

# PREMIER



## Transforming Teacher Education

Building on legacy, shaped by collaboration, designed for the next generation of Panther teachers

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New Alignment,  
New Directions

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A Shared Bond, A  
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**Dean:**  
Colleen S. Mulholland, EdD

**Editor:**  
Stacy McGauvran-Hruby

**Writing:**  
Lindsey Giardino  
Stacy McGauvran-Hruby

**Design:**  
Sarah Judisch

**Photography:**  
Elliot Tensen

Please send comments, suggestions and story ideas to:



Premier Editor  
University of Northern Iowa  
College of Education  
SEC 150  
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0610  
[coedeansoffice@uni.edu](mailto:coedeansoffice@uni.edu)



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## FROM THE DEAN

Dear Friends,

With a year of significant change behind us, we're **stepping boldly into the future.**

We're energized by what's taking root, even more by what's ahead! As we move further into the 2025–26 academic year, we're beginning to see the results of many initiatives, several of which we've previously shared with you in progress, now coming to fruition:

- **Full implementation of a rejuvenated teacher education curriculum** for the good of students of today and tomorrow. We are grateful for everyone's efforts within the college and across campus that helped us achieve our vision.
- **A newly structured College of Education** that promises greater synergy, flexibility and collaboration as we look toward the future.
- **The opening of the TEACH Studio**, a collaboration with the Rod Library that enhances the resources and environment for learning in a model media center and library setting.
- **A consolidated Office of Graduate Studies and Research** that solidifies and supports a growing graduate curriculum.

It's been, as they say, a heavy lift. And while these highlights tell part of the story, they don't capture it all. Throughout all the change and preparation, our faculty and staff have continued doing what they do best: showing up every day to support student success.

We celebrated a record number of doctoral graduates in May, launched new micro-credentials through the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education, and managed a growing number of pre-service teacher placements with our PK-12 school partners, driven by expanding online programs.

As we move forward, we're embracing a broader, more inclusive vision of education — one that builds on our proud past in teacher preparation while stretching beyond for a bold future. With our updated organizational structure and deeper collaboration across disciplines, the College of Education is positioned to support learning across the lifespan — not only in PK-12 classrooms, but in all the places education happens. Undergraduate teacher education remains our foundation, and we will continue to meet the needs of practicing teachers, career changers and adult learners through our strong graduate programs and emerging pathways.

We believe the UNI Sesquicentennial Celebration theme, "Tradition Meets Tomorrow" perfectly encapsulates who we are today. With a legacy tied to our very origins as a university, we're focused on the future, ready to meet changing times and changing needs.

With that momentum behind us, we invite you to help shape our future. Join us as we begin to write the next chapter of the College of Education.

**Colleen Mulholland**  
Dean, College of Education



## UNI TEACHER EDUCATION

MORE THAN  
**2,000**  
undergraduate teaching majors\*

**1** IN **4**  
UNI students are teaching majors

**23** MAJORS | **20** MINORS  
**1** CERTIFICATE

**1** IN **8**  
UNI undergraduates is an elementary education major

### LEADING MAJORS\*

Elementary education (1,003)  
Social studies and history (188)  
Music education (145)  
Physical education (126)  
English teaching (105)  
Art education (99)

\*FALL 2024



# TRANSFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION

Incoming freshman **Lucy Varney** joined hundreds of students this fall, embarking on a journey she's long dreamed of: becoming a Panther-prepared teacher.

At the University of Northern Iowa, expectations are high. She's joining the largest teacher education program in Iowa, dating back to UNI's origins in 1876. What she'll experience, though, will be different. And better.

The Dike-New Hartford graduate is part of an incoming class whose members are the first to benefit from a transformed, ready-for-tomorrow teacher preparation experience. Fall semester marked the implementation of a thoughtfully redesigned curriculum – the most comprehensive update in 20 years. For more than 200 UNI Teacher Education

faculty, administrators and staff, it's the culmination of a collaborative focus for change.

For Varney and her peers, this significant update offers the potential for more timely completion of degrees across the spectrum of teaching majors, enhanced relevance and a refined experience to better position future teachers for continued success.

*Pictured with Lucy Varney, Class of 2029, are faculty and staff who were among those helping transform teacher education curriculum: (left to right) Mike Tate, advising; David Hernández-Saca, faculty; Mandie Sanderman, placements and assessment; and Megan Balong, clinical faculty.*



Three key updates

Driven by a 2022 charge from Provost **José Herrera**, academic deans and the Teacher Education Executive Council, the revitalized curriculum is grounded by the four components of the Educator Preparation Program’s conceptual

framework: professional coursework, content, methods and clinical experience.

Today’s curriculum is now more consistent across all majors and offers a flexibility and adaptability that benefits both students and faculty. Key updates include:

- The **pairing of required methods courses with a new clinical internship model**
- An **overhaul of the common core of courses, now known as Educator Essentials**
- A **more balanced emphasis on both content and methods** coursework

“This effort represents the best of what collaboration can achieve — real, lasting change for teacher preparation at UNI,” says **Colleen Mulholland**, dean of the College of Education and co-chair of the steering committee that coordinated the intensive effort. “Together, we’re cementing our legacy of excellence in teacher education.”

Expanding an essential foundation

A need for a more flexible framework drove the effort to revitalize the professional coursework for UNI Teacher Education.

