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In this edition, we introduce the new School of Health and Human Sciences within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The school houses both new and existing programs, and represents UNI’s commitment to multi-disciplinary fields encompassing health in all its forms. We are already discovering exciting connections between the programs within the school and across the entire college, and look forward to seeing these grow over time.

With this reorganization, I want to say a big “welcome” to the alumni who join our circle of CSBS graduates. The names of your associated majors may have changed some over the years, but we are excited to welcome alumni from the fields of kinesiology, physical education, athletic training and public health. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions you might have about this transition or anything else related to UNI.

The key theme of this year’s magazine is “Here to Help,” which really describes all of our programs and initiatives within the college. We are proud to support people and programs that truly are an inspiration. We know our students go on to make a difference in so many ways in the world. You, our alumni and donors, also make an impact on us. Through your support, our college has grown and continued to thrive even when faced with challenges. I hope you enjoy reading about the newest members of the college, along with our usual profiles and updates.

Thank you for your partnership in creating a vibrant and ever-evolving learning environment for our students. We would not be able to do it without you!

BRENDA BASS
DEAN, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
A NEW HOME FOR

HEALTH

SCHOOL OF HEALTH & HUMAN SCIENCES
The University of Northern Iowa is no stranger to helping tackle big, global challenges through its academic programs. Now, the university is addressing the increasing need for health professionals in Iowa and beyond with its new School of Health and Human Sciences, housed in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

“The key reason for launching the school was to bring health-oriented programs together and elevate awareness about them, especially with prospective students who might not have been aware of the extensive offerings we have at UNI related to health,” said Dean Brenda Bass. “We have also broadly defined health in the school to include programs focused on physical, mental and emotional health, to help demonstrate how they all intersect with one another.”

This comprehensive reorganization of health programs will make the University of Northern Iowa an even more desirable destination for students seeking a career in some of the nation’s most in-demand fields.

The school serves as home to a new Department of Nursing and Public Health, which oversees the university’s new Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and public health program, previously offered through the College of Education.

Combining these two areas into one helps align the department and educate students to both promote and protect health.

The School of Health and Human Sciences additionally houses longstanding UNI programs such as athletic training, kinesiology (now aligned within a new Department of Kinesiology and Athletic Training), gerontology, family services, counseling (within a new Department of Family, Aging and Counseling) and social work.

The school also serves as a central hub for health programs across the university, working closely with the Office of Academic Advising and departments that house other pre-professional pathways such as pre-medicine, pre-dentistry, pre-optometry and more.

One of the biggest assets of the school is its ability to be a bridge to collaboration amongst these health-oriented programs.

“For both students and faculty, the school provides opportunities to find connections and synergy across the programs, which helps curriculum and research to be more multidimensional,” said Bass. “This better prepares students for their post-graduation careers and provides them with pathways for unique skill sets.
that help them stand out in an applicant pool. For faculty, it brings people together who share similar research and teaching interests, so they can find opportunities to share information and collaborate.”

“The connections across programs have been exciting to see, and sometimes in areas one wouldn’t automatically expect,” said Bass. “Some examples include kinesiology faculty connecting with gerontology faculty on research possibilities, nursing and public health faculty exploring curricular collaborations, and athletic training and nursing faculty finding possibilities to share processes that track students’ required clinical hours.”

The collaborative reimagining of UNI’s health programming was led by a working group of faculty from each department in the school, who met every couple of weeks through the spring 2023 semester leading up to the school’s launch. The team collectively put together the school’s mission and vision and helped keep their departments up to speed as the school came together.

The team also received input from a variety of campus entities — from Academic Advising to the University Faculty Senate and the Office of Business Operations — so the creation of the school was a true campus-wide initiative.

“The faculty group did fantastic work,” said Bass. “They did their homework on what health-related schools looked like at other institutions, while also recognizing the unique strengths of our UNI programs and seeking ways to build on those strengths. They were also very cognizant of what our community partners are saying in regard to workforce needs in the region and what academic foundation is needed for success in various careers.”

Each of the programs within the School of Health and Human Sciences includes faculty who have a real passion for providing students with curriculum that prepare them for a wide range of health-related careers.

“The faculty also are dedicated to connecting with community organizations and businesses to provide students with real-world learning opportunities, to keep the curriculum up to date with what occurs out in the field, and to create meaningful partnerships with community partners,” Bass said.

“Students in the programs are excited about the new energy of the school. They are already benefiting from the ongoing conversations faculty are having about potential interdisciplinary minors and certificates, which will provide students with additional relevant knowledge and skills.”

The School of Health and Human Sciences comes at an especially important time, as over the next 10 years, the health care sector is projected to add two million new jobs with an additional two million openings each year due to retirements, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Alongside the growing health care sector, there is an increased need for mental health services across the country. The job outlook for careers focused on substance abuse, behavioral disorders and mental health counselors are projected to grow 22% over the next 10 years.

By housing programs focused on both physical and mental health, the School of Health and Human Sciences will help ensure students receive a well-rounded education in integrated care. This ultimately helps ensure the school lives out its vision of empowering students to make a positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities in Iowa and beyond.
Throughout its nearly 150-year history, the University of Northern Iowa has made a strong commitment to preparing students for in-demand careers.

Today, that means providing a nursing program and strengthening its public health degree.

UNI’s new Department of Nursing and Public Health will house the university’s new Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program, the first cohort of which will begin in fall 2024, alongside the public health major, minor and certificates, previously offered through the College of Education.

The department is led by UNI’s chief academic nurse administrator, Nancy K. Kertz, Ph.D., FNP-BC. Kertz brings more than 18 years of experience leading and developing nursing education programs and has played a strategic role in obtaining state and national accreditation, developing curriculum, and forming partnerships with clinical experience providers and future employers of UNI graduates.

“I am very honored to be part of the UNI family and to work alongside our talented faculty and staff to transform nursing and health care, now and into the future,” Kertz said. “Our mission to prepare graduates who are clinically focused and practice-ready while instilling a proficiency in situational awareness and clinical reasoning is critical in today’s health care environment.”
PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS

Nursing is a special calling. Ranked by Gallup as the most trusted profession in America for 20 years running, nurses are the front line of patient care and the backbone of a healthy society.

In many hospital settings, patients interact with nurses more than any other care provider. Yet, a critical shortage of these vital caregivers — both in Iowa and across the country — has been compounded by the strains of the pandemic, the demands of an aging population and greater access to health care.

Throughout the 2023-24 school year, Kertz and the nursing program team, which includes Assistant Professor of Practice Jimmy Reyes, Ph.D., DNP, AGNP, RN, FRE, and Academic Coordinator of Nursing Education Carrie Hollerud, MSN, RN, have been reaching out to prospective students and meeting with health care stakeholders across the state.

“These partnerships will help our future students participate in many engaging and interactive clinical experiences with qualified and proficient clinical faculty,” Reyes said.

Reyes, who is a nurse and nurse practitioner, has helped refine the BSN plan of study and develop engaging courses for the program. He also currently conducts screening clinics among under-served and under-resourced communities in the Des Moines area with the assistance of community health workers and UNI students.

Reyes plans to transform this work into a hands-on learning opportunity available to students in the nursing program.

“I look forward to working with students in the community to facilitate care among many undeserved and under-resourced communities and populations in Iowa,” he said. “I also look forward to working with students who have a passion for research, legislation, global health and public health nursing. There are so many great opportunities in nursing, and I want to share what I have learned so far in my 20-plus years of nursing experience.”

He added that because UNI promotes a culture of flexibility, creativity and success, the Department of Nursing and Public Health has a real opportunity to provide students with an array of experiences within the classroom, clinical settings and labs.

“Students can look forward to a great and challenging nursing program,” he said. “We have made sure to include many interactive courses where students can apply the knowledge they learn in the classroom to the simulation or skills laboratory. Students will also work with many clinical instructors who may provide additional support and guidance as they transition to becoming registered nurses.”

