**Proposal to found the Center for the Study of Undergraduate Education**

**University of Northern Iowa**

**Higher education is experiencing disruptive change and UNI can help**

In 2009, 2,121,982 students were enrolled in public comprehensive and public baccalaureate universities (Carnegie foundation, 2013). These institutions tend to be regionally focused, reliant on state and tuition revenue and have student bodies made up of the top 50% of high school graduates (Henderson, 2007). Despite the number of students served by the institutions, “the research and writing on these institutions is exceedingly sparse” (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005, p. 20).

Public universities face serious challenges: declining state and federal funding, ballooning costs, increased competition, and an increasingly diverse pool of potential students with unique needs. In addition to these overt challenges, there are more subtle shifts like the increasingly transactional nature of higher education and the swing of the educational pendulum toward a more narrow training in specific disciplines and careers.

Public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions have the added challenges of fewer revenue streams and resources for recruitment and marketing than their land grant and flagship competitors. The **Center for the Study of Undergraduate Education (CSUE)** will assist the University of Northern Iowa in addressing the challenges of the comprehensive institution through its research and scholarship.

**Vision**

CSUE will be a cultural change agent for public comprehensive and baccalaureate universities across the nation, leading efforts to strengthen student outcomes and overall organizational health. CSUE will provide meaningful data, critical analysis, and innovative recommendations to the University of Northern Iowa, supporting the University as it becomes a national leader and best practice site amongst comprehensives.

**Mission**

To conduct research and policy analysis devoted to topics relevant to public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions in the state of Iowa, the Midwest, and the nation.

**Center Structure: Strategy, People, Place, Programs and Products**

*Strategy:* The work of the Center will be grounded in a unique collaborative structure in which students, faculty, staff, administrators, and policymakers can research and discuss complex problems, long-range strategies, and future visions of undergraduate education outside the immediate pressures of decision making and competing interests.

*People*: Center leadership will be comprised of staff, faculty, and administrative members of the university community who have terminal degrees in Higher Education and whose research agenda matches that of **CSUE**. At its inception, the Center will be made up of a Director, Dr. Steve Carignan, and Associate members Drs. Kristi Marchesani, Jessica Moon, Kristin Moser, and Kristin Woods. As the Center matures other scholars in the UNI community will join as affiliate members providing new ideas and multidisciplinary perspectives. Graduate and undergraduate students interested in higher education will have mentored research opportunities to lead and participate in the Center’s projects.

*Place*: The Center for the Study of Undergraduate Education (CSUE)will be housed at the University of Northern Iowa, within the administrative structure of the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. At its inception the Center will not maintain a bricks and mortar office, instead it will exist as a collaboration among scholars who will share resources relevant to the Center’s mission through a website, conference presentations, publications, and symposia. The Center’s members will work together and individually to create research that enhances understanding of the challenges facing public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions.

*Programs*: Much of the work of the Center will involve the production, publication, and presentation of research. The Center will also engage in work that serves the University of Northern Iowa and its internal and external communities through the creation of issue-specific white papers that examine concerns specific to the University and the analysis and collection of data to support that work. The Center will host symposia that provide a place where the campus community can share research and learn about trends, challenges, and new developments in higher education paying specific attention to undergraduate institutions.

*Products*: The Center for the Study of Undergraduate Education will publish research papers and essays that reflect multidisciplinary perspectives, contribute to research on higher education, and enhance dialogue among educators, policy makers, practitioners, and the public through symposia and publications. The Center's *Issues Series* will include blogs, white papers, original research, reflective essays, and reports connected to Center-related research projects.

**Goals**

* To enhance understanding of critical issues facing public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions.
* To elevate student learning and engagement through guided research opportunities as well as the dissemination and application of innovative research on the student experience.
* To develop collaborative relationships that increase capacity to meet challenges facing public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions.
* To provide staff, faculty, and students at the University of Northern Iowa with opportunities for professional experience and research.
* To identify relevant issues and potential projects through consultation with campus leadership (e.g. Cabinet, Faculty Senate, Academic Affairs Council, CSUE Advisory Board) to support the University’s strategic priorities.
* To make findings readily available to the University community in order to support tactical and strategic decision making.