For years, seven courses served as the professional core sequence required of all teacher education students. With the introduction of Educator Essentials — the new name for these foundational courses — students now have 26 topics to choose from within six categories, such as “social context of learning,” “effective pedagogy” and “the professional educator.”

One three-credit class is required per category. The selections — now taught by a broad array of faculty from across all colleges — provide

a foundation with general and specialized areas of focus.

“Our students gain by having more options based on schedules and needs — and it helps keep them on track and moving toward their degree,” says **Benjamin Forsyth**, College of Education associate dean of undergraduate studies and teacher education. “As for faculty, more departments will be teaching these courses and faculty can lean into their areas of expertise instead of teaching the same standard course each semester.”

Students, particularly secondary education majors, will also find greater balance and consistency among majors in requirements between the subject coursework — such as math, science, music — and the methods of teaching courses.

In all aspects of the curriculum, there is specific alignment with UNI’s Teacher Education Conceptual Framework, the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners rules and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Standards. Each conceptual anchor now has student learning outcomes (SLO) identified and tied to these standards and rules.

“As the educational context shifts, SLO assessment is going to allow us to add new components and/or courses to meet the needs of our education students,” says **Sarah Vander Zanden**, head, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education. Overall, she adds, “We can be innovative and

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The introduction of an updated curriculum for UNI Teacher Education served as a springboard for deeper dialogue with local school districts — critical partners in professional education.

With the launch of a new internship model, the College of Education — which manages clinical placement agreements — saw an opportunity for greater engagement, balance and collaboration with districts in and around the Cedar Valley.

This led to two workshops and face-to-face meetings this past spring with superintendents, principals, curriculum coordinators and mentor teachers from 15 districts. College faculty and staff reviewed the upcoming curricular changes and the new approach to placements. They also welcomed input on how clinical experiences could better mutually benefit everyone involved.

Improving partnerships & placements

At an April workshop, **Becky Wilson Hawbaker**, head, Department of Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, outlined goals to improve partnerships and the placement experience:

- Provide support to mentor teachers in ways that lighten their loads
- Offer leadership, reflection and professional learning for mentor teachers
- Support student interns academically, behaviorally and emotionally
- Enhance learning for all students
- Bring fresh ideas and resources to the classroom
- Align pedagogy, curriculum and management strategies

“These efforts benefit both our school partners and our students. We want to support our partners while giving our students a professional education that should result in strong new teachers ready for success and prepared to become valuable colleagues once hired,” Hawbaker says.

Flexibility in learning

Increased credit hours for the internship course create flexibility for additional learning through activities and more support for mentor teachers and schools. UNI students might help plan a family literacy night, support 1:1 tutoring — or even take a lunch duty shift.

“Who wouldn’t benefit from adult volunteers helping around the school?” asks Hawbaker. “These real-world experiences not only support schools, but also deepen our students’ understanding of teaching, benefiting UNI Teacher Education as well.”

Attendees also discussed alternative models, such as more embedded placements, like the professional development school model used with several Waterloo elementary schools. Interns might gain broader experience through instructional rounds or interactions with other classrooms, support services or special programs.

Other topics included the selection and orientation of mentor teachers and balancing placements across districts, including internships and student teaching, particularly in local rural districts.

Though still early, the renewed dialogue signals promising new directions for UNI Teacher Education. Partner feedback reinforced the shared interest in purposeful partnerships, greater support and communications for teachers who mentor, and quality experiences that reflect the best teaching practices.

**Justin Stockdale** (’98, BA; ’01, MAE), superintendent of Dike-New Hartford Community School District, appreciated the outreach, especially as a rural district.

“I really like the concept of getting students real-world, organic experiences and the changes will do just that,” Stockdale says. “Our school district has opened its doors for years and supports field experience and those needing a student teaching placement. Being invited to the table validated all the hard work that’s gone into supporting those students.”

“These real-world experiences not only support schools, but also deepen our students’ understanding of teaching, benefiting UNI Teacher Education as well.”

UNI TEACHER EDUCATION

200+

faculty and staff across five colleges (including online education)

Clinical Experiences (2024-25):

2,434 field experiences (previous Level 1, 2, 3)

313,877 hours in clinical experiences (all placements)

949 student placements for 525 student teachers

45

classes with clinical experiences before student teaching

Coursework Updates with Transformation:

