

**Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs**  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



**200 Day Report**

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Version 2.0

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha



*“When we underestimate complexity, we fall prey  
to the perils of unintended consequences.”*  
— Siddhartha Mukherjee

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## 1. Purpose of This Document

As Fall turns to Winter, it has been a privilege to learn more of the needs and aspirations of the UNO community and co-create with you plans that leverage our strengths, address our challenges, and look forward to the future in alignment with the UNO Strategic Plan. As we approach another milestone in our time together, I wanted to take another opportunity to check in, ensure that I am focusing on the priorities you have identified, and welcome feedback. Throughout our work together, it is our conversations and the opportunity to learn from all of you that have been the most energizing. The goals of my work and this document are the same as I wrote in the 100 Day Report:

### Goals:

1. To get to know the people of UNO both personally and professionally. In turn, I hope the Maverick family will come to know me as fully as possible in this brief period of time.
2. To learn the history and norms of the school, and how these affect how the organization functions at present and may function in the future.
3. To determine concerns/issues in regard to students' performance, the professional careers of faculty and staff, and our connections to the community.
4. To set clear expectations for myself and others.
5. To ensure alignment of my activities with the UNO Strategic Plan and the Chancellor's vision as articulated in the September 5, 2019, State of the University address.
6. To formulate, with the UNO community, our priorities and a plan to accomplish them.
7. To build a strong foundation for connection and communication.
8. To establish myself as an interested listener and learner, and a supportive and proactive leader.

To be sure, as our work together progresses, it has been evident that the UNO community has identified and been engaged in the central challenges and opportunities facing the campus – in short: we have much to celebrate, elevate, and build upon. Further, in looking at some activities of the last 200 days, some projects have matured, others are very much in their infancy, and still others require “course corrections.” My goal in this document is to communicate and empower a culture of experimentation and innovation with complex problems, while clarifying goals and how we can align our efforts.

By sharing this document with the campus community, I seek to communicate and test my learning process, elevate and celebrate the many activities being undertaken around the campus that are critical to our mission, make transparent the process to develop action plans, and learn from you whether there are gaps in my learning that could lead to incorrect prioritization. My intent is to develop a shared understanding across all constituencies of exactly what is going on, increase trust, and create a shared commitment to the goals that emerge from this process.

I hope this document adequately celebrates the wonderful spirit of partnership, collaboration, and “can do” found across the UNO community. It has been a privilege to work in partnership with the academic



colleges, Student Success team, faculty and staff, Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, and the Vice Chancellors. It is a privilege to work with the Chancellor, whose optimism infuses the campus with “big thinking” and whose care for individuals further infuses the sense of a “Maverick family.” I welcome feedback on how my team and I can support this culture further in the years ahead. This remarkable community works together in special ways.

## 2. Complex and Exciting Paths Ahead

I have been energized by the many perspectives and ideas from across campus that can shape a positive path (or paths) forward for UNO. To that end, I have found it valuable to ask different questions, discover what various members of the UNO community know and bring to the table, and build learning throughout. It has been vital to learn multiple perspectives to build a direction in which we can all share and invest. There are, as with any organization, cultural norms, accepted practices based on historical precedent, groups with collaborative history, and stakeholders, all of which have influence on our thinking. In a very real way, we must acknowledge, validate, examine where appropriate, and include such factors in our decision making – such factors are part of the fabric of the UNO community.

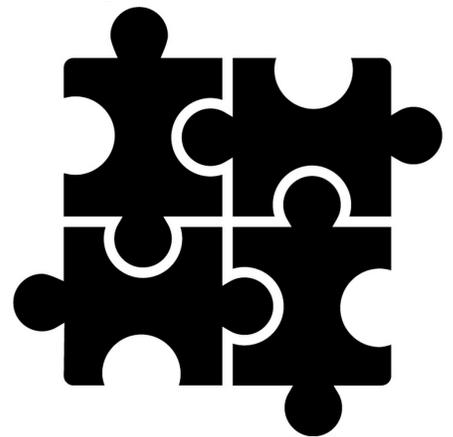
In this document I hope to give a sense of some important directions within the Academic Sector, how these align with the UNO Strategic Plan, and the process we will go through to get there. The priorities you all articulated to me were summarized in the 100 Day Report and are repeated in Section 3 of this document. These priorities echo the elements of the UNO Strategic Plan. I reiterate these here so as to reinforce the “north star” at which our efforts should “point.” We are at the stage in campus strategic planning where we don’t need to reevaluate the overall goals (these are in the Strategic Plan); rather, we must examine, experiment with, and iterate on tactics that align with those goals.

### Complicated vs Complex Decisions

At the risk of “waxing philosophical,” it seems important to call attention to how we make decisions together and how we can develop clarity of approach. UNO can be proud of its willingness to tackle (and track record of tackling) big challenges, and our Chancellor has fostered this in his vision for the campus. How, institutionally, shall we implement decision-making that embraces complexity, engages broad participation, and navigates uncertainty? It will first help to define what we mean by complexity.

*Complicated Situations:* Many challenges have several decision points, input variables, and goals that can seem very long term. Those situations that are *complicated* are generally governed by predictable outcomes: “if we do ‘a,’ then outcome ‘b’ will result.” We may have to sequence or knit together a long solution of steps to get to our long term outcome, but complicated situations are generally predictable: known practices or procedures will lead to predictable outcomes given sufficient resources and time invested in a problem.

*Complex Situations:* Much of what we take on in higher ed is *complex*. We can institute certain changes in practice, or add resource to address a challenge, and yet no discernable change may take place. A complex situation has human factors at every node or decision point that are unknown, so that major changes may not yield the desired outcomes (and may have unintended consequences). *Complex* problems differ from *complicated* problems because we don’t know, and cannot know, the “right approach” to the problem. It’s not even the case that we could just “study” the situation more and get to a “correct” approach. There may not be a correct (universal) approach – what works in one campus context may not work in another campus context. Topics like raising graduation rates, workforce development, increasing research and creative activities all fall in to this category of *complexity*.



	“PLAYING SAFE”	“TAKING RISKS”	
Up-side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid mistakes</li> <li>• Constituencies balanced</li> <li>• Majority views honored</li> <li>• Iterate to solutions</li> <li>• Certainty of “hitting the target”</li> <li>• Preserve relationships in organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue new ideas</li> <li>• Bigger possible outcomes (graduation rates, research outcomes, etc)</li> <li>• Attract new talent to organization</li> <li>• Foster creativity in team</li> </ul>	Up-side
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking on eggshells</li> <li>• Status quo</li> <li>• Everyone feels handcuffed</li> <li>• Nothing gets done</li> <li>• Others surpass us</li> <li>• Miss clues or opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “going solo” vs team approach</li> <li>• Worse outcomes (students, research)</li> <li>• Financial instability</li> <li>• Disagreements within organization</li> <li>• Loss of relationships</li> </ul>	Risk

**Safe to Fail Experiments:** When situations are complex, it is valuable to think beyond a single “correct” approach. Rather, it is helpful to think in terms of “experiments.” We may not know if idea “A” or idea “B” will help the problem, so we try more than one solution. We focus on learning from experiments, iterating where needed, or abandoning ideas when we learn they will not work. To do this well, we have to establish goals for each experiment, a process and a timeline, and copious opportunities for feedback. We also have to ensure the experiments are “safe” in that a “failure” cannot jeopardize the system.

How do we know if an experiment is “safe” and furthermore “on point” with our goals? It is helpful to think in terms of “bumpers on the lane” that guide our path. Rather than trying to hit a specific target, we ensure that we are progressing in a general direction (the “lane”) and ensure there are “bumpers” that keep us out of the realm of “letting all flowers bloom” and also serve as decision points as to whether an experiment is yielding fruit. Guardrails, further, defines the limits of acceptability for an experiment – the zone of risk we will not accept. The great thing about experiments is that they can build on experience and expertise we already have seen work, and for those experiments that don’t work, it allows us to learn *why* they don’t work. Further, we support more creative ideas because the implications of a ‘null result’ do not negatively impact anyone on the team. It’s not an entirely new approach, and many of the deans’ experiences seem to foster similar processes in several colleges.

**Polarities:** As we discuss complex problems, it is helpful to highlight the polarities of approach. In many situations, polar opposite approaches may appear to signal completely different directions. It is helpful instead to think of these as alternative tools in a tool kit. Different polarities are not necessarily better or worse than one another. They may represent different strategies appropriate in one circumstance. In the context of “safe to fail” experiments, it is helpful to be reminded of the “up side” of different polarities, while simultaneously working to avoid the potential risks or pitfalls of a given polarity.

Consider the classic polarity of whether to “take a risk” with a given solution, or to “play it safe,” sketched in the polarity diagram above. There are lots of “up sides” to either approach, and in some cases one or other may be the appropriate decision. At the same time, it is important to be mindful about the risks associated with either approach and make sure we are not overly vulnerable. It is also important to be mindful of the risks of either polarity, because for all those who perceive the “up side,” there are those who will be worried about the risks. These considerations don’t make the choice obvious, they just have

to be factored in to our thinking. And just because we pursue one polarity over another in one decision, this should not dictate what we do in another decision (in other words, we must avoid labeling ourselves as always being one “type” of decision-maker or another).