**Budget**

***Expenses***

*Symposium:*

Speakers 1,500

Food 1,000

Room rental/Setup 500

*Travel:*

Conference 3,000

Research 800

*Supplies and services:*

Research:

Participant Incentives 300

Software 350

Materials 150

Printing 100

Mailing 100

Graduate assistants 16,000

*Website development:* 500

*Contingency/reserve*  800

*Total*  25,100

***Revenue***

CHAS Dean 2,500

Provost 6,600

Graduate College 16,000

Net Total -0-

**Advisory Board Members:**

Joel Haack

Susan Hill

Michael Licari

Jean Neibauer

Hillery Oberle

Mike Waggoner

Jerry Smith

Ramya Varadaraju

**Addendum: Strategic Alignment**

The Center for the Study of Undergraduate Education will serve a dual purpose as a national leader in research in higher education, particularly comprehensive institutions, and as a resource for the University of Northern Iowa. This dual focus allows the Center to be closely aligned with the University's strategic plan and priorities.

#### *Goal 1: Be a leading undergraduate public university that provides a strong liberal arts foundation*

#### Research into comprehensive universities is inherently multi-disciplinary. The liberal arts or general curriculum are core to the historic mission of comprehensive and baccalaureate education. Any understanding of these complex institutions requires a thorough understanding of all disciplines and their interdependencies. Interested scholars of all disciplines will be engaged by the Center to create interdisciplinary scholarship.

#### *Goal 2: Provide rigorous and relevant graduate education that meets the needs of graduate students, the university, and the community*

#### Opportunities for graduate students to produce and collaborate on the creation of original research supports existing graduate programs in the College of Education and opens up new opportunities for scholarship in areas such as economics, public policy, and other social sciences that are increasingly relevant to higher education. Blending different groups and disciplines will increase campus unity and make UNI able to react quickly to challenges and opportunities.

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#### *Goal 3: Lead the state and nation in pre K-12 education*

The boundaries between pre K-12, community college, four year and even graduate education have become porous and their permeable nature has led to overlaps that are disruptive to traditional curriculum. Phrases like “freshmore” and “frunior” describe students that come to UNI either from community college or high school with sophomore or even junior status. In addition, demographic projections show an increasingly diverse population of students entering higher education. CSUE will provide research and recommendations and stimulate meaningful dialogue to guide the university as it adapts to the changing landscape of education.

#### *Goal 4: Create and maintain an inclusive educational environment that prepares students to thrive in a diverse global environment*

#### To succeed in understanding undergraduate education, we must understand the chimeric natures of today’s student body. CSUE provides an avenue for better understanding of barriers and opportunities specific to first generation and diverse student populations. By studying comprehensive institutions nationally and internationally, CSUE can discover best practices and provide opportunities for faculty, student, and staff research in different cultural settings.

#### *Goal 5: Enhance the economic, social, cultural, and sustainable development of the state*

CSUE will provide better understanding of our students, our institutional strengths, and the strengths and weaknesses of other institutions in Iowa and the Midwest. This understanding will inform institutional and brand differentiation and allow us to focus on the strategic support of programs and departments that strengthen UNI and tune our graduates to meet Iowa’s challenges.

#### *Goal 6: Ensure accountability, affordability, and access*

For decades UNI and the Board of Regents, State of Iowa have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on branding, admissions, and organizational consultants. The university has also invested thousands of staff and faculty work hours in efforts to identify and address university challenges. The ad hoc nature of this strategy has not allowed us to have a cohesive approach that engages the university as a whole. CSUE will be a rigorous research entity, providing the University with strong quantitative and qualitative research that digs deeper, providing valid, actionable recommendations that will strengthen the University and improve efficiency.

In short when National Public Radio does a story on higher education or comprehensive universities they will interview us. When the University of Northern Iowa sees a looming challenge or a potential innovation, CSUE will be a key resource.