

Iowa, like all public universities, has reached a moment in history where it must rededicate itself to its core function of undergraduate education . . . Public universities wouldn't exist were it not for our role in educating undergraduate students and preparing them for responsible participation in their communities. We must, therefore, hold each other accountable for outstanding performance as undergraduate teachers, advisors, and mentors. We must explore new learning environments, encourage good citizenship through service learning programs, and create new research experiences that will enable our students to sample the value-added of an education at a major research university.

— Michael J. Hogan, University of Iowa Executive Vice President and Provost 2004-2007

## Introduction

### Overview of Special Emphasis

The Higher Learning Commission's special emphasis self-study option affords a qualified institution a valuable opportunity to study in depth an area of particular, timely importance—to address an issue critical to its mission and aspirations. As University of Iowa leaders began planning for the current reaccreditation cycle, consulting broadly across campus, one theme quickly emerged as a likely subject for a focused self-assessment: undergraduate education, defined broadly.

National trends in higher education over the past several years have led many institutions—especially public institutions—to refocus on their core mission of undergraduate education. Feeling mounting pressure from expenses such as Medicaid, K-12 education, and the prison system, states have shifted a greater share of the costs of higher education onto students and their families. As tuition rises and students and their families borrow more to pay for college, the demand for greater accountability has grown. Students and families—and Secretary Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education—want to know if “our investment in higher education [is] paying off—are we getting what we paid for?” (Miller & Malandra, 2006, p.1). Meanwhile, the nation's perception of higher education as a public good increasingly has taken a back seat to the idea that it is a private good, with the primary purpose of landing the eventual graduate a good job and a higher salary. Academic leaders have struggled to keep constituents aware of the value of a liberal education, not just for students but for the local, national, and international communities of which they will be citizens.

The University of Iowa has not been immune to these trends; nor have we ignored them. In fact, The University of Iowa has reached a defining moment in a decade-long process of strengthening our commitment to undergraduate education.

#### 1c: Mission pervades organization

DEVELOPMENTS IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, 1997-98 TO 2007-08

#### 1d: Effective governance and administration

In 1997, then-Provost Jon Whitmore appointed the University's first associate provost for undergraduate education. The University's first two strategic plans, *Achieving Distinction* (1990 to 1995) and *Achieving Distinction 2000* (1995 to 2000), had included among the institution's top-level goals “comprehensive strength in undergraduate programs.” The creation of the new position in the Office of the Provost reinforced the University's commitment to that goal.

#### 1e: Institutional integrity

#### 2d: Mission-aligned planning

Two years later, in her 1999 Convocation Address, then-President Mary Sue Coleman called the University community's attention to Iowa's four- and six-year graduation rates, which were lower than those of Michigan State and Indiana—institutions with student bodies comparable to Iowa's in terms of mean composite ACT scores and high school rank. "What can we do," she asked, "to encourage students to graduate in a more timely fashion?" This led to the appointment of a Task Force on Persistence to Graduation, chaired by Professor Lola Lopes, who later became associate provost for undergraduate education (and in 2007-08 is serving as the University's interim provost). In its September 2000 *final report*, the Task Force on Persistence to Graduation urged the University to do more "to integrate students into a scholarly culture and to provide them with the intellectual skills and strategies that make the difference between success and failure."

In 2005 a report to the Board of Regents, State of Iowa, titled *Best Practices in Student Retention at the Regent Universities* examined how policies and procedures at the three state universities compare to those recommended in the ACT study *What Works in Student Retention? Four Year Public Colleges* (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). The report finds that many of ACT's "best practices" for retention have been in place at UI for many years—such as the oldest writing center in the U.S., for example, and one of the earliest residential learning communities. Many other efforts date from the 1990s, such as the addition of several new residential communities, the creation of the block scheduling program *Courses in Common*, and the inauguration of the *Four-Year Graduation Plan*. But it was after 2000, prompted by the recommendations of the Task Force on Persistence to Graduation, that UI experienced a "flowering of retention programs." The University expanded learning communities, strengthened academic advising, and implemented a variety of new programs to help new students develop the skills they need to succeed in college. The task force's counsel and then-Associate Provost Lopes's leadership began to bring about a cultural shift toward a focus on undergraduate education and the factors that affect student success.

One measure of the benefit the University and our students have realized from this cultural shift is the one that began it—the rate of *graduation and retention*. UI's one-year retention rate has increased from 82.0% for the 1995 entering cohort to 84.1% for the 2005 cohort. The six-year graduation rate has increased from 62.6% for the 1990 cohort to 65.5% for the 2000 cohort. And the four-year graduation rate has increased dramatically, from 32.3% for the 1992 cohort to 40.5% for the 2002 cohort.

