

Program Prepare Students for Future Success

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Revisions

UNI Culture and Intensive English Program Prepare Students for Future Success

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As high school seniors set their graduation plans into motion, the reality of higher education can be difficult to imagine for marginalized groups of students. According to the Department of Education, English-Language



Learners (ELL) are among the fastest growing populations of students in schools. However, ELL students are less likely to view higher education as a possibility.

The enrollment of ELL students in Iowa school districts statewide has been rapidly increasing within the last five years. In the 2018-2019 school year, there were over 1,140 ELL students in the Waterloo Community School District and 280 ELL students enrolled at Waterloo West High School. ELL students experience significant gaps in both achievement as well as opportunities in schools compared to their non-ELL peers. Currently, ELL students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programming, extracurricular activities, and high-level courses. Both Carolina Coronado-Park, director of UNI Culture and Intensive English Program (CIEP) and Waterloo West High School faculty saw a need in the community to develop a pathway program for English-Language Learner students.

“In order to enable more ELL students to reach four-year colleges, technical, or professional training, we should make a targeted effort to support them in the early stages of academic readiness, language acquisition, and college planning” states Carolina.

The purpose of the pathway is to help students gain readiness in four

main areas including, academic English proficiency (reading and writing), culture of higher education in the U.S., understanding of financial aid at U.S. higher education institutions, and accessing and using higher education resources. The pathway program has three components: the summer college preparatory academy, the fall seminar focusing on writing essays for scholarships, and the spring seminar that introduces the notion of college.

The pathway program includes the integration of English language instruction and college preparation. During the first year, to develop the program, the UNI CIEP collaborated with the UNI Center for Urban Education's Classic Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search programs, as well as the UNI Admissions Office.



Another aspect of preparing ELL students for college is the curriculum and visualization of being on a college campus. Sally Roos, Student Service Coordinator and instructor for UNI CIEP, welcomed high school students from the pathway program every Friday to participate in lectures, workshops and cultural activities as part of the academic cultural learning focus of the program. The main focus of the academy is to build college reading and writing skills for ELLs, expose them to the campus culture and resources, and set them on a pathway to education beyond high school.

In addition, Jaime West and Petra Maier, both Academic Support Specialists for UNI CIEP, developed the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and workshops that have been offered to the ELL students this past academic year. The program also collaborates with the Waterloo West High ELL Program Coordinator, Sheila Houston and ELL teacher Ellen Sonnent for their guidance.

But UNI staff isn't the only aspect of campus life the program taps into. Graduate students from the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at UNI have also offered workshops on essay writing and intro to college classes to the students. The seminars allow high school students to improve their academic English skills and focus on writing and reading, as well as speak with several representatives from UNI.

Currently, the Waterloo School District has limited resources and TESOL teachers to support the ELL student population. With the CIEP ELL College Preparatory Academy program established by Carolina and her team, they are filling a gap to provide formal support to ELL students

from Waterloo West High at an early stage.

Carolina stated, “The main goal of this program is to create a sustainable pathway to support ELL Waterloo West high school students to go into higher education institutions in the future. So, they can have a clear



understanding of their professional future by planning and getting ready for college“.

Throughout the summer pilot of the pathway program and into the fall semester, Carolina noticed the attitudes of many of the students changed. In fact, Carolina noted that some students have even gone so far as to reach out to UNI programs such as the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). Additionally, five students have applied to UNI and were accepted for the 2020-21 academic year.

“They were excited to come to the UNI campus and learn more about the opportunities available to them when they are college students. Students were able to see that college is attainable because they were provided resources and guidance” says Carolina about the changed attitudes of the students.

In a true team effort with a student focus, Carolina and her CIEP team, Waterloo West High School, and the University of Northern Iowa have managed to create a pathway for students to travel on their way to success. The pathway allows students to visualize what they can accomplish and achieve in a future plan that can become their own reality. Interested in learning more about UNI’s Culture and Intensive English Program? Click here to check out all of the office’s amazing work at ciep.uni.edu

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