

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DIRECTED INDEPENDENT STUDY

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Directed Independent Study (DIS) sub-committee of President Delaney's Transformational Learning Initiative. The committee defines a DIS as a student's self-directed pursuit of academic excellence. It recognizes that a DIS can fall into the four broad categories: research; community collaboration and application; travel; and performance, exhibition, and creative works. The team recommends that DIS event measurements and faculty participation incentives be rooted in fractions of the traditional 12.5% per class compensation formula. Finally, the committee provides suggestions for structuring student participation to ensure that a given DIS provides a truly transformational learning opportunity.

Committee Charge

Provost Mark Workman convened an ad-hoc committee on February 6, 2006, and charged it with the task of integrating the pedagogy of independent studies into the university's transformational learning opportunity (TLO) initiative. Specifically the committee crafted a working definition of a DIS, the activities and experiences that qualify under this definition, and made recommendations regarding incentives for both faculty and students to increase the likelihood of involvement in these endeavors. The committee members are Susan Syverud (Chair), Krzysztof Biernacki, Louise Brown, Krista Paulsen, Bobby Waldrup, and Sharon Wilburn.

Definition

A Directed Independent Study (DIS) provides opportunities for individual students to work closely with faculty as they pursue a shared scholarly or creative interest. A DIS allows students to earn University credit for activities and experiences outside the conventional curriculum, but does not provide a substitute for the conventional curriculum. These opportunities may be initiated by either the student or the faculty member, and the precise content and form of the independent study "course" often reflects collaboration between the two. To be a transformational learning opportunity, a DIS should aim to transform the student in the following ways: (1) develop and/or nurture the ability for independent study; (2) increase self-motivation, curiosity, sense of self-sufficiency and self-direction in planning and carrying out the student's education; and (3) nurture academic excellence through academic independence. Although the most salient characteristic of a DIS is a student's self-directed pursuit of academic excellence, DIS may include elements of other Transformational Learning Opportunities such as travel, original research, or service learning.

Activities and Experiences – Defined

Faculties across the university have taken a multifaceted approach to directed independent studies. While each is unique, these activities broadly fall into four categories: research; community collaboration and application; travel; and performance, exhibition, and creative works. These categories are articulated below in this section. Specific examples of these activities are accessible in the appendix and illustrate that an independent study may often overlap both within the different categories of DIS and between the different categories of TLO.

Research

Independent studies can provide a means of rewarding students for original research, often conducted in collaboration with a faculty mentor. This may include collaboration on a project undertaken by the faculty member wherein student responsibilities include data collection, input, and/or analysis; review and critique of relevant literature; editing assistance, or other participation in the research process. Through such opportunities, the student learns a great deal of substantive knowledge on the research topic as well as gaining insight into the practice of professional scholarship. Many such collaborations have led to scholarly publication.

Alternately, the student may propose a research topic. Independent studies of this type have proven particularly effective when paired with the structured research opportunities provided through the University's Undergraduate Research Grant program. This program funds original research by students that is conducted under the close supervision of a faculty mentor. After conducting preliminary research in a chosen area, the student formulates a research question, and develops an appropriate methodology, budget, and timeline. The program format recommends that DIS units be used to grant the student credit for this work. The program also requires that the student present findings at a research symposium, and prepare a manuscript for the Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry. Preparing research findings for these events is often an important element of the DIS, and the posters and articles produced are concrete means by which the student's work can be assessed. Furthermore, these experiences provide the student with insights into the scope of the scholarly research process and provide excellent preparation for graduate study.

Community Collaboration & Application

A DIS can take the form of community collaboration when the student works cooperatively with an organization or members of the community. This type of DIS can provide an opportunity to apply acquired academic knowledge, enhance skills, and continue learning under the supervision of a community facilitator or expert. It also provides a structured opportunity to experience roles and responsibilities in the student's

area of professional interest as the student further develops qualities of leadership, formulates personal values, and cultivates a commitment to community service.