For Kertz, the chance to help provide a student-focused education to future nurses is exciting.

“UNI has an exceptional history in offering undergraduate and graduate programs, and the university is dedicated to meeting the workforce needs of Iowa,” Kertz said. “As an Iowa citizen, I felt compelled to be a part of the solution in addressing the nursing workforce shortage in the state, and nursing program development is a passion of mine. This program will contribute to the education of nurses, which will in turn assist in increasing the number of nurses in Iowa.”

PUBLIC HEALTH DEGREE INSPIRES PROFESSIONALS TO LEAD HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

While the public health degree at UNI isn’t new, the shift to being offered through the Department of Nursing and Public Health opens opportunities to grow.
“Partnering with nursing and the other programs in the School of Health and Human Sciences is a better fit in terms of what our students learn, what we prepare them for, and the research that faculty are engaged in,” shared Associate Professor of Public Health Disa Cornish. “I am thrilled about the new opportunities that students will have to work across disciplines and engage with other students and faculty who are interested in similar career and research paths.”

Cornish explained that the shift happened as UNI engaged in a deliberate process of academic positioning over the last few years. Creating more connections between programs related to the health sciences was a priority.

“The public health faculty got to be part of the decision-making process regarding where we were housed, and joining with the nursing program made so much sense,” she said. “In public health we are focused on prevention and population health. Nursing students also spend time learning about population health and the importance of preventive care. There is a natural fit with the progression of what students learn in the two programs from prevention to treatment.”

The public health program includes a major, minor and multiple certificates for students to investigate a specific topic more in-depth, such as global health, women’s health or corporate fitness.

Susan Roberts-Dobie, professor of public health, shared that the public health major attracts a wide variety of students, but they all tend to have an “I want to make the world a better place” mindset.

“For one student that may translate to international work with refugees, for another student that may be a dream of helping residents in an assisted living facility be more healthy and active, and for another student a dream of keeping the local water supply clean,” she said. “One benefit of a generalist public health degree is that we focus on the core skills of public health, so the degree is transferable from one population to another. An alum may work with childhood nutrition for a period of time but has the skills to pivot to another topic like substance abuse prevention.”

Roberts-Dobie noted that according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, careers in public health are projected to increase 18% in the next decade.

“The health of our nation depends on these workers, and demand is growing, but in addition to being a career field, public health is also a mindset of seeing opportunities to prevent illness and injury, so we are always thrilled when students from other fields choose public health as a second major or a minor,” she said. “That creates an opportunity for us to train people in other career paths to look at problems through a public health lens.”

Ultimately, through the new Department of Nursing and Public Health, UNI is putting health at the forefront.
The School of Health and Human Sciences welcomes the addition of two long-standing programs at the University of Northern Iowa, kinesiology and athletic training.

Together, they’ve formed the new Department of Kinesiology and Athletic Training, combining a number of majors, minors, certificates and graduate programs focused on health and wellness.

“The department is dedicated to the study and practical application of all things related to human movement and physical activity,” explained Windee Weiss, professor of kinesiology and physical education. “Our majors provide a strong base of knowledge for students interested in health-related fields.”

At the undergraduate level, students can major in kinesiology (with or without a pre-athletic training emphasis), physical education teaching, or sports administration. Graduate program offerings include kinesiology and sport performance, physical education pedagogy, and athletic training, which is especially thriving.

“Our Master of Athletic Training program has been flourishing, and we expect it to remain popular in the future,” said Fabio Fontana, head of the new department and professor of kinesiology and physical education.
The department also offers an athletic training 3+2 program, through which students can obtain their degree faster and for less money. The intensive pathway blends three years of undergraduate studies and two years in the master's program at UNI. So, upon completion, students earn both their bachelor’s degree and master's degree in athletic training while saving on a year of tuition. This also means that students are engaged in clinically-focused coursework and actual clinical experiences from their very first semester at UNI.

Several students in the Department of Kinesiology and Athletic Training are “pre-health” in the sense that they plan on continuing their education for physical therapy, occupational therapy, athletic training, physician assistant or chiropractic. The department also offers several minors including coaching, sport administration, and strength and conditioning.

Fontana shared bringing all these complementary areas together into one department simply makes sense.

“It also combines our expertise for better learning experiences for the students,” he said.

Faculty within the department bring a wealth of knowledge in areas like coaching, sport psychology, exercise physiology, anatomy, sport performance training and more.

Students will gain exposure to more coursework options of interest, including pre-health, pre-athletic training, coaching, or strength and conditioning.

“Additionally, students will be able to take courses from multiple emphases to gain a broad base of knowledge and exposure to the variety of occupations in the physical domain,” Weiss said. “Many students start at UNI with an idea of what they would like to do as a profession, but along the way, they realize that maybe they want to do something else. With our new department, we will be better able to assist these students to move and transition to other areas of interest within kinesiology.”

Students have ample opportunities for hands-on learning within the department’s suite of lab facilities, including the Exercise Physiology Lab, Biomechanics Lab and Psychomotor Behavior Lab. There’s also a room dedicated solely to strength and conditioning, and students get to spend a considerable amount of time in the nationally award-winning Wellness and Recreation Center and renowned Richard O. Jacobson Human Performance Center, too.

For Weiss and many of her fellow faculty, the opportunity to be part of the new School of Health and Human Sciences and the Department of Kinesiology and Athletic Training is exciting.

“This is a perfect fit for our students and faculty. The new department provides an opportunity for both our undergraduate and graduate programs to grow and provides our students with more integrated coursework, research experiences and community outreach endeavors.”

UNI’s Master of Athletic Training is the first master’s program in Iowa to be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)

100% of physical education teaching students reported full-time employment upon graduation

14.7% projected growth for kinesiology majors over the next decade
The reorganized Department of Family, Aging and Counseling offers new opportunities for students to focus on the health and well-being of families, communities and individuals across the lifespan.

Each of the programs in the department — including undergraduate degrees in family services and gerontology, as well as a graduate counseling degree and an online, individual studies program for human services — were formerly offered through the School of Applied Human Sciences, which additionally housed the university’s textiles and apparel and interior design programs.

By narrowing the scope of the department and moving it within the new School of Health and Human Sciences, the programs have found an elevated awareness to their paths of study and career potential.

William Henninger, head of the Department of Family, Aging and Counseling, shared that the shift provides for more focused majors that work well in tandem.
“It allows us to have a cohesive story around majors in health and human sciences. That drives how we view ourselves.”

The department’s undergraduate programs in family services and gerontology provide a strong foundation for family dynamics and healthy aging, preparing students for future careers or advanced education across a variety of fields and placements.

“The family services major focuses largely on the application of the skills we teach,” Henninger said. “We want to train students to go out into the field and work.”

The gerontology major offers two tracks: social sciences and long-term care administration. Approximately half of UNI gerontology students work in nursing homes after graduation, with others working in a wide variety of senior support, education and advocacy services. The opportunities for careers in the field are certainly plentiful, from estate planning to music therapy and much more.

And it’s a great time to pursue an education in gerontology, as the need for professionals in the field of aging is growing exponentially. In fact, the demand for older adult care will be fueled by a steep rise in the number of Americans living with Alzheimer’s disease, which could nearly triple to 14 million by 2050.

UNI’s gerontology program is the only four-year degree in the subject in the state of Iowa. The program also runs the only Dementia Simulation House in the nation, which is open to the community, students, family caregivers and professionals.

The house offers an innovative hands-on learning experience where individuals use goggles, headphones and gloves to experience what it’s like to live with dementia. The purpose of the home is to educate people about Alzheimer’s and other dementias, increasing empathy for those living with dementia, and empowering care partners.

Elaine Eshbaugh, Davis Professor of Gerontology, shared that the program’s move under the newly reorganized department and school is an exciting one.

