.und.edu), you will find the details you need to obtain funding for your planned summer teaching-related work. Full guidelines for the SIDP, Online SIDP and Mini-Projects programs are found under the “Funding” tab. And if you have questions, just email (oid@und.edu) or call 7-3325.

**SIDP: SUPPORT FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT**

Summer Instructional Development Professorships (SIDPs) fund course development grounded in sound teaching practices. Designed to allow faculty to work full-time on instructional development for four weeks during the summer, these Professorships provide a salary stipend of $4000. Work must go beyond normal course development (the program does not fund updating of course content for example) and focus on enhancing student learning.

**Deadline: March 1 (noon)**

**ONLINE SIDP: ONLINE DEVELOPMENT**

The Online Summer Instructional Development Professorship (Online SIDP) program grants $4000 summer stipends to UND faculty working full-time for four weeks on innovative instructional projects for online courses offered through Distance Education in the following academic year. As with traditional SIDPs, the project must go beyond normal course development and have the potential to increase student learning.

**Deadline: March 1 (noon)**

**SUMMER MINI-PROJECT GRANTS**

Summer Mini-Project Grants support faculty working on significant teaching/assessment projects that go beyond typical course preparation and can be completed in 1-2 weeks of full-time effort during the summer. Projects may relate to individual classes or to department/program needs. Grants range from $750-$1500, depending on the size of the project, and are paid as salary stipends.

**Deadline: April 1 (noon)**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SCALED-UP CLASSROOM**

With the support of the Provost, OID will be offering a faculty development initiative for STEM faculty teaching large enrollment courses that are interested in utilizing the new SCALE-UP classroom being constructed in Ireland Hall (for information on the classroom, see On Teaching Volume 19, Number 6 under “Resources” at oid.und.edu). The goal of the initiative is to change the paradigm for teaching and learning in large undergraduate STEM classes from a passive, lecture-based model of instruction to a collaborative, inquiry based model of learning. As this transition requires a significant investment of faculty time, OID will fund six projects undertaken during the summer of 2011. The initiative’s primary objective is the development of appropriate course materials and assessments for teaching large scale collaborative, inquiry based courses. The courses and materials created will serve as models for faculty who will use this approach (either in the SCALE-UP or a traditional classroom) in the future. If you are interested in more information on this program, please contact Anne Kelsch (7-4233).

**Deadline TBA.**
ON TEACHING
Office of Instructional Development
O’Kelly Hall, Room 300
221 Centennial Drive Stop 7104
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7104

On Teaching is published six times a year as a service to UND faculty.
OID Director: Anne Kelsch. OID/UWP Staff: Jeanne Boppre, Jana Lagro and Kathleen Vacek.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND DEADLINES

December 1  On Teaching Lunch Seminar: Engaging Students in an Online Environment
December 1  FIDC Grant Monthly Deadline (noon)