Travel

While the DIS experience is already a traditionally out-of-the classroom occurrence, many take the form of actual off-campus travel. The travel component of a DIS allows a student to experience the subject matter in ways facilitated by a change of milieu. Travel can take several forms. Students may travel locally as part of a community collaboration or application of their field. They may travel outside of the local area, including internationally, to experience a location that is pertinent to their field, such as a political, economic, cultural or historic destination. These travel experiences often provide students with new insights, greater confidence, and, perhaps, new relationships.

Performance, Exhibition, & Creative Works

A DIS exercised at fine art schools or humanities departments may fully incorporate or directly relate to live performance, artistic exhibition, or a variety of creative works. Such independent study may include musical performance, composition, theater and drama, dance, visual arts and multimedia, or hybrid combination of all of the above. Besides focusing on actual performance or presentation alone, DIS of this category may also incorporate research, publication, proliferation and preservation of artistic heritage, and performance education. It may also include generation of a written work such as a short story or novel. This form of a DIS can provide the student with wide-ranging possibilities for intellectual, personal, and community enrichment.

Qualifications of a DIS

Because of the university's commitment to providing students with transformational learning opportunities such as DIS and to compensating faculty for partaking in such endeavors, it is important to establish criteria for determining whether an independent study qualifies as a transformational DIS. A DIS qualifies as a TLO if the following criteria are met.

- The DIS provides for activities and experiences outside the conventional curriculum, rather than providing a substitute for the conventional curriculum.
- Faculty members determine the student's commitment, interest, and capability of self-directed learning through an interview, consultation, or prior coursework.
- Faculty and student collaborate in writing the syllabus for the DIS, including how performance will be evaluated.
- The student will write a reflective summary explicating how the DIS impacted his or her life.

- Because UNF is committed to systematic program examinations such as program accreditation, student feedback should be sought a few years after the completion of a DIS to determine the impact of the DIS.

Participation Incentives

Faculty Incentives

In undertaking Directed Independent Studies, faculty members add to their existing workloads. The amount of additional work may vary from one experience to another, but the quality and quantity of work involved in a DIS that is truly “transformational” reflects a significant investment for a faculty member. In the past, compensation for DIS work has varied from department to department, ranging from no compensation (even for a DIS conducted in the summer, when the faculty member may be receiving no salary), to departmental agreements that the accumulation of a given number of DIS units will result in a course release.

We propose a uniformly applied University-wide system of incentives for faculty participation in Transformational Independent Studies. These incentives will provide faculty compensation for their labor and encourage faculty to engage with students in opportunities that add to already full faculty assignments. We propose that faculty have a choice of two compensation options: professional development funds or accumulation of credits towards a future course release. The specifics of each are detailed below.

Professional development fund. Currently, through the mechanism of the sponsored research department, the university has in place a system for creating individual professional development accounts (PDA) for faculty. We propose extending that mechanism as a vehicle to compensate faculty in DIS pursuits. Like the existing accounts in sponsored research, this option would allow the faculty member to accrue funds for travel, supplies, equipment, research support, or other expenses incurred through scholarly and creative work. It also allows for the funds to be paid as a salary supplement without fringes.

At the conclusion of the semester in which the DIS was conducted and following completion of all course requirements, faculty will receive a deposit in an individual professional development account (funds will not accrue to departmental professional development accounts). The following formulas are proposed to be used to determine the amount of funds received:

Each student enrolled in a DIS = one unit of DIS credit
 Each unit of DIS credit = 1.25% of regular salary (one course [12.5%]/10)

For example, a faculty member working with a single student on a DIS would earn 1.25% of salary toward a professional development account. Were the faculty member to involve two students on *the same* DIS, the faculty member would earn 2.50% of salary

toward his or her account. Were a faculty member to work with two students on two distinctly different DIS topics (different syllabi and preparations), that faculty member would earn 2.50% toward his or her account.

Course releases. This option would allow the faculty member to accrue credit toward a regular semester course release based on the number of students supervised for each Transformational DIS that the faculty member facilitated. The funding formula is the same as computed for professional development accounts. When DIS efforts accumulate to 10 units of DIS credit, which have not been applied to fund a PDA, the faculty member is awarded one course release.