95

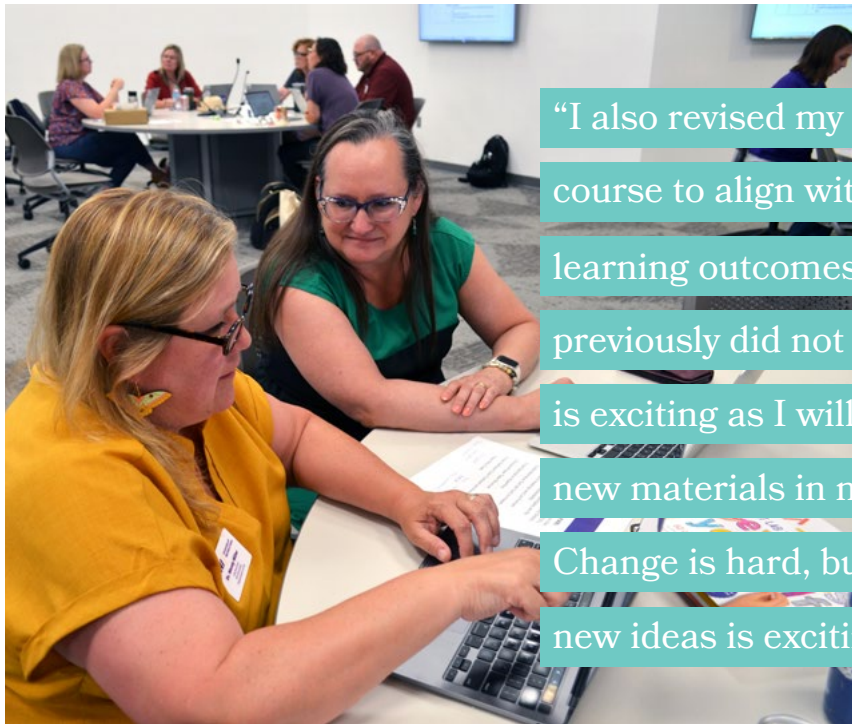
new or revised courses

34

program revisions

MOVING FROM 7 CORE COURSES TO 26 EDUCATOR ESSENTIALS





Wendy Miller, left, and Becky Wilson Hawbaker

“I also revised my methods course to align with new student learning outcomes, a few that I previously did not teach. That is exciting as I will have fresh new materials in my courses. Change is hard, but learning new ideas is exciting!”

flexible with the framework put forward. This allows for change and that is responsive education.”

#### A new model for clinical experience

With curricular approval last fall, the focus turned toward the intricacies of implementation, particularly the new approach to clinical experiences and the linked methods courses.

Many alumni are familiar with the four prior levels of field experience — Levels 1-4, including student teaching. The new model is partly a response to a growing trend: many first-year and transfer students enter UNI having already met the requirements for an initial 10 hours of observation in a classroom.

The faculty also saw benefits to integrating classroom experience with methods courses during the same semester, bridging theory with practice in real time.

A new three-step model emerged:

- **Clinical Internship 1**, a beginning internship paired with a methods course
- **Clinical Internship 2**, an advanced internship, with a similar pairing
- Student teaching

An elective course remains available for those who need those initial hours of experience.

“Pairing methods courses with internships allows students to learn while doing, with real-time feedback from experts,” says Forsyth. “We purposefully chose this approach and believe this only strengthens the depth of field experience for which UNI is well known.”

An added benefit: internships now carry three credit hours instead of one — better reflecting student time and effort and building in flexibility for faculty as well.

“In the previous model, I had limited time to proactively teach and had an overreliance on sidebar conversations, debriefing in classrooms and online feedback to make up the difference,” says **Becky Wilson Hawbaker**, who coordinates internship experiences as part of her role.

“When I sat down to map out how much more time I will have for the Internship 1 seminar, supervision in classrooms and support of the methods course, it felt like a synergistic miracle,” she continues.

As implementation drew closer, teams of faculty representing the internship and methods part of the collaboration began connecting. **Megan Balong**, clinical associate professor, and **Elizabeth Hughes**, math education professor and current educator preparation program faculty chair, piloted paired coursework in the spring semester. “Their

structures and experiences helped inform other teams as they prepared for fall,” Hawbaker says.

In May, about 35 UNI faculty and staff gathered for the first of two retreats to finalize alignment among teams of faculty who view their roles as co-teaching in the new model. In addition to reviewing various processes and tools, they worked together to create a consistent framework across syllabi, policies, assessments and assignments.

Hawbaker was among the attendees, working with **Wendy Miller**, professor of art education and her methods partner for internship experiences she coordinates. “Teaching is so much more fun as a team!” Hawbaker says.

“I will be able to co-teach with Becky and be more directly involved in the internship experience,” Miller notes. “I also revised my methods course to align with new student learning outcomes, a few that I previously did not teach. That is exciting as I will have fresh new materials in my courses. Change is hard, but learning new ideas is exciting!”

“Now students are not just ‘completing hours,’ but are gaining vital experience in applying what they have learned in methods,” says **Mandie Sanderman**, College of Education assistant dean of assessment and clinical experiences during the ramp up to implementation. “They are then able to debrief with their classmates and professors regarding their experience, allowing

for greater reflection and growth.”

As these final touches were being planned, professional and faculty advisors worked with current students in the spring to update plans of study. This led to questions, like: “Will this add more? How is this better?”

“When students realized it’s a change, but not drastic in terms of combinations of classes, length of time or a load, they were relieved and pumped,” says **Jenny Connolly**, College of Education director of advising.

#### An unwavering commitment

The re-energized curriculum reflects a myriad of refinements and adjustments, large and small, meant to secure a legacy and enrich the experience of today’s students. Through it all, a sincere adherence to a mantra of “accessibility, flexibility and adaptability” kept the focus on an outcome meant to benefit all — faculty and staff behind the program, future students, future teachers, future employers and the communities served.

Forsyth says the process has led to stronger interactions and communications among faculty, advisors across campus, on-campus partners like admissions and the registrar’s office as well as PK-12 and community college partners off campus. “Staying actively up-to-date with each of these groups remains a major priority,” says Forsyth.