“We will be able to work more closely with programs like nursing, exercise science and public health,” she said.

Students in the department’s graduate counseling program, which was purposely designed for working professionals, have the option of pursuing a school or clinical mental health specialization. The 60-hour program is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and is intentionally designed over three years to create optimal development of counseling professionals.

During the first two years of the program, courses are offered in a traditional in-person format with mandatory summer courses in a flexible format (in-person or online).

The program’s third year is digitally delivered to allow students flexibility in clinical placements in or outside of the Cedar Valley.

The Department of Family, Aging and Counseling also oversees the Patricia A. Tomson Center for Violence Prevention, which was established at UNI in 2011 to enable schools, victim service agencies, law enforcement and institutions to implement best practices in violence prevention.

The center provides financial support to qualifying CSBS students who are engaged in internships with non-profit organizations, associations or government entities addressing interpersonal violence.

Ultimately, the Department of Family, Aging and Counseling allows for a number of hands-on learning experiences while keeping the focus of preparing students to enter careers that help others at its heart.

UNI’s Family Services major was the first in Iowa to be a designated and approved Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) program by the National Council on Family Relations.

MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling was the first accredited program in the nation.

Offering the only four-year gerontology program in the state of Iowa.
Social work is a helping profession.

So it's logical that UNI's Department of Social Work, which offers both bachelor's and master's degree options, has moved within the new School of Health and Human Sciences.

Across undergraduate and graduate programs, social work students learn from experts in the field, gain hands-on experience and learn innovative approaches to address the complex problems facing the world.

Through the department's Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program, students engage in a generalist practice approach, which prepares them for an array of careers working at the individual, family, small group, organizational and community levels.

BSW courses are taught by faculty who have real-life research and practice experience. Students cap their degree with a field instruction experience of at least 440 hours in a social work agency that serves a population of their choice.

Libby Fry, who oversees the BSW program, explained that when many people hear the term “social worker,” they think of child welfare, but there's much more to it.

“Although child welfare is a critical piece of social work, it is only a small piece,” she said. “Alums from our program work in various settings with a variety of populations, including addictions treatment facilities, schools, hospitals and clinics, and mental health centers. A BSW is a very marketable degree.”
Because the Department of Social Work is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, students who graduate with their BSW from UNI are eligible to complete their Master of Social Work (MSW) degree in just one calendar year.

Rebecca Dickinson, who oversees UNI’s MSW program, explained that it’s one of the first programs in the Midwest to offer a specialization in trauma-informed care and continues to be the only one in the state of Iowa.

“One of the biggest misconceptions about our program is that it is only for people who want to become therapists, when in reality, we need trauma-informed social workers at all levels of social work practice.”

At its core, trauma-informed care recognizes the effects trauma has across all areas of a person’s life, from the emotional to the physical and relational.

“Ultimately, we want to create an atmosphere of empathy and support to promote resiliency and healing that is free of judgment or shame,” Dickinson said.

UNI’s MSW program offers a track for students who have an undergraduate degree in social work and one for students who don’t, the latter of which is only available online. Students with a BSW can elect to take courses in-person or online.

“Students in our program learn from faculty with real practice experience; in fact, many of our faculty continue to work within their fields of interest,” Dickinson said. “They have a wide range of practice interests that inform their teaching and add to the learning opportunities our students have available. We pride ourselves in creating a community amongst our cohorts and within our department.”

Because the class sizes are kept relatively small (20 to 25 students), students have opportunities to get to know and feel connected to faculty as well.

This students-first mentality remains an important distinction for both the MSW and BSW programs.

“We care deeply about our students,” explained Fry.

Offering one example, “Each semester there are numerous opportunities for students to share feedback and suggestions about the program that is then used for continuous improvement,” she said. “Recently, feedback indicated that students didn’t find our department space very welcoming. So, faculty worked to create a student lounge space in the faculty office suite.”

The space now provides a spot for students to rest, collaborate, renew, fuel, as well as lean on faculty for support.

The Department of Social Work’s alignment in the School of Health and Human Sciences allows for additional opportunities for social work students to collaborate with faculty and students in other programs within the school.

“This may include the development of new interdisciplinary certificates, cross-listed courses or collaboratively sponsored student events,” said Fry.

The department’s inclusion in the school also illustrates how UNI is conceiving of the term “health” more broadly — meaning it encompasses peoples’ entire well-being, both mind and body.

“Our social work programs at UNI are really geared toward addressing issues of mental health and overall wellness, both at the individual and family level, and also thinking about how communities impact mental health and wellness,” said Adam Butler, interim department head.

“We’re very excited to have the social work programs align with the new school and look forward to the future opportunities it offers our students.”
Pita Agbese
Political Science

Pita Agbese is retiring after 35 years in the Department of Political Science at UNI. He earned his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1984 and served in term positions in several universities (including UNI) before beginning his appointment here as an assistant professor in 1989. He earned tenure in 1992 and was promoted to professor in 1998. Prof. Agbese completed his undergraduate work in his native Nigeria, and before coming to the U.S. to pursue graduate studies he taught at the high school level, meaning that the 2023-24 academic year culminates a 50-year career of teaching.

Prof. Agbese built an international reputation as an expert on Nigerian politics, civil-military relations, and human rights, among other topics. His scholarship on civil-military relations and democratization was especially influential, investigating the ways that the military could be an obstacle to both democratization and development more broadly. His expertise in Nigerian politics extended into other realms as well, including human rights, ethnic conflict and environmental issues. He co-edited seven books and authored or co-authored two dozen peer-reviewed book chapters and twenty journal articles during his career. Throughout his career, he earned grants from the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He served the university and the discipline in a variety of ways, including through consultancies and lectures delivered around the world. As just one indicator of his scholarly expertise and reputation, in 2019 he was selected as an election monitor in the Nigerian presidential election.

For many years, Prof. Agbese taught the Non-Western Cultures: Africa course within the Liberal Arts Core. In doing so, he exposed thousands of students to African cultures, history and politics. In recent years, he continued this work by developing a new UNIFI course, “Colonial Encounters,” using the history and politics of colonialism to examine the development of African nations. Within political science, he taught courses in African politics, international law, international organizations, international political economy and U.S. foreign policy, among others. In recognition of his accomplishments in teaching, scholarship, and service, Prof. Agbese received the Regents’ Award for Faculty Excellence in 2004. The department wishes him a rewarding retirement. We will miss his collegiality, the colorful photos that adorned his office door (he is an avid photographer), and his joyous laugh punctuating our discussions in department meetings.

Sharon Mord
Textiles & Apparel

From William Henninger, head of the Department of Family, Aging & Counseling:

Sharon Mord has been a stellar teacher and is truly unique in her approach to ensuring students learn.

The textiles and apparel program (TAPP) is a skill-heavy major where students are not able to passively learn content. To really learn their craft, students must practice it with varied feedback from someone who has mastery of that skill. Prof. Mord has always been willing to give of her time to each student in this manner. Be it sewing, printing, pattern creation or any other skill, she meets students where they are and gives them the feedback necessary to better learn and master a skill.

TAPP is also one of the more equipment-heavy majors on campus. The program has sewing machines, irons, a giant fabric printer, a steam column to set fabric colors, a spectrometer, and various other expensive gadgets that are important to the discipline. Over multiple uses, these items break down or do not work as efficiently as they once did.

As any who owns a car or home knows, when something breaks someone has to fix it, be it the owner or a repair person. In TAPP, oftentimes that person has been Prof. Mord. I am not sure anyone ever asked her to learn how to fix these items, that is just who she is. She sees a problem and fixes it. Prof. Mord’s willingness to don her forehead lamp and dig into the bowels of a fabric printer has ensured that students’ projects get done on time and the departmental budget stays reasonably on track. Her value to the department in this area cannot be overstated.