Today, the commitment to undergraduate education and student success has a prominent place in the University's strategic plan, *The Iowa Promise*, and continues to guide University actions. Over the past year, Vice Provost Tom Rocklin (who prior to September 2007 held the title senior associate provost for undergraduate education) created a Student Success Team that includes broad representation from across campus. He also appointed the University's first director of student success initiatives. These and many other recent developments related to undergraduate education are detailed in the sections that follow.

## CHOOSING THE SPECIAL EMPHASIS

In choosing to use the reaccreditation process as an opportunity to make a focused, in-depth study of the many facets of undergraduate education at The University of Iowa, the University hopes to take the next step toward achieving our strategic goals more quickly and carrying out our mission more effectively. We believe that to take that next

**1c: Mission pervades organization**

**1d: Effective governance and administration**

**1e: Institutional integrity**

**2a: Preparation for future**

**2d: Mission-aligned planning**

- 1c: Mission pervades organization**
- 1d: Effective governance and administration**
- 1e: Institutional integrity**
- 2a: Preparation for future**
- 5a: Learns from constituencies**

step we must widen the conversation, bringing faculty, staff, and students more actively into discussions about making the best use of our resources, overcoming challenges related to undergraduate education, and promoting student success. We believe this process will help us to fulfill our promise to those we serve.

See Appendix II-A for the Memorandum of Understanding between The University of Iowa and the Higher Learning Commission regarding the University's option to pursue a special emphasis self-study for its 2007-08 comprehensive evaluation.

### *Organization of the Special Emphasis Self-Study*

#### UI Self-Study Steering Committee Members:

Thomas Rocklin, Vice Provost and Dean of the University College (chair)

Kenneth G. Brown, Associate Professor, Department of Management and Organizations, and Huneke Faculty Research Fellow, Henry B. Tippie College of Business

Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Pat Folsom, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Services and Director, Academic Advising Center

Norbert J. Pienta, Director, Center for Teaching, and Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Mary Trachsel, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Rhetoric, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Elizabeth Whitt, Director of Student Success Initiatives and Professor of Counseling, Rehabilitation and Student Development, College of Education

#### STEERING COMMITTEE

In fall 2005, Provost Hogan convened a steering committee to develop a self-study proposal and work plan, oversee the research and data collection process, and write the self-study report. The steering committee comprised five faculty members, a senior academic services staff member, and the senior associate provost for undergraduate education (now vice provost), who served as chair. The committee's goal was to conduct and document a self-study that would support the University's reaccreditation and serve as the basis for ongoing efforts to enhance undergraduate education.

In spring 2006 the steering committee appointed five subcommittees made up of faculty, staff, and students, each charged with conducting an in-depth study of one of five broad themes (as described below) over the 2006-07 academic year. The subcommittees received staff and research support from the Office of the Provost. They submitted their final reports in June 2007.

Later, the steering committee identified a need for a sixth subcommittee to study learning environments, which worked on a shortened timeline. That subcommittee submitted its report in September 2007.

The steering committee members prepared the final self-study report based on the research and evaluative reports presented by the subcommittees, along with input collected from a variety of content experts and other contributors from across campus. The committee shared several drafts of the self-study with the University community during fall 2007 and made many substantive changes in response to the constructive feedback received through that process.

#### SUBJECT AREAS AND SUBCOMMITTEES

The steering committee members identified six broad themes related to undergraduate education that they felt merited in-depth examination as part of the self-study process. A subcommittee was assigned to research and evaluate The University of Iowa in relation to each theme. The charges to each of the subcommittees may be found in Appendix II-B.

#### Entry and Transition

As stated by the Policy Center on the First Year of College, "The first college year is central to the achievement of an institution's mission

and lays the foundation on which undergraduate education is built” (2005). Research has demonstrated that the process of setting expectations, communicating values, equipping students with essential learning skills, and integrating them into the campus community—a process that actually begins with recruitment and extends through the student’s first year—is critical to student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005a). Therefore, the self-study includes an examination of The University of Iowa’s programs, policies, and practices related to recruitment, admissions, and orientation, as well as opportunities and experiences specifically geared toward the first-year student.

### Common Academic Experiences

Faculty and academic leaders at colleges and universities throughout the country have many and conflicting opinions about how (or whether) to define the core educational experience every undergraduate should share, and about how to deliver it. Nonetheless, most would agree that we in higher education must ask ourselves—especially in times of rapid change—whether our curricula are in appropriate balance, whether we are advancing the objectives of liberal education, whether our expectations are too high or too low, and other key questions to ensure that we are meeting our students’ needs and preparing them for the world in which they will live.

