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Provost

One of the abiding constants of this University has been a strong commitment to the mission and to its link with the educational experiences of our students. The following article by NDNU Provost Dr. Lucille Sansing describes how our forthcoming Centers of Excellence will underscore this commitment and enhance and enrich the curriculum of each of the University's four schools.

NDNU'S Centers of Excellence: Taking the Curriculum to the Next Level

Background

As part of the strategic plan of NDNU, approved in 1998, the faculty and staff began a comprehensive review of the mission of the University. The objective was to reaffirm the core values of the institution and to revise the curriculum in all programs to link explicitly to that mission. The result, ratified by the faculty in 2002, is a fresh, new undergraduate core curriculum, threaded throughout the traditional undergraduate student's four years of study. The integrating principles of the core are "the whole person," "the collaborative community," and "the just society." These themes are reflected in the reading materials, co-curricular activities, class assignments, pedagogy, and assessment of the courses.

Next Stages in the Curricular Transformation

The next stage in the curricular transformation involves linking NDNU's mission to each of the University's four schools. The linkage in each school is a distinctive Center of Excellence. Each Center is the "signature" or flagship for the school and is unique to the disciplines and programs within each school. Yet there are common organizing principles behind the development of all four Centers. The Centers:

- Are linked explicitly to the mission of the University.
- Are organized around themes that are interdisciplinary and engage all programs/departments in the school.
- Are tied to issues significant to the region and will seek partnerships with corporations and associations to address these issues.
- Will include new curriculum/co-curriculum opportunities for internships and other community-based projects, faculty research, faculty/student collaborations, grant support, and other forms of fundraising for the school.

School of Arts & Humanities: Center for Social Justice

Inspired by an invitation from Sr. Helen Prejean to stage the collegiate premier of the play, "Dead Man Walking," the Center for Social Justice will schedule at least one social justice play each year around which supporting programming such as courses, speaker series, community forums, music and art performances, and liturgies will be offered.

School of Business & Management: Center for Social Capital

Social capital is an exploding area of business inquiry that examines the roles social relationships play in the operation of a business, both internally with its business partnership and clients, and externally in its relationship to its community. The research literature on social capital is persuasive in documenting how "doing good" in terms of nurturing social relations is profitable to a company's bottom line, or "doing well."

Projects currently underway include creating "best practices" case studies of corporations in Silicon Valley with strong commitments to investing in social capital. The plans for the Center include using case studies as text in the MBA and MPA programs, forming a think tank for the study and furtherance of social capital, and developing community-based projects and internships with the best practices corporations.

School of Education & Leadership: Center for Educational Success

The School of Education and Leadership is seeking a partnership with a junior high school in East Palo Alto. The project anticipates working with an economically challenged group of students over several years with various enrichment programs (study skills, college-prep counseling, sports camps, concerts, etc.). The promise

from NDNU to anyone in the adopted cohort who graduates from high school with a B average or better is a full tuition ride to NDNU.

As with the other school centers, this Center involves all programs within the School of Education and Leadership as well as links to co-curricular programs. The purpose of this center also affirms the core principles of the University's support for social justice, collaboration with community partners, and educational access to underrepresented populations.

School of Sciences: Center for Science & Society

This Center plans projects and research that promote healthy lifestyles in the community and that educate the community regarding current health promotion and disease prevention. The goal of the center is to develop comprehensive and integrated programs of community education to enhance physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being and to produce favorable changes in lifestyles.

The Center for Science and Society will utilize the disciplines of biomedical life sciences, psychology, art therapy, sociology, computer science, history, and political science with a focus on multicultural diversity. The software tool known as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be used to help integrate these disciplines around key community health and well-being issues. GIS is a powerful technology for integrating multi-discipline databases to study complex economic, social, medical, and environmental issues. The intention is to use the research data to develop curriculum and community-based learning projects that respond to the multiple needs of the regional community.