Prof. Mord is one of the most “game” faculty I have ever met. A few years ago, one of our faculty members became exceptionally ill and was not able to teach the rest of the semester. With this illness came a need for class coverage on a course that required knowledge of several computer programs. There was not an adjunct pool at the last moment for that kind of knowledge. However, Prof. Mord was willing to learn the software and teach so students could finish the class.

She has always been willing to pitch in and is fearless in her willingness to undertake uncomfortable and unfamiliar tasks. It is one of the traits we will miss the most about her.
NEW FACES

Melinda Heinz  
Assistant Professor  
Family, Aging & Counseling

Tami Popenhagen  
Secretary III  
Family, Aging & Counseling

Sarah King  
Instructor  
Kinesiology & Athletic Training

Gracie Davis  
ROTC Supply Technician  
Military Science

Carrie Hollerud  
Academic Coordinator,  
Nursing Clinical Education  
Nursing & Public Health

Kristin Soppe  
Secretary III  
Nursing & Public Health

Lane Forsman  
Assistant Professor  
Social Work

Casey Schotter  
Instructor  
Sociology, Anthropology  
& Criminology

Ann Plagge  
Assistant Professor  
Family, Aging & Counseling

Johnathan Williams  
Instructor  
Kinesiology & Athletic Training

Megan Maly  
Assistant Athletic Trainer/Instructor  
Kinesiology & Athletic Training

Nancy Kertz  
Department Head  
Nursing & Public Health

Jimmy Reyes  
Assistant Professor of Practice  
Nursing & Public Health

Susie Grover  
Secretary III  
Psychology

Itunu Ilesanmi  
Assistant Professor  
Social Work

Kristin (KJ) Johnson  
Secretary II  
Women's & Gender Studies
PROMOTIONS & AWARDS

Tom Connors
Promotion to Full Professor, History

Donald Gaff
Promotion to Full Professor, Anthropology

Olivia Chen
Promotion & Tenure at Associate Professor, School Counseling

Sei-Young Lee
Promotion & Tenure at Associate Professor, Social Work

Tricia Schrage
Promotion & Tenure at Associate Professor, Athletic Training

Libby Fry
Promotion to Associate Clinical Professor, Social Work

Heather Schaffner
Promotion to Associate Adjunct Instructor, History

Kenneth Atkinson
James F. Lubker 2023 Faculty Research Award

Cathy DeSoto
2023-2024 Distinguished Scholar Award

Christopher Larimer
UNI 2024 Outstanding Graduate Coordinator Award

Rebecca Dickinson
UNI 2023 Outstanding Teaching Award (tenure track); United Faculty 2023 Emerging Leader Award

Heather Schaffner
UNI 2023 Outstanding Teaching Award (contingent)

Nathan Taylor
UNI 2023 Outstanding Teaching Award (tenure track)

Eran Hanke
UNI 2023 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award

Libby Fry
United Faculty 2023 Above & Beyond Award

Sharon Mord
United Faculty 2023 Above & Beyond Award

Gary Gute
Veridian 2023 Community Engagement Fellowship

Michael Fleming
Veridian 2023 Community Engagement Fellowship
IN MEMORIAM

Robert “Bob” Leslie Ross

(political science), 95, died on Thursday, November 30, 2023, at MercyOne Cedar Falls. He was born on May 29, 1928, the son of Leslie O. and Margaret C. (Mitchell) Ross, and grew up in the wonderful town of Sidney, Iowa. He received his B.A. from Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls and served in the Army during the Korean War. Following military service, he taught social studies at high schools in Humeston, Algona and Davenport. He then earned his M.A. from Columbia University in New York and his Ph.D. at Michigan State.

On August 31, 1957, Prof. Ross was united in marriage to Mary Ellen Sawyer in Hawarden. He was a professor of political science at the University of Northern Iowa from 1962 until his retirement and was head of the Department of Political Science for many years. Locally, he was an active supporter of the Democratic party, serving terms on Black Hawk Co. Democratic Central Committee and Iowa Democratic State Central Committee.

Prof. Ross co-founded the Waterloo Sharks swimming program and enthusiastically supported the swimming achievements of his children. He was a lifelong member of Presbyterian and Methodist churches. He served for a time on the City of Waterloo Human Rights Commission and in 2004 received the Human Rights Commissioner Award. He co-founded the Sidney, Iowa Music Endowment Committee of Sidney Alumni and Friends, Inc. He had lifelong interests in politics, music, history, religion and sports.

David Whitsett

(psychology) died after 82 years of a meaningful, high-quality life. Prof. Whitsett’s adventurous life began in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he and his sister, Toni, were raised by parents John David Whitsett and Dorthea (Upton) Whitsett.

After high school, he pursued his interest in human behavior through psychology at Penn State University, later earning his Ph.D. in organizational psychology from Case Western Reserve. His career led him to consulting firms in New York, where he was a specialist in managing large-scale change.

Prof. Whitsett later moved to Cedar Falls, joining the psychology faculty at UNI. He excelled at sparking students’ excitement about psychology using his natural storytelling and presentation skills. He was deeply involved in UNI athletics, especially wrestling. He took pride in helping coaches and athletes “create their own realities” in pursuit of their highest-level performance. Prof. Whitsett was an avid marathon runner; he guided a group running rim-to-rim in the Grand Canyon and co-created a marathon running course at UNI.

Prof. Whitsett remained connected to the Cedar Falls community, publishing a history book about the city in 2013. After surviving cancer and retiring from academia, he later moved from Iowa to Texas to be closer to his daughters.

Prof. Whitsett cherished solitude, independence and intellectual stimulation. As an atheist and freethinker, he devoured books about science and evolution. He also loved listening to music, especially to live bands. His favorite song, “Imagine” by John Lennon, reflects his relentlessly optimistic outlook on life. Prof. Whitsett wishes to be remembered as a man “who did what he said he would do,” as someone who left others feeling energized, included and significant, and as a man who lived and died on his terms. He had an extraordinarily sharp mind and wonderful sense of humor. Prof. Whitsett will be remembered as an amazing human being who embodied meaningful living.
Growing up, Katelyn Bakker was fascinated by crime shows like “Law and Order: SVU” and “Criminal Minds.” Although she now knows those TV shows may not have the most realistic depictions, her dream of going into law enforcement has not wavered. She’s pursuing this dream at the University of Northern Iowa, where she is majoring in psychology and criminology and criminal justice with minors in sociology and mental health.

“After doing more research throughout high school and taking the courses to make sure that was something I wanted to continue in college, it just opened my eyes to the fact that, sure, it’s not the same as what I grew up with on TV, but it’s definitely still a career that I would be super passionate about.”

Even though she has just finished her junior year of college, Bakker has already acquired a plethora of experiences that have confirmed she’s on the right track. First, she went through an internship with the Urbandale Police Department, working alongside alum Meagan Cowden, ’07.

Then, at the beginning of August, Bakker attended the 2023 FBI Omaha Field Office Collegiate Academy. Of about 50 students, she was the only one going to college in Iowa to attend the academy. Bakker had to submit an application with a resume and her GPA to be selected for the day-long opportunity.
The experience included hearing from a variety of speakers who work at the FBI. Bakker learned about national security, cyber crimes and violent crimes against children. She also learned about the different types of jobs available at the FBI.

Bakker was most interested in the violent crimes against children presentation because it is the most similar to the route she hopes to work in her future. Although she’s not sure whether she would like to work at the federal or the state level, Bakker knows would like to work on human trafficking cases.

Bakker also got to tour the FBI’s gun vault — where she met a UNI alum working for the FBI — as well as the evidence response team room.

“I didn’t know that it was just going to be a bunch of guest speakers, but I appreciated that it gave me a variety of different contacts and people to reach out to,” she said. “So I think that definitely was more helpful than watching a video about what life is like as an FBI agent or just hearing an internship coordinator talk about what it’s like.”

Most of the other students in attendance were criminal justice-related majors, but some were also pre-law.