In spring 2005, Provost Hogan announced his intention to initiate a review of the University’s General Education Program (GEP). As plans for the special emphasis self-study developed, the steering committee chose to incorporate that review into this larger assessment of the UI undergraduate experience. The committee’s goal was to collect information and provide a report that would serve as a basis, if necessary, for a more focused group to begin to redesign the GEP.

### Education within the Major

The UI undergraduate curriculum consists of common academic experiences (the General Education Program), electives, and focused, specialized learning through one or more major programs. Major programs—usually department-based, though some are interdisciplinary—advise students, assess their progress, provide mechanisms to support effective learning, and become the nexus for student relationships with faculty and peers. This self-study includes an inventory of major programs at The University of Iowa.

### Getting Involved

Higher education researchers have long understood that student involvement outside (as well as inside) the classroom benefits students. Alexander W. Astin’s (1985) extensive work with college students, for example, resulted in his well-known “theory of involvement,” which is “Stated simply: students learn by becoming involved” (p. 133, as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Moreover, Astin’s work suggested that an institution can be shaped and altered in ways that will encourage student involvement—a theory supported by later research (Strange & Banning, 2001).

The self-study steering committee felt it important, therefore, to take stock of the opportunities for co-curricular involvement currently available to undergraduate students at The University of Iowa.

## Cultivating Student Potential

Many organizational units and programs on The University of Iowa campus contribute to students' academic and personal growth outside of the classroom. Some—such as the University Libraries, Information Technology Services, and the Academic Advising Center—provide services used by most undergraduate students; other programs are more specialized, whether designed to support students who face particular challenges, or to challenge very talented and well-prepared students to make the most of their abilities. This self-study describes some of the programs that exist at The University of Iowa, targets a subset of them for further examination, and evaluates the effectiveness of the targeted programs in helping students reach their potential.

## Learning Environments

An institution's appreciation for the ways in which physical and virtual spaces and settings can enhance student learning has been shown to contribute to success in the areas of student engagement and graduation rates (Kuh et al., 2005a). This self-study includes a review of learning environments provided by the University, including spaces used for both formal and informal teaching and learning.

## CHARGES TO THE SUBCOMMITTEES

The general charge to each subcommittee (except for the subcommittee on Common Academic Experiences) was to submit a written report accomplishing the following three tasks within the scope of its subject area:

*Inventory:* Identify and describe the programs, policies, and practices in place at The University of Iowa that relate to the scope of the subcommittee's charge.

*Evaluate:*

Collect information that addresses the effectiveness of these programs, policies, and practices in meeting the criteria for evaluation.

Collect real life stories from relevant constituencies to illustrate the findings of the subcommittee.

*Propose:* Suggest changes that will allow The University of Iowa to better meet the criteria for evaluation.

The charge to the subcommittee on Common Academic Experiences was to produce a report addressing two key questions:

What learning outcomes should the University of Iowa's General Education Program promote among our students?

To what extent does the current General Education Program succeed in promoting those outcomes?

The steering committee also asked the subcommittee on Common Academic Experiences to keep the campus community involved and informed about its work, and to include among its research methods an examination of practices at other institutions; consultation of the relevant scholarly literature; and input from students, faculty members, alumni, and employers.

The steering committee asked all of the subcommittees to be mindful, as they carried

out their tasks, of two overarching questions related to diversity:

In what ways do the programs, policies, and practices under study support the goal of recruiting and retaining a diverse campus community?

How do the programs, policies, and practices draw upon the diversity of our campus community to promote excellence in undergraduate education?

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

Although the steering committee members ultimately chose to organize the special emphasis self-study report around the broad themes they had identified (with the exception that “Cultivating Student Potential” and “Learning Environments” have been combined into a single chapter called “Environments and Resources for Learning”), they discussed at length concerns about perpetuating distinctions between “academic affairs” and “student affairs,” between “academic” and “non-academic” experiences, between “in-class” and “out-of-class” learning. Student success ultimately depends upon many factors. Universities need to recognize the interactions among these factors, rather than artificially compartmentalizing them.

While acknowledging that the organization of this report does to some extent rely on artificial categories and compartmentalizations, we affirm here one of the findings presented at the end of the self-study: we must do a better job of communicating across traditional barriers and work harder to break down the “silos” of focus we have built over time.

