

Baccalaureate Review Task Force

Proposed Purpose Statement and Student Learning Goals

Extended edition

September 16, 2010

Nothing happens unless first we dream—Carl Sandburg

Over the past 18 months, the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Baccalaureate Review Task Force listened to dreams. Reflecting the care and sense of community that characterize the university, over 1,200 NIU students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and employers contributed their input to develop a shared vision and understanding of what NIU students should learn. Developed through a process designed to be thorough, inclusive, and transparent, the task force proposes the following purpose statement and baccalaureate learning goals:

Purpose statement

The NIU baccalaureate degree experience enables graduates to think critically, create, and communicate by participating in an engaged learning environment to prepare for success in a diverse, global society. This learning environment emphasizes the importance of context. Graduates will be prepared to understand the impact of history on modern society, the relationship between our society and others around the globe, and the unity and diversity of the American experience. Students will be exposed to a broad range of experiences and knowledge through the study of natural science, social science, the humanities, and the arts. Students will develop their knowledge, capacities, and abilities through an intentionally developed curriculum that integrates general education, the students' majors, and opportunities outside the classroom. NIU graduates will become life-long learners who are empowered, informed, and responsible citizens.

Goal definitions—The “Three Cs”

Critical thinking—involves literacy, reflectivity, and understanding how to gather and make sense of various forms of information before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

Creativity—uses a combination of imagination, intellect, insight, and emotion to solve problems and transform existing ideas, images, or techniques in innovative and original ways.

Communication—includes the mastery of basic skills, such as language, technology, and collaboration.

Baccalaureate learning outcomes

NIU’s current baccalaureate goals are very broad and simply written. The task force would like to maintain that style. Learning goals and outcomes become more explicit as one goes from baccalaureate goals, to general education, departments, and then to the major.

The university’s **current** baccalaureate learning goals include:

- (a) effective habits in logical thinking,
- (b) communication skills,
- (c) quantitative skills,
- (d) an understanding of and ability to use modern technology,
- (e) sophisticated practices in using resources,
- (f) mature interpersonal behavior in various settings, and
- (g) those unique skills necessary for one’s chosen area of in-depth study.

The **proposed** baccalaureate learning outcomes include:

- Integrate knowledge of global interconnections and interdependencies
- Exhibit intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives
- Analyze issues that interconnect human life and the natural world
- Demonstrate critical, creative, and independent thought
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Collaborate with others to achieve specific goals
- Use and combine appropriate quantitative and qualitative reasoning skills to address questions and solve problems
- Synthesize knowledge and skills relevant to one's major or particular fields of study and apply them creatively to develop innovative outcomes

The importance of baccalaureate goals

The baccalaureate goals are, first and foremost, about student success. Everyone associated with the university wants students to receive the best education possible. Goals allow us to be better and more consistent in what we do. Educational reform requires, however, that people have a shared vision. Identifying baccalaureate goals is the first step in making this happen.

Baccalaureate goals tell the world what the university values and are an integral part of the university's image. Baccalaureate goals drive the academic and co-curriculum. They provide students, parents, and employers with a clear expectation of the knowledge, skills, and capacities graduates will demonstrate. They provide faculty and staff

with a consistent framework upon which to consider their actions and efforts.

Baccalaureate goals provide a shared reference for NIU's Academic Affairs as well as Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Shared goals are designed to increase opportunities for collaboration and engagement. Student success requires exposure to situations and learning environments that extends their classroom and online experiences.

Next steps

Short-term

The purpose statement and goals will be submitted to the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum (CUC) for review in September 2010. The CUC submits its recommendations to the Undergraduate Coordinating Council (UCC). The task force hopes to complete the curricular approval process by the end of fall semester.

Longer-term (assumes the purpose statement and goals are approved)

The task force recognizes the importance of identifying activities, programs, and instruction that support the baccalaureate goals. During the Spring 2011 semester, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and employers will be asked for input to identify what the university is already doing well. Both the academic and co-curricular aspects of university life will be included. Particular attention will be directed to finding best-practice strategies that can be shared across disciplines, colleges, and co-curricular settings.

General Education Committee (GEC): The purpose statement and goals will be used to guide general education reform. It is expected that the GEC and the baccalaureate review task force will maintain a close working relationship.

Majors and co-curricular activities: Goal alignment issues will be addressed so that baccalaureate goals can be reinforced in students' majors and co-curricular activities.

Goal development process

In Fall 2008, NIU established the Baccalaureate Review Task Force. This effort builds on "The Great Journeys Strategic Plan" and addresses two strategic imperatives:

- Preserve, strengthen and extend NIU's teaching and learning environment.
- Make NIU an institution of first choice for students, faculty, and staff.

In an effort to provide guidance for curricular reform, the task force sought to establish widely known and endorsed baccalaureate goals. The task force implemented a plan to discover what should be expected of an NIU graduate. First, a concerted effort was made during Spring 2009 to engage the NIU campus community. Task force members led 29 focus groups with faculty, staff, administrators, and employers. An additional 16 groups were held with (and led by) students. Over 300 people participated in these groups. An online survey was also used to gather input. It was linked to NIU's home page and received 929 replies from February through April 2009.

