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## Academic Affairs Update, October 2014

University of Northern Iowa. Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.

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From the Office of the Provost and  
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

# Academic Affairs Update

University of Northern Iowa



## New Student Assessment Instrument Debuts at UNI

During 2013-14, eighteen meetings and dedicated faculty-administrative collaboration, in the form of the Student Assessment Instrument Committee, resulted in a new instrument by which students can evaluate their courses at UNI.

The committee's membership (as outlined in the *Master Agreement*) included nine representatives, three each from the Northern Iowa Student Government (NISG), United Faculty (UF), and the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (P/EVP). Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs Nancy Cobb chaired the committee.

Research and substantial discussion among committee members characterized the initial phases of the committee's work. Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Director and Professor Susan Hill submitted a recommendation paper regarding teaching assessment to the committee, and other members consulted publications by performance evaluation specialist Peter Seldin, whose 2013 Fall Faculty Workshop on teaching assessment generated great interest among UNI faculty.

As the next phase in its process to create the instrument, in December 2013 the committee distributed a campus-wide survey to all students, faculty, and administrators. Question topics were wide-ranging and included course structure and content, Student Learning Outcomes, and the efficacy of an online versus paper instrument.

The Center for Social and Behavioral Research guided the development and distribution of the survey and analysis of its results. Almost half of the faculty body (two-thirds of whom were tenured) and half of the administrative body (68% of whom were

## From Teacher to Learner

In late August, almost 225 UNI faculty explored innovative teaching strategies during the 2014 Fall Faculty Workshop on "Creating a Learner-Centered Classroom."

Recently, many faculty have shifted their teaching style away from a lecture-based approach, instead to focus on engaging students in the classroom. Guest speaker Dr. Maryellen Weimer, professor emerita of Teaching and Learning at Penn State Berks, discussed the implications of moving from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered teaching paradigm.

***Although I was very familiar with student-centered learning, I learned some thoughtful ways to ask questions to engage my learners in my higher education classroom. In particular, I found one of the suggestions especially fruitful: asking students "What are your questions?" instead of "Do you have any questions?" Assuming students have questions gives an instructor richer feedback from students.***

***--Dr. Lyn Le Countryman, Professor, Department of Teaching***

***Having students summarize what they learned seems like an effective learning tool that I am implementing... [T]his would provide a way to assess learning.***

***--Dr. Mary Donegan-Ritter, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction***



**Save the Date: Prove the Impact of Your Community Engagement**

also teaching) responded to the survey. Nine percent of students responded.

Among points of consensus most exhibited among faculty, administrators, and students were the preference that the instrument be administered during class time, and that a certain portion of the instrument's feedback be accessible only to the instructor.

Referring to results from the survey, from focus groups comprised of faculty, department heads, and students, and from discussions held among college deans, the committee then composed a pilot instrument, distributed to over 2700 students in February 2014.

Committee member and Educational Psychology and Foundations Department Head Robert Boody analyzed the reliability of the piloted instrument's results, to gauge the strengths of the instrument and spot opportunities for revision. Consequential changes included altering the scales used to respond to instrument questions, and reducing the number of questions.

At the end of the Spring 2014 semester, the committee presented a report to the NISG, UF and P/EVP for their consideration and the latter two bodies' approval. The report recommended that the Student Assessment Instrument Committee remained formed throughout 2014-15 to continue evaluating the instrument, and that its members explore the concept of including discipline-specific questions in the instrument's future versions.

The conversations and workshops on UNI's community engagement activities continue on November 4, when Dr. Adrienne Lamberti, Associate Professor of Languages and Literatures and Professional Writing Program Coordinator, presents on "Documenting Your Impact" from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Center for Multicultural Education. Dr. Lamberti will discuss methods for effectively demonstrating the benefits of community outreach projects, specifically when using quantitative-focused institutional documentation to report on qualitative impact.

*Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs*

### **Save the Date: CHGE Hosts Patrick Hicks**

On November 5-7, the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education (CHGE) will co-sponsor Patrick Hicks, Writer-in-Residence at Augustana College (Sioux Falls) and the author of several collections of poetry. Recently, Hicks published to strongly favorable reviews the novel *The Commandant of Lubizec*, the story of a fictional death camp in eastern Poland. Hicks also will publish a collection of short stories in Spring 2015. His visit to UNI will include two presentations/readings from his work, classroom visits, and an event with the CHGE Faculty Book Reading Group.

In its initiatives such as hosting Professor Hicks' visit, the CHGE enacts the goals of UNI's Strategic Plan, including "creat[ing] and maintain[ing] an inclusive educational environment."




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Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs  
20 Seerley Hall, University of Northern Iowa  
Cedar Falls, IA 50614