#### *Research Processes*

##### THE RISE STUDY (RESEARCH ON IOWA STUDENT EXPERIENCES)

Executive Vice President and Provost Michael J. Hogan set the self-study in motion in June 2005 when he commissioned the University of Iowa [Center for Research on Undergraduate Education](#) (CRUE) to perform a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative study of undergraduate experiences at The University of Iowa. The center undertook the Research on Iowa Student Experiences (RISE) project during the 2005-06 academic year and the summer of 2006. Researchers collected quantitative data via a web-based survey instrument sent to all undergraduate first-year and senior students. They received completed surveys from 1,477 first-year students and 1,676 seniors, a response rate of 36.5%. To gather qualitative data, researchers conducted interviews with focus groups including 75 first-year students and 45 seniors who chose to participate. The center submitted its [final report](#) to the provost in fall 2006.

##### Summary of RISE Study Findings

Because the RISE study informed the work of each of the self-study subcommittees, a summary of its findings in several key categories is provided here in the hope that it will usefully inform the reading of the special emphasis self-study as a whole. The full report will be available to the HLC consultant-evaluators in the University’s resource room.

#### **Academic Engagement**

Two items on the RISE survey sought student impressions of the academic climate at UI: (1) “Students (at UI) spend a lot of time studying and completing academic assignments” and (2) “Academic work at UI is challenging and requires serious

intellectual effort.” Sixty-one percent of first-year students and 58% of seniors agreed that UI students spend a lot of time in academic pursuits; 82% of first-year students and 74% of seniors agreed that academic work at UI is challenging and requires effort.

Students also were asked to identify the number of books, term papers, and essay exams they had completed in the current (2005-06) academic year (that is, as of the end of March 2006). Twenty-five percent of first-year students and 34% of seniors said they had read 0 to 4 “assigned books and readings *this academic year*” (emphasis added); 44% of first-year students and 39% of seniors said they had read 5 to 10 assigned books or readings (the most frequent response for both groups). Sixty-five percent of first-year students and 68% of seniors had completed 0 to 4 essay exams. Fifty percent of seniors said they had completed 0 to 4 term papers or written reports; 30% said they had completed 5 to 10. In contrast, 47% of first-year students said they had completed 5 to 10 term papers or reports and 20% said they had completed 11 to 20.

Students also were asked to estimate the amount of time (in hours) they spent on a variety of academic activities during the current (spring 2006) semester. Students were asked, for example, to estimate how much time they spent “preparing for class in a typical week.” The most frequent response for both groups (25% of first-year students and 26% of seniors) was 6 to 10 hours per week. Twenty-three percent of first-year students and 22% of seniors said they spend 11 to 15 hours per week preparing for class. Twenty-one percent of first-year students and 19% of seniors said they spend more than 21 hours per week preparing for class; 10% of first-year students and 15% of seniors said they spend 0 to 5 hours per week.

The academic activities reported by the students could appear to be inconsistent with their assertions about the academic climate at UI. One could argue, for example, that reading 0 to 4 assigned books or readings in the first 7 months of the academic year (as reported by 25% of first-year students and 34% of seniors) contradicts the assertion that UI students “spend a lot of time studying and completing academic requirements” or that “academic work at UI is challenging and requires serious intellectual effort.” It might be the case, however, that the respondents were not referring to themselves when they said UI students spend a lot of time studying. Or the respondents might view 0 to 4 readings in 7 months as “a lot” or intellectually challenging.

All the RISE focus groups were asked to describe the quality and quantity of “academic challenge” they had experienced in their time at UI. How that term was defined was left to the students, but the discussions about it referred (among other things) to time spent studying and on homework, the pressure students felt to work hard in and prepare for their classes, expectations of faculty for student effort and performance, class attendance, and general feelings of being challenged (or not) academically and/or intellectually. Both first-year students and seniors described their UI experiences as lacking in academic challenge and characterized by low expectations (particularly their own, but also their peers’ and their instructors’) for time spent studying, preparing for class, studying for exams, writing papers, and, in general, focusing on the academic aspects of college. Many noted that “academic challenge is what you make it,” because they felt little external academic pressure.

Some first-year students asserted that this lack of academic challenge was a surprise and/or a disappointment: they expected more challenge than they encountered and many were surprised at the amount of free time they had in their first semester at UI. Many seniors noted a decline in perceived academic challenge over their time in college; most asserted that once they “figured out the system,” they needed to

spend little time on academic endeavors. This seemed to depend, to some extent, on a student's major (e.g., some engineering majors described extensive and intensive academic challenge) or on whether the student was working on a senior thesis.

These data are in sharp contrast to responses to the survey questions about academic climate. Survey respondents (83% of first-year students and 74% of seniors) indicated they perceived academic work at UI to be challenging and requiring serious intellectual effort. They might not, however, contradict the survey data about time spent engaged in academic activities; the small numbers of assigned readings, essay exams, and papers reported by both seniors and first-year students and the low number of hours spent in class preparation could be viewed as supporting the focus group assertions about lack of academic challenge.