In September 2009 the task force released three reports summarizing the data collection process, findings, and proposed goals. There was general agreement across focus groups and survey participants that NIU graduates should have mastered critical thinking, communication skills, and understanding of context (the “Three Cs”). A complete description of the effort as well as the initial set of goals is available on the Baccalaureate Review web page.

During the Fall 2009 semester, the goals were taken back to many of the prior focus group participants for feedback. To further maintain transparency and encourage participation the goals were also posted online with an option to provide input. These meetings and the survey were designed to obtain feedback for possible revisions to the goals. A second, and no less important, purpose was to continue building awareness and understanding of the baccalaureate goals.

At the end of the Fall 2009 semester, the steering committee met twice to review the feedback and discuss possible revisions to the goals. Feedback received online and from presentations was similar with three primary themes identified. First, there was strong sentiment that “creativity” had been overlooked as a goal. Creativity was seen as an essential part of the baccalaureate curriculum. Second, there was concern that the proposed goals did not highlight students’ majors. Although the baccalaureate goals should be aligned with the major, this was not emphasized in the initial reports. Third, there was significant discussion regarding the definition of “to know a foreign language.” There was strong support for the concept but it was not clearly operationalized. Further feedback on this issue focused on how global-learning outcomes could be added as learning objectives. Based on input received during these meetings, the steering

committee revised the Three Cs to include: critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Context was elevated to become the overriding concept upon which all goals are based.

During the Spring 2010 semester, task force members and other university volunteers participated on goal development teams (see Table 1 for a list of participants). Led by steering committee members, each team was charged with developing meaningful and measureable student learning objectives associated with critical thinking, creativity, or communication. The teams were given six weeks to develop a list of proposed goals. On March 23, 2010 the goal development teams shared their proposals with the task force. Across the three teams, 47 goals were suggested. Individual task force members submitted an additional 18 goals. The steering committee met the following Friday (3/26/10) to review the proposed goals. It quickly became apparent that it would be necessary to direct further attention to reducing the total number of goals and refine the purpose statement.

Table 1: Goal development team membership

Goal Development Teams		
Creativity	Critical thinking	Communication
<i>Jeff Kowalski*</i> <i>(leader)</i> Art	<i>David Changnon*</i> <i>(leader)</i> Geography/Provost's Office	<i>David Gorman*</i> <i>(leader)</i> English
Sinclair Bell* Art	David Ballantine* Chemistry	Anne Birberick* Foreign Languages & Literatures
Glenda Cosenza* Music	Sinclair Bell* Art	Jeff Chown Communications
Amy Franklin* Planning & Assessment	Brad Broughton* Student	Samantha Fisher* Public Administration
Elisa Fredericks* Marketing	Paul Crawford* Community College Relations	Kerry Freedman* Art Education
Ed Klonowski* Music	Barbara Fouts* Career Services	Janice Hamlet* Communication
Jeanette Rossetti Nursing & Health Studies	Wendell Johnson* Libraries	Deb Pierce* International Programs
Donna Smith* Catalog Editor	Murali Krishnamurthi* Faculty Development	Norm Stahl Literacy Education
Matt Streb Political Science	Mary Pritchard* Health and Human Sciences	Laura Vazquez Communications
	Pam Rosenberg* International Programs	
	Jim Schmidt* History	
	Joel Stafstrom Biology	
	Lucy Townsend* Leadership, Ed. Psych & Foundations	

* = Task force member

Over the next four months the steering committee met multiple times to review and refine the goals and purpose statement. They were guided by a desire to find core ideas. Goals needed to reinforce critical thinking, creativity, and communication. The purpose statement needed to emphasize the context in which goals should be considered. Table 2 provides a curriculum matrix mapping the proposed baccalaureate learning goals to context, critical thinking, creativity, and communication.

Table 2: Proposed baccalaureate goals matrix

	Con-text	Critical Thinking	Crea-tivity	Commun-ication
Integrate knowledge of global interconnections and interdependencies.	X	X		
Exhibit intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.	X	X		X
Analyze issues that interconnect human life and the natural world.	X	X	X	X
Demonstrate critical, creative, and independent thought	X	X		X
Communicate clearly and effectively.	X		X	X
Collaborate with others to achieve specific goals	X	X	X	X
Use and combine appropriate quantitative and qualitative reasoning skills to address questions and solve problems.	X	X	X	
Synthesize knowledge and skills relevant to particular fields of study and apply them creatively to develop innovative outcomes.	X	X	X	

The proposed purpose statement and baccalaureate goals presented at the beginning of this document were distilled during eight separate meetings from March 26 through August 25, 2010. A summary document that includes the original goal development team proposals

as well as working notes for all subsequent goal revisions and refinements are available on the Baccalaureate Review Web Page.

Further Information

Please visit the NIU Baccalaureate Review web page for additional information regarding this initiative.

(<http://www.niu.edu/bacreview/index.shtml>).