“The changes represent an exciting modernization of our preparation of Iowa’s teachers at UNI,” says

**Jennifer McNabb**, professor of math education. “The curricular processes involved the energies and input of faculty across campus and represent the partnerships and collaboration that exemplify UNI’s student-centered approach to program design.”

She adds: “Our work was inspired in part by conversations with our alumni who have related their experiences in Iowa’s classrooms. I think they will find these changes capable of producing well-trained and job-ready future colleagues.”

“We want great teachers to join great teachers in the field,” says Vander Zanden, citing UNI Teacher Education alumni. “Some of the names of things have changed, but the ongoing commitment to quality and the focus on both theory and practice is unwavering.”



## STATE APPROVAL EXTENDS EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

A nearly two-year process culminated in May with UNI’s Educator Preparation Program (EPP) receiving unanimous approval by the Iowa State Board of Education for full re-accreditation.

The state’s largest EPP coordinates the preparation of more than 2,250 undergraduate and graduate students in more than 20 undergraduate teaching majors and six graduate degrees leading to Iowa licensure.

“To be re-accredited recognizes the quality of a program that has served as the foundation for UNI from its origins nearly 150 years ago,” says José Herrera, provost and executive vice president. “As a program, we’re in great shape to continue to help meet the workforce needs of Iowa in all the key professions this program supports.”

The curricular update helped meet expectations for re-accreditation, says College of Education Dean Colleen Mulholland. “Driven by our approach to the updated curriculum, its implementation has naturally led to process, structural and communication adjustments which better position us to support students, faculty and partners in PK-12 education.”

The accreditation covers five academic areas of study: undergraduate teaching, administration, school counseling, school psychology and speech-language pathology. The next state review occurs in the 2030-2031 academic year.





# NEW ALIGNMENT, NEW DIRECTIONS

Synergy. Balance. Flexibility. Rejuvenation.

Faculty, staff and leadership chose these words to describe the impact of a newly aligned departmental structure, which went into effect July 1 for the College of Education.

In moving from five academic departments to four, the college begins a new chapter. Importantly, it's more than a reshuffling of people and programs, says **Ron Rinehart**, current head of the Department of Learning, Leadership and Community and a member of the core COE Alignment planning team.

"It's about clarity of purpose, interdisciplinarity of effort and creating a foundation," he says.

At the fall all-college retreat in 2023, University of Northern Iowa Provost **José Herrera** charged the college to reimagine the college structure following the departure of several academic programs to the new School of Health

and Human Sciences in the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences.

"The remaining structure was unbalanced among five departments," says **Colleen Mulholland**, dean, College of Education. "We recognized this as an opportunity to improve efficiencies and collaborations within the college while also addressing inefficiencies in operations and support of our mission to prepare future educators, administrators and professionals."

Two years later, the college is moving forward with a newly aligned structure. In April, the Iowa Board of Regents approved the new department names, and the college announced new departmental leadership:

- Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, led by **Becky Wilson Hawbaker**.
- Elementary and Middle Level Education, led by **Robin Dada**.

- Learning, Leadership and Community, led by **Ron Rinehart**.
- Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education, led by **Sarah Vander Zanden**.

The outcome re-envisioned the connections among disciplines, based on faculty, staff and student input and guided by six principles of efficiency, interdisciplinarity, student-focused, balance, belonging and collaboration. It also reflects true change within the college.

## True change, new connections

Colleges, like most things, are dynamic. From the beginning, UNI has incorporated elements of teacher education into its structure. Initially, it was reflected in a collection of departments, some of which have roots back to the very origins of UNI. That changed with the university's reorganization in 1967 and the establishment in 1970 of the College of Education, along with its departmental structure. Ever since, there has been a commonality in that structure. With these changes, the realignment says farewell to the departments of:

- Curriculum and Instruction, a mainstay since 1970 and responsible for more graduates than any other department at UNI
- Special Education, added in 1979
- Teaching, with the college — and UNI — in some form since its inception in 1876
- Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies, the

most recent iteration of a set of disciplines represented by various integrations since 1970

- Health, Recreation and Community Services, the remaining vestige of the original college departments devoted to physical education for men and women

The new alignment maintains disciplines, but finds new homes and new synergies with a fit that better balances operational realities while maintaining academic integrity. That includes placement of clinical faculty who support professional education (internships, student teaching) in departments with the programs they support (early childhood, elementary and secondary education).

It also adds another key component: a horizontal layer to collaboration among departments, programs and faculty.

Moving forward, the college will intertwine a more purposeful, matrixed approach for collaboration and communication from a programmatic perspective. For example, periodic gatherings regarding curricula in elementary education will welcome faculty from its department as well as colleagues within other College of Education departments and associated faculty from across UNI. Implementation includes personnel and resources to support this vision.

"The matrix model represents opportunities for interdisciplinary work while providing a departmental home. We discovered how

intentional organizational design can support the values we care about most," Rinehart says, adding, "Nothing excites the faculty more than interdisciplinary work."

## A collaboration for rejuvenation

"I see this reorganization bringing more logical structure, enhancing interdisciplinary learning and fostering collaboration among faculty, benefiting students," says **Magda Galloway**, an associate professor of instruction who served on the planning committee. "We will be less in silos because the new structure encourages collaboration on a horizontal level between departments."

"The new structure better balances our human resources and more flexibly and strategically aligns faculty according to the programs they serve and the full range of their professional roles," says Hawbaker, while Dada notes: "Programs have potential new synergies that could bring new programs forward in areas not previously considered."