We could likewise make polarity diagrams for other major decisions (“centralize” vs “decentralize”, “promote from within” vs “recruit outside” etc). Polarities arise such important considerations such as raising passing rates in courses while simultaneously maintaining academic standards; balancing the teaching and research mission; exploring online education while still fostering the personalized student experience; or balancing decentralized empowerment of units vs. careful coordination across all colleges and schools. With each decision, recognizing the polarities that emerge, and their upsides and risks, can help us be intentional, flexible decision makers and ensure that we are open to experiments and yet only run experiments that are “safe to fail.” Further, we can recognize that any experiment toward one polarity or another will *always* encounter some of the risks or downsides – it’s just a matter of regulating how far we lean to one polarity so we don’t inherit too many of the risks/downsides.

Supporting a Rich Culture of Feedback: Within complexity, meaningful two-way communication is vital. Communication across campus must reinforce the overall goals and the encouragement of ideas. Communication and feedback from faculty and staff and students ensures we are learning valuable lessons from the various experiments we undertake. In order to lean in to the complexity, and in order to feel safe that ‘null results’ are in fact valuable learning exercises, we must create numerous venues for discussion, questioning, and feedback.



In the context of complex tasks, feedback is essential to undertake “safe to fail” experiments. A rich culture of feedback is intended to communicate our desire to incubate new ideas; obtain early “data” whether the experiment is “working” (even if it is anecdotal); make “course corrections” to initial plans; clarify goals; and learn valuable lessons from the experiments we undertake. Often, feedback in the form of anecdotes, impressions, and incremental findings is preferable to waiting for “hard data:” if feedback is slow, experiments are more likely to fail for reasons we will not learn until it’s too late. Ensuring a rich feedback loop allows us to experiment with greater confidence.

Open, two-way communication supports another aspect of UNO I have come to value – community. The UNO community is one that speaks openly and honestly about ideas, and works constructively to address new situations. It has been a privilege to witness the UNO community in important conversations, open to discussions about the future rather than speaking out of fear of losing aspects of the past. This is a special culture. It leads to new ideas, better decision-making, and strong relationships.

Action Plan: To the extent we can articulate such a thing in complex situations, I hope our approach will look like this: we assess a situation as to whether it is complicated or complex, and for the complicated we institute known remedies while in the case of complex we intentionally lean in with a different approach. A feedback-rich environment fosters co-created ideas, and ensures consistent communication on ideas and learning. We identify and acknowledge influences and norms (and polarities) that have governed situations in the past, validating those that ‘work’ and liberating ourselves from those that have not. We build guard rails for the experiments we undertake, and we learn from them. Through concerted experiments, we build on trust and communication, empowering deans and faculty and staff leadership to be bigger than the problems we face.

### 3. Priorities that Emerged from The 100 Day Report

The following priorities appeared to emerge from the observations and learnings of the previous 100 Day Report. These priorities should now become the basis for discussion across the campus. The priorities speak only to the “what” informed by the “why” of the 100 Day Report. This list does not spell out “how,” “who,” or “when.” That is, these priorities may require actions from the colleges, the Division of Student Success, the Office of Academic Affairs, Business and Finance, or collaborations thereof. These priorities inform the experiments being outlined in the remainder of this document.

#### Student Achievement

- Ensuring course capacities match enrollments and use of time vectors
- Examining DFW rates in key entry-level courses
- Summer session (online) capacity – expanding access
- INDS major and TLC-like structure for undeclared students.
- Academic advising across the campus
- Student recruitment (internal) and retention staffing across the campus
- Remissions strategies for recruitment+retention
- Building connections between Academic Affairs & Student Affairs offices
- Workforce development in degree plans



#### Academic Excellence and Strategic Planning

- Goal 2&3: How do we prioritize investments in programs vis a vis research/scholarship/creative-activity?
- Aligning grad programs (and collections) with research/scholarly/creative mission
- Priority facilities needs? Space allocation that ensures success of programs?



#### Financial and Institutional Stewardship

- Creating a budget calendar for decisions
- Online revenues — growing and appropriate level of expenditures
- Increasing sponsored research revenues, foundation philanthropic support, and philanthropic giving.
- Create budget allocation process that provides incentives to colleges and prioritizes resources toward campus-level strategic initiatives (Completion Imperative, Big Ideas process)
- Develop and implement initiatives that increase re-enrollment of students



#### Faculty and Staff Development

- Support and advancement of midcareer faculty
- Gender and diversity balance of the faculty
- Salary structure of faculty
- Expanding full time employment of faculty lines, especially in specific priority areas of instruction
- Explore a ladder rank system for instructional faculty.
- Through shared governance, re-examine RPT, last updated 1990
- Staff professional development



It's worth pointing out that these priority areas align well with the UNO Strategic Plan and its four goals (1: Student Centeredness, 2: Academic Excellence, 3: Community Engagement, 4: Institutional Quality), and the Chancellor's vision as set out during the Investiture ceremony.

#### 4. Experiment: UNO Strategic Plan Goals 2 & 3 “UNO Big Ideas” process

Having received feedback that greater intentionality was required in resource allocation, and also greater transparency, the deans, vice chancellors, and I collaborated to create a new process modelled after the NU System Big Ideas process. The proposed process will build on areas of strength, encourage collaboration across the colleges, build our research and community engagement mission, and encourage partnerships with external entities in the greater Omaha area.



##### The UNO Big Ideas Process

The UNO Big Ideas process was announced to the campus in a message to faculty and staff on August 22.

- Initially, faculty and staff teams worked on initial short pre-proposals 1-2 pages in length which were reviewed by the deans October 1.
- These pre-proposals were grouped by the deans in to 10 broad umbrella themes.
- On October 16, an email to faculty and staff across campus invited everyone to collaborate on these 10 broad themes and develop them into final proposals.
- Final proposals were received on the 10 umbrella themes on December 1. The proposals spelled out the faculty expertise on campus that could collaborate on the project; the metrics of academic excellence; potential student outcomes; potential partners in Omaha and Nebraska that could partner with UNO on the proposal; and potential revenues (philanthropic or sponsored grants).
- A message to the campus December 4 and again December 16 invited faculty and staff to review the proposals, provide written feedback using an online portal, communicate with their deans, or participate in campus forums.
- The deans will convene in January to recommend proposals, weighing the factors of cross-campus collaboration, community engagement, academic metrics, and external revenues.

As part of our strategic planning process, it is important to view the final selection of campus themes as a mechanism to enhance overall scholarly and creative activities for the campus. This is not a traditional proposal process like those at a federal agency or philanthropic foundation. Rather, the UNO Big Ideas process is intended to be a consensus-driven process that identifies themes that can elevate the entire campus.

With the identification of the 5 Big ideas, it is our hope to examine how all programs at UNO can align with these Big Ideas. In so doing, we hope to further advance a national identity for UNO.

Our rubric to select the UNO Big Ideas will be to examine the proposals for the following criteria:

- Does the proposal demonstrate cross-campus collaboration (multiple colleges) in a genuine way?
- Does the proposal demonstrate how we could be nationally prominent in a given area? Does this area of work build a brand identity for UNO as a center of excellence?
- Does the proposal expand community/regional partnerships (UNMC, MOEC, STRATCOM, OPD, ...) in a tangible way that leverages the strengths of our location in Omaha?
- Does the proposal enhance student outcomes? (Grad rates, experiential learning, grad program excellence, ...)
- Does the proposal concretely get us to new revenues (philanthropic or sponsored grants)?

Polarities, the (apparent) opposite approaches to the same challenge, abound in this process:

- Should we apply resources to a small number of themes with concentrated investment, or should we spread new resources across a larger array of themes so as to give more programs an opportunity?
- Should we invest in programs that already are “programs of strength” for UNO, or should we invest in new programs or those that currently lag behind?

It will be helpful to not think of these as one being better than the other. Rather, it is helpful to think of these as equally valid approaches to a problem, each with up-sides and risks, and we must be intentional in considering both polarities/options in our decision making. Depending on the circumstance, one polarity may be a better option than the other, but this should not tie our hands to explore the opposite polarity at another time or in another circumstance.

#### How Is This an Experiment? What is the Data?



While ultimately we could look for outcomes such as national program recognition, strong undergraduate or graduate programs, or significant philanthropic plus sponsored grant revenues, we recognize that these are longer term goals. As a “safe to fail experiment,” it will be important to have rapid indicators of whether the experiment is succeeding. If we don’t have rapid feedback, the campus becomes too invested in the experiment and it is no longer “safe” in the sense that major investments are made toward a program that is not ultimately successful.

The hypotheses of this experiment are somewhat implicit in the design of the process, but it is worth spelling them out here:

- The most compelling research, scholarship, and creative activities today are cross-disciplinary in nature, bringing together several disciplines to solve “grand challenges.”
- UNO is a smaller campus than some of our R1 competitors. Therefore, to build significant research programs it will be to our benefit to pool resources across campus towards a select number of research projects.

- UNO is a smaller campus than some of our R1 competitors. Therefore, partnering with nearby entities such as UNMC, MOEC, STRATCOMM, etc, will help UNO ‘punch above its weight’ in research.
- As a public metropolitan research university, UNO will approach its research and scholarly mission in conjunction with its community engagement mission.
- Building up revenues will not only assist these projects to become sustainable, but will help build resources to invest in other areas of scholarship and creative activities.

