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# Implementing and Assessing the ACE 10 Outcome: Exploring Learning and Career Preparation within the Undergraduate Major (Quality Initiative Proposal--University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

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## Open Pathway

### *Quality Initiative Institutional Proposal Template*

*The enclosed Quality Initiative proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.*

See attached form

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

Date

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Name of Institution

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. The institution may choose to include a brief implementation plan that addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the outline. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words.

#### **Overview of the Quality Initiative**

1. *Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.*

**Title:**

Implementing and Assessing the ACE 10 Outcome:  
Exploring Learning and Career Preparation within the Undergraduate Major

**Description:**

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's quality initiative proposes to implement and assess UNL's General Education capstone course requirement (ACE 10). Assessment of ACE 10 outcomes is designed to be a broad marker of the quality of learning within our undergraduate majors. While examining students' learning within their major, we also propose to engage faculty in systematic conversations about the role that curriculum, advising and mentoring within each major can play in assisting students to choose and prepare for meaningful careers after college. Deeply examining what students are learning within ACE 10 courses and simultaneously exploring their opportunities for career

development within each major will enable UNL to gain a holistic picture of how our undergraduate degree programs are preparing students for career success.

Initiated in 2009, UNL's Achievement-Centered Education Program (ACE) is a 30-hour general education program that consists of ten student learning outcomes. The first nine learning outcomes focus on development of intellectual and practical skills including written and oral communication skills; building knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures through use of scientific, historical, social science, and arts theories and methods; and exercising individual and social responsibilities through the study of ethical principles and reasoning, application of civic knowledge, and engagement with global issues. The tenth learning outcome, ACE 10, culminates in the integration of these abilities and capacities via "a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection." Similar to the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile, ACE 10 courses ask students to demonstrate the integration of ideas, methods, practice and theory through summative projects, assignments, and research.

The ACE assessment process requires faculty and departments to collect, assess, and archive samples of ACE student work to inform programmatic discussions on how students are achieving particular outcomes. In 2014-2015, assessment reports are due for all ACE 10 courses, followed by a 5-year review of the entire ACE program in 2015-2016. This project has several benefits as a Quality Initiative:

- Every college is committed to implementing and assessing its ACE 10 courses over the next two years.
- ACE 10 courses are intended to generate student products that serve as broad indicators of learning outcomes within the major.
- The ACE assessment process is already structured for collecting evidence and documenting impact.
- Faculty will find discussions of ACE 10 outcomes highly relevant to their core work. Department discussions of ACE 10 assessment data engage faculty in discussions of the effectiveness of the curriculum within their major.
- While ACE 10 courses are often viewed as "culminating" points in the curriculum, they also serve as "launch sites" for graduating students and thus are a useful site for inquiring into how students are being prepared to take their knowledge into the world, either within careers or further study at the graduate level.
- In September, 2013, the Office of Career Services moved from Student Affairs into a reporting line in the Senior Vice Chancellor's organization. The office is now under the leadership of the new Director for University Advising and Career Services. This structure is designed to facilitate a new level of collaboration between faculty, advisors and career services professionals. The QI project will be our first vehicle for engaging faculty across campus in direct conversation about the role that the academic major plays in offering career mentoring and preparation to undergraduate students.

There are three components to this proposed initiative:

1) The ACE 10 implementation project in 2013-2014 will help faculty from the 60 departments that offer ACE 10 courses to prepare for assessment reporting. Faculty representing ACE 10 courses across campus will participate in year-long program discussions of ACE 10 curriculum implementation and assessment and will share best practices for assessing student learning in ACE 10 courses. The faculty will examine their students' learning within the major program as represented within ACE 10 courses by exploring questions such as the following:

- What did we learn about the depth and breadth of student learning in each major?
- What aspects of curriculum development are suggested by the ACE 10 assessment results?
- Are there best practices for curriculum and assessment within ACE 10 courses that can be shared across departments?

2) In 2014-2015 the Office of Academic Affairs will coordinate discussions between faculty, advisors and career services staff about career development activities that complement ACE 10 courses by advancing students' academic, personal, and career growth. These conversations will focus on questions such as:

- What did we learn about the ways that each major prepares students to meaningfully apply what they learned during their career?
- How can we refine the career preparation component of our curriculum, advising and mentoring within each major?
- What kinds of career assistance are relevant and necessary within each major?
- What are best practices for career assistance and development that could be shared across departments and programs and what outcomes could be used to measure institutional success in providing them?

3. In 2014-2015, the University Assessment Committee and the Dean's Council will review the submitted ACE 10 reports and provide recommendations in preparation for the 2015-2016 Comprehensive Review of the ACE program. The 2015-2016 review will be the first comprehensive review of the ACE program since its inception in 2009.