Those thoughts align with goals to ensure greater balance in workloads for support staff and administrators, better distribution of service responsibilities and refreshed opportunities for faculty and staff interactions internally and across campus.

The alignment work, in process at the same time the UNI Teacher Education curricular transformation effort was underway, offered its challenges, but also led to greater understanding of the expertise and opportunities

"We recognized this as an opportunity to improve efficiencies and collaborations within the college while also addressing inefficiencies in operations and support of our mission to prepare future educators, administrators and professionals."

for collaboration and research within the college.

"We have amazing colleagues and wonderful support staff. The energy around the work was pretty contagious — so many people joined the conversation and planning, and it moved quickly as a result," says Vander Zanden.

"The alignment process gave us a rare chance to come together across departments. Through thoughtful listening sessions, we shared concerns, exchanged ideas and learned from one another," says Galloway. "Being in the same space — talking, reflecting and collaborating — helped us see things from new angles. It was a valuable experience that not only shaped our work, but also strengthened our sense of community."

## A new chapter in education

Many see the potential for further innovation from new connections now forged. Dada cites synergies for interdisciplinary research and development of new programs, minors and micro-credentials. Rinehart notes a new program in development — e-sports administration — being built through new alliances within his department.

While the new structure most overtly impacts the College of Education community, its benefits extend externally as well.

"The better our internal divisions run, the better we can put our best efforts forward working with external partners," notes **Benjamin Forsyth**, associate dean of undergraduate studies and teacher education.

Hawbaker foresees collaboration that, in turn, supports the preparation of educators and other professionals. And Vander Zanden considers this a renewed opportunity — with new intradepartmental alliances — to connect to external communities, including alumni.

Through the process, Rinehart says, "We gained clarity — clarity grounded in who we are and what we value. This gives us a chance to modernize, update and attract new students.

"Alignment is more than an organizational structure. It's a commitment to a new chapter in the long story of education at UNI," he adds. "We are working to enhance the UNI brand as we continue to lead in preparing educators and community leaders for today's world."





## Educational Foundations & Professional Experiences (EFPE)

Becky Wilson Hawbaker, Head

### Programs:

- Educator Essentials
- Educational Studies, minor
- Secondary Education, MAT
- Undergraduate certificate (1)
- *Support Doctor of Education program*

### What attracted you to lead this new department?

EFPE is the cornerstone, capstone and additional tower of UNI's teacher education program. The Educator Essentials courses are what all teaching majors take as their foundation, while professional experiences like Internship 1 and 2 build on that foundation, and student teaching is the capstone experience to complete preparation to teach. In addition, our department offers a tower of a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) to add graduate-level teacher education onto a structure built on content expertise, allowing those with BAs in secondary content areas to come back for both a master's degree and teacher licensure.

### What is your initial hope and focus?

I'm excited about new collaborations and synergies we can achieve both within and across new departments. I am perhaps more excited about the horizontal, cross-departmental structures as I am about the vertical departmental structures. We definitely need both for success.

### What is the "beginning of the story" for EFPE?

Our EFPE crew are sadly leaving some valued former colleagues and happily joining other new ones. We are working on bringing together the best of our former departmental cultures and identities and learning more about each other personally and professionally. We are hard at work building our new courses and internships for fall implementation and ongoing revisions.



## Elementary & Middle Level Education (EMLE)

Robin Dada, Head

### Programs:

- Elementary Education, BA, MAE, minor
- Middle Level Dual Major, BA
- Social Studies, minor
- Transformative Education, MAE
- Graduate certificate (1)
- *Support Doctor of Education program*

### What attracted you to lead this new department?

The EMLE department, although highly connected to the other new departments, has the opportunity to establish connections to other programs formally and also to departments and programs that we had previously not considered. The implementation of the new curricular program will also influence the way we prepare future elementary and middle level teachers.

### What is your initial hope and focus?

My hope for the EMLE department is that we define a path that prepares all elementary teachers to teach all students, creating schools and classrooms where students thrive.

### What is the "beginning of the story" for EMLE?

We are a faculty of creative problem-solvers with the capacity to think and dream outside of the box while envisioning the best and then finding the way to get there.

"Programs have potential new synergies that could bring new programs forward in areas not previously considered."



## Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education (LESE)

Sarah Vander Zanden, Head

### Programs:

- Early Childhood Education, BA, MAE, minor
- Literacy Education, MAE, minor
- Special Education, minors
- School Library Studies, MA
- Graduate certificates & endorsements (14)
- *Support Doctor of Education program*

### What attracted you to lead this new department?

The group — excellent colleagues, interesting interconnections and a chance to support faculty and students in new ways. After working with the Educator Preparation Program community and curricular transformation process, it felt like a good chance to focus — renewal from a different perspective.

### What is your initial hope and focus?

To develop an understanding of who we are and build toward something we want to be, together. It's important to honor what we bring to the group and see how that makes our research and teaching stronger.

### What is the "beginning of the story" for LESE?

Our department has interdisciplinary connections in many ways. We have frequently noticed this, but now it is at the forefront and, with a new grouping, there is space for a different path. The faculty in LESE are invested in understanding who learners are and how we can elevate their strengths and curiosity to be successful societal contributors.



