

UNI Foundational Inquiry Faculty Senate Report, April 22, 2024

Per the UNI Foundational Inquiry's Faculty Senate charter, this report summarizes the work the committee has accomplished this academic year, along with directions for future progress as the program evolved grows to serve faculty, staff, and students.

GENERAL UPDATES

1. Association for General and Liberal Studies Award

On August 4, 2023, we were informed that the UNIFI program had been named a 2023 Exemplary General Education Program recipient from the Association for General and Liberal Studies. Founded in 1961 the AGLS is a community of practitioner-scholars that provides strategic, effective, and innovative support for peers engaged in the day-to-day work of general and liberal learning in 21st century higher education. According to [the award letter](#), the committee was impressed by our process of revising and implementing a new program, noting that “many campus partners were consulted to ensure a smooth launch.” The committee further was pleased that UNI “is committed to its success by dedicating resources to assessment activities and investigating outlying results.” Finally, they noted, “It was great to read about the multidisciplinary certificate that was created within the structure of the general education program.” Two other programs, Virginia Tech University and Clemson University, were named Exemplary General Education Programs this year. Our application materials can be [viewed here](#).

2. DEI Study Group Report Response

The UNIFI committee drafted material to contribute to UNI's overall response to the Board of Regents DEI Study Group Report and Recommendations. We noted the program's mission to be “an innovative, common experience for all students, enabling them to develop skills and knowledge across a breadth of disciplines... preparing students for fulfilling personal, professional, and civic lives.” In addition, we explained the goal of the program was to be flexible and adaptable over time to meet the emerging needs of current and future students. We further described UNIFI SLO 6 (Diversity and Commonality) and detailed its implementation in the program. In response to Recommendation #6 of the Board of Regents DEI Study Report, the UNIFI Committee determined that no changes or updates were required either to the names of different categories or to the substance of any curricular offerings that coincide with themes, topics, and questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3. Committee Charter

Three substantive changes were made to the charter governing the UNIFI committee in the Faculty Senate Handbook. When the committee was first constituted, in order to facilitate the launch of the program and initial oversight of the program, representative membership was determined through recommendation in conversation with UNIFI

co-chairs and approved by senate leadership. Now that the program is underway, representative membership is now determined through elections overseen by the colleges. Second, language was added to help faculty determine if they would like to be nominated: “Members should have a demonstrated commitment to upholding excellence in teaching general education courses.” Finally, though they are not official members of the committee, liaisons from the Deans Offices of each College have a standing invitation to attend meetings in order to maintain open lines of communication.

4. Professional Development

UNIFI continues to partner with the CETL in some of its professional development offerings. Launched in January 2024, Open by Design was a course design initiative for UNI instructors who wished to enhance both student learning and their own teaching experience. Participants (re)designed a course while also exploring open resources and pedagogies. The course applied backward or integrated design principles to enhance course coherence and effectiveness, building awareness and understanding of various types of free course materials, with emphasis on Open Educational Resources (OER). Though it was not limited to faculty teaching UNIFI courses, instructors interested in (re)designing UNIFI courses were particularly encouraged to apply.

The UNIFI Summer Ethics Workshop: Bringing Ethics into Focus at UNI will be offered May 20-22, 2024. Robert Earle and John Preston from Philosophy and World Religions will facilitate. Specifically designed for all faculty teaching in the Responsibility learning area, this workshop is meant to enhance knowledge of ethical frameworks that can be used to help students learn how to do ethical reflection, allowing instructors to examine strategies for infusing additional ethical content and reflection into existing Responsibility courses.

5. UNIFI Strategic Plan

The UNIFI committee initiated various conversations in the fall and spring semesters about what and how elements of the program might be revised, including brainstorming many ideas for: 1. changing the third Connect Tier to restrict the kinds of electives that could count toward fulfilling the requirement, 2. developing and promoting current and new certificates, 3. adjusting the rules concerning “double-dipping” between general education and other programs, 4. introducing rules or guidelines for a course remaining in good standing in the UNIFI program, and 5. clarifying the transfer credit evaluation process. Other various ideas were discussed, but even though the committee is representative, it was difficult to ascertain at that level what the specific needs of the entire campus were. It was determined therefore to implement a more systematic approach that would not only be informed by data but would also be more open and democratic.

As part of the larger strategic planning effort currently underway in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, UNIFI has begun taking some initial steps toward sketching out aspects of its own strategic plan, with the end goal of adjusting elements of the program that have been determined by stakeholders as being in need of revision. The first stage of this process will consist of gathering information from campus to identify specific areas to target for revision, beginning with our visit to the Council for Academic Department Heads on April 19, asking Heads to solicit feedback from faculty and staff in their programs. Once key components are identified from this feedback, data will be collected to help shape possible revisions. By the end of our next academic year, we hope to have data-informed proposals for changing specific elements of the current UNIFI program. The reason for undergoing this revision process is to demonstrate our promise to campus to remain a program that is able to adapt to current and future needs.