Thus, this initiative builds upon ongoing ACE curriculum development and assessment processes in which faculty are already engaged, offers new opportunities to focus on curriculum development and assessment for ACE 10 courses in particular, and seeks to sponsor broader conversations about opportunities for integrating more intentional career development within undergraduate majors.

### **Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance**

#### **2. *Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.***

Recent critiques of U.S. institutions (Arum & Roska 2011; Hacker & Dreifus 2010; Selingo 2013) have led to many questions about the quality and value of postsecondary education: What are students learning? Is what they are learning in college classrooms useful? Can the "added value" of a college degree be documented? How is this learning connected to the skills and expertise that employers seek? And how can academic programs better connect to career development and preparation? This

quality initiative focuses upon the most significant curriculum and programmatic assessment that UNL has undertaken in the past decade to pursue these questions.

Approved in January 2008 by the faculty of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in all eight undergraduate colleges, the thirty hour, Achievement-Centered General Education Program (ACE) is built on student learning outcomes that answer the fundamental question, "What should all undergraduate students--irrespective of their majors and career aspirations--know or be able to do upon graduation?" Any department at UNL can propose to offer an ACE course for any student learning outcome contingent upon two requirements: 1) the course must clearly address the outcome and provide students with opportunities to demonstrate its achievement and 2) the unit must agree to routinely collect and assess student work from the ACE course and reflect on student achievement of the particular learning outcome designated for the ACE course. Hallmarks of the ACE program include the following:

- ACE is flexible. Students have many choices and can intentionally select ACE courses that compliment and build upon major interests.
- ACE is transferable. ACE courses are the same across all 8 colleges. Even if a student changes majors, the ACE courses they have taken still count.
- ACE is efficient. ACE courses are included in the 120-hr. programs so that students can easily stay on track to graduate in four years.
- ACE is marketable. ACE courses are designed to supplement students' educational experiences and provide them the skills and knowledge that employers value.

The quality initiative focus on ACE 10 courses is particularly significant, since ACE 10 courses serve as both a general education requirement and the culminating capstone experience within a student's major. Examining the assessment products for ACE 10 courses will provide units with valuable information about their students' learning and performance within their undergraduate majors and opportunities to revise curriculum accordingly.

Examining students' opportunities for career development within the major is also a timely and significant component of UNL's proposed initiative. President Obama's recent proposal to tie federal funding for universities to graduation rates and job placement success is the latest in a series of efforts to promote institutional accountability and commitment to measuring student learning and career preparation (VSA, College Portrait, NILOA, etc.). On a local level, the University of Nebraska's Board of Regents is intensely interested in how UNL's academic programs prepare undergraduates for career placement. UNL's recent move of the Office of Career Services into the Office of Academic Affairs provides an unprecedented opportunity to promote discussions across the campus about how student learning within degree programs is (or could be better) integrated with career development. Sponsoring systematic discussions about how degree programs are providing students with career development will further inform what faculty learn about their degree programs from the ACE 10 assessment process.

#### *The ACE Assessment Process*

A key feature of the ACE program is the assessment process in which departments are required to collect student work from ACE courses, analyze student performance, and engage in department discussions about the implications of the analysis for the curriculum. The key questions that departments are asked to report on include the following:

- What did the department/program analysis reveal? Discuss the findings and implications of the analysis as it relates specifically to the outcome.
- How will the department/program use the findings to improve student learning of the ACE learning outcome?
- What assessment questions related to the ACE learning outcome would the department/program like to investigate in the future?

Because the first nine ACE learning outcomes are assessed at the student and course level, these assessments do not naturally lead to broader discussions about student learning in the major. Further, since some departments may offer only one or two courses for the first nine ACE outcomes, there are limited opportunities to use ACE 1-9 courses to engage in these broader discussions about the curriculum.

To date, the campus has reviewed the assessment results for six of the ACE learning outcomes. Not surprisingly, the ACE assessment reports received thus far have been somewhat uneven. Some departments have been highly engaged in the ACE assessment process and have cycled their analyses into important curricular revision efforts. Other departments have struggled to develop an assessment process that is useful to them. As an institution UNL is committed to developing a culture that supports assessment not as a hoop to jump through but as a meaningful and authentic faculty activity that cycles back into curriculum for improved teaching and student learning.

In preparation for the assessment cycle for ACE 10 courses, then, UNL's Quality Initiative will engage faculty in conversations intended to share best practices about how they are implementing these capstone courses, how they can best use assessment of ACE 10 courses to refine each undergraduate major, and how each major might best prepare students to choose and prepare for a meaningful career after college.

Focusing on ACE 10 courses for UNL's quality initiative also serves another purpose: providing evidence of annual "participation in pilot programs to measure student learning outcomes" as required by the University of Nebraska Board of Regents in order to "provide accurate and transparent information to the public about college costs and student learning and success outcomes" (NU strategic learning assessment, 6-g). In the past, UNL has participated in standardized assessment pilots (The Collegiate Learning Assessment, the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency, etc.) to address these questions in compliance with the BOR framework. But UNL administrators and faculty have not found these national assessments as useful in terms of sponsoring sustained conversations about how to improve curriculum for students' needs.