### Non-Academic Engagement

Most RISE survey respondents—88% of first-year students and 83% of seniors—said they spent 0 to 5 hours per week on co-curricular activities (i.e., “student organizations or government, campus publications, art or music, etc.”) and almost all—94% of first-year students and 91% of seniors—spent 0 to 5 hours per week in community service or volunteer activities not related to class. First-year students were more likely than seniors to spend time using a computer “for fun.” Most of the respondents—62% of the seniors and 84% of the first-year students—reported working 0 to 5 hours per week on campus; 58% of the seniors and 88% of the first-year students reported 0 to 5 hours of paid employment off campus. Seniors were more likely than first-year students to work on or off campus, but particularly off campus. With the exception of employment, however, first-year students tended to report spending more hours on the activities identified in the survey than seniors.

The survey also asked students to identify the types of activities they had engaged in during their time at UI. They were to select from a list of experiences and activities, most of which are known to be associated with desired educational outcomes of college—for example, living-learning communities, leadership positions or training, racial or cultural awareness workshops, senior capstone experiences, or research with a faculty member (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). With a few exceptions, the “no” responses far exceeded the “yes” responses regarding involvement in this array of activities for both first-year students and seniors. One could infer from this that the choices given the students did not reflect the experiences and activities in which the respondents have been engaged at UI, and that another list might have yielded more “yes” responses than “nos.” However, given that the activities included in the survey were, for the most part, associated with high-quality college experiences and educationally-effective postsecondary learning environments (Kuh et al., 2005a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), one might infer that these are desirable activities that ought to be characteristic of UI students' experiences. One also might hope that such desirable activities are widely distributed among, and experienced by, UI students. The RISE results indicate they are not.

Analyses of the survey results did, however, demonstrate the impact of participation in some of these activities on the desired outcomes of college; that is, the students who did participate benefited in important ways. “Worked on a research project with a faculty member” (9% of first-year students and 24% of seniors) was associated, for example, with the following self-reported outcomes for both groups of students: cumulative grade point average, growth in general/ liberal arts education, growth in career/professional preparation, personal/interpersonal growth, and overall/composite

growth. Other detailed results of experiences and outcomes can be found in the full RISE report.

In the RISE interviews, first-year students described themselves, in general, as having a lot of free time, and surprisingly few described involvement in formal out-of-class activities such as student clubs or organizations (although this, too, is reflected in the survey responses). In addition to going to class, for example, a “typical day” for most first-year students included quite a bit of “non-academic” computer time, time on the phone with friends, napping, and “hanging out.” Many first-year students said they did not have a job on campus besides being a student; several, however, noted working off-campus in restaurants or retail.

Seniors described themselves as “overachievers” with regard to involvement in formal out-of-class activities, leadership positions, and campus life. When asked to describe a “typical Iowa student,” the seniors (who did not see themselves as “typical”) conjured a picture of “someone who maybe goes to class, watches a lot of TV, and parties a lot” but “who doesn’t really get involved in anything else, like leadership or student [organizations].” They referred to themselves as “the student leaders,” and as “a really small group—you see the same people at every meeting.”

Seniors also were asked why they had chosen to stay at UI, and one theme related to engagement stood out. For these seniors, “getting involved” with student organizations and with other people (other students, faculty, and staff), was the key to staying at UI. This is consistent with decades of research about student retention and points to the importance of finding ways to expand the numbers of first-year students who are actively engaged in academic and co-curricular aspects of college. This also emphasizes the need for concern—or, at least, further study—about the fairly low levels of first-year involvement in a range of college experiences and activities reported in the survey.

The RISE interview data were replete with this message: UI offers many opportunities for student engagement and success, but it is up to the individual student to find those opportunities and to create a positive experience for himself or herself. First-year students and seniors described as “challenging,” however, the processes of finding the opportunities and resources one needs to craft a successful and engaging college experience. Students said they relied mostly on other students (first-year peers and older students) to identify what an Iowa education could and should be, and made a wide range of decisions based on the example of other students.

### **The Impact of Effective Classroom Instruction**

The RISE survey asked students a variety of questions about their perceptions of teacher quality. The survey questions referred to “teachers”; whether respondents interpreted this to refer only to tenure track faculty or to all classifications of instructors (e.g., teaching assistants, clinical faculty, tenure track faculty, staff in teaching roles) is impossible to determine.

Survey respondents reported very positive opinions about the quality of teaching they have experienced at UI. For example, 74% of first-year students and 77% of seniors agreed that “most teachers with whom they have had contact” at UI “are genuinely interested in students”; 69% of first-year students and 71% of seniors agreed that teachers “are genuinely interested in teaching.” About 60% of respondents from both groups agreed their teachers “are genuinely interested in helping students grow in more than academics.” Almost half of the first-year students and 58% of seniors agreed

that their teachers “are outstanding” and 74% of first-year students and 75% of seniors agreed that teachers are willing to spend time outside of class on issues of interest to students.

