

DISCOVERING WHAT NIU GRADUATES SHOULD KNOW, VALUE, AND BE ABLE TO DO—

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACCALAUREATE REVIEW

In Fall 2008, NIU established the Baccalaureate Review Task Force. This effort builds on “The Great Journeys Strategic Plan.” The baccalaureate review addresses the following 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.

The baccalaureate review furthers the work of The Presidential Task Force on Curricular Innovation. This group called for a significantly enhanced general education program in its April 2008 report. Similarly, President Peters requested general education reform in his 2008 State of the University address.

NIU’s general education program should be based on the university’s baccalaureate goals. Furthermore, the baccalaureate goals should reflect what students need for success in the 21st century. The last time NIU thoroughly reviewed the baccalaureate curriculum was 1983. At that time, Ronald Reagan was president, a “portable computer” weighed 25 pounds, and the Internet was unknown to the general public.

Prior to reforming general education, we must first establish widely known and endorsed baccalaureate goals. Recognizing this fact, the Baccalaureate Review Task Force implemented a plan to discover what should be expected of an NIU graduate. A concerted effort was made 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 May 1, 2009.

MAJOR FINDINGS

There was overall agreement among focus group and survey participants. People identified similar goals despite different backgrounds. The baccalaureate curriculum should create graduates who have mastered critical thinking, communication skills, and understanding of context (the “Three Cs”).

1. **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinkers are literate and reflective, understand how to gather and analyze information, and demonstrate ethical behavior.

2. **Communication**

Students with strong communication skills will have mastered written English, know a foreign language, use technology to facilitate communication, and collaborate well with others.

3. **Context**

Students who understand context see themselves as part of the larger picture of society. They have a historical perspective and view the world in a global context. Diversity is expected and appreciated. They recognize a duty to take responsibility and give back to society.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The proposed goals will be discussed and refined during the Fall 2009 semester through discussion with the university community. They will then be submitted to the appropriate university governance committees for approval. If endorsed, these goals will guide subsequent academic planning and decision making, particularly as related to the general education program.

www.niu.edu/bacreview

