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Academic Affairs Update, January 2016

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January Academic Affairs Update



RISE-ing to the Challenge: UNI Refugee and Immigrant Support and Empowerment

By Dr. Adrienne Lamberti and Katy Resop Benway, Post-Baccalaureate Candidate (English)

Iowa has one of the fastest growing refugee populations in the nation; Waterloo alone is home to more than 2,000 refugees from Burma, and between 100-200 Congolese immigrants.

As a result, community engagement projects by the organizations Cedar Valley Advocates for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (CVAIRR), University of Northern Iowa Refugee & Immigrant Support and Empowerment (UNI RISE), and the Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC) are timely examples of "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities..., for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (*The Carnegie Classification...*, 2010).

UNI RISE provides English tutoring and other services to area refugees and immigrants, by bringing together members of various ethnic and immigrant communities with the intention of promoting solidarity. One example of such partnership is among UNI RISE, ethnic minorities from Burma, and Congolese immigrants in the area, and St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Waterloo, in a project focusing on English language acquisition. The organizations' literacy work is purposed to empower immigrant and refugee leaders.

In early October, "RISE Week" offered on-campus presentations, videos, and community interactions on such topics as the European refugee crisis, "Confronting Islamophobia," immigration reform, and personal accounts told by refugees from Burma.

CVAIRR too enables immigrant advocacy, and alerts the wider Cedar Valley community about global and local issues related to refugee services and immigration.

EMBARC is an Iowa nonprofit with an office in Waterloo; it daily works with ethnic minorities from Burma and other area immigrant and refugee groups. The entire Waterloo office staff, in fact, is comprised of recent UNI graduates, current UNI students serving as AmeriCorps members, and refugees from Burma.



Last fall's RISE Week featured a slate of several presentations and community events
More information about the organizations' work is available on [Facebook](#) and the [EMBARC](#) website.

Writing the World

By Marci Swank, M.A. in English (2015)

Students who've experienced it have called it one of UNI's best-kept secrets. Non-profit, not-for-profit, and for-profit organizations come back to it repeatedly. It has generated hundreds of communications impacting local, state, and inter/national audiences.

Maybe it's the name: "Professional Writing at UNI." While professional communication is a rigorous discipline present in universities across the globe, and has been so since the early 20th century, the phrase isn't popularly understood (one of its subfields, technical writing, is more recognized). Within a UNI context, Professional Writing curricula are taught as the study of workplace communication, and writing in the disciplines.

Professional Writing courses simultaneously serve two student populations: those who will communicate as part of their career, and those who will communicate as their career. In other words, all students.

Or, as one Professional Writing instructor tells her students, "If you plan to have *any* job, you're going to be a workplace communicator."

While Professional Writing at UNI is meant to provide workplace and disciplinary communication experiences to students, it also is rooted in bringing the university and organizations together to support larger communities. In Professional Writing courses, students work directly with organizational clients, to generate a variety of professional-level communication projects ranging from web presences to art exhibit storyboards, from video gaming narratives to philanthropic white papers.

Such community engagement is an increasing component of UNI's identity, as the university looks to its future. UNI once again was named to the 2014 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, and the university is now one of 361 institutions nationwide that hold the Community Engagement Classification from The Carnegie Foundation.

Coordination of Professional Writing (PW) changed in 2005, and since then PW students have collaborated with an average of over 20 organizational clients each year. During the 2014-15 year alone, students' communication product deliverables represented such Presidential Honor Roll categories as Economic Opportunity, Health, Veterans and Deployed Personnel, Education, Environment, General Community Service, and Summer Learning.

Undergraduate and graduate students have these impressions of Professional Writing at UNI:

Professional Writing has given me amazing opportunities to work and network with organizations throughout the Cedar Valley. Through the client projects, I have the chance to apply class concepts to the "real world" and create communications that will actually be used by organizations.

–Katie Kelzer

It's important to learn about the community, and see that it is invested in UNI students, but [Professional Writing] gives students a chance to learn about companies as well.

–Elizabeth Collins

Meanwhile, organizational clients offer such comments:

I feel it is important to have the community support UNI and the students through professional development. Through doing so, the students are giving back to the community at the same time.

–Carol Lilly, Cedar Falls Community Main Street Director

When Professional Writing works with [UNI's] Fabulous Resources for Energy Education [program], it helps teachers not just in the Cedar Valley, but around the entire state. They are reaching the community and the state, and really helping better the world.

–Pat Higby, FREE Program Director

For more information about Professional Writing at UNI, contact prof-writing@uni.edu or visit its [Facebook page](#).

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