Students in the RISE interviews also talked extensively about the quality of instruction they encountered at UI. Comments were fairly evenly divided between positive experiences and negative. In general, both first-year and senior students felt that quality undergraduate instruction was a lower priority for the University than research. Class size was a factor in the nature of students’ experiences with instruction. Instruction in large classes tended to be described more negatively than instruction in small classes. Students—particularly first-year students—tended to be most positive about instruction that required active engagement with class materials and with other students, techniques that students described as occurring in small classes, not large. Students also were much more likely to feel their presence was noted and, therefore, important in smaller classes than in large.

Follow-up analyses of RISE data were conducted in fall 2006 to determine what (if any) factors influenced the return of first-year survey respondents to UI for the sophomore year. In the presence of statistical controls for student characteristics and experiences, two experiences predicted persistence to the sophomore year: (1) participation in a living-learning community, and (2) perceptions of having received effective teaching. Elements of effective teaching included clear course goals and explanations, good use of examples, well-organized presentations, effective use of class time, and so on. In fact, a one standard deviation increase in perception of the overall quality of teaching increased the odds of first- to second-year persistence 1.37 times (137%).

### **Student-Teacher Interaction**

The RISE survey asked students a variety of questions about frequency of student-teacher interactions and the impacts of student-teacher interactions outside the classroom. Again, respondents may have interpreted “teachers” to refer to tenure track faculty or to all classifications of instructors.

Students reported a wide range of personal and academic gains as a result of interactions with faculty. Students agreed that “non-classroom interactions” between students and teachers had positive effects on personal growth (52% of first-year students and 62% of seniors), intellectual growth and interest in ideas (56% of first-year students and 68% of seniors), and career goals and aspirations (44% of first-year students and 61% of seniors). The survey left interpretation of the term “non-classroom interactions” to the respondents.

Unfortunately, student-faculty interactions outside of class appeared to be fairly uncommon among the respondents to the survey. Most frequent (“very often” or “often”) were interactions to discuss class assignments (first-year students: 41%; seniors: 47%) and to discuss ideas from reading or class (first-year students: 35%; seniors: 32%). Sixty percent of first-year students and 42% of seniors said they “never” interacted with teachers on non-coursework activities (e.g., committees, orientation, student life activities) and 54% of first-year students and 40% of seniors “never” interacted with teachers to discuss personal matters. In addition, 44% of seniors reported they had “rarely” or “never” interacted with teachers to discuss career concerns and plans.

Students also were asked in the RISE interviews about interactions with faculty. In general, as with the survey respondents, students in the interviews spoke in very positive

terms about these interactions. In fact, even a single interaction or a single individual could have a significant impact on a student's satisfaction with the University and/or with herself or himself.

With few exceptions, interviewed students described faculty as approachable, available, and willing and able to help students. First-year students in particular often included teaching assistants in their discussion of "faculty." Some distinctions were made between the availability and approachability of faculty in large classes and faculty in small classes, but some students noted positive interactions with faculty in the very largest classes. These faculty were exceptions, rather than typical, but the impact they had on students' sense that students and undergraduate education mattered to these faculty was striking. When asked about advice they would give to prospective or new UI students, most seniors offered some form of "Get to know your professors" and "Go to office hours so they know you care." Across the board, however, students asserted that positive, meaningful interactions with faculty had to be initiated by students.

### Diversity Experiences

In the RISE study, students were asked to note the frequency with which they had been involved in a range of "diversity" experiences (e.g., conversations with students different than they in race, political perspectives, religion) during their time at UI. It is disappointing to note that 39% of first-year students and 42% of seniors reported they had "rarely" or "never" been encouraged to make contact with students from different economic, social, racial, or ethnic backgrounds. Thirty-six percent of first-year students and 30% of seniors had "rarely" or "never" had serious conversations with students of a race or ethnicity different than their own. Forty-eight percent of first-year students and 50% of seniors, however, said they had made friends "very often" or "often" with a student whose race was different than their own. Forty-seven percent of first-year students and 38% of seniors had "rarely" or "never" made friends with a student from another country. When asked about how often they engaged in "serious discussions" about major social issues or with students whose politics, religion, or philosophy of life were different than their own, students in both groups were most likely to say "occasionally."