Once the UNO Big Ideas are selected, and we move forward with investments in these areas, how will we gather data for these experiments? First, it is our intent to build in an annual review process for these projects, as well as develop qualitative and quantitative indicators of progress along the way. To be a true experiment, we need indicators that are available early. Some possibilities:

- Is there greater cross-campus participation in seminars, lectures, exhibits, or concerts associated with this theme/cluster?
- Are students in one department/college working with research faculty in another department/college as a result of cross-disciplinary interest in the same theme/cluster?
- Has the creation of cross-campus “themes” or “cluster hires” increased the quality of our faculty applicant pools for these programs?
- Have community partners come forward with interest in working with UNO as a result of these themes?
- Are faculty in other departments/units re-examining their scholarly/research/creative ideas to align with or collaborate with the new themes? Are departments or colleges updating their strategic plans to emphasize these themes?
- Have RFP’s emerged in the recent (3, 6, 12 months) past, either from federal and state agencies or from philanthropic foundations, that are appropriate venues for this theme/cluster?
- Are the faculty submitting more proposals for sponsored grants or foundation grants?
- Are more students engaged in experiential learning opportunities as a result of this Big Idea?

This list is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, these are simply examples of questions that can be answered, even anecdotally, with early feedback.

December 4, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

It's a pleasure to write to you today to share with you the results of much hard work and creativity: the proposals generated by faculty and staff across the colleges as part of the UNO Big Ideas process.

As you know, [10 cross-cutting themes](#) were identified by the deans back in October based on short working papers from all of you. From there, faculty and staff were invited to develop these themes into full proposals, which are now available [at this link](#) for all of us to view and discuss, with a proper UNO NetID login.

I hope you will be as encouraged as I am about the quality and range of ongoing activities and possible ideas we can make a reality here at UNO.

[The UNO Big Ideas process](#) was created as a decision-making structure for Goals 2 & 3 of the UNO Strategic Plan. It focuses on how will we prioritize investment in areas of campus strength and where there are opportunities to enhance our academic excellence and community engagement. Through this process, we will identify initiatives, spanning our colleges, which will help UNO grow in research, scholarship, and creative activities. At the same time, these initiatives should also increase student opportunities, community partnerships, and philanthropic or sponsored revenues.

With the completion of these proposals, it is now time for all of us to review and discuss how each proposal could help lift the campus. We will be collecting feedback in a number of ways, including active discussion among Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, within the colleges and at the Strategic Planning Forum on Friday, Dec. 13. Please [RSVP](#) by Friday, Dec. 6, if you plan to attend the forum.

We will also be collecting feedback through each of your deans and through an online survey that is included with each of the 10 Big Ideas proposals.

In early January, the deans will meet to develop a consensus plan focusing on five of the proposals based on the feedback provided.

Clearly, with such high-quality proposals to consider, we have a lot of exciting discussions ahead.

I look forward to your feedback and your ideas. And I thank all of the faculty and staff who came together to develop these excellence proposals.

With great appreciation for all you do,

**Sacha Kopp, Ph.D.**  
Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

December 16, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

Friday's [Strategic Planning Forum](#) was a great event, and I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you for sharing in an inspiring process.

The Chancellor has challenged us to 'think big' in our campus strategic planning, and you all have done just that. The [UNO Big Ideas process](#) was created with input from the deans and many members of the campus community to help prioritize our efforts around academic programs of research and creative activity, and our efforts toward community engagement. Friday's forum demonstrated the UNO community's commitment to work together on the very biggest of ideas.

The faculty and staff groups that came together to develop these proposals worked together in cross-campus collaboration to envision new possibilities that leverage our existing strengths and partnerships. The presenters on Friday spoke passionately about these ideas, but also in an invitational way that encouraged the entire campus community to participate. The table discussions I witnessed were remarkable — following each presentation faculty and staff huddled around and discussed strengths and weaknesses, asked questions out of genuine curiosity to learn more, and brainstormed ideas to enhance these proposals even further.

From here, I encourage everyone to participate in the feedback process. We've had good discussions in Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, and Chancellor's Cabinet. We received great written feedback on Friday at the Strategic Planning Forum. The [online portal](#) is another opportunity for everyone to read the proposals in detail and provide extensive written feedback.

I also hope all of you will be communicating with your deans, who will be meeting with me early January to review the feedback received from the campus and suggest final projects to proceed as campus priorities. These will be discussed campus wide next semester for best ideas for implementation

There are not many campuses that could work together so creatively and collaboratively as you all have done. Thank you, everyone, for your commitment to UNO and a future built on its wonderful community.

With great respect for all you do, and warmest wishes for the holidays,  
Sacha

## 5. Experiment: Faculty Recruiting Process



The entire UNO community has communicated to the deans and to me the need for greater intentionality and effort to diversify our faculty recruiting and also retain faculty at UNO. To this end, we announced in September the creation of a new role in the Office of Academic Affairs, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs, to be occupied by Dr. Candice Batton. AVC Batton has worked closely with our Faculty HR Officer, Dr. Gina Toman. In the past few months, they have implemented several measures to review faculty recruiting across campus, share best practices with other colleges, and bring to our campus research-based practices from other campuses.

### Workshops for Faculty Recruitment:

AVC Batton and Dr. Karen Hein of the Center for Faculty Excellence hosted Dr. Virginia Valian (CUNY Graduate Center) in September. Dr. Valian conducted workshops on faculty recruiting and research on implicit bias. Dr. Valian is a scholar in the area of gender representation and the advancement of women in the academy. Her workshops were presented to the deans and the Office of Academic Affairs, chairs and directors, as well as all faculty serving on faculty recruitment committees this year. These workshops were an opportunity to begin a conversation about successful practices across the campus and learn about practices from other campuses.

Finally, the Center for Faculty Excellence will hold a workshop March 10, 2020, to be conducted by a team from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The UW group has been a national leader in the field of implicit bias and faculty recruiting, focusing on all areas of gender, ethnicity, and intersectionality. The workshop will be open to chairs of search committees, chairs and directors, and faculty interested in developing search advocate skills. We hope this will be a positive continuation of the discussions begun earlier in the Fall semester during Dr. Valian's visit.

### Resources for Faculty Recruitment

The Office of Academic Affairs has provided funding to send faculty to specific conferences where a diverse set of students and potential applicants may be attending. Additionally, we have provided resources to post positions on such portals as [The Registry](#) and the [Doctoral Scholars Program directory](#). These portals have been recognized opportunities to advertise to and recruit resumes from diverse faculty applicants. Additionally, the Office of Academic Affairs increased the number of Special Faculty Development lines by three during the current recruitment cycle. Colleges are invited to submit resumes of current terminal degree holders or candidates who are ABD for positions in connection with currently-approved faculty searches.

Finally, the Office of Academic Affairs has placed an ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that speaks to the public metropolitan research university mission of UNO (see following pages). The ad contains a pointer to all current faculty searches on the HR website. It is envisioned that all faculty search advertisements will point back to this ad in the *Chronicle*. By speaking to our engaged mission, we hope to highlight the special mission of UNO and increase its brand identity as a leader serving the diverse communities of Omaha.

### Revised Faculty Search Process:

Building on best practices on campus and borrowing from research-based strategies from other campuses, we worked with the deans over the summer to revise the faculty recruitment process. The revised process is intended to interrupt potential implicit bias at crucial points in the process

- 1) The Office of Academic Affairs will provide deans with demographic data about applicant pools for each search.
- 2) Search committees form a semi-finalist (or shortlist) for initial Skype/Zoom interviews.
- 3) Search committees should be developing questions for the Skype interviews so that each candidate is asked the same set of questions.
- 4) Search committees should discuss a finalist list for campus interviews and select 3-4 finalists. If an additional visitor to campus would expand the diversity of the finalists, the Office of Academic Affairs will consider funding the travel of the extra visitor.

For details, see the [memo](#) on the Office of Academic Affairs web site and reprinted here.

### How is this an Experiment? What is the Data?

The “hard data” on faculty recruiting and diversity will only come after a couple of years’ effort, and consequently too late in the context of conducting experiments. It is vital, therefore, to have “early” signals as to how things are working so that all the “experimenters” (search committees, department chairs, deans, and the Office of Academic Affairs) can adapt and improve the experimental procedures.



Some examples of early “data” or signs of success/failure of the experiments:

- A wider array of relationships of our faculty and PhD mentors on other campuses and professional societies.
- Faculty participation in CFE-sponsored events on bias, representation, and recruitment practices.
- A wider geographic representation in the applicant pool.
- A broader demographic representation in the applicant pool.
- An increased awareness among applicants about the mission of UNO as a public metropolitan research university.
- Vigorous questions among members of search committees about the appropriate questions to pose during a Skype/Zoom interview
- Vigorous discussions amongst search committee members about metrics to judge accomplishment and “promise” amongst candidates that shift away from candidates’ pedigree.
- Shortlists of applicants that offer choices of “apples and oranges” – different skill sets and backgrounds that offer a wider array of choices of backgrounds.