“It definitely affirmed the idea I’ve had of possibly applying to work for the FBI,” she said. “It solidified some of the knowledge I thought I knew just from the internet or assumption.”

During her internship with the Urbandale Police Department, Bakker rode along with the patrol division and was able to go on calls for service with the police officers.

“I really thought it was beneficial to witness that, rather than just kind of reading about it and assuming how it’s going to be,” she said. “Sometimes those circumstances are exactly what the textbook says, and sometimes that doesn’t work at all.”

This year, Bakker is looking forward to diving deeper into her psychology courses. She believes expanding her knowledge of mental health issues will be crucial for her interactions on the job when she works in law enforcement.
In many ways, Marvin Carr is the typical college student. He works an on-campus job, lives in the dorms, is active in a handful of student organizations and plans to study abroad next summer. But as a 46-year-old pursuing his bachelor’s degree for the first time, he is redefining what it looks like to be a transfer student.

“It’s okay to change careers and take a different path,” said Carr. “It’s never too late to go back to school. Sometimes I think you can learn from younger students and vice versa.”

Carr grew up in Webster City, which he still calls home today. He always thought he would go to college after high school, but a friend convinced him and a few other friends to instead enlist in the Navy. Carr worked as a culinary specialist in the Navy for six and a half years.

After returning to civilian life, Carr was active in his daughter’s elementary school. It started by volunteering to dress up as a train conductor and read books to the kids as part of their Polar Express programming. Later, he worked as a substitute teacher and a paraeducator while also coaching basketball, track and field, and cross country.

Eventually, coworkers in the school suggested Carr should consider a career as a teacher. For Carr, the desire to be a positive influence in the lives of students drew him to the suggestion.

“I can relate to a lot of the kids nowadays and their circumstances. In my eyes and a lot of other peoples’ eyes, they need a role model to help guide them. I want to be that person.”

Even after he began thinking about becoming a teacher, Carr had to consider what subject he would teach. From an early age, he has loved history. His dad had a bunch of history books he recalls reading, and being in the Navy gave him the chance to be immersed in many different cultures, sparking an interest in the stories of different places around the world. So he settled on social sciences teaching as a major to teach history.

In 2013, Carr began his journey to obtaining a degree by enrolling in community college. However, having three young kids at home made the timing less than ideal.
It would be nearly 10 years before Carr went back to finish his associate’s. Just last year, he graduated from Iowa Central Community College at the same time that his youngest child graduated from high school.

The next big decision for Carr was to choose which college to attend to earn his bachelor’s degree. At his community college, Carr was involved with a TRIO program that enabled him to tour colleges throughout the state. He considered attending colleges besides UNI, but kept feeling that the professors didn’t truly want him there. That all changed during his visits to UNI, especially after meeting with Jennifer McNabb, head of the Department of History, and Chad Christopher, the social science teaching program coordinator.

“I was sold on Dr. McNabb,” said Carr. “She has a passion for the job she has — if you want to call it a ‘job’ for her because I think it’s just something that she loves to do. That’s the type of person I want to be to get the kids to enjoy history.”

Carr also likes how close together everything is on campus.

“I just loved the atmosphere of the campus,” he said. “You can find everything easily. The motto that it’s a big university with a small university feel is really true.”

Carr is only one year into his studies at UNI, but he’s certainly making the most of the opportunity. He’s involved in Model United Nations, the Dancer Activities and Recreation Team, and Northern Iowa Student Government. He’s also stayed in close contact with the UNI Veterans Association.

So far, the biggest challenge has been being away from his wife and home back in Webster City.

“I’ve been gone before but not for this long,” he said. “Yet, in some sense, it has actually made my relationship with my wife better. We’ve been married for 24 years. Now being apart, I want to know what’s going on with her because we aren’t in the same house every day, and that’s made our relationship stronger.”

Carr tries to keep in close contact with family by calling his wife frequently and going home just about every weekend.

Although he may be far from home, Carr knows he’s not alone. One of the ways he’s been pleasantly surprised at UNI is the way other students have rallied around him.

“I’ve been blown away by their acceptance,” he said. “That was a concern of mine going in, but it’s been really fun to get to know so many new people.”
As a student at the University of Northern Iowa, Valerie Jennings, ’01, had no idea what her future career would look like. What she did know, though, was that to gain a baseline for how to work with people from all backgrounds and personalities, she’d need to seek out classes and internships with an international focus.

And she did just that.

Jennings, the first person in her immediate family to graduate college, pursued a degree in political communication, as well as double minors in international affairs and journalism.

After graduating in 2001, she worked in a few internships in Washington, D.C., political campaigns and state legislature roles before launching Jennings Social Media and MarTech (JSMM) at the age of 24. To get the agency off the ground, Jennings worked with more than 20 political candidates in Kansas over the course of a year and a half — a period during which she met many financial contributors, one of whom had a successful business and asked if she thought her skillset was transferrable to the private sector.

She thought, why not? Jennings took him on as a client, knowing it was a big career shift, and loved it.

Today, JSMM consists of about 30 professionals with clients all over the world, from public to private, small to enterprise. The agency focuses primarily on digital marketing, advertising, social media, content marketing and creative services. JSMM is honing in on AI marketing as one of its core service offerings as well.
"We've always been an early adopter of tech since 2005 when we started doing social media," Jennings said.

Because there can be ethical issues surrounding the technology, Jennings shared that ethics in AI is a key driver for her team. She draws from skills she learned as a UNI student to help guide her team in this area, especially from a media law class she took with Anelia Dimitrova.

"A lot of the foundation in that class can be applied to some of these attribution, sourcing and copyright issues we're seeing with AI," Jennings said. "That class was probably the most valuable class I took at UNI, not just because of this AI, but because everything I do has a potential copyright issue associated with it."

Jennings feels that with this new era of AI — and any new technology, really — people need to raise questions. She first learned to do this at UNI, when her courses were based around questioning. "Why?" "Is this true?" "What is the bias behind it?"

Because of this commitment to questioning and not just accepting what's "truth," it's no wonder Jennings is known as an early adopter of technology.

Jennings has also received such accolades as a 2021 Gold Stevie® Award for Female Entrepreneur of the Year in the advertising, marketing and public relations from the CEO category; 2021 Silver Stevie® Award for Marketing Executive of the Year; 2021 Top Women In Media Honoree by FOLIO; and DMN's National Marketer of the Year 2020.

She is passionate about giving back, too.

In addition to JSMM's purpose of educating, leading and inspiring others by providing cutting-edge digital marketing and advertising resources, the agency supports numerous non-profits focused on animal welfare, children, families, women and girls.

"Through the course of all this, we've been able to do a lot of mentoring with young women and girls and contribute to lots of charities along the way," Jennings said.

Her commitment to giving back started in earnest when the agency was just four years old and she was volunteering and contributing monthly to Safehome in Kansas City. Today, she gives to organizations such as the Rose Brooks Center, which provides domestic violence programming, and KC Digital Drive.

"My life has been greatly impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault," she said. "[So now I feel] it's not just about earning a good living, it's also about building a good community around us."

Jennings' philosophy behind giving is simply that it's a social responsibility. This also drives her dedication to mentoring.

"It's important everyone have a mentor, no matter how old or successful," she said. "If we can start small, those efforts over time really add up."

Jennings still gets excited when she runs into old interns from JSMM. She recently caught up with an intern whom she helped get a job at a big company in Florida. Upon their run in, the former intern told her:

"You changed my life. You're responsible for my career. I wouldn't have done these things if you hadn't believed in me."

To Jennings, helping this intern get a job just made sense. For the woman, it changed her life.

"These small efforts change people," Jennings said.

It's why Jennings established a policy at JSMM where employees can either work fully remote or come into the office. This has helped the many women on her team juggle their career interests with their families, ultimately facilitating new career growth.

For Jennings, as she reflects on her time at UNI and all that she's carried with her over her journey, gratitude shines through.