At the same time, however, the survey item "participated in a racial or cultural awareness workshop" was associated with several self-reported desirable outcomes of college for both first-year students and seniors: (1) growth in general/liberal arts education, (2) personal/interpersonal growth, and (3) overall/composite growth. Participation in a racial or cultural awareness workshop also had a negative relationship to binge drinking for both first-year students and seniors. Given the limitations of this form of survey research, it is not known to what specific workshop or workshops the students referred, nor what the workshops included that led to these outcomes. The data do indicate, however, that a very small number of students (6% of first-year students and 12% of seniors) reported participating in what seems to be a very valuable experience.

Similar but more detailed results about student experiences and attitudes regarding diversity can be found in the [report of the UI undergraduate student diversity climate survey](#) conducted in 2005.

### Binge Drinking

The RISE survey included information about alcohol use. Students were asked (1) to

“Think back over a typical 2-week period when you were in high school. How many times did you have 5 or more drinks (a 12-ounce can of beer, a 4-ounce glass of wine, 1 wine cooler, 1 shot of liquor or 1 mixed drink) on one occasion?”, and (2) to “Think back over a typical 2-week period at The University of Iowa. How many times did you have 5 or more drinks . . . on one occasion?”

Ten percent of first-year students and 13% of seniors reported drinking five or more drinks six or more times (that is, at least 30 drinks) during a typical two-week period in college. This is roughly the equivalent of having five or more drinks every other night in a two-week period. The drinking reported might or might not, however, be spread evenly over the two weeks; the six or more reported binge drinking occasions could, for example, occur over two weekends.

For both groups (25% of first-year students and 29% of seniors), the most frequent response was three to five times in a typical two-week period. Therefore, 36% of first-year respondents and 43% of seniors reported binge drinking at least three—and as much as six or more—times in a typical two-week period in college. However, 31% of first-year students and 21% of seniors reported no binge drinking in a typical two-week period.

Analyses included comparing first-year students’ reported binge drinking in high school with their binge drinking in college. There was a substantial increase (21.6 percentile points) in binge drinking behavior between first-year students’ reported high school drinking behavior and their drinking behavior at the University, suggesting that the major socialization to binge drinking at UI occurs sometime during the first year of college—perhaps as early as the first semester. The data indicate, too, that although reported binge drinking behavior shows a significant increase between high school and the second semester of the first year in college, that behavior does not decrease significantly by, or during, the senior year. This suggests that binge drinking behaviors, once established in the first year, did not change significantly over the respondents’ time in college.

Analyses were also conducted to estimate the net impact of binge drinking on desired outcomes of college. In each analysis, statistical controls were introduced for student characteristics and college and high school experiences. In the presence of the above statistical controls, level of binge drinking had no significant net link with any of the other outcome measures except cumulative grade point average. On this outcome, there was a clear inverse relationship between binge drinking frequency and grades for both first-year and senior students. As frequency of binge drinking increased, grade point average decreased. First-year students who reported binge drinking six or more times in a typical two-week period had average grades .284 of a grade point lower than their peers who did not binge drink; for seniors, the difference was .203 points.

Alcohol consumption by UI students—in the words of some, “a culture of drinking”—was raised by students in every RISE interview, even though the focus group protocols did not include questions about drinking. Alcohol use—or concern about alcohol use—clearly was in the forefront of these students’ UI experiences. In a few cases, “partying” (excessive alcohol consumption and underage drinking) was described as a positive attribute of student life at the University—e.g., as a reason to choose to attend UI, or as a highlight of one’s UI experience. Comments such as “Drinking is just part of undergraduate life [and] part of how students adjust to college” were typical from many students. Many others, however, indicated that the “drinking culture” is a distinct disadvantage in terms of its negative impact on social life, academic life, UI’s external reputation, and quality of life in the residence halls.

## SELF-STUDY SUBCOMMITTEE DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS

The RISE study provided useful data about students’ undergraduate experiences. The study was limited, however, to first-year and senior students. It did not collect data about faculty or staff perspectives, and it was not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of UI programs, policies, and practices related to undergraduate education. The steering committee therefore organized the subcommittees around themes that addressed the undergraduate experience as a whole—from the transition to college life, through common academic experiences, to selection and entry into a major program, all the way through to graduation. The subcommittees carried out several new data collection efforts designed to gather information about student, faculty, staff, and employer perspectives and about the effectiveness of UI programs, policies, and practices related to the organizational themes.

Table II-1 below provides an overview of the research methods involved in the subcommittees’ data collection efforts, which are described in greater detail in Appendix II-C.