CURRICULUM UPDATES

1. New Courses

This academic year new courses were introduced into two learning areas. In Responsibility we added the following:

- EARTHSCI 3367 Global Water Environment
- HIST 3279 Conflict and Justice Study Abroad: (Topic)
- PHIL/RELS 1059 Ethics for Professional Life
- SOCSCI 2300 Analyzing Ethics, Personal Decision-Making, and Social Responsibility

In Human Expression, we added the following:

- ENGLISH 3130 Writing and Healing
- LITED 1044 Children's Literature

2. New Certificate

This academic one new multidisciplinary certificate was added to the catalog: Civic Literacy, Engagement, and the Humanities. This innovative certificate emphasizes training in civic literacy and the humanities that address how to contribute to the flourishing of democracy society. It will introduce students to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with civic literacy and the humanities disciplines that prepare them for a life of meaningful engagement with democratic processes at the local, regional, national, and international levels. The certificate was a result of a \$30,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant and a \$10,000 Capacity Building Grant from UNI, awarded to a team of Department Heads at UNI: Susan Hill (Philosophy and World Religions), Jennifer McNabb (History), Jim O'Loughlin (Languages & Literatures), and Scott Peters (Political Science).

3. Study Abroad

Last academic year, the UNIFI committee approved rules that allowed for any short-term faculty-led UNI study abroad course to count as a UNIFI elective. In our continuing mission to support these courses, and in consultation with the Study Abroad Office, the following statement was approved and added to the catalog: “Recognizing the value of Study Abroad as a High Impact Practice for our students in an increasingly globalized world, the UNIFI program will accept any short-term, faculty-led UNI Study Abroad course as a Connect Elective. Only one Study Abroad course will count toward the requirements in the Connect tier unless one of these courses has also been individually approved as a UNIFI course in a specific learning area.”

ASSESSMENT UPDATES

Assessment of UNIFI began in AY 2022-23 and has continued with AY 2023-2024. Last year’s report was submitted prior to the deadline for collecting Spring 2024 artifacts. That collection serves as the beginning of the following report:

1. In response to a call for artifacts for Spring 2023, UNIFI found that while the percentages of faculty submitting for each Learning Area were approximately the same, the number of faculty not submitting artifacts almost doubled.
2. UNIFI’s Assessment co-coordinator attended the Fall Deans’ Council to share assessment results and to discuss participation and the need to see a 90% rate of artifact submission.
3. A call for artifacts went out for Fall 2023 classes. In addition to seeing percentages for some Learning areas decrease, others held roughly the same. However, the number of faculty not submitting artifacts had increased to over a hundred.
4. UNIFI’s Assessment co-coordinator worked with UGS leadership, Deans, and Department Heads to increase the submission rate for artifacts by providing weekly updates on participation, which did drive up the participation rate significantly for Fall 2023 artifact submissions.
5. UNIFI Co-Coordinators attended an all-day retreat for strategic planning during which a rough plan for UNIFI was developed. This plan included assessment.
6. Spring 2024 witnessed the second round of assessment of student work in the form of faculty workshops that included orientation to assessment, assessment of artifacts, and feedback about assessment results. Four Student Learning Outcomes were assessed—SLO 4 (Quantitative Reasoning), 5 (Collaboration), SLO 10 (Artistic Meaning), and SLO 12 (Ethics). With low artifacts submission for SLO 5, that was turned into a workshop for SLO 2 (Writing). In an effort to finish a complete assessment cycle, another round of workshops was launched in early April. There are for SLO 3 (Communication), SLO SLO 7 (Human Condition), and SLO 9 (Creativity). All workshop-based assessment will have been completed by the end of Spring 2024.

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7. Preliminary results of the Spring 2024 assessment suggests a similar results in that roughly 15 artifacts are being assessed per learning outcome. In almost all instances to date student work is falling between “Competent” and “Emerging” across the different categories on the rubrics. Overall, these results continue to be in line with what would be expected from General Education classes.
8. Feedback solicited in the workshops reinforces ideas from last year in that some changes to the rubrics are required—some technical (e.g., half steps in scoring and an N/A option) and some pedagogical (e.g., revisions to rubric terminology and changes to some categories).
9. Results of assessment will be further analyzed and developed into a report during Summer 2024.
10. Fall 2023 will see a campus discussion of assessment results and additional solicitation of feedback.

This report is respectfully submitted by Don Gaff, Associate Professor of Anthropology and UNIFI Assessment Coordinator; and Jeremy Schraffenberger, Professor of English and UNIFI Curriculum Coordinator.