Year-Long Student Teaching Pilot
Overview

In August, the Iowa Department of Education put out a call to all institutes of higher education in Iowa to apply for a grant to develop, implement, and evaluate a Year-Long Student Teaching Program for the state of Iowa. According to the state, the purpose of the project “Is to examine the expansion of the typical one semester of student teaching to one full academic year to better prepare future teachers to maximize each child’s potential and raise academic achievement. Strengthening clinical experience must be balanced with strengthening content knowledge. As a result, first-year teachers will perform like highly effective second-year teachers.” The grant would be awarded to one public university and one private institution. In order to meet our strategic goal of leading the state and the nation as we prepare our teachers to educate, serve, and lead, UNI worked very diligently to apply for this grant. We are happy to announce that in January, the University of Northern Iowa was selected as the public university to work on this grant. (Dordt College in Sioux Center was chosen as the private institution).

To accomplish this project, UNI will partner with schools in Waterloo, Hudson and Linn-Mar school districts to implement the program. It was very important to our team at UNI that we honor all the school districts in Iowa by including a strong representation of geographical diversity in the project. This means that urban schools will be represented by the Waterloo School District, suburban schools by Linn-Mar School District, and rural schools will be represented by the Hudson School District.

In addition, it was important to our team that we include a wide range of grade-levels in the project. It is our goal to have at least 20 elementary education majors placed in Waterloo, up to 5 elementary/middle level students placed in Hudson, and up to 5 secondary Social Studies majors placed in Linn-Mar. We are excited to have the secondary students involved in the program. Currently, secondary education has not been involved much in year-long student teaching programs nationwide, so we appreciate the opportunity to gather this information for the state and nation. This is just one example of how UNI hopes to highlight its status as the primer Teacher Education program in the state, and one of the premier programs in the nation.

As conversations have started with our K-12 grade school partners on how this pilot program might look, we are starting to build a working vision together. At this time the project will have:

- UNI students meeting their cooperating classroom teacher this summer.
• The student and classroom teacher will attend a workshop training session devoted to “Co-Teaching” during the summer prior to the start of the school year.

• The week before the K-12 school year starts, the student will report to the school district to attend all in-service trainings, new teacher orientations, and school building team meetings. The student will also work side-by-side with the cooperating teacher to set up the classroom and plan for the first week(s) of school.

• When the K-12 school year begins, the UNI student will be there to meet the K-12 students. He/she will then observe and work with the classroom teacher to set up all routines and procedures for the year and start into classroom learning. The UNI student will also have the chance to learn from their classroom teacher on how to use data to gain an understanding of individual student needs in the classroom.

• The UNI student will stay in the classroom full-time until UNI starts classes on August 25th. Once UNI starts classes, the UNI student will move to a schedule that allows him/her to be in their school building on Monday/Wednesday/Fridays to continue working with students and their classroom teacher. Then on Tuesday/Thursdays they will participate in the majority of their methods classes. However, some of these courses will be taught onsite, at the school building, instead of on the UNI campus. This model will give a great opportunity to our UNI students to take what they learn in their methods classes and put that learning immediately to use in the classroom. It will also allow for wonderful reflection when the students return back to their methods classes. The UNI students will be able to talk with the other students and their professor about what they experienced in the class after having implementing the teaching strategy.

• During this first semester, the UNI student and the classroom teacher will be working to implement the “Co-Teaching” strategies they learned together during the summer into the classroom. For the first semester, the classroom teacher will be taking the lead in this process, however, as the semester moves along, the UNI student teacher will gradually be given more opportunities to be the leader in this model.

• This schedule will continue throughout the fall semester. The schedule will allow the UNI student to have opportunities to become involved in grade-level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), attend school-wide Professional Development opportunities, and participate in parent-teacher conferences.
At the start of the spring semester, the UNI student will report back to the same classroom, with the same cooperating classroom teacher for their full-student teaching semester. However, in a difference from our traditional model, the UNI student would stay in the same classroom for the entire experience. We are very interested to see if this extended time working with the same students right up until the end of the year will help meet the goals for the project set up by the state.

To help discover these answers we will be collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from all stakeholders directly involved: UNI students, classroom teachers, UNI supervisors, and school administrators. From this data, UNI will write a report that is shared with the Iowa Department of Education and other interested parties.

Finally, the students will finish their experience in May, when they graduate from UNI. Then, after graduation, the UNI student could have the option to return to the K-12 school to finish the year with the class.

At this time, we know we have a very strong student teaching program at the University of Northern Iowa. Our students are very well prepared to meet the needs of the K-12 schools of Iowa. However, if the findings from this project indicate that there are benefits to a year-long student teaching option, we will use the knowledge and expertise of our faculty to see how we can take what we learn in order to best help the state of Iowa move forward in educating its children. Dating back to 1876, UNI has helped lead the state with its innovative spirit and willingness to experiment using new teaching methodologies and practices. Based upon this reputation, UNI has developed strong collaborative partnerships with school districts across Iowa, hired outstanding faculty to bring best practices to the field of education, and has been a beacon to individuals wanting to pursue a dream of becoming a teacher. "We are very honored that we are able to showcase the expansiveness of our Teacher Education Program at UNI through this pilot," said Dwight Watson, dean of the College of Education. "We have always taken great pride in being innovators and pioneers in teacher preparation. The awarding of the pilot will allow us to research the feasibility, effectiveness and scalability of yearlong student teaching.”

As we look to the future in regards to the feasibility and sustainability of this type of program, we know we are going to have to consider the needs of the state of Iowa. Iowa is much different than other states that have begun to use Year-Long Student Teaching as one of the models for their Teacher Education programs, so it will be very important to continue working collaboratively with our P/K-12 grade school partners, and other institutes of higher education across the state, to ensure that we do the best job we can to prepare future teachers for the state of Iowa, and ultimately, the wonderful students of Iowa.