

**UND Strategic Planning Focus Group**

**Graduate Students**

**8 students**

**May 6**

1. **Why did you choose to attend UND?** 
   1. My conversations and interactions with a professor who had conversations with me regarding my education. Also, I like that it is quiet. This is a small family community. Didn’t have funding when I came initially, so it was not even a scholarship that made me first come here- it was the personal connection to a faculty member.
   2. The online program. UND offers an online accredited doctoral degree in higher education. Also, the cost. Online accessibility and opportunities for engagement.
   3. Graduated with my bachelor’s degree 17 years ago and I decided a to come back. Because of my undergraduate experience it was easy.
   4. My department has close ties to the industry (oil and gas). The relationships with faculty and staff- I knew them from working in industry. Also, cost was important factor.
   5. I finished my bachelors in 2013, worked for a year, and moved to North Dakota- site unseen. The space program is a unique blend of ideas and funding was available for me.
   6. I have a family, so having a safe community is why I came here. Also cost was a factor.
2. **How do you describe UND to your family, friends, and neighbors?**
   1. It has a good community feel; it is a quiet, safe town. I describe UND values togetherness. Diversity is not great (not UND’s doing), but they make do with what they have. There is a sense of belonging.
   2. In regard to research, I mention aviation to people- it is the best in the country. I am not in that program, but I am proud to be at a university that has a program so highly rated. I also mention the faculty- they are all very helpful, even outside of academia.
   3. I agree to these themes we are hearing- it is an R2 in a small area. This is unique. We are a research institution but in 5 minutes you can be in woods. I have enjoyed this.
   4. Mixed feelings. At end of my first semester, I experienced anti-LGBTQ bias from a faculty member, so this influenced my feelings about the school. My experience with my new advisor and all other faculty and staff has been great. UND is not as progressive as website indicates.
   5. In terms of diversity, it is true that this is a very homogeneous place, so diversity is something that I am missing a bit. Don’t know if UND can do much about that. Taking in more diverse faculty might help there.
   6. I came to UND because of the indigenous health program which is unique, and I get to study from high ranking faculty who are mainly indigenous themselves.
3. **Who does UND serve, and do you believe we are currently meeting these needs?** 
   1. **Who do you** **believe it should be serving and what do you think needs to change for this to happen?**
      1. I think UND is serving the state of North Dakota. Additionally, the students – these are the two main subgroups. UND is meeting needs of state in terms of educating students to meet workforce needs. Some sub sections of the university could be served better- in terms of diversity. We lost some good faculty during UND’s period of financial strain. Need to not lose the brightest of minds and have incentives to keep best of best here at UND.
      2. The large UND scholarships are focused on North Dakota. From an out-of-state grad student perspective, I feel outside of those opportunities.
      3. My program is remote, and I think there is a lot of room for improvement in terms of my experiences in some courses. Huge opportunity for to do better orientation for online students, especially for those joining in January. I have had good experiences with all the staff and departments that I work with. I’ve been to 4 schools, and I have never had the level of customer service as I have experienced here.
      4. I agree on orientation. I think we can do a better job at tailoring some programs to meet the specific, changing needs of industry in North Dakota.
      5. In terms of serving Native Population of North Dakota, we should expand to surrounding states. State lines are meaningless in terms of Tribes. I don’t know how well the university is serving the Native population. I have not seen land acknowledgement used often which is problematic to me. I have enjoyed my online experiences and think you can expand those programs to serve more students especially in rural areas.
4. **What has the university done to benefit you or your student organization most?** 
   1. **What might the university do better to help you, or your student organization succeed?**
      1. As a graduate student it is complicated as to how you can finance your research. Work to remove barriers for Graduates Students to get grants and research funding
      2. More funding- it is really needed. From perspective of international graduate students there used to be a program called *Higher One*- which helps international students pay in installments. This was discontinued and we have a lot of students that don’t know how to pay the bills.
      3. I think it is very important to have an official mentorship program for graduate students. Many other schools have this. Faculty have this (Alice Clark program) so Graduate Students would really benefit from this as well.
      4. Agreed! More money for graduate students...for example, at U of MN when you receive a 0.25 FTE grad assistant position, you get free tuition. Also helpful would be grant money for graduate student travel (to professional conferences)
      5. Writing Center and One Stop has been great!
      6. The Delta Flight program was amazing (discount to fly into and out of Grand Forks)! It is difficult, and cost prohibitive, at UND to start a new student organization, so if we could waive some of these fees that would be helpful