Of course, many ideas for “early data” will come from members of the UNO community, and the above list is merely an example. It may be noted that little of the “data” above is quantitative. All these examples, however, are intended to provide frequent, early feedback.

October 7, 2019

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for participating in last week's workshops with Dr. Virginia Valian and participating in this campus-wide discussion about fostering diversity and equity on the faculty.

Since my first days here on campus, many within the UNO community have emphasized the pride we place on serving the diverse student population here, and in addition have emphasized our aspiration to continue as a faculty to represent amongst ourselves that great diversity of our students.

The campus has done a great deal in recent years and has many exciting traditions such as the faculty development program. Further, many colleges and programs have described exciting practices they undertake to recruit, onboard, and welcome our faculty. The purpose of events like this week is to extend and share those ideas in campus-level conversations.

Certainly, one hour, one week, or even one year of conversations is not enough to effect all the changes we would like to see. Nonetheless, it was valuable to continue these important conversations. That's why I felt it important to have meetings with Dr. Valian for the faculty and staff leaders working on recruitment during this academic year, the deans, the staff in my office, and myself and the Chancellor.

This year, thanks to the leadership of Assistant Vice Chancellor Candice Batton and Faculty HR Officer Gina Toman, the Office of Academic Affairs has made resources available to the colleges to post positions on helpful recruitment websites; resources for travel to specific conferences; and resources for additional faculty development lines. In addition, we have worked with the deans to formulate and adopt some of the best practices from other campuses and recommended by Dr. Valian for our recruitment efforts. Those practices are described [here at this link](#).

Of course, we can and must do more. I welcome your input and ideas. Continued conversations across the campus are critical, and I'm grateful for the commitment you all have expressed for this important work, especially as the campus undertakes nearly 50 tenure line recruitments this cycle.

With gratitude,  
Sacha Kopp  
Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs



## GROWING WITH AND WITHIN OUR THRIVING COMMUNITY

The question of whether academics should try to connect with their surrounding communities has, for decades, been a non-question: Scholars typically assumed there was no way to devote time to public service or community engagement without abandoning their intellectual mission.

The *Chronicle* weighed in, with articles such as “The Campus as City” depicting the challenges of urban campuses trying to build town-gown relationships, or “How One College Went ‘All In’ in Its Neighborhood”, highlighting one university’s partnerships with its local P-12 system. These reports convey the complexities inherent in being an anchor institution.

But if the *Chronicle* had studied the University of Nebraska at Omaha, it would have found a Carnegie-classified engaged university growing with and within its metropolitan community and aligning its activities across the academy with the aspirations of metropolitan Omaha and rural Nebraska. We seek to be an exemplar metropolitan university, one whose faculty, staff, students, and facilities are in partnership with community organizations, local government, schools, and businesses in building the economic and cultural life of the diverse and growing Omaha community.

To be a strong partner, we support faculty and students who focus on “engaged scholarship” – work on “pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” – and express this in our service learning programs and in promotion/tenure processes. We founded “community chairs,” endowed professorships whose scholarship is focused on community engagement and impact. We support faculty research such as our partnerships with Offutt Air Force Base and the U.S. Strategic Command in the study of violent extremist groups. Our College of Public Affairs and Community Service hosts the Nebraska Center for Justice Research, the Center for Public Affairs Research, and the Juvenile Justice Institute, which regularly provide support and analysis for local and state policy makers. We created the Center for Health Humanities, supporting faculty scholarship in the healing arts and partnerships with the University of Nebraska Medical Center. With over 400 engaged publications annually, our faculty are leaders in their discipline by leading in our community.

To be a strong partner, we work to maintain relationships across Omaha and Nebraska. We are a key part of the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium and Omaha STEM Ecosystem, consisting of representatives of school districts and community colleges. We explore workforce and business development with the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and our Nebraska Business Development Center. Even city-wide events in Omaha are integrated into our campus, as the surrounding city parks are the site of concerts and outdoor theater. UNO and the community came together to build the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, an incubator facility on campus for small non-profit and community organizations that partner with our students and faculty. The center is home to the Service Learning Academy, which builds pedagogical tools in service learning and incubates partnerships with faculty, P-12 educators, and community organizations; over 600 projects since 2010 have engaged 11,000 UNO students and impacted 20,000 P-12 students.

The community’s needs/aspirations are found in our student body, many of whom are from the Omaha metro area. Many are first generation, Pell-eligible, and of diverse family backgrounds. Many are returning students, seeking to advance their lives mid-career. Many seek online and hybrid modalities, balancing careers and education.

We have a long way to go, aggressively pursuing research-informed techniques to support these students. We support pathways to college for students from rural Nebraska communities as well, with hybrid opportunities for students.

Fortunately the community has recognized our partnership. Through philanthropy, our Strauss Performing Arts Center underwent a major renovation. The community came together 10 years ago to build Mammel Hall for our College of Business and again this year to build a major addition, as well as a doubling of our Biomechanics building. Endowed professorships in STEM Education have been established to support innovation across P-12 and the university. Philanthropy has been instrumental in building residence hall communities and student services on our Scott Campus. A deliberate strategy to promote public-private partnership’s that involve federal, state, and local government funding with corporate and philanthropic support has flourished on our campus.

To be sure, aligning a complex comprehensive university with community aspirations and needs requires intentional commitment. At UNO, we are fortunate to have engaged community leaders who see UNO as integral to the economic and cultural life of Omaha and Nebraska, as reinforced by the recent business-led economic development report “Blueprint Nebraska.”

Conversations on this engaged metropolitan mission are essential. They speak to what we value as an institution and how we want our campus to be known both in the academic community and in the public eye.

As higher education faces ever more complex economic realities, it’s vitally important for people to see us as a public good worthy of investment. The public truly needs us to be partners in the civic future.



Work for a university that knows the value of community engagement: [hr.unomaha.edu](http://hr.unomaha.edu)

## FACULTY RECRUITMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE UPDATES | 2019/20

As part of an initiative to diversify\* the faculty at UNO and build a more inclusive campus community, the following elements are updates to the faculty recruitment process, effective for the 2019/20 academic year.

### 1) Faculty Search Committee Training

All faculty search committee members are asked to attend two workshops (one fall, one spring) geared toward interrupting the impact of implicit bias on faculty search processes. Dates of the fall workshop are Monday, September 30 and Tuesday, October 1, 2019. Dates of the spring 2020 workshop are forthcoming. Deans are asked to send the names of search committee members to Dr. Candice Batton, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Deans are encouraged to construct search committees that are representative of the diversity aspirations of the campus.

### 2) Recruitment Advocate

All faculty search committees should include a recruitment advocate whose purpose is to observe committee deliberations and ask questions when members are considering credentials, letters of recommendation, or other source information that may allow implicit bias to persist. The recruitment advocate does not have to be familiar with the discipline or housed within the unit, but may come from another unit in the college. The concept of recruitment advocates will be explored during the 2019/20 academic year for future implementation.

### 3) Applicant Pool Demographics

The demographic characteristics of PhDs nationwide within each discipline will be shared with the dean, chair/director, and search committee chair. Aggregate demographic characteristics of the applicant pool and short list will be shared with the dean. At any stage in the process, the dean or senior vice chancellor may advise redoubling efforts to expand the applicant pool, short list, or finalist list.

### 4) Structured Screening of Short List Candidates

All search committees are required to conduct screening interviews with a short list of 8-10 candidates who reflect the diversity of the pool and diversity of the discipline. Screening interviews can be conducted by telephone or via Zoom, and should consist of standardized, structured questions developed in advance by the search committee and asked of every candidate.

### 5) Dean Approvals

The short list of candidates must be approved by the dean before any candidates are contacted. Likewise, the finalist list must also be approved by the dean before any candidates are contacted.

**\*The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities, or employment.**

<https://www.unomaha.edu/office-of-equity-access-and-diversity/about-ead/non-discrimination-statement.php>



## 6. Pay, Recognition, and Professional Development



One theme emphasized in many initial conversations on campus, and also echoed in the RESPECT Survey, is the desire for faculty and staff to have more opportunities to advance professionally. In addition, faculty and staff expressed the desire to better understand the basis for their compensation.

### Full Time Instructor Positions:

Within the faculty ranks, there have been discussions about equitable creation of full-time appointments and questions about when it is appropriate to rely on part-time adjunct instructors. When sustained instruction is envisioned, how do we as a campus balance the staffing of courses with tenure-line faculty, instructors/lecturers, and part time adjuncts who bring outside expertise? The Office of Academic Affairs has been working with the colleges to increase the number of full-time appointments of the faculty in critical areas of instruction, having heard that past budgetary pressures have in some cases led to unfilled faculty vacancies being replaced with adjunct (part time) instructors.

While such part time appointments do fill classes, and often do identify high-quality instructors, the hypotheses behind this experiment include: (a) part time instructors have less time available to address student questions or provide mentorship to students because the instructors may be teaching at multiple institutions; (b) part-time instructors have less time to contribute to department, college, or university service roles; (c) part-time instructors do not earn sufficient salaries, possibly leading to higher turnover; (d) higher turnover of instructors can lead to loss of continuity in instruction and pedagogical innovation within the colleges; and (e) insufficient full-time employment challenges the positive community culture of UNO.