The faculty member will be allowed the course release within a twelve month window in arrears of the 10 unit accumulation. Because some time may elapse as the faculty member accrues this credit, we propose a uniform University policy to provide assurances that the credit will be secure over time regardless of changes in administration at the departmental, college, or University levels. Timing of course releases will be determined by the faculty member in consultation with the department chair, with the general understanding that only extenuating circumstances should cause the release to fall beyond the twelve month window.

Performance evaluation considerations. In recognition of the meritorious nature of providing transformational learning opportunities, including directed independent studies, we propose a university-wide understanding to recognize participation by faculty. Faculty should be allowed to report DIS activity on their annual activity reports as well their dossiers prepared in connection with tenure and promotion considerations. While the pedagogy of the directed study is inherently a “teaching” activity, it is also unique in its application. Faculty should be granted latitude to classify each DIS event by its primary impact on their teaching, research, or service components of activity.

Such a plan would, we believe, compensate faculty for the time spent guiding students through the DIS process and provide a means of contributing to the faculty member’s professional development through time available for research or resources available for scholarly and creative pursuits—often the very endeavors that are compromised when faculty devote additional time to student learning. It would also provide concrete rewards for the important work we do in guiding individual students through the learning process.

Student Incentives

Self-directed pursuit of academic excellence should be the primary incentive for students to participate in a DIS. The freedom to explore ideas and experiences outside of programs of study should inspire students to investigate the possibility of engaging in a DIS. Moreover, a DIS provides the student with an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member who has shared scholarly or creative interests. Engagement in a DIS may also allow the student to carry a heavier or lighter course load, which is often impossible in traditional settings. Successful completion of a Transformational DIS provides the type of

experience that may distinguish the student who is applying to graduate or professional programs.

Appendix

Transformational Learning Opportunities DIS Activities & Experiences

The following DIS activities represent ongoing efforts across the campus. While these are illustrative of current efforts, they are by no means meant to represent an exhaustive array of potential activities that could fall under this pedagogy.

Research

- *Collaboration on faculty initiated research*
 - Three finance students were involved in analyzing data related to a financial fraud case that a faculty member was analyzing. Their duties including data gathering and statistical testing.
 - A Sociology student retrieved, reviewed and synthesized literature on the sociology of art that would contribute to a faculty member's paper in this area. The paper was subsequently published in an international sociology journal.
 - A special education major collaborated with a faculty member on research on giftedness. As a result of the student's significant efforts, the student co-presented with the faculty member at a national conference and co-authored a manuscript that was published in a refereed journal.

- *Student proposes a research topic*
 - A MIS student tested voice-recognition software to determine its suitability for spreadsheet applications, the results of which were published in a journal.
 - Two accounting graduate students interviewed participants in an actual accounting fraud investigation and created a teaching case for undergraduate accounting students.
 - Following in the tradition of important sociological studies of work-family balance among contemporary couples, a Sociology student studied the division of household labor among dual-earner couples in Baker County. Her work will culminate in a series of conference presentations (national, regional, and University).
 - An Anthropology student studied the behavior of four male Western Lowland Gorillas now in residence at the Jacksonville Zoological Gardens. Her results

will be published in the University's research journal and has already been provided to the Jacksonville Zoo's mammalian curators.

- A student's paper on the sociology of religion so impressed a faculty member that he asked her to enroll in DIS hours so that they might collaborate on her work further. Their research culminated in two refereed publications, and the student is currently enrolled in a top Ph.D. program.
- An Anthropology student spent 10 months participating in the activities of the Northeast Florida Islamic Center in Jacksonville to learn more about the experiences of American Muslims in the Southeastern United States. Because of this experience, she has applied for graduate school at the University of Chicago in Middle East Studies.
- Modern Christian pilgrimage at the Holy Land Experience theme park in Orlando, Florida was the topic of a poster presented by an Anthropology student at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2004. The student and his faculty mentor have co-authored a paper based on this research, which is currently under review with Review of Religious Research.
- Two students had their final health education projects published in refereed journals with faculty co-authors.
- Several students have presented health education papers and poster presentations at state, regional, and national professional conferences.