## Learning, Leadership & Community (LLC)

Ronald Rinehart, Head

### Programs:

- Instructional Design and Learning Technologies, MA
- Principalship, ASC, MAE
- Recreation, Tourism & Nonprofit Leadership, BA, MA
- Superintendency, ASC
- Teacher Leadership for International Educators, MA
- Post-secondary Education: Student Affairs, MA
- School Psychology, MAE, EdS
- Undergraduate certificates (4), graduate certificates (6)
- Social and Emotional Learning, minor
- *Support Doctor of Education program*

### What attracted you to lead this new department?

I was attracted to the chance to shape and lead a department focused on fostering a collaborative culture, valuing innovation and advancing human-centered design.

### What is your initial hope and focus?

Picture a large Venn diagram in your mind. I hope that faculty will focus on the areas of overlap, leveraging those connections to create meaningful and relevant learning experiences for our students, rather than concentrating on gaps.

### What is the "beginning of the story" for LLC?

What excites me most are the alignment tools we can use to break down traditional silos, and co-create innovative programs that serve our students.

"We gained clarity — clarity grounded in who we are and what we value. This gives us a chance to modernize, update and attract new students."



# Graduate Education on the Rise

As the new academic year unfolds, working professionals and adult learners have more options than ever to advance their careers, knowledge and expertise at the University of Northern Iowa.

What's driving this growth in the College of Education?

For one, all but two of its graduate programs — including those in principalship,

superintendency and the new Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in secondary education — are now fully or mostly online. The proportion and number of online programs within the curriculum represent a shift that attracts today's adult learners — many placebound, working professionals who seek, even demand, such flexibility.

Another change: more graduate programs now operate on an annual

admissions cycle. Some now even admit students every term. Previously, most programs operated in a cohort model and admitted students every other year.

The tremendous growth in the Doctor of Education (EdD) program reflects these new directions. Between a transition to a mostly online program five years ago and a move to annual enrollment, its numbers have risen dramatically. Ninety-eight

students were enrolled last spring, up from a typical annual average of about 30. This boost supports overall growth and stability within the college. The college also boasted 385 graduate students overall, a point of pride, with a record-setting 30 EdD graduates being hooded on the commencement stage in May.

### A new office to recruit and retain

Supporting this change is a new Office of Graduate Studies and Research, led by Associate Dean **Soh Meacham**. For recruitment, it complements and supplements the efforts of partners in UNI's online education office, part of the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education, who assist the college in online-based recruitment, matriculation and enrollment. The new office coordinates a centralized approach within the College of Education to engage with prospective students for both residential and online programs.

"We're really focused on the adult learner and making sure that when they reach out to our office, they're getting timely, responsive, accurate communication that helps them in a more personalized way," says **Cheryl Meller**, graduate recruitment and event coordinator.

Part of the office's mission is to remove barriers that prevent students from earning advanced degrees at UNI. From the initial stages of research to program completion, faculty and staff

## NEW ONLINE OPTIONS IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

### Doctor of Education

- Interdisciplinary studies academic emphasis

### Master's Programs

- Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in secondary education for career changers interested in teaching in middle and high school classrooms
- Master of Arts in Education (MAE) in transformative education, for current educators seeking tools to lead change in their schools and communities through teaching methods, student engagement and problem-solving skills that enhance learning and drive improvement
- Master of Arts in instructional design and learning technologies, a revamped program to prepare instructional designers for settings ranging from corporations to schools to e-learning

### Advanced Studies Certificate

- Director of Special Education

### Micro-credentials

A new initiative overseen by the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education increases micro-credentialing options for educators. Online graduate-level endorsements and certificates offer flexibility for practicing teachers and professionals to add credentials — most of which can be stacked toward a master's degree. New graduate certificate offerings now in place:

- |                                              |                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education* | • Special and Inclusive Education for Young Learners*         |
| • Childhood Diversity and Learning*          | • Strategist I Mild/Moderate K-8*                             |
| • Instructional Design*                      | • Strategist I Mild/Moderate Graduate Certificate 5-12*       |
| • Learning Technologies*                     | • Strategist II Behavioral Disorder/Learning Disability K-12* |
| • Literacy Leadership Reading K-8*           | • Strategist II Intellectual Disability K-12*                 |
| • Online Teaching*                           | • Transformative Education*                                   |
| • PK-K Early Childhood Special Education     |                                                               |

*\*Qualify as stackable certificates*

For more information, visit [microcredentials.uni.edu](https://microcredentials.uni.edu).

work to ensure a seamless experience.

"We really pride ourselves on the education and experience students get in the College of Education," Meller says. "A lot of the work outside of recruitment has focused on that experience, like what we can do to make the admissions process simpler."

For example, must a letter of recommendation always come from a former professor? For students who earned their undergraduate degrees 15 years ago, those relationships may no longer exist. The office is evaluating such requirements to ensure prospective students feel welcomed from the start.

For current students, the office is also reimagining final project requirements to expand opportunities for scholarly and professional contributions. While traditional dissertations and thesis projects remain valued options, capstone or culminating projects may serve as an alternative. The



# TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION MAE OFFERS ACCESS, FLEXIBILITY

The new transformative education MAE is already making an impact. This stackable degree enables students pursuing additional endorsements, certificates or specializations to design a customized master’s program in consultation with their advisor.