To make this an intentional experiment rich with learning opportunities, we again should look for early indicators that guide us on its efficacy. These can be enrollments, first quarter grades, qualitative feedback of student satisfaction, ease of course scheduling and capacity management, use of high-impact practices in gateway courses, faculty turnover, fall-to-spring retention, ease of scheduling department service obligations, etc.

### Recognition of Faculty Service:

A separate set of questions have arisen about faculty (both instructors and tenure-line) being recognized for significant service responsibilities, either to the campus or their discipline. While it is clear that some units and colleges have proactively recognized service obligations, either through workload adjustments or auxiliary appointment stipends, such recognition is not being uniformly created across the campus. In an effort to be less heterogeneous in our campus approach, and in an effort to be more equitable to faculty who seek recognition (and paid stipends, where appropriate) for their service obligations, the Office of Academic Affairs has worked with Faculty Senate and University Counsel to create two new auxiliary appointments: Senior Lecturer (for instructional faculty) and Distinguished (Associate) Professor (for tenured faculty). As an experiment, we will want to examine its impact on faculty satisfaction, professional advancement, retention, departmental climate, etc.

## DISTINGUISHED (ASSOCIATE) PROFESSOR

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is founded on the talents and contributions of its faculty, whose teaching, scholarship and creative activities, and service to the university define its character and enable its mission. While many aspects of service are recognized in processes such as the reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) process or faculty workload, it is beneficial to examine additional mechanisms to recognize, support, and compensate faculty for significant contributions to the university, lest the institution risk overburdening faculty or creating competing demands on faculty time. Several units across the campus have instituted formal “auxiliary appointments,” beyond the typical roles of chair, director, and graduate program director. With the present proposal we seek to extend this practice across campus and ensure that all units consider such a possibility where appropriate service by faculty warrant this recognition.

It is proposed to create the title “Distinguished (Associate) Professor” as an “auxiliary appointment”. The title “Distinguished (Associate) Professor” shall recognize those individuals on the faculty whose contributions to the unit, institution, or profession serves a key role and is meant to recognize exceptional responsibilities beyond the typical level of contribution factored in to workload. Such contributions can include, but are not limited to:

- Mentoring of a junior faculty cohort
- Mentoring of graduate student cohorts
- Editorship of a scholarly journal
- Leadership of a major professional society
- Development and implementation of a new academic program
- Development of a new intra- or inter-college research initiative

Those holding the title of Distinguished (Associate) Professor shall receive an administrative stipend established by the chair and dean for the duration of the auxiliary appointment.

The title of Distinguished (Associate) Professor will be available to those who hold the continuous appointment as Associate Professor or Professor in an academic department, and the holder of the title will be known as Distinguished (Associate) Professor of \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in academic department). Proposals for the auxiliary appointment “Distinguished (Associate) Professor” may be made by the chair or director or by faculty within the unit. Designation as “Distinguished (Associate) Professor” will be recommended by the chair or director of an academic unit, subject to review by the relevant college dean and the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Recognition of faculty service through special appointment is already the practice in many academic units. The purpose of this proposed title is to ensure the possibility and procedure is available to faculty across the campus, and ensure that the contributions of faculty across the campus do not go unrecognized.

## NONTENURE TRACK FACULTY APPOINTMENTS AND PROGRESSION

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is fortunate to have the service of excellent nontenure-track faculty, many of whom are masters of pedagogy and/or professional practice and committed student mentors. These faculty help fulfill our mission for excellence in teaching.

At UNO, nontenure-track instructional faculty are typically appointed as “Instructor” with one-year appointments. Individuals with significant teaching experience and a proven record of teaching effectiveness may be appointed as “Lecturer” with a one-, two-, or three-year appointment, with consideration given to performance, capacity for instruction, and programmatic constraints. Some colleges also use appointments as “Community Service Associate” for nontenure-track faculty with a significant instructional workload assignment.

In an attempt to provide clarity and ensure consistency, this document articulates terms and criteria for nontenure-track instructional appointments and progression through nontenure-track faculty ranks. Within that process, it is desirable to communicate to instructors and lecturers their opportunities for professional growth, to offer our feedback on their achievements and development, and to recognize their value and contributions to the institution. In addition, it is proposed, to codify the auxiliary appointment of “Senior Lecturer” at UNO as a title that recognizes sustained excellence in teaching and administrative service among nontenure-track faculty.

The proposed policy is consistent with the following sections of the By-laws of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents:

- 4.3 Appointments: Apportionment of Faculty Responsibilities; Stated in Writing
- 4.4 Types of Appointments: Professional Staff
  - 4.4.1 Special Appointments

### Primary Appointment

At UNO, the primary appointment for nontenure-track instructional faculty is a “special appointment” as “Instructor” or “Lecturer”, with the following terms and criteria:

- Instructor
  - Initial appointment recommendations must include the candidate’s CV and a letter of support from the unit chair/director.
  - Instructors must meet institutional faculty credentialing requirements.<sup>1</sup>
  - An instructor appointment may be a full- or part-time appointment.
  - Recommendations for instructor appointments are made by unit chairs/directors to deans.

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty credential requirements are articulated in “Academic Policy – Credentials and Qualifications for Faculty/Instructional Personnel at the University of Nebraska Omaha (Aligned with HLC Guidelines)”, available on the Academic Affairs website.

- Appointments as “Instructor” are one-year appointments and typically follow the academic year calendar
- Appointments as “Instructor” shall not exceed seven (7) years.
- Instructor performance is evaluated annually by the unit chair/director in accordance with criteria established by the unit and/or college.
- Lecturer
  - Faculty holding the title of “Instructor” are eligible for promotion to “Lecturer”, a title that recognizes sustained exceptional performance in carrying out teaching responsibilities.
  - Initial appointment recommendations must include the candidate’s CV and a letter of support from the unit chair/director that includes a rationale for the appointment to “Lecturer”.
  - Lecturers must meet institutional faculty credentialing requirements.
  - A “Lecturer” appointment requires a full-time faculty appointment.
  - Recommendations for “Lecturer” appointments are made by unit chairs/directors to deans.
  - “Lecturer” appointments are for one-, two-, or three-year periods and typically follow the academic calendar.
  - Performance is evaluated annually through the annual review process by the unit chair/director in accordance with criteria established by the unit and/or college.

All appointments must be in writing and be authorized with the college dean’s signature. The letter of offer serves as a contractual agreement, and therefore, must include a) the type of appointment (i.e., special appointment), b) a statement referencing academic responsibility and academic freedom (as described in sections 4.1 Academic Responsibility and 4.2 Academic Freedom of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents By-laws) as part of the appointment, c) identification of rank, compensation, benefits, and (where applicable) the termination date of the appointment, and d) the general apportionment of responsibilities (e.g., teaching, research, service).

Special appointments terminate in accordance with the time stated in the appointment to the position or the written contract, or if none, then with the appropriate period of notice.

#### Evaluation and Reappointment

Currently, academic units conduct an annual review of all nontenure-track instructional faculty within the unit as part of the annual review process for full-time faculty. The evaluation should be conducted in accordance with institutional policies as well as unit and/or college level policies. The evaluation informs recommendations for reappointment or non-renewal to the dean.

For select dossiers, upon recommendation of the Dean of the College, upon consultation with the Unit Members of the department or school, and with the approval of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, a “Lecturer” may additionally carry the auxiliary appointment as “Senior Lecturer”. Proposals for the auxiliary appointment “Senior Lecturer” may be made by the chair or director or by faculty within the unit.

### Auxiliary Appointment as Senior Lecturer

At UNO, appointment as a “Senior Lecturer” will be an auxiliary appointment used to recognize an individual who is at the forefront of administrative service, education and student mentorship, and a valuable member of the life of their department and college. The title is intended to recognize those individuals on the faculty whose service to the unit or institution serves a key role and is meant to recognize exceptional responsibilities. Such contributions can include, but are not limited to:

- Mentoring a nontenure-track faculty cohort in teaching and pedagogy
- Mentoring a graduate student cohort in teaching and pedagogy (if graduate faculty)
- Coordinating multiple sections of a course
- Developing experiential learning opportunities for students
- Leading degree program and/or general education assessment activities

Individuals carrying the auxiliary appointment of “Senior Lecturer” are considered qualified rank faculty, not eligible for tenure, and subject to the same status within departmental governance as given in departmental by-laws for lecturers. Individuals with this appointment may apply for grants and advise undergraduates or graduate students as allowed by their departments and Graduate Studies.

Those holding the title of Senior Lecturer shall receive an administrative stipend established by the chair and dean for the duration of the auxiliary appointment.