As Theall (2006) suggests, campus teaching development initiatives need to promote educational reform on several levels including: 1) assisting faculty in evaluating, improving, and deepening their students' learning and 2) building campus communities that support and refine inquiry into student learning. UNL's quality initiative is primarily designed to achieve both of these goals: 1) help facilitate the enactment and assessment of ACE 10 courses, and 2) develop campus communities committed to examining and improving learning within major programs and exploring the integration of students' career development within these programs across the institution.

***Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.***

UNL's quality initiative is designed to broaden and enhance current efforts to assess the value and impact of the ACE 10 courses in relation to their major degree programs. Because the initiative focuses on the ACE 10 capstone courses, it offers opportunities to engage faculty in conversations about improving academic quality within the undergraduate major. The initiative is also an opportunity to engage faculty, advisors and career services professionals in exploration of how to integrate career development inquiry within major programs to foster students' career development. With the recent move of UNL's Career Services office within the Office of Academic Affairs, this initiative offers an unprecedented opportunity to structure ongoing conversations between faculty, advisors, and career services professionals about the role of career development within degree programs. Finally, the first two years of this initiative will provide recommendations for the comprehensive review of the ACE general education program in 2015-2016. Since ACE is a central component of all UNL undergraduates' major programs and career development is inextricably tied to preparing students for how they will use what they are learning within their degree programs upon graduation, the impact of UNL's initiative on academic quality is comprehensive and significant.

### ***Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose***

3. *Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.*

This initiative seeks to examine the quality and impact of student performance within ACE 10 capstone courses for undergraduate degree programs, to improve the processes for sharing best practices about assessment and curriculum across units, and to encourage discussion of refining career development within each undergraduate major across the campus.

4. *Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments, and determine what has been accomplished.*

**In AY 13-14**, the two goals will be to 1) run the year-long ACE 10 project with between 25-30 faculty participants and 2) conduct a comprehensive audit of the career development and programming colleges and departments currently provide.

AY 13-14 Metrics:

Within the ACE 10 project, faculty will meet monthly to

- Read and discuss literature on assessing student learning and career development within the major;
- Share student work products from their ACE 10 courses;
- Discuss departmental assessment practices;
- Disseminate the results as best practice models for assessment processes that all departments offering ACE 10 courses can use for the AY 14-15 reporting cycle.

Faculty participants will complete a survey about how they use assessment in September and a follow-up survey regarding what they learned in May. Participants also will present preliminary results regarding ACE 10 assessment in the form of posters at the Undergraduate Research Fair in April of 2014.

For the career services audit, the Director of University Advising and Career Services will meet individually with the deans of the eight academic colleges to inventory and assess current practices and to explore collaborative opportunities. By summer 2014, a menu of best practices for career assistance and development will be created and disseminated to all academic departments and programs.

**In AY 14-15**, the two goals will be to 1) hold a series of discussions between faculty, staff, and career professionals on relationships between undergraduate degree programs and career development opportunities and 2) continue review of ACE 10 assessment processes, including collection of ACE 10 assessment reports for all undergraduate degree programs.

AY 14 - 15 Metrics:

- Number and quality of discussions regarding degree programs and career development opportunities
- Number and quality of departmental ACE 10 assessment reports submitted.
- Quality of department plans for using the results of ACE 10 assessments to refine students' learning and career preparation within each major
- Summary recommendations from Dean's Council and University-Wide Assessment Committee regarding departments' ACE 10 reports.
- Summary report from Office of Career Services on outcome measures of success with regard to supporting students' career preparation and goal attainment.

AY 15-16 Metric

- A report summarizing the comprehensive review of the ACE program.

### ***Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative***

5. *Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.*

This quality initiative proposal has been vetted and approved by the academic deans of all undergraduate colleges, the senior vice chancellor and the chancellor, the director of undergraduate education programs, the associate vice chancellor for undergraduate education and student success initiatives, and the director of university advising and career services. Each college has recommended faculty participants for the AY 13-14 ACE 10 program (currently 27 are enrolled).

6. *Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.*

Several groups and individuals will be involved in implementing this quality initiative. The Director of Undergraduate Education Programs, Dr. Nancy Mitchell, and Dr. Amy Goodburn, Associate Vice Chancellor in Academic Affairs will collaboratively oversee and lead the year-long faculty inquiry program in AY 13-14. Dr Mitchell has overseen the implementation of the ACE program since 2008 and has broad expertise in general education programs. Dr. Goodburn participated on the original ACE implementation committee. The ACE program coordinator, Brooke Glenn, will also help support this program. All undergraduate colleges have identified faculty to participate in the ACE 10 inquiry program. The Dean's Council and the University-Wide Assessment Committee (comprised primarily of

associate deans from each college who work with academic programs) will discuss and review the ACE 10 assessment reports in AY 14-15 and make recommendations to the units. All faculty will be engaged in discussions about the assessment of ACE 10 course(s) within their respective departments. The Director of University Advising and Career Services and the Career Services staff will help lead the faculty and advisor conversations the following year about the valid role for career preparation within each major.