Table II-1:

### New Data Collection Efforts Undertaken within the Self-Study

Data Source	Description	Appendix
Entry and Transition Office and Department Interviews	Information requests were sent to a variety of offices and departments that actively recruit and help transition new students. Informational interviews were held with 33 individuals representing 17 offices and departments. Written materials were obtained from an additional 11 offices.	II-C.1
General Education Program (GEP) Student Survey	Web-based surveys were distributed via e-mail to 8,251 students, who were asked to indicate how they felt courses within various groupings (rhetoric, foreign language, interpretation of literature, historical perspectives, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, quantitative or formal reasoning, the general education distributed area, and the major [for comparison purposes]) had contributed to their growth in eight major learning outcomes categories (critical thinking, communication skills, understanding of world complexity, appreciation of diversity, understanding of scientific inquiry, social responsibility, appreciation of the arts, and life of the mind). A total of 972 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 12%.	II-C.2
General Education Program (GEP) Faculty Focus Groups	Faculty were invited to participate in focus groups to share their perceptions about general education at UI. Invitations were extended to faculty with deep involvement in general education, and also to faculty who are involved with undergraduates but not necessarily in general education. The committee also sought diversity in length of experience at UI and in scholarly discipline. A total of 47 faculty from 25 departments participated in five focus group sessions, each lasting about an hour.	II-C.3
General Education Program (GEP) Employer Interviews	Committee members interviewed 13 individuals representing nine “typical” employers who recruit University of Iowa students without requiring a given liberal arts major. They were asked to indicate how much value they place on specified skills when hiring, whether the UI students they hire are adequately prepared in those areas, and what skills not listed by the interviewer might also be especially valuable. Interviewees included individuals from middle to upper management as well as representatives of general hiring networks in their fields, and were identified through the Pomerantz Career Center and through committee member associations. Occupational spheres represented included corporate retail, the public sector, public relations and marketing, and staff positions in professional settings. Interviews were conducted in person when possible and over the telephone when not.	II-C.4

Data Source	Description	Appendix
Education within the Major Survey of Departmental Executive Officers	Surveys were sent to 60 departmental executive officers (DEOs) of departments that offer an undergraduate major. A total of 54 responses were received for a 90% response rate. The survey asked a variety of questions about each major program, including questions about advising in the department, the percentage of courses in the major taught by specified categories of instructor, research opportunities available to majors, goal-setting and assessment, and efforts to promote diversity.	II-C.5
Undergraduate Experience Focused Student Satisfaction Survey	Web-based surveys were distributed via e-mail to 8,250 students who were asked a variety of questions assessing their satisfaction with specified aspects of their major programs and their experiences at UI outside of their routine classroom experience. The first set of questions addressed the availability of majors, the effectiveness of advising when selecting a major, the availability of courses within a major, advising within a major, and the level of interaction with faculty within a major. The second set of questions was designed to first assess student experience broadly, and then to focus on experiences with a specified set of programs. There were 892 usable surveys returned for an 11% response rate.	II-C.6
Co-Curricular Involvement Office and Department Interviews	Teams of committee members conducted 34 interviews with faculty and staff from offices and departments across campus. Using a prepared checklist of student involvement opportunities, the interviewers asked each department or program about the involvement opportunities it currently provides and those it plans to provide, how it encourages students to engage in those activities, the philosophy behind choosing to support those activities and how they align with strategic planning goals, and how they assess the effectiveness of student engagement in those activities.	II-C.7
Co-Curricular Involvement Student Organization Focus Groups	Focus group interviews were conducted with the executive board members of four undergraduate student organizations and the members of an additional multicultural student organization. Interviewers asked the students about their involvement outside of the classroom, how that activity began, how it had benefited them, what factors encourage or hinder student involvement, and what opportunities are not available at the University that should be, as well as follow-up questions.	II-C.8
Learning Environments Student Survey	Web-based surveys were distributed via e-mail to 3,000 randomly selected non-first year undergraduate students. There were 282 useable surveys returned for a response rate of 9%. Most questions used a Likert scale, although the survey did include some opportunities for write-in responses. The students who responded to the survey represented a wide variety of colleges and majors, and 74.5% reported having lived in a residence hall at one point.	II-C.9
Learning Environments Faculty Questionnaire and Focus Groups	Focus groups were conducted with faculty on the University of Iowa's Classroom Committee. In addition, an informal e-mail survey was sent to 25 faculty who had received teaching awards over the last few years. Five useable surveys were returned.	II-C.10

## OTHER DATA SOURCES

In addition to the RISE report and the focused data collection efforts described above, several subcommittees relied on various existing data sources—such as the [Profile of Students](#) and other reports prepared each session by the [Office of the Registrar](#), satisfaction surveys and evaluations conducted by various departments and programs, institutional data provided by the Office of the Provost, and many others as described throughout this report. The committees also gathered a wealth of information from conversations and interviews with knowledgeable individuals across campus, and took full advantage of the collective expertise of the committee members themselves.