The following terms and criteria apply to the auxiliary appointment of “Senior Lecturer”:

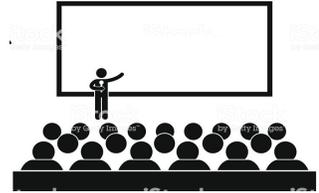
- At least three years full-time service to the college as “Lecturer”
- Syllabi from courses should be submitted that reflect teaching modalities, modes of assessment, and learning objectives
- Evidence of teaching effectiveness including
  - At least three letters of recommendation from tenured or tenure-track faculty
  - At least three letters of reference from students
  - Teaching evaluations from undergraduate and graduate courses taught at UNO
- A statement of teaching philosophy that reflects excellence in
  - Attention to pedagogy, discipline best practices and research-based methods
  - Understanding of student success issues
  - Student mentoring
  - Assessment strategies which encourage learning outcomes and student growth
  - Service to the department and college in the form of committee membership, curricular innovations, administrative roles, or enhancement of student life on campus
- A summary endorsement of the department chair or school director

Review of performance regarding the auxiliary appointment of senior lecturer every three years

## 7. Experiments: Student Achievement

### Course Availability

The Student Success Team, academic advisors across campus, and Student Government have indicated that inadequate seats in courses, have been a bottleneck in timely progress to degrees. Although it is difficult to quantify the impact of this observation, it is worth noting that in Fall 2019, there were many course sections that were 100% full at the beginning of the semester, and as new students were enrolling during summer orientation, certain courses in the general education were completely full even before the first freshman had an opportunity to register. Further, Student Senators could point to areas in the curriculum where they had to continue an additional semester at UNO due to unavailability of upper-division courses. Such indicators warrant further investigation and remediation.



One experiment attempted this fall was to increase the availability of seats in courses (either through increasing section sizes or the number of sections) such that the capacity exceeded 110% of the prior year's enrollment. This surplus capacity could allow for "surges" in enrollment during the add/drop period at the beginning of the semester (always a fluid time period), or it could allow us to address pent demand for seats. In the latter case, of course, there is no guarantee that 10% more seat capacity is sufficient. This is a hypothesis, and we will have to monitor enrollments in Spring 2020 to see if the additional capacity is utilized. In certain courses, such as speech and composition, the capacity was raised further to accommodate the entire freshman class. Of course, such increases required in some cases more instructor and TA support for the units. An early indicator of success in this experiment comes from Fall 2019 enrollment: the 500 new seats created in speech communications all filled, the average credit load for freshman approached 15SCH for fall semester (an all time high), and the average credit load for all students at UNO grew from 12SCH to 12.8SCH.

Another experiment was to launch development of asynchronous online sections of fourteen courses. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has identified these courses commonly taken by students in their first one to two years at UNO, but frequently taken at other institutions and transferred into UNO because the course is not available when and how a student needs through UNO in order to stay on track for subsequent program requirements and/or graduation. The total loss in tuition revenue to UNO is in excess of \$24M. Knowing that choice and flexibility to take key courses when and how students want and need each semester increases retention and decreases barriers for students, and knowing that online courses are showing the fastest increases in enrollment (10%/yr for each of the last three years), these fourteen courses were identified as potential options to strategically develop into larger online courses.

After a series of meetings with Deans, Department Chairs, and faculty members, these larger online courses are beginning to be developed utilizing the support of Instructional Designers and Instructional Technologists in UNO's Office of Digital Learning/ITS. Including courses in Criminal Justice, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, History, Math, and Chemistry, these larger online courses will also utilize Open Educational Resources (OER), free or reduced-cost digital course materials that students access through the learning management system rather than paying

additional costs for traditional textbooks, which can be an additional barrier for many students. Faculty were given course development grants to undertake this work. The first of these larger online courses will be delivered in Fall 2020, and we look forward to assessing the outcomes of this initiative.

It emphasized that in both these areas – increases in course capacity and increases in online course options, there has been tremendous optimism and experimentation from faculty and leaders across the colleges, emblematic of the proactive, collaborative spirit of UNO.

At the same time as we add new resources to relieve pain-points in the curriculum, it is essential to examine whether we are being good stewards of existing resources allocated for instruction. Each year, the campus dedicates significant funds to recruit adjuncts (part time instructors) – adjuncts teach nearly half of all sections at UNO. While clearly there are needs to offer more full time appointments for instruction, it is also important to examine where current full time faculty are deployed. As an example, over 300 of 800 undergraduate courses in Summer 2019 enrolled less than 10 students. In Fall 2019, it was more than double this number. Going in to Spring 2020, over 300 undergraduate course sections are enrolled with <10 students. If each section is taught by an adjunct, the total cost outweighs the current tuition revenue. Even those taught by full time faculty come at a cost, since that faculty time could be devoted elsewhere in the curriculum where adjuncts are in use.<sup>2</sup> It is important for the deans and departments to examine options going forward, including (a) offering certain courses once per year instead of once per semester; (b) reducing the number of upper division electives in low-enrollment areas; or (c) offering partial workload assignments for courses enrolling less than 10 students. It will be important for deans and departments to examine this question further.

Areas of “low enrollment” have to be examined in the full context of our academic mission. We should and must offer a diverse, comprehensive set of academic curricula. At the same time, we should and must undertake intentional discussions about the opportunity costs of such offerings, and where reducing costs could lead to increased investment in priorities such as more full time faculty, pay equity, operating costs, increased undergraduate and graduate student support, etc.

### Enrollment and Retention



The Student Success team, the academic deans, and members of the Academic Affairs team have been meeting regularly to review enrollment and recruiting. As these meetings have progressed, it has become increasingly apparent that “re-enrollment” (a.k.a. retention) is a critical area of focus, and consistent with the Chancellor’s Completion Imperative (UNO Strategic Plan Goal #1). As emphasized by AVC Omar Correa, approximately 30% of UNO students who are enrolled in a typical Spring semester and are eligible to re-enroll in the Fall fail to do so, and another 10% of students enrolled in a typical Spring semester are ineligible to re-enroll due to financial holds on their registration. This loss of 30-40% of the

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these undergraduate courses are independent study, some are field placement courses, some are music or studio art lessons, etc. So it is likely that many of these courses are essential parts of the curriculum.

student body is a significant factor meriting continued attention. Building on the experience of this group, several areas of focus emerged:

1) Outreach to non-enrolled students: This fall, the colleges, the academic advisors, and Student Success Team collaborated to reach out to all the non-returning students – all those who were enrolled in Spring 2019 and did not enroll in Fall 2019. Phone calls, emails, text messages, etc, were undertaken for a few thousand students. The purpose of these calls was to learn more about the reasons students did not return. The causes of these students leaving UNO are diverse (life circumstances, discouragement experienced in a UNO program, disappointing academic performance in a class or classes, financial burden, family concerns, etc). With the information gathered, it was possible to develop hypotheses for future experiments for remediation, and perhaps in some cases encourage specific students to re-enroll for Spring 2020. It was clear that a number of these students had since enrolled at other colleges or universities, especially MCC. This informs an urgency for this outreach – if a student leaves in Spring and enrolls elsewhere in a couple courses in the Fall, we have to explore options for the student to return to UNO no later than October/November, when enrollment for Spring typically takes place.

2) Probationary Students: Some of the students lost from Spring to Fall 2019 semester fell below the GPA threshold to be in good standing at UNO. Such students have clearly encountered difficulty in their studies and need different support structures. A working group was established to recommend appropriate strategies, which could include taking just 1 – 2 courses, perhaps online, as a ‘recovery’ period, just so these students continue to be engaged with UNO and work through better academic skill building.

3) Students Ineligible to Continue in Professional Programs: three colleges at UNO have minimum GPA thresholds for continuation in their degree programs. Such requirements are completely understandable within the realm of faculty oversight of the curriculum, or perhaps national accreditation standards, but are generally higher than the requirements of academic good standing at the university. In these cases, it becomes critical for the students to learn both about their ineligibility to continue in these (accredited) professional degrees, and of their options throughout the university for them to study in related, academically meaningful disciplines. Communications strategies are being developed amongst the advisors. The hypothesis here is that students, receiving bad news from one program, can become disheartened and leave UNO.

4) Academic Focus Areas: A couple of statistics are relevant as context for this discussion. Nationally, over half of students will change major during the course of their undergraduate degree. At UNO, approximately a third of our students enter as “undeclared” – no declared major – and the graduation rate of these students is approximately 8%. These statistics support a hypothesis that underscores how important it is for students to connect to faculty and academic program early in their career – even if it is provisional and will change. With dozens of academic majors at UNO, the campus can be a little complex to navigate. Some majors at first blush sound similar (geography/geology, biomechanics/kinesiology, counseling/psychology, bioinformatics in two colleges, BMS/INDS, etc). Especially with majors that may be unfamiliar to some students, we must do more to communicate students the options available to them. A group of faculty and administrators met to recommend the creation of 5 “Academic Focus Areas,” which are clusters of individual majors that hopefully will ease navigation into a specific degree. The 5 areas

are Creative Production and Performative Arts; Public Service and Helping Professions; Culture, Ethnicity, and Social Justice; STEM; and Technology, Business, and Innovation. Within each are 20-30 academic majors (some appearing in more than one area). Every student at UNO will be assigned to an Academic Focus Area consistent with their interests. The purpose of these assignments will be two-fold: for students with no major, this assignment will help narrow their focus for choosing a major. For those with a major, the area will facilitate their exploration if they ultimately decide to switch. Advisors and UComm are working on communications tools for the Academic Focus Areas.

5) Financial Holds: the Student Success team has been exploring retention grants to support students who encounter financial challenges and ultimately “holds” on their enrollment process for subsequent semesters. Exemplar programs at Georgia State University, and the Student Success team has explored options built on the GSU experience. A couple of the UNO deans have piloted small grants to students using donor funds, consistent with the gift agreements. Scaling this concept up for the campus will require finalizing a good working model of which students are the best able to take advantage of such grants and continue successfully in their academic programs. The Student Success team has been crafting a proposal based on concrete data.