"I think UNI is a fantastic school," she said. "I feel the time I spent there was invaluable to cultivating my basic understanding of the world."

She added, "I feel the investment I personally made in the university, since I paid for my education, was a very good one. But because I took it so seriously, I went out of my way to set very deliberate intentions. You're going to get out of it what you put into it."
CHARLES MHOON
BRIDGING the EQUITY GAP in HIGHER EDUCATION
If you would had asked Charles Mhoon, ‘17, in high school where he'd be almost two decades later, he certainly wouldn't have said working as an educational counselor at the University of Northern Iowa.

Mhoon, ‘16, recalls his high school principal in Mississippi telling him he'd end up in prison, not college. Halfway through his senior year, that same principal sent him to a detention center. Now, Mhoon's job includes recruiting potential students, particularly adults over the age of 19, who may have fallen through the cracks and be unaware there are educational resources like the programs that helped him get through college himself, where he ultimately earned a master's degree.

“I'm able to view it from both sides of the coin. I know what it's like to be the person to receive the help, as well as now give the help. It was very beneficial for me. I can understand and really empathize with the people who come to me for assistance.”

After graduating with his associate degree, someone pointed Mhoon to UNI's Center for Urban Education (UNI-CUE). The priority of this center is to provide educational opportunities to students who identify as first-generation and low-income and fully embraces the concept of continuing and part-time education to serve nontraditional students.

In fact, Mhoon had already benefited from UNI-CUE's services as a student at East High School. The facility supports several federally funded TRIO programs like a few Mhoon utilized, including the Educational Talent Search, the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) and serving as a tutor for Upward Bound.

Mhoon went on to graduate from UNI with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 2016. He shared that he originally wanted to be a psychiatrist but knew he'd need to attend medical school, which didn't excite him. So, he switched gears to focus on child psychology and school counseling in hopes of helping kids like him navigate their journey to college.

“Sometimes in life, things may happen, and you do have to reprioritize,” he said. “I make sure to let people know that there's nothing to be ashamed of, that you started and had to stop. That just means you took the time to get other things taken care of and now you're back, trying to finish what you started.”

Mhoon feels that his experience at UNI, both as a student and an employee, has enabled him to grow personally and professionally.

He acknowledges colleagues like Executive Director of UNI-CUE Robert L. Smith, Jr., former director of UNI-CUE's TRIO and EOC programs Kathy Martin, ‘83, and current EOC director Nickole Dillard, ‘96, for playing a big part in his life as well, helping him get into spaces where he can make an even bigger impact on students' lives while also serving as mentors. In addition, Mhoon credits the UNI-CUE's assistant director, Bethany Botchway, for her support.

“Within the last two years, it's become a purpose – it's not just a job,” Mhoon said. “It's transformed into a purpose.”

After graduating from Waterloo East High School, Mhoon, a first-generation college student, attended Ellsworth Community College to follow his dream of playing college basketball. Those plans were put on pause once he learned he was going to become a father. He transferred to Hawkeye Community College with the help of UNI educational counselor Constance McGovern, ‘87.
Joana Lwin’s journey has been anything but easy.

Today, through her role as director of Refugee and Immigrant Youth Organization (RIYO) in Waterloo, Iowa, she hopes to take her experiences and pay it forward.

Lwin, ‘22, was born and raised in a refugee camp in Thailand, where her family fled during the ongoing Myanmar Civil War.

When she was 10 years old, Lwin's family resettled to the United States, and she enrolled in the Waterloo Community School District as a fifth grader.

“It was hard not speaking the language and being in a school and culture I was unfamiliar with,” Lwin said. “During that time, as the oldest in my family, I also played a big role in supporting my family and other community members with all sorts of things, like reading mail, responding to bills, interpreting (even with limited English) and helping with appointments.”

Because the Karenni language Lwin speaks is rare compared to the other languages spoken in Burma, it’s hard to come by interpreters who know it.

JOANA LWIN
OPENING HEARTS,
OPENING DOORS
“This shaped my perspective on barriers and expectations for young newcomers and their families,” she said. “I have always been involved with youth programming, volunteering to help teach English and supporting families to access resources. This inspired me to want to learn more about how to be of support and led me to study at UNI and co-found the refugee and immigrant-led nonprofit, RIYO.”

At UNI, Lwin chose to pursue a degree in social work because of the impact her caseworker had on her when she arrived in the United States.

“I grew up seeing her as my role model and wanted to help families the way she helped me and my family,” Lwin said. “She tried to make us feel welcome and went above and beyond to make time for us. We went to the beach, celebrated Halloween and even went on a picnic with her. I’ve always wanted to help people the way she helped us.”

Likewise, Lwin felt valued and inspired by her professors in UNI’s Department of Social Work. In addition, her time at the university helped her learn more about the systems that contribute to the barriers refugee and immigrant families face.

“I have a better understanding and more compassion now. I also believe earning my degree helps me open doors for other high school or middle school students who might not believe they can succeed in college. Now they can see someone who has overcome similar challenges as them.”

After graduation in 2022, Lwin collaborated with other community members to create RIYO.

“After more than six years of working with refugee youth and coming to the United States as a refugee myself, I saw a lot of barriers to success for the youth from refugee and immigrant communities in Waterloo, and we wanted to create more opportunities for them to succeed in high school and after college,” Lwin said.

RIYO is dedicated to providing opportunities for education, self-exploration and community development while removing hurdles and nurturing leadership skills among refugee and immigrant youth and their families.

A majority of RIYO’s founding board of directors, and all its staff and AmeriCorps members, are current students at or alums of UNI. The organization also partners with numerous departments at UNI, including the Department of Languages and Literature.

One of the highlights from Lwin’s time at RIYO thus far was the final day of its Youth Navigator Program last year, where 10 refugee and immigrant youth completed leadership training and received their certificates of achievement.

“It was so powerful to see how much they grew in their confidence and built such strong relationships with each other by the end of the program,” Lwin said. “That confidence is critical to their success, too. We have a lot of students who don’t feel confident to meet people or even ask questions. This affects their ability to learn, their ability to take risks and try new things, their ability to ask questions and to dream big.”

Lwin explained that for students in the program, English is their second, third or fourth language, and they often don’t have support at home with academics, career advice or English language learning, because their parents are also adjusting to learning the new language and culture.

“Some students are even the main support system for their parents,” Lwin said. “So, our programs are really critical for supporting growth and opportunities to learn in these areas.”

As a former refugee herself, Lwin hopes her experience can make students feel more understood or hopeful.

“I hope seeing me in my role helps them see themselves doing similar things, like graduating high school and college, and serving as a leader to help others,” she said. “Representation can be so important. I think when English language learning students learn that the RIYO team has a similar background as them, they feel a sense of belonging and understanding that they might not feel with leaders who don’t have a refugee or immigrant background.”

For Lwin, though she’s had to face many barriers herself, she’s proof that a little help can go a long way toward future success.
As UNI gears up to welcome the inaugural class of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program students this fall, donors are already rallying to support the future nurses.

Thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends, each of the incoming 30 BSN students will receive financial assistance to offset tuition and other costs of the program such as lab fees. The gifts are part of an Our Tomorrow campaign initiative to secure donor support for nursing scholarships, academics and capital projects.

Michael Wright, ’69, created UNI’s first endowed nursing scholarship. The Mary Lynn Wright Memorial Endowed Scholarship honors Michael’s wife of 52 years who died of cancer in 2021. Lynn was a 1972 graduate of UNI, where she earned an elementary education degree and later taught in Iowa and Texas for more than 30 years.

Michael said the scholarship is his way of giving back to the providers who cared for Lynn throughout her diagnosis. It’s also in keeping with Wright’s philanthropic goals, having established several other scholarships in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

“Students who have a need and are high achievers academically, I’m interested in helping them,” Wright said. “That’s the core of why I give.”

