A New Vision for the Center for Teaching Excellence
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Introduction
A bright, creative, productive, energetic, and well-prepared faculty is integral to the fulfillment of the university's mission. The Center for Teaching Excellence was created for the purpose of increasing the level of teaching proficiency and student learning. I am honored to continue this important work. My vision for the Center is ambitious, and quite different from those of my predecessors. As a result, there will be some changes to the way the Center operates. One major change I plan to make is ending the practice of awarding mini-grants for travel to conferences. Instead, I will issue formal calls for proposals. I also plan to organize a few larger events each year rather than several smaller luncheons.

Context
Today's world of higher education is very different from that of even a decade ago. A severe economic downturn impacted state and private funding of higher education. At the same time, the technological revolution meant that universities could reach students in all corners of the world with their recruiting messages, as well as their online courses and degree programs. Competition for students on brick-and-mortar campuses is fierce since students and their parents are easily able to shop for the "best" programs, financial aid packages, and campus amenities. Universities have had to stretch to develop unique brands that set them apart from their competitors, and innovative programs to attract and retain students. We must incorporate this relatively new reality into our consciousness as educators. Not only do professors need to be excellent teachers, they need to be imaginative in designing their programs to stand out from competitor schools. Our students enjoy doing and experiencing things rather than simply learning them. They want to be challenged and engaged both inside and outside the classroom. They are one with their digital devices and are eager to embrace new technology as it emerges. They also face an uncertain job market upon graduation. As a result, they (and their parents) are looking for both specific, relevant career advice and unique experiences that will give them an advantage during their job searches. They look to faculty to provide all of these things.

Vision
Since teaching involves so much more than classroom technique, I am proposing a change in name from the Center for Teaching Excellence to the Center for Academic Innovation. I believe this name more accurately reflects the broad scope of the bold, inspired, collaborative work we must do to keep UNK on its upward trajectory over the next several years. In addition, I am committing to a set of priorities for the Center for Academic Innovation. I believe these articulated priorities will help focus our efforts to not only continue the important work of improving classroom teaching, but also to build and strengthen programs, create distinctive experiences, and provide our students with every conceivable advantage during their time with us.

This document is intended to be a springboard for discussions with campus constituents about what the Center for Academic Innovation can do to support the university's academic mission. I look forward to spirited discussions and planning sessions. I look forward to seeing the creative ways faculty will come together to reinvigorate their programs. I look forward to helping faculty identify exciting new opportunities for their students. I also look forward to working with faculty, staff, administrators, community members, and other stakeholders as we put your plans in motion.

Priorities of the Center for Academic Innovation

1. Provide faculty development activities that engage faculty in training, peer education, and dialogue.

   Strategies:
   - Faculty Development Day prior to each semester, with breakout sessions.
   - Annual faculty workshop with a scholar in a relevant area of higher education.
   - Teaching Innovations Campus Conference each year.
   - Teaching-focused session during New Faculty Orientation.
   - Individual sessions with faculty (on request) for teaching evaluations and suggestions for improvement.

2. Know who are students are, and what their needs are, so we can serve them well.

   Strategies: Communicate demographic information to faculty and staff.
Study and act on results from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Work with Student Affairs and registrar to determine why students leave UNK. Conduct focus groups with various student populations to identify needs.

3. Find ways to **challenge students** both inside and outside the classroom.
   
   **Strategies:**
   - Determine what “academic challenge” means to students.
   - Use results from student “academic challenge” discussion to inform faculty how they can increase the level of challenge for their students.

4. Find meaningful ways to **engage students** both inside and outside the classroom.
   
   **Strategies:**
   - Encourage faculty to consider engaging teaching strategies such as the “flipped classroom,” Socratic, inquiry-based, or student-centered models.
   - Help identify program-specific academic experiences that accomplish this goal, which may include field trips, research projects, service learning projects, study abroad experiences, accompanying students to professional conferences...

5. **Make High Impact Practices** a priority because they are the key to retaining our students and creating a unique brand that will attract prospective students.
   
   **Strategies:**
   - Examine current examples of High Impact Practices at UNK and look for appropriate ways to implement these in a greater number of programs.
   - Examine existing implementations of High Impact activities to determine if changes would allow greater numbers of students to participate.
   - Encourage students to make deliberate choices to participate in these activities.
   - Balance desire to create and maintain more High Impact activities with faculty workload.

**High Impact Practices**

High Impact Practices (HIps) are transformative experiences, being so significant as to change a student’s perspective, outlook, trajectory, or career path. The five HIps tracked with NSSE data are:

1. Learning Communities (students take two or more courses together)
2. Experiential learning (service learning, internships, field experiences, student teaching)
3. Study Abroad
4. Undergraduate Research with Faculty
5. Senior Culminating Experience (senior-level thesis, project, portfolio, capstone, or internship)