### Exploratory Studies

In August, faculty and staff came together at the Strategic Planning Forum to summarize a year’s work on the “Completion Imperative.” A significant topic was the group of students who do not enter UNO with a declared academic major. Undeclared students represent approximately 50% of the entering class each year (nearly 1000 students). This group has a much lower graduation rate (8%), and stands in sharp contrast to those students who enter UNO with an intended degree plan. Indeed, given the positive milestone that UNO has crossed 53% graduation rate this year, we can infer that the graduation rate for those with a major is much higher, resulting in an average of undeclared plus declared students coming out to 53%.

These statistics suggest some hypotheses that inform the experiments that follow. Possible reasons for the achievement gap include:

- The academic preparation of students who are undeclared is less complete than that of students with a declared major.
- Students with a declared major may have access to more advising resources than the undeclared students.
- Students with a declared major have greater connection to faculty mentoring.
- Students with no undeclared major have a high “venn diagram” overlap with several disadvantaged groups, including 1<sup>st</sup> generation in college, Pell-eligibility, etc.

Informed in part by such hypotheses, the Completion Imperative working group this August recommended the creation of the Exploratory Studies track within the Interdisciplinary Studies major in the College of Arts and Sciences. As part of this experiment, the following will occur:

- All students with no declared major will be assigned to the INDS major.
- Additional advising FTE in both ACDC and College of Arts and Sciences
- The creation of an advising coordinator for the campus, with Dr. Sammi Kaiser appointed in this role.

- The creation of INDS1000, a FYE course for all students in INDS that emphasizes exploration of all academic areas of the campus, critical inquiry, and cross-disciplinary approaches to the challenges facing society today.
- Recruitment of 5 full time instructors for the INDS program.
- Appointment of Dr. Tammie Kennedy (Department of English) as faculty director, as well as program director to both serve as support for students in the program as well as facilitate collaboration with all the colleges at UNO.
- A renewed focus on undergraduate recruiting for majors by all the colleges, now focusing on the students in INDS as a pool of potential recruits.
- The creation of a TLC-like learning community structure for students in INDS, with students in INDS1000 being also scheduled in sheltered courses in the general education curriculum across all the colleges.
- All students in INDS will be assigned to a meta-major (Academic Focus Area) based on their broad interests. A “signing incentive” will be created for the students to declare a major by the end of 45 SCH.

The program details have been elaborated elsewhere. The overall structure is informed by the hypotheses of the experiment.

It then becomes important to examine what will be the early indicators for this program? There are many, and I truly hope to see wide collaboration on developing such indicators. Everyone’s collective brainstorming here will ultimately ensure we are thinking proactively and comprehensively on the student experience for this cohort. Some possibilities:

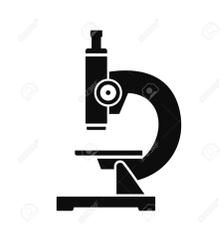
- How many of the INDS students participate in a summer orientation session? Of these, how many meet with a professional academic advisor? With a faculty member?
- How many INDS students participate in Fall Convocation?
- How many INDS students enroll in 15SCH in both fall and spring semester of their first year?
- How many INDS students are enrolled in a quantitative literacy course in their first year? Speech communications? Composition?
- Have we recruited INDS instructors with experience in student success issues?
- How many INDS students fail a first midterm exam in two or more classes in 1<sup>st</sup> semester?
- Can the INDS instructors relay meaningful one-on-one conversations they are having with their students on their college experience? On their academic and career goals?
- Do all the colleges have detailed plans for conducting “recruiting” for majors within the INDS cohort in collaboration with the INDS director?
- How many of the INDS students have a declared major by December 2020? May 2021?
- Can all of the INDS students explain what an Academic Focus Area is? How many can connect this area with their possible career interests?
- How many students in INDS have engaged with student clubs in their first semester? Met with a faculty member to learn more about their research? Attended an academic lecture?
- How many INDS students meet with a professional academic advisor in their first semester to examine courses for Spring?
- Have we deployed broad, consistent use of the LMS for communication and grade nudging?
- What will be the fall-to-spring retention rate for INDS students during Dec ’20 to Jan ’21?

Again, this is a list just to demonstrate examples, and requires further elaboration to develop a feedback-rich environment that gives us early about the program.

## 8. Experiment: Review of ORCA



As faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities have increased, it is timely that we examine our institutional support for the research and creative mission of the campus. To that end, we launched a review of ORCA and related offices that support faculty in this work. The deans were asked for nominations of active members of the faculty who could



provide insight in to the workings of ORCA, grants support, and the interactions with the colleges. This group was called together to address the following charge:

Date: December 15, 2020

Subject: Needs Assessment of the Office of Research and Creative Activities

cc: Deborah Smith-Howell, Dean of the Graduate School

Doug Ewald, Vice Chancellor for Business, Finance, and Economic Development

From: Sacha Kopp, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Ken Bayles, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Creative Activities

Dear Colleagues,

As UNO continues to expand its scholarly and creative opportunities for faculty and students, it seems timely to review our current institutional structures and resources. We want to ensure that our campus support continues to grow and evolve in line with the needs of faculty and students. To that end, we ask for your help in performing a “needs assessment.” This effort should examine the Office of Research and Creative Activities (ORCA), its current level of support, and the needs you foresee going forward. In addition, we ask that you examine our campus support in the academic colleges, the Graduate School, and the Division of Budget and Finance, all of which interconnect with ORCA. It will be helpful to identify areas of strength, areas requiring reinforcement, and areas where increased collaboration is warranted.

We asked this group to form a committee to develop this needs assessment. Each of you were recommended by your dean. It is essential that this group represent the experiences of faculty across the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. The committee shall consist of:

- Matt Germonprez, College of Information Science and Technology
- Parvathi Chundi, College of Information Science and Technology
- Gina Ligon, College of Business Administration
- Ben Smith, College of Business Administration
- Jeanette Harder, College of Public Affairs and Community Service
- Josie Schafer, College of Public Affairs and Community Service
- LaReesa Wolfenbarger, College of Arts and Sciences
- Roni Reiter-Palmon, College of Arts and Sciences
- Cristian Doña, College of Arts and Sciences
- Amy Morris, College of Communications, Fine Arts, and Media
- Pete Madsen, College of Communications, Fine Arts, and Media
- Anne Karabon, College of Education
- Alexey Kamenskiy, College of Education
- Juan Casas, Graduate School
- Amy Schindler, Criss University Library

We’ve asked Neal Grandgenett to chair this committee, and thankfully he has agreed.

So as to structure your needs assessment conversations, it would be helpful if you could address the following questions:

- 1) What skills sets do you see adequately represented in the ORCA team? What skill sets or functions are currently under-developed?
- 2) What trainings are organized by the ORCA team for faculty learning to write grants and fellowships? How could this improve?
- 3) How does ORCA assist in building faculty teams to respond to specific RFP's from external agencies, foundations, or the NU System?
- 4) How does the ORCA team support individual investigators in their process of preparing proposal submissions? How can investigators contribute?
- 5) How does the ORCA team support graduate students in obtaining fellowship support? How do these efforts coordinate with those in the Graduate School?
- 6) How does the ORCA team support individual investigators at the post-award stage? IRB? Intellectual Property? Animal use issues? Export control? How could this be improved?
- 7) What issues regarding procurement and HR arise from grant funds that should be addressed? How is this supported by ORCA? Grants/Accounting? Other areas of Business and Finance? What could be improved?
- 8) How has ORCA worked and/or collaborated with colleges to build specific partnerships with external partners such as UNMC, UNL, UNK, NSRI, StratComm, NARI, the Metropolitan Omaha Education Consortium, Durham Museum, Omaha STEM Ecosystem, etc? How could this improve?
- 9) How does ORCA utilize its resources to catalyze/seed research and creative activities on campus by students and faculty? How could it do better?
- 10) What resources exist within the colleges to support grant writing and grant-supported work? How do these resources connect with or collaborate with ORCA? Where could there be improvement? Where can future partnerships with colleges be formed?

The questions above are meant to help seed your assessment. They are not exclusive. If this committee feels that other questions should be addressed during the course of your work, we would be very glad to have you consider these as well.

My office is available to help you in scheduling meetings, providing data, or anything that would help this group in its efforts. It would be very helpful if this group could provide a written report by March 1, 2020.

Thank you in advance for your efforts. This needs assessment is tremendously helpful for us to ensure that the campus continues to support faculty and student efforts in research and creative activities across this comprehensive university community.

Sincere regards,

Sacha & Ken

## 9. Celebrating Successes



With pages and pages of this report devoted to “what’s next” and “what are we working on,” it seems worthwhile to call attention to some of the many successes of 2019. While just a small sampling of the many stories across UNO, they are reflective of the hard work, collaborative spirit, dedication to the mission, and many talents of the UNO community. These, and many other, stories make us each proud to be part of the work ahead.