Nancy Kertz, head of the Department of Nursing and Public Health and chief academic nurse administrator, said scholarships are critical for recruitment and retention at this early stage of the program.

“We are very grateful for the generosity and enthusiasm we have seen from our alumni and friends,” Kertz said. “Their donations will help us provide a rigorous, high-quality education that prepares nurses for the full spectrum of healthcare settings.”

The innovative program will include hundreds of hours of hands-on experience in both simulated and real-world clinical settings across a wide variety of care disciplines.

A $150,000 gift from the Pauline R. Barrett Charitable Foundation will help attract nursing students. The foundation’s scholarship adds to the late Barrett’s philanthropy at UNI and furthers her legacy of supporting causes in the Cedar Valley.

Klaus and Marla Jarr, ’69, established the Jarr Nursing Fund for Excellence, which will waive lab fees for the first class of nursing students, providing resources to purchase lab coats and stethoscopes. A portion of the fund will support nursing scholarships.
Theresa Hoffman, a representative for the Barrett Foundation, said the project melds two of Barrett’s passions in charitable giving.

“How higher education and healthcare were very important to Pauline,” Hoffman said. “Advances in healthcare are a constant which requires more expertise and knowledge to best serve our Iowa population resulting in better outcomes. Pauline was a strong believer in education as the path to a better outcome.”

The children of the late Eldred and Donna Harman, ‘47, have established a nursing scholarship through the Harman Trust. The Harman Family Nursing Fund for Excellence will offset tuition and fees for high-achieving Iowa students who demonstrate financial need.

“Our parents were longtime contributors to UNI, having served on committees in support of planned giving for the university,” the family said in a statement. “In addition, they were historically strong supporters of medical care in the Cedar Valley and recognized the need and shortage of well trained medical professionals in Iowa. They would be proud to know that they were supporting both UNI and the need for medical professionals in the state of Iowa.”

Kertz stressed that there remains a significant need for scholarships and other philanthropic support as the university scales up the program to help meet the state’s nursing shortage. UNI is planning a phased expansion of the nursing facilities to add specialized lab spaces, simulations and other equipment as enrollment increases.

Support for the BSN program is a major initiative of the Our Tomorrow campaign. Donations will make an immediate impact on the first cohort of students, and will help the university recruit, retain and educate additional students as the program grows.

UNI is seeking investments in the following areas:

/ Scholarships
/ Renovations, Equipment & Instrumentation
/ Faculty & Teaching
/ Nursing Fund for Excellence

For more information and to give, scan the QR code or visit csbs.uni.edu/support-nursing.
A transformative gift from the Gerdin Charitable Foundation will significantly enhance the University of Northern Iowa’s ability to train the next generation of elder care professionals working in the field of gerontology.

The North Liberty-based Gerdin Charitable Foundation has pledged a $1 million endowed gift that will expand faculty teaching, research and outreach for UNI’s growing gerontology program. In honor of the investment, UNI will establish the Gerdin Family Chair in Gerontology. “We’re grateful to the Gerdin Charitable Foundation for their philanthropic leadership and enduring commitment to programs at UNI that serve the broader community and state,” said UNI President Mark Nook. “The Gerdin Family Chair in Gerontology will provide our faculty in the gerontology program with resources to enhance educational opportunities for students and expand their outreach to professionals and caregivers throughout Iowa.”

“We as a family feel strongly about taking care of our elderly population and recognize that there will be a severe shortage of knowledge, training and workers in this field in the coming years,” said Julie Durr, ’94, a member of the Gerdin family. “We only hope that this gift will make a large impact at UNI and for the program.”

The Gerdin Charitable Foundation is directed by the family of the late Russell Gerdin. Gerdin founded Heartland Express in 1978 and grew the company into a nationwide leader in logistics and transportation. During his lifetime, Russell, and his wife, Ann, were among Iowa’s leading philanthropists, and that legacy continues today through the work of the foundation.

“We’re grateful to the Gerdin Charitable Foundation for their philanthropic leadership and enduring commitment to programs at UNI that serve the broader community and state,” said UNI President Mark Nook. “The Gerdin Family Chair in Gerontology will provide our faculty in the gerontology program with resources to enhance educational opportunities for students and expand their outreach to professionals and caregivers throughout Iowa.”

“The Gerdin family has a long history of philanthropic support with UNI, leading the effort to renovate the Schindler Education Center in 2017. The foundation has also generously supported student scholarships and aided in the creation of the Jacobson Human Performance Complex. “This generous gift will further strengthen our gerontology program and elevate our work to the next level,” said Dean Brenda Bass. “The Gerdin Family Chair will allow us to recruit and retain leading faculty in the gerontology field, and provide funding for faculty and staff to expand their research and outreach in a field that is critical to Iowa’s future.”

The state of Iowa, and the nation, is facing an extreme shortage of caregivers to provide for a growing aging population. The entire Baby Boomer generation – those born between 1946 and 1964 – will be over the age of 65 by 2030 and will account for 1 in 5 Americans. The aging revolution is creating a critical need for professionals with a deep understanding of the needs, challenges and complexities of the aging process. The demand for elder care is fueled in part by an expected rise in the number of Americans living with Alzheimer’s disease.

UNI has been at the forefront of addressing the elder care workforce
crisis as home to Iowa’s sole undergraduate gerontology program since 2006. UNI also offers the nation’s only dementia simulation house training experience. Since opening its doors in spring 2022, the UNI Dementia Simulation House has provided more than 1,800 students, faculty, staff, professionals and caregivers the chance to experience what it’s like to live with dementia. The house also provides participants the opportunity to learn strategies for supporting family, friends and community members living with dementia.

The UNI gerontology program prepares students to obtain state licensure in nursing home administration and provides broad training for careers in corporate, government and nonprofit agency environments. Graduates of UNI’s gerontology program work in a variety of roles in the field of aging, including nursing home administrators, dementia specialists, case managers, nonprofit leaders, and more.

The Gerdin Family Foundation’s gift was made through the UNI Foundation as a part of the Our Tomorrow campaign.

SUPPORT THE DEMENTIA SIMULATION HOUSE

UNI’s Dementia Simulation House gives students, caregivers and elder care professionals the chance to experience what it’s like to live with dementia.

For more information about the Dementia Simulation House, including scheduling a session or making a donation, visit:

dem-sim-house.uni.edu
ANNUAL GIVING

As a new member of the CSBS, I’ve thoroughly enjoyed getting to know many of the incredible students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors that make this college so special. Each individual brings unique perspective, interests and passions—yet they all share something in common: a desire to give back to the institution that holds such significance for them.

To all who contributed to the Dean's Fund or other area within the college last year, thank you. Your generosity directly impacts the quality of education we provide to our students, and for that, we are immensely grateful.

I’m eager to meet more of you, our alumni and friends, and explore ways to align your passions with our college’s goals. Your contributions serve as a crucial investment in the future of our students, faculty, and programs. If you’re interested in exploring different avenues for giving, please reach out. I’m excited about the opportunity to collaborate with you!