Four core courses comprising the certificate are available every semester and fully online. Students can take these alongside — or before or after — their specialization courses, offering maximum flexibility to meet their career goals.

One of the professors who helped develop the program is **Sunah Chung**, assistant professor of literacy education.

“I’ve always believed in the power of education to spark personal and social change, and this program felt like an opportunity to bring that vision into a graduate context,” she says. “From the beginning, our faculty team engaged in some really thoughtful conversations about what transformative education looks like, not just for students, but for us as educators and lifelong learners.”

Stackable credentials and asynchronous course formats ensure flexibility within the course design. This structure has made graduate study far more accessible for in-service teachers already managing demanding schedules. It has also expanded the program’s appeal to individuals who may not have otherwise considered graduate school.

One student currently enrolled is **Jill Louzek**, a student and a supervising teacher in the Marion Home School Assistance Program in Marion, Iowa. She is part of the program’s first cohort. Louzek was drawn to the program in part because it’s offered entirely online, and because she has long wanted to complete her master’s degree. Other institutions wouldn’t accept credits from the late 1990s – when she first began graduate studies – but UNI did as part of its “Return to UNI” program.

She’s had such a positive experience that she’s now encouraging others to consider the program, especially those who have put their degrees on hold due to life’s demands.

“Everyone is blown away that UNI is making this possible and meeting every need that I had,” Louzek says. “Transformative education is not just memorizing facts and spitting them back out, but learning and helping students become the future leaders we need them to be. It’s neat to see education turning around to see how we can best benefit students.”



Maxine Davis, Soh Meacham, Cheryl Meller

team continues to explore options that better align with the skills students will need in their post-graduate contexts.

“We really celebrate our team endeavor in terms of providing our students with what they really need,” says Meacham.

Another key area of focus is enhancing quality mentoring by promoting more guided advising from faculty members.

“We believe mentoring is related to recruitment,” says Meacham. “Providing meaningful experiences to our students increases the pool for our prospective students.”

This work matters deeply, as Iowa needs more teachers and education professionals with advanced education.

“We can’t forget that the end result is somebody who goes into the school system, higher education or other organizations and impacts lives,” says Meller. “That’s an important cherry on the top — not only seeing what they do here at UNI, but also what they do once they leave the walls of our institution.”

## New programs, new pathways

The growth in graduate education is also driven by new program offerings. Recently,

the college introduced a new Master of Arts (MA) program in instructional design and learning technologies, aimed at serving instructional designers working in corporate and industry settings. Updated master’s programs in early childhood education, literacy education and school library studies are also in development.

Additionally, new graduate certificate programs in special education, literacy education and early childhood education became available this year. Most of these programs support in-service teachers seeking new endorsements.

With another new graduate certificate, UNI became one of the first in the nation to offer coursework specific to artificial intelligence in education. An additional bonus: this is one of a set of new stackable graduate certificates which can help complete a new Master of Arts in Education (MAE) in transformative education (see sidebar).

**Robin Dada**, head of the Department of Elementary and Middle Level Education, believes all of these efforts make the future of graduate education bright.

“As we continue to develop models to deliver educational opportunities to more people

in Iowa and beyond, more of Iowa’s workforce has access to graduate education, growing new skills for their professions, careers and vocations that will make a difference to the Iowa economy and quality of life in Iowa,” she says.

Dada also notes that many students began a traditional college degree, but life circumstances prevented them from finishing on campus. Some gave up on higher education altogether.

“As higher education builds new pathways and develops new access to continuing

education, new ways to deliver learning opportunities and support learners at a distance are born,” she says.

Some of those same students are now completing their degrees and stepping into new leadership roles in their communities, helping to improve the quality of life at the local level.

“It’s rewarding to see our graduates reaching their goals and ‘pushing the envelope’ as they break new boundaries and make opportunities come to life right where they are,” Dada adds.

## ALUM ANDY MIEHE:

## IT ALL BEGAN WITH A FLYER

Shortly after earning his bachelor’s degree in history teaching from UNI in 2001, **Andy Miehe** landed a social studies position at Waterloo East High School. One day, while in the mail room, he was about to toss a flyer for UNI’s educational leadership master’s program into the recycling bin.

“A veteran teacher stopped me and said, ‘Hey, what are you doing? You know you will never get any younger. You should look into it,’” Miehe recalls. “Crazy as that sounds, it was my start on the road to my master’s degree.”

He completed the degree in 2005 and became a department head, managed the summer school program, and served on the building leadership team at East — all within just a few years of starting his teaching career.

Miehe then moved into an assistant principal and athletic director role at Bunger Middle School in Evansdale and was later promoted to principal.

In the spring of 2015, while attending a conference as part of the Advanced Studies Certificate in superintendency he was working on at UNI, Miehe received a message: Waterloo West High School was beginning a search for a new head principal, and he was encouraged to apply.

“The stars seemed aligned at that point,” Miehe says. “I was finishing my superintendent’s endorsement, our kids were getting older, I had been at Bunger for nine years and felt ready for whatever was next, and I had graduated from West, so that seemed kind of cosmic.”

This year marks Miehe’s 10th year in that role.

Along the way, Miehe also chose to pursue his Doctor of Education (EdD) as a way to push himself professionally and expand his skill set and understanding of all things related to education.