- The College of Public Affairs and Community Service program in Public Administration was ranked #25 in the nation according to *US News and World Report*. Its online program in Criminology and Criminal Justice was ranked #1 in the nation amongst online programs.
- The UNO Aviation program in the College of Public Affairs and Community Service entered in to a partnership with Jet Linx and Southwest Airlines to form a Pilot Pathways Program along with three other universities.
- The College of Public Affairs and Community Service Center for Public Affairs Research is working with *Governing* magazine to host its online database.
- The UNO Flying Mavericks Team finished in the Top 10 of the nation’s collegiate aviation programs at the 2019 National Intercollegiate Flying Association SAFECON competition.
- The College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media collaborated to with the UNMC to inaugurate the Ted Kooser Center for Health Humanities on August 6.
- The Fried Academy for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Schwalb Center for Israel and Jewish Studies (CAS) and School of the Arts (CFAM) collaborated to host an exhibit of Holocaust artist Samuel Bak, which included a public lecture by Mr. Bak. Over 6000 members of the community, may from OPS schools, attended the exhibit.
- The Goldstein Center for Human Rights and Goldstein Community Chair for Human Rights (CAS) hosted Human Rights Week in October, which included a symposium on Art and Human Rights and featured a lecture by the Hon. Richard Goldstone.
- The School of Music received a \$5M gift to enter Phase II renovations of the Strauss Performing Arts Center.
- Theater students were invited to perform their production of “Little Wars” at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland in July. "Little Wars" has also been invited to present at the Kennedy Center, American College Theatre Festival.
- The Marion Marsh Brown Writers Lecture Series announced David Baldacci as the fifth author to speak at UNO. His appearance is April 21, 2020 at 7 pm in Baxter Arena.
- The College of Education completed construction on the second wing of the Biomechanics Research Building thanks to gifts from the Omaha philanthropic community.
- The College of Education Biomechanics group was the recipient of a second \$10M COBRE grant, one of only a few universities nationwide to win two such grants.
- The School of Health and Kinesiology’s Midlands Sexual Health Research Collaborative (MSHRC) launched Huespring, a leadership development program tailored to LGBTQ+ early career professionals.
- Four College of Education faculty and administrators joined an American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) network to address the national shortage of special education teachers.
- The CADRE Project, an accelerated master’s degree program providing support to first-year public school teachers, received a national impact award from the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS).

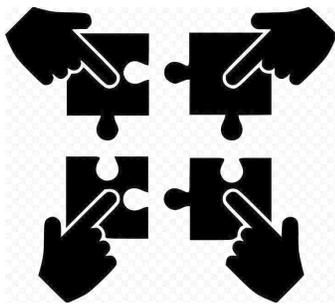
- The College of Business Administration broke ground on an addition to Mammel Hall thanks to gifts from the Omaha philanthropic community.
- The College of Business Administration completed a national search for its next dean. Dr. Michelle Trawick, Vice Provost at Western Kentucky University, will begin her new role as dean of CBA on February 1.
- The College of Business Administration, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Information Science and Technology collaborated to inaugurate a new Master of Science in Data Sciences in August 2019.
- UNO is one of two finalists for the National Center for the Investigation of Terrorism and Extremism, a program of excellence from the Department of Homeland Security. Colleagues from CPACS, CBA, CAS, and CIST collaborated on this proposal.
- The College of Business Administration received approval for a new MBA/MS-Nursing dual degree program in collaboration with UNMC.
- The College of Information Science and Technology and the College of Education collaborated to launch a new MS degree in Computer Science teacher education.
- UNO welcomed 80 new full time faculty in August, 2019.
- UNO faculty and staff were awarded over \$14M in sponsored grants thus far this fiscal year (July – December), nearly exceeding the \$17M awarded during the entire previous fiscal year (July – June).
- At an annual meeting at the Sherwood Foundation, researchers from MIT and USC described the impacts of the Buffet Scholarship program for students across Nebraska institutions of higher education. UNO had the number one ‘return on investment’ in terms of degrees (graduations) made possible through this support, thanks in part to the services provided by the Thompson Learning Community.
- UNO Thompson Learning Community enrolled over 300 new incoming students for Fall 2019 with a 90% retention of Fall 2018 first year students
- At December graduation, over 1000 students (700 undergraduate and 300 graduate) received their degrees in Baxter Arena. They were congratulated and celebrated by nearly 100 faculty from across the colleges who participated in the ceremony, as well as 6000 family and friends.
- The College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Communication, Fine Arts, and Media collaborated to inaugurate the region's first academic major in Medical Humanities.
- Vice President Joe Biden spoke to more than 300 at the Inaugural Chuck Hagel Forum in Global Leadership, an event organized by the College of Arts and Sciences.
- The Fried Academy for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Goldstein Center for Human Rights partnered to host The National Higher Education Leadership Consortium of Directors of Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Centers.
- Criss Library awarded 20 Affordable Content (OER) Grants to faculty. 11 courses were fully converted for the Fall 2019 semester with the remainder in Spring 2020. In total, students will save \$190,000/semester from these courses’ textbook costs.
- DigitalCommons@UNO reached 2 million global downloads. DigitalCommons@UNO is UNO’s institutional repository, providing a digital showcase for UNO scholarship. The repository contains 15,716 items that have been downloaded over 2,021,046 times.

This list is just a small sampling of many things that took place on the UNO campus in 2019. A few things are evident, however: a broad range of talents and creativity among the UNO faculty and staff; a high degree of collaboration across the campus; an unwavering commitment to students; and a deep connection through service to Omaha, Nebraska, and the nation.

## 10. Where We Go From Here

This is my second report to the UNO community. This is a different report in style and intent. While I continue to integrate into and learn about the UNO community and its needs, I hope here to reflect additionally my learning about the collaboration and integration of many offices, departments, and colleges into the grand challenges described here. I am gratified by the collaborative nature of the UNO community, and eager to support this further. As we all know, this important work only happens if we undertake it together. It is through this work undertaken together we can foster a sense of shared direction aligned with the Chancellor's vision and with the UNO Strategic Plan.

UNO can be proud of its proactive focus on complex questions. Such complexity requires further conversation, experimentation, assessment, and iteration. In this document, I spent some time



describing the concept of “safe-to-fail” experiments. This is not a “let all flowers bloom” model. Rather, it is a model that challenges us to be focused on the important problems, agree on general direction, be open to experiments without getting attached (some will fail and discontinue), identify the “guardrails” of risk we will not accept, and be committed to learning what’s working and what’s not – it is through early and intentional learning that experiments can be effective. It is also a model that allows us to stay focused on the broad goals of the UNO Strategic Plan.

In the 100 Day Report, I summarized the input received from the UNO community and indicated the following four areas that emerged for our focused attention:

Re-Enrollment and Retention: What factors contribute to students not re-enrolling? What strategies can support students academically and continue to complete their degrees? How can we develop academic sector solutions that build on and complement the successes of the Student Success team? We will explore course availability, strategies for undeclared and transfer students, remissions strategies, factors that are barriers to student success in entry-level courses, and online courses.

Campus Budget Model: How do we incentivize colleges’ activities and create accountability for measurable outcomes, while also prioritizing campus strategic objectives? How do we align campus efforts with the metrics of success? Further, we will revise the calendar of decisions (hiring, sabbaticals/leaves, course planning) to create more accurate, proactive budget plans.

UNO Big Ideas Process: We will continue to develop programs of excellence, emphasizing those that foster cross-campus collaboration, deepen the research and creative activities mission, increase external revenues (grants and philanthropy), student outcomes, graduate program enhancement, and external partnerships. The campus will be engaged in identifying these themes and the tactics to implement them in our academic plan.

Faculty and Staff Development: We will continue exploring tactics that recruit and retain a diverse faculty, expand full time positions within critical areas of the curriculum, and support faculty and staff advancement in rank and remuneration.

These broad areas inform the experiments outlined in the present 200 Day Report and indeed align well with the UNO Strategic Plan. As noted in the 100 Day Report, identifying the challenges and opportunities is only the first step. From there, it is vital to examine how these challenges and opportunities engage or affect each of the units within the campus, and how across campus we can build partnerships to undertake the projects ahead. It is further vital, especially in addressing problems of great complexity, to ensure there are consistent and multiple opportunities for meaningful, two-way feedback. As I hope is conveyed in the present report, a feedback-rich environment is essential for us to learn and proceed with confidence and trust.



As we embark on these important conversations, it is vital we reflect on the assumptions, norms, and past practices that have governed prior thinking. Where possible, we can build on successful strategies. At the same time, mindful of the concept of polarities, we can be flexible in our decision making and mindful of the pro's and con's of multiple approaches.

Another theme of this report is partnership. It has been a great pleasure to learn and witness the many ways in which individuals and units around campus come together to tackle the big challenges and opportunities. I hope this report serves to celebrate many whose work has been and continues to serve the broader needs of the university.

At the Investiture Ceremony in September, Chancellor Gold reminded us of the Social Contract, that as a university we strive to be relevant and responsive to our community – powerful reasons why we are here that we embody in our identity as a metropolitan university. These reasons “why” inform the spirit that infuses this community. And they inform our activities such as student success, engaged research and creative activities, online learning, faculty and staff development, continuing education, community engagement and service, and so much more. I am excited for our continued work together, and excited to see our conversations lead toward efforts aligned at the strategic objectives of UNO.