ALISSA SPIDELL, ‘14
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
alissa.spidell@uni.edu
319-273-5985

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Brenda & Bill Bass
Tom & Rebecca Newton
Robert & Carol Deppe
David VanSickel
Jim & Simone Lynch
Michael Wright
LEGACY SOCIETY

The following members of the UNI Legacy Society have made provisions for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences through a deferred gift:

Susan K Baker
Dolores A Bogard
Elizabeth M Brand
Darrell E Briggs
Susan A Caley
Mark A Cubit
Robert D Deppe
Terry W Edmunds
Christine R Faust
Mary Gaye Fielding
Al Geiger
Charles E. Grassley
Dr Richard A Hays

Tim A Hilby
Loren N Horton
Dr Harmon M Hosch
Richard D James
John W Johnson
Doris Kelley
John L Koberg
Katie Kuker
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Jeanette Marsh
Patricia J Maxwell
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Dr Myrtle A Merritt

Jessica L Moon Asa
Cheryl A Myhr
Marybeth A Nelson
Judy K Nissen
Carol L Phillips
Victoria A Roller
Ronald N Rubek
Scott A Schamberger
George E Soper
Suzanne Strever
David B VanSickel
David A Whitsett
Diane E Wille

AMETHYST SOCIETY

The Amethyst Society recognizes annual donations of $1,000 or more. This year’s members include:

Amy Wienands Real Estate
Brenda & Bill Bass
Phil & Ann Beckman
Emily Bormann
Bob & Candy Bowlsby
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Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust Co
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Troy & Deann Cook
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Gudrun Fruehling
Pat Geadelmann
Gowri & Sanjay Gulwadi
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Randy & Connie Hefner
Don & Sandra Hofsommer
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Dr Harmon & Jeanne Hosch
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Katie Kuker & Brad D Bredehoeft
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Kathleen & David Quam
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Diane Schaeffer & Maxine Davenport
Steve Segebarth
Judi Segebarth
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Since 1876, UNI has built colleges and programs and iconic spaces. We’ve sent Panthers out into the world to build schools, businesses and communities across Iowa and beyond.

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1950s

‘53 Carolyn (Cummings) Haurum, BA, Cedar Falls, is 90 years old and started teaching in 1953. Her husband, Harlan Haurum ‘52, was in the first master’s class at UNI.

1960s

‘62 Marlys (Benning) Folkers, BA, MA ‘70, Cedar Falls, received the Governor’s Volunteer Award in 2022.


‘67 David Prescott, BA, Oklahoma City, OK, was awarded a 50-year certificate of appreciation from the Oklahoma Bar Association.

1970s


1980s

‘80 Randy Pilkington, BA, MA ‘98, Waterloo, received the 2023 Cedar Valley Legacy Award from Grow Cedar Valley. He is the executive director of Business and Community Services at UNI.

‘81 Joel Alter, BA, Saint Paul, MN, retired in April 2022 after 39 years of conducting nonpartisan research, program evaluations and investigations for the Minnesota Legislature. He served as program evaluation coordinator, director of special reviews and interim legislative auditor.

‘81 Ronald Langford, BA, Milwaukee, WI, was a Wisconsin state public defender from 1985 2003 and now is in criminal defense private practice. He is licensed in both Iowa and Wisconsin and has received numerous awards, including National Top 100 Criminal Defense Trial Lawyers of 2018 and Top Ranking Attorney Iowa 2020.

‘86 Deb Vangellow, BA, Sugar Land, TX, received the 2023 Nancy Lopez Golf Achievement Award from the Ladies Professional Golf Association.

‘88 Patrick Murphy, BA, Northport, AL, entered his 28th year with the University of Alabama softball program. He is the winningest coach in any sport in school history.

1990s

‘93 Dean Eyler, BA, Minneapolis, MN, was recognized by the World Trademark Review as a Global Leader in Private Practice for 2022. He is a partner at Lathrop GPM LLP. He was appointed by the Governor of Minnesota as district court judge in Minnesota’s Fourth Judicial District.

‘93 Jennifer (Stephens) VanHaaften, BA, Fort Atkinson, WI, co-authored a chapter on national and ethnic dress with UNI professor emeritus Annette Lynch that will be published in “The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present.” She is the assistant director at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison, WI, serves on the Wisconsin Federation of Museums’ board and was program chair for the 2021 and 2022 Association of Midwest Museums annual conferences.

‘95 Krista (Ficek) Castellanos, BA, Aliso Viejo, CA, was elected president of the Capistrano Unified School District Board of Trustees, which represents the 8th largest school district in California. She is also an elementary teacher for the Santa Ana Unified School District.

‘97 Karla Williams, BA, Pflugerville, TX, launched Echelon Protection Group, a business specializing in high end executive protection.

2000s

‘02 William Hagans, BA, Houston, TX, was board-certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in the area of personal injury trial law.

‘02 Grant Menke, BA, Ankeny, was named deputy secretary of agriculture with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

‘04 Chad Lang, BA, Glenwood, was selected as the School Administrators of Iowa Central Office Administrator of the Year for 2023. He also has written a book with UNI assistant professor Matt Townsley, called “A Parents’ Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear About What Matters.”

‘04 Ashley (Atherton) Thompson, BA, Ames, was named to the United Way of Story County Board of Directors.

‘05 Stacey (Conaway) Mahajan, BA, Austin, TX, was awarded by the Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants as one of the 2023 Rising Stars in the accounting profession. She is senior finance manager at Wilsonart International.

‘06 Philip Jones, BA, Waverly, was named to the 2022 2023 Leadership Iowa class. He is the president of Rada Mfg. Co.
‘07 Jaymes Sime, BA, Omaha, NE, received the 2023 JCI (Jaycees) USA Ten Outstanding Young Americans Award. He is the president and CEO of Child Saving Institute.

‘09 Bryan Conaway, BA, Verona, WI, is a retail sales leader at AAA Madison West (WI), AAA Rockford (IL), and AAA Vernon Hills Car Care Plus (IL) for the Auto Club Group.

‘09 Leann (Schroeder) Pederson, BA, Polk City, was named one of the 40 under 40 by the Des Moines Business Record for 2024. She is a senior partner with RDG Planning & Design.

2010s

‘10 Alexa Hach, BA, MA ‘14, Grundy Center, was named one of the Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is a public health professional with the Iowa Department of Health & Human Services.

‘10 Darius Robinson, MA, Waverly, is the attorney for Bremer County.

‘10 Julia Ruetten, BA, Albuquerque, NM, earned a master’s of studies in law from the University of New Mexico School of Law.

‘11 Adam Haselhuhn, BA, Des Moines, was named one of the 2023 40 Under 40 winners by the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy. He is the director of development with John Stoddard Cancer Center at UnityPoint Health Des Moines Foundation.

‘12 Nick Krob, BA, Des Moines, is the 2023 chair of the Licensing Executives Society Iowa Chapter. He is an attorney with McKee, Voorhees & Sease, PLC.

‘12 Spencer Walrath, BA, Glenview, IL, is the system director for corporate reputation for NorthShore University HealthSystem in Chicagoland.

‘13 Tyler Avis, BA, Grinnell, celebrated 10 years working in local government utilizing GIS skills obtained at UNI and seven years as the building official for the City of Grinnell.

‘15 Tirzah Roussell, BA, Delhi, is an attorney with Dentons Davis Brown.

‘17 Shantel Kahrs, BA, Hudson, received the 2023 Gold Star Award for Outstanding Teaching. She is a 7th grade social studies teacher at Peet Junior High in Cedar Falls.

‘17 Kerra Kruse, BA, Muscatine, is a sales coordinator for Musco Sports Lighting and is pursuing a master's degree in business administration.

‘18 Kaylee Clemens, BA, Des Moines, has been a medical social worker with Iowa Home Care for five years. She also teaches dance for Devine Dancers in Des Moines and will be starting her fifth year as coach of the Des Moines Roosevelt Color Guard.

‘18 Alexis (Hawley) Rogers, BA, San Marcos, TX, earned a MS in criminal justice from Texas State University and works for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division. She will also be working on a Master of Arts in professional counseling and concentration in clinical mental health.

‘19 Jordan Gehlhaar, BA, Waukee, joined the Peddicord Wharton law firm as an associate attorney.

‘19 Shantavia Parker, MSW, Waterloo, was named one of the Cedar Valley's 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2023. She is a Leader Valley coach and facilitator.

2020s

‘20 Marissa Miller, BA, Waukee, graduated from Drake Law School in 2023 and is an associate attorney at Dutton Law Firm.

‘21 Kaitlyn Evers, BA, Clinton, is the assistant director of the Sawmill Museum.
University of Northern Iowa.

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