UNI-Community Connections Task Force

Executive Summary

I.   The Charge:
    1.   Look at the involvement of UNI faculty, staff, and students in the community and pinpoint strategies for supporting and furthering these connections.

II.   Approach to Task:
    A.   Review of comments solicited during the initial Campus Conversation in February 2005.
    B.   Focus group session in January 2006, drawn from the approximately 30 people (faculty, staff and students) who had expressed a strong interest in community connections.
    C.   Inclusion of questions on community connections on a campus wide survey, the results of which we were unable to utilize due to collective bargaining concerns.
    D.   Solicitation of comments from faculty, staff, and students during the second Campus Conversation session in February 2006, and through subsequent e-mail contacts.
    E.   The committee structured its discussion around the following central questions:
        1.   Values: How can UNI articulate values that support community engagement?
        2.   Communication: How can UNI promote effective communication on/off campus about opportunities for involvement?
        3.   Incentives: How can UNI offer incentives that demonstrate a serious, university commitment to engagement?

III.   Findings & Recommendations:
    A.   The committee agreed on common definitions to frame the UNI-Community Connections discussion. These include:
        1.   Experiential Learning: Supervised opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills to "real world" settings.
        2.   Service Learning: Community service that is incorporated directly into academic instruction.
        3.   Public Scholarship: Faculty research agendas that address community issues
        4.   Volunteerism: Voluntary contributions of time and talents on behalf of the community.
        5.   Faculty and Staff Service: Service to the campus through departmental, college or University committee work.

6. Community: "Community" may be defined flexibly, according to the interests of individuals and departments, to include the Cedar Valley, Iowa, the nation, or the global community.

B. Recommendation One - Developing:
1. Establish a Center for Community Engagement to:
   a. Serve as UNI's "front door," connecting communities to UNI programs.
   b. Promote the integration of community engagement into UNI core activities.
   c. Foster multi-disciplinary and cross-unit initiatives that further community engagement.
   d. Encourage and sustain discussion on the practical implementation and community engagement across campus.
   e. Identify barriers to engagement that affect core activities at all levels.
   f. Support the strategic investment of resources for engagement through development initiatives (private and public funding).
   g. Work closely with University Marketing & Public Relations to advance a clear message about community engagement through multiple media on and off campus.
   h. Partner with an advisory board composed of community members and University representatives
2. Incorporate into faculty and staff development opportunities to learn about community engagement and how to implement experiential and service learning in their courses.

C. Recommendation Two - Creating Institutional Incentives
1. Offer regular institutional messages by senior administrators, deans, and department heads that attest to UNI's core commitment to community engagement.
2. Target resources within departments and colleges for promoting community engagement among faculty and staff.
3. Commit development staff to seeking and disseminating information about funding sources for community engagement both locally and nationally, including public and private funding sources.
4. Support community engagement within units by drawing clear distinctions among categories of service. For example, "community engagement" should be distinguished from departmental or campus-based "service." Activities with direct links to professional assignments at UNI should be distinguished from community volunteerism.

5. Encourage individual units to incorporate their commitments to community engagement into departmental evaluation processes over which they have control.
6. Create community engagement awards for faculty, staff, and students in order to formally acknowledge the value attached by the University to community engagement.
7. Identify ways in which experiential and service learning opportunities for students may be developed within the Liberal Arts Core courses and/or major courses.
8. Explore focused discussions about community engagement among staff. Questions for discussion might include:
   a. How can staff be more fully supported and encouraged in community engagement initiatives?
   b. What structures and processes of support could be developed that would facilitate greater community engagement among staff?

Members of UNI-Community Connection Task Force

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