5. **What have been your best experiences at UND?** 
   1. **Would you recommend UND to your family and friends, why or why not?**
   2. **Can you see yourself returning to UND as an alumnus?**
      1. One of my best experiences has been being a part of my research group. This has made such an amazing experience for me as a graduate student. I would recommend UND because it is safe. I would return to UND (depending on the capacity) to continue being part of this community.
      2. Best experiences have been the people. UND has a smaller diverse population, but it is better than no diverse population. UND offers us more experiences with people from different backgrounds then we might get in other parts of the state. Also, my advisor who runs our research group has been amazing and contributed to my favorite experiences.
      3. In terms of identity UND, I feel it is lost when it comes to research and graduate study. This could be attributed to the past transition in leadership and budget cuts. Speaking to the R1/R2 question, it seems we are not sure what is happening – this could just be in my college, but it feels isolating and like we do not know the plan moving forward in terms of research.
      4. I had several bad experiences but with just one person. Appreciated that the department did act, and I have a much better advisor and she is inspiring, and she is helping me start my dissertation study already. Also, One Stop, Library, Writing Center are all fantastic. My leadership course with Dr. Olson was great. She intentionally structured an online space where students could speak to one another. She works to get all the students together and offered asynchronous classes and synchronous meeting times– being able to connect to other people in my program as an online student has been great.
      5. UND is a smaller university, and this makes it more flexible- so this is something not lose. Accessibility to people has really helped
      6. Best experiences can be related to my PhD project-the close relationship with the research and ERC and their connection to industry.
      7. Some specific classes I’ve really appreciated in the Ingenious Health Programs. Some teaching has been spotty, and I wonder what the evaluation of teaching and learning is. By and large 85% of my experience with teaching has been enjoyable. Concerned with recommending it to other Native American students. I have not been to campus but was part of the Diversity group and making it seem like it might not be the best place for diverse students.
6. **As a student, what concerns you most about UND?** 
   1. **What do you think needs improvement?**
      1. My problem was just a one-off situation for somebody that was ill fit to be in higher ed. Think there should have been a faster resolution to the problem- it took 3 months for my complaint to get to my department chair. I still think I would recommend UND but would warn LGBTQIA population that it is not as progressive as it could be.
      2. Needs to have better structure for orientation for graduate students- especially if we are remote- because all we see are blackboard and email. Isolating if we do not know where to go to get help.
      3. The direction of the graduate education at UND, it seems ‘lost’. I first came during budget cuts and MIRA, but it seems like we are still understaffed in Graduate School. UND is a research university, and more importance needs to be placed on graduate research. Even things such as funding for graduate students to go to conferences.
      4. It would be great to have more connection to the campus as an online student, including with other graduate students in different departments.
      5. A mentorship program- so important
7. **What would be your vision for UND’s future?**
   1. Do you have any ‘big dreams’ for the institution?
      1. I don’t know if R1 will be the objective but increasing the research would be great. Increasing the communication with Graduate Students.
      2. Keep UND a really good R2 and find better ways to collaborate with Graduate School and support more research initiatives. Many of these are college level issues, but we need more institutional assessment of what is happening in the colleges in terms of supporting research initiatives.
      3. Mentorship should be a feature of all grad programs
      4. We should be recognized not just nationally in more areas, would like to see the whole university grow in recognition. We need to bring in the best of the minds.
      5. UND is a center for our students, for the Grand Forks community, business, and research. There are a lot of things happening and we should expand some of these things to benefit the whole state in a more consistent way. UND needs to take the lead in whatever it can do- widen the impact to other area.
      6. UND needs to build more networks with industry to create opportunities students
      7. I would like to see UND follow UMN's lead in establishing free tuition for Native American students. <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/u-m-establishes-nation-leading-tuition-assistance-program-native-american-students>
      8. President Armacost is a huge asset. Having somebody communicate so often has been great. I believe there is action behind what he communicates. In terms of my vision for UND I want people to ask me about UND and not just North Dakota when I say I attend this university. To have that reputation academically would help us retain people.
      9. I would want it to be more inclusive, but I have limited experience so take that with a grain of salt. I want people to recognize my program nationally and hope that people of ND feel like they are being attended to by administration.