“The highlights for me were the lifelong relationships I developed with the fellow EdD cohort students and the faculty at UNI,” Miehe says. “We all spent a lot of time together either in person or virtually, and we became like a little family supporting each other in our research, pushing each other academically and sharing ideas, advice and opportunities.”

Ultimately, Miehe knows he’s a more adept instructional leader and analytical thinker because of the EdD program.

“I am better at what I do and happier doing it with the skills and knowledge gained from the program,” he says. “I really do feel that my time at UNI has prepared me to be a lasting contributor to the education world in the Cedar Valley and beyond.”





# A Shared Bond, A Special Legacy

*Generations of UNI educators can be found among the thousands of Panther alumni. For many families, that legacy is truly generational — beginning with relatives who earned two-year teaching certificates and continuing through second and third generations who earned bachelor's degrees and beyond.*

*For some families, it's a straight line: grandmother, mother, daughter. For others, it's a cousin, aunt, uncle or grandfather. And while elementary education finds common ground with many, the spectrum of teaching disciplines is evident in the variety of degrees received.*

*Several families shared snapshots of their unique ties to UNI and to the teaching profession. For each story, there are countless others — each with its own journey and set of memories. But all are connected by a shared bond: they are Panther teachers and educators who have inspired children across Iowa and beyond and left a lasting legacy.*

*As we launch the 150th anniversary of UNI, we begin with the profession that started it all: teaching.*

For UNI alumni, the purple passion runs deep and long — particularly for the teaching alumni whose roots trace back to 1876. And for good reason. Throughout its history, UNI's reputation in teacher education has made it an easy choice for prospective students, generation after generation.

"I knew it was a strong education school, and I knew my aunt and grandmother had gone there. I didn't look at or apply to any other schools. UNI was my one and only," says **Rachel Martin**, ('00 BA, elementary education), whose grandmother, **Mary Jean (Quinn) Martin** started her family's teaching tradition with a teaching certificate earned in 1948.



*Rachel Martin family: (front row) Debbie Martin-Feddersen (attended UNI), grandmother Mary Jean Quinn Martin ('48, teaching certificate), aunt Vicki Martin Klein ('76 BA, elementary education); (back row) cousin Linda Martin Sneed ('02, BA, industrial technology education); Rachel Martin ('00, BA, elementary and Spanish education), cousin Heather Martin ('97, BA), and cousin Laura Martin Walbeck ('03, BA, elementary education).*

**Doxie (Godden) Weber** ('71 BA, elementary education), shares similar thoughts: "My uncle Keith ('51 BA, science education) always knew he wanted to be a teacher, and Iowa State Teachers College is where you went in Iowa if you wanted to be one."

Within six families who responded to a survey asking about generations of teachers, 22 teachers represented 10 different teaching majors, with half of them in elementary education (counting those who earned teaching certificates). Ten more non-teaching UNI graduates complete their family circles.

Since 1876, UNI has produced more than 60,000 teaching alumni, including thousands from the College of Education. Though representing a tiny fraction of these thousands of alumni, their thoughts mirror the memories of many. For these UNI graduates, the word "legacy" carries genuine weight as alumni of the state's largest teacher education program.

"It's pride. I get to say this is something that's been in my family for decades. And I love meeting other teachers who say they went to UNI," Martin says. "I love being part of that legacy and sharing with my current students about why they should go to UNI. I still keep in contact with my own friends from UNI. I have so many positive memories from being there."

**Emily Borcharding**, ('07 BA, math and Spanish teaching, '12 MAE, postsecondary education: student affairs) followed in the teaching footsteps of her mother **Raelene Borcharding** ('73 BA, English education) and her grandmother, **Mabel Siefkas Morgan**, who earned a teaching certificate in 1944.

The UNI legacy, she says, "means we are well prepared — and there is a network and community to go to for support if we need it. UNI is such a strong community and such a supportive and quality teaching network."

"It's something of which I'm very proud," says **Ruth Koenigsberg Maxedon** ('72 BA, elementary education). She, like her sister **Ladine Koenigsberg Elwood** ('78 BA, elementary education) followed her mother **Loretta Schwartz Koenigsberg**, ('47,



*Raelene Borcharding ('73, English education) and her brother, Eugene Morgan ('71, math teaching).*



*Emily Borcharding ('07, math and Spanish teaching) and her teaching team at the 2025 Black Hawk County Gold Star Teachers celebration.*

"It's pride. I get to say this is something that's been in my family for decades. And I love meeting other teachers who say they went to UNI," Martin says. "I love being part of that legacy and sharing with my current students about why they should go to UNI. I still keep in contact with my own friends from UNI. I have so many positive memories from being there."

teaching certificate) to UNI. Her daughter, **Kristianne Maxedon Buck**, earned her master's in teaching English to students of other languages (TESOL) at UNI.

"We three generations really enjoyed our time at UNI with the excellent education for our careers and the friendships we made. It's been a treasure to have gone through the university.



## A TEACHING CERTIFICATE BEGINS A CAREER

**Florence (O'Mara) Koch**, from Cambridge, Iowa, has a story like so many Panther teaching alums “of a certain age.”

She graduated from high school at age 16. Daughter of a former teacher and librarian, she went to the Iowa State Teachers College, aided by a scholarship her high school superintendent helped her earn. She completed her two-year teaching certificate in upper elementary education in 1954.

Koch married, eventually earned her BA from Drake University