*List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.*

Over the past six years, UNL has demonstrated a significant commitment of resources to the implementation and assessment of the ACE program, including the Director's salary and one staff position. This quality initiative will be similarly resourced. All of the faculty who successfully complete the year-long program will receive a stipend of \$500. Technological support is already provided for ACE curriculum and assessment processes including an online system for submission and tracking of assessment reports. The campus intends to invest in new positions for career service professionals who will be embedded within each undergraduate college. The deans of all academic colleges have committed to participating in the Career Services audit and to having their respective departments and programs participate in the conversations about career development in year two.

*Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative (The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)*

**7. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.**

For this quality initiative, we propose to engage faculty and administrative leaders in a series of discussions and workshops designed to help them assess the quality and impact of ACE 10 courses in their units and to explore the intersection of career development and preparation within these courses. The initiative consists of three components: 1) a year-long Faculty Inquiry program focused on ACE 10 courses during academic year 2013-14 and an audit of current career preparation and development programs across the colleges 2) review and analysis of ACE 10 assessment reports submitted in fall 2014 by the university-wide assessment committee, the Office of Academic Affairs, and Dean's Council, and (3) AY 14-15 discussions about the role of career preparation within each major across departments and programs. This timeline is especially appropriate because all department ACE 10 assessment reports are due in the fall of 2014. Running the pilot program in 2013-14 will enable selected faculty to share and hone assessment strategies and tools that they can use for the 2014-2105 reporting year. With the recent move of Career Services into the Office of Academic Affairs, it is also timely for the new Director of University Advising and Career Services to conduct a comprehensive audit of current practices across all academic colleges.

**Component One:** the below calendar describes the activities for the ACE 10 Inquiry Program

**Calendar for ACE 10 Inquiry Meetings, August 2013-May 2014**

September **Introduction to one another and project goals**

- What are we asking students to do in ACE 10 courses?

- What can we learn from one another and as an institution from ACE 10 assessment?

October      **Unpacking the ACE 10 outcome**

- How do we define and understand key terms within ACE 10 within our disciplines?
- How do we know when students are achieving these practices/skills in our courses?

November    **Using Institutional Rubrics to Assess ACE 10 courses**

- Review of AACU Values rubric examples
- Identifying items/categories which seem suited to assessing ACE 10 work

December    **Defining appropriate performance levels for ACE 10 work**

- What performance levels can we identify for student learning in ACE 10 courses?
- Discussion of samples of student work from participants' department ACE 10 courses

January      **Reviewing samples of ACE 10 work**

- Review of work produced in ACE 10 courses using performance levels previously identified

February    **What are we learning about our students' learning in ACE 10?**

- Sharing of themes/observations from analysis of ACE 10 work in individual departments
- How can results of ACE assessment be made public and used (by departments, students, etc.)

April        **Going Public with ACE 10 Observations**

- Faculty will create posters describing assessment of integrative learning within their ACE 10 courses. Some posters will be showcased at the undergraduate research fair.

May         **Final Sharing and Reflections**

- What have we learned about ACE 10 and/or assessment that might be shared with others?
- How might your department's ACE 10 course change based on your assessment results?
- What assessment questions related to ACE 10 does your department/program hope to investigate in the future?

**Components Two and Three:** the below calendar describes the activities of the various committees that will review and make recommendations regarding the departmental ACE 10 assessment reports and the career services audit and outcome plans.

September 2013      Begin audit with deans of eight academic colleges regarding current career preparation and development opportunities.

Summer 2014        Create and distribute menu of best practices for career assistance and possible outcome measures against which each department or program can evaluate its progress.

September 2014	Begin conversations between faculty, advisors, and career services staff about the role of and opportunities for career development within major programs.
November 2014	All departments with ACE 10 courses submit assessment reports.
December 2014	University-wide assessment committee (UWAC) reviews ACE 10 reports. from each college and writes summary and recommendations.
March 2015	Deans Council reviews recommendations from UWAC and provides summary recommendations for Undergraduate Education Programs.
May 2015	Office of Career Services will design and report outcome measures of success for undergraduates' career goal attainment.

**Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal**

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

Dr. Joan Giesecke, Professor of Libraries and Special Assistant to the Office of the Chancellor

Dr. Amy Goodburn, Professor of English and Associate Vice Chancellor, Office of Academic Affairs

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