Community Collaboration & Application

- *Student works cooperatively with an organization or members of the community*
 - One accounting student was involved with a cost allocation study to help JEA understand how long-term IT costs are driven by the JEA's need to carry spare capacity so that power outages are minimized.
 - Four logistics students assisted a professor in helping Vistakon to understand how their shipping actions affect the profitability of their small distributors.
 - Studio Art students worked with critically ill children at Wolfson Children's Hospital through the Art with a Heart Program. The students drew for the children. They taught the children how to draw. They also taught the children about art history. The students functioned as artists, teachers, and friends to the children. At least two students have become employed by the program.
 - Students have worked with Art in Public Places for the city of Jacksonville. They learned how to work with major artists, set schedules, sort slides, and set

up presentations. In essence, they learned what the requirements for public entails. One student was asked to work for the Art in Public Places organization.

- Twenty-seven Athletic Training students went to the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Learning Center to interact with fire/rescue emergency personnel and to develop their emergency management skills regarding head and neck trauma. The students placed injured individuals on a spine board for transport to the hospital.
- A student worked with a Duval county elementary school on an arts and culture grant that taught children how to plant fruits and vegetables and to complete food related art projects. The student then provided nutrition education about the foods planted.
- A group of students participated in developing and delivering a series of workshops for a Teen Prevention Summit for rural county youth.
- A group of students organized and presented health fair posters for a teen leadership training with the Florida National Guard.
- A group of health education students acted as proctors for two different state professional meetings.
- A student taught a 9 year old boy with autism how to read while at the same time she also taught her 4 year old daughter to read. The student compared and contrasted the reading development of the two emerging readers.
- Nine graduate education students conducted needs assessments and then developed a technological solution to each need. Solutions included web sites for school and classroom use, course designs for professional development, a school technology review and plan, and research designs.
- Students assisted in teaching in the ASL I Lab. Through these experiences, students were responsible for teaching vocabulary to their peers and developing sign language games. The students facilitated both small and whole instruction.
- A student examined the responses of third grade students from rural northeastern Florida to multicultural children's literature. The literature focused on some of the same issues that the children faced, but with characters and settings different from their own.

Travel

- *Student travels outside of the local area, including internationally, to experience a location that is pertinent to his field, such as a political, economic, cultural or historic destination*
 - Accounting students traveled to Beijing and Shanghai China to visit manufacturing facilities of American and Chinese companies to understand better the economic phenomenon of “Made in China.”
 - Accounting students traveled to Hong Kong and visited Big Four accounting firms. The goal was for students to get an understanding of how accounting firms have to coordinate worldwide in their ongoing relationships with global clients.
 - Finance undergraduate students in the “student managed fund” are going to the New York Stock exchange to visit the trading floor and meet with stock traders.
 - Finance undergraduate students visited London and Paris to see European stock exchanges and to visit British offices of major trading firms.
 - Logistics students traveled to Australia to visit major manufacturing facilities and distribution houses to better understand how commerce travels around the globe from raw materials to finished goods for sale in the U.S. and abroad.
 - Art students traveled to Venice, Tuscany, Lake Garda, and Rome. While studying the art and culture of these cities, the students worked daily on paintings and drawings. The students painted and drew as they worked with and received feedback from professional artists from around the country.
 - Students in a variety of health care disciplines (nursing, health administration, nutrition and public health) traveled to London, Paris, and Ireland and will be traveling to China to visit hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

Performance, Exhibition & Creative Works

- *Student conducts a live performance in his field*
 - A music student performed a concert of solo songs as part of DIS on compositional output of Jewish composers prosecuted during Nazi occupation of Europe.

- *Student carries out an artistic exhibition*
 - Fine Arts students presented group exhibitions and a solo exhibition based on their research and experiences in Italy. The group exhibitions were entitled “Venice,” “Venice 111, “ and “Tuscany.” The solo exhibition was entitled “Venice.”

- *Student manages performance education in his discipline*
 - A music student performed a lecture recital of compositions for solo piano based on a DIS research project exploring compositional techniques in piano works of Robert and Clara Schumann.