

30 June 2025

UNI Faculty Senate

Greetings!

I write in support of Dr. Francis Degnin's application for emeritus status. Francis arrived at UNI in 2003, after receiving his B.A. at Whitman College, a second B.A. and a Masters of Pastoral Ministry at Seattle University, an M.A. in Philosophy from Villanova University, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy from Vanderbilt University. He came to UNI to fulfill a unique role, to teach ethics courses to our students, and to provide ethics consultation services to local hospitals and organizations. Over the years that he has been at UNI, he has expanded the role of ethics education at UNI, in the community, and in the state of Iowa.

For many years, Dr. Degnin's primary courses were LAC Capstone courses in Biomedical Ethics and Perspectives on Death and Dying, which were taken by students in their final two years at UNI. In recent years, he has taken over a course required for the Ethics Minor, Religion and Ethics. Some students found Dr. Degnin's courses challenging: many UNI juniors and seniors who took his courses had never taken a philosophy course before, and the kind of thinking he required of them was new and difficult. At the same time, he regularly received glowing comments about courses; I have no other colleagues who have received so many heartfelt letters and comments from students as Francis has. Here are a few:

"This has been a very insightful course and is one I will remember going forward in my life. During this semester there was a member of the Panther Marching Band who had passed away unexpectedly, and the skills I learned throughout the class up to that point helped me understand the healthy ways in which to grieve and process this event. To that I simply say thank you.

I have been a college student at this university for five years. Although there is a terrible amount of reading to be done, this is by far the BEST AND MOST FULFILLING class I have ever taken. It was my favorite subject because these are the things that no one wants to talk about. I understand his reasoning and I have become a different person just by taking this course.

As graduation approaches I have been reflecting on the courses I have taken and the things I have learned. The course I took with you has been my favorite course. Thank you for creating a learning environment that didn't force me to reject my beliefs, but instead to investigate my own, and other faiths with gentle respect."

...I feel that this has been one of the most impactful courses I've taken at UNI....this course has absolutely challenged my thinking in the way few have.

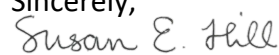
I always emphasize the importance of having an instructor with field experience. This instructor has it and uses his experiences to relate to the subject matter. This is enormously helpful. The instructor is possibly the best I've seen at engaging students in critical thinking through the journals that forces them to carefully consider both sides and write an intelligent analysis. This strengthens the ability to take in information, analyze beyond the surface, and come to an informed judgement free of any unreasonable bias.

This final comment emphasizes another aspect of Dr. Degnin's work at UNI that was instrumental to his teaching: his service to the community and to the State of Iowa. Since 2004, Francis has been an Ethics Consultant for Mercy One Hospitals in Cedar Falls and Waterloo, where he also serves as a night/weekend chaplain. In 2015, he also became an Ethics Consultant for Unity Point Hospitals in Waterloo. He is also the Ethics Consultant for the Iowa Veteran's Home in Marshalltown and is a member of the Iowa Legislative Advisory Committee on Congenital and Inherited Disorders. He also serves on the Pathways Behavioral Services Board. All of this significant service to the community and state has made his teaching richer.

Francis has also used his service and consulting experiences in his scholarship, making many presentations and publishing articles on topics such as "difficult" patients and the ethics of having "non-decisional" patients make their own medical decisions. He has also participated in the training of many medical professionals on issues of ethics, and spent much time during the pandemic helping them think carefully about pandemic medical care. He also used his experience to develop *Facing Death, Facing Ourselves*, a textbook for his Perspectives on Death and Dying course.

Finally, Francis has given much time and talent to UNI as Faculty Senate Chair, Faculty Senate Member, and Chair of the Faculty, and in his role on those bodies, was a member of numerous other committees, including the Faculty Handbook Committee, the Senate Governance Committee, and the Senate Policy Committee. He has been a member of United Faculty, serving on its Central Committee, Academic Freedom Committee and Bargaining Team. He was an excellent PAC chair and served on many departmental committees. In 2015, he received the Ross A. Nielsen Service Award, which is the highest award for service at UNI.

I know that Francis is looking forward to moving to his new home in St. Paul, MN, and being able to spend more time on one of his favorite pursuits: ballroom dancing. I thank him for his excellent work throughout the course of his career at UNI and wish him well in retirement.

Sincerely,

Susan E. Hill, Head

Department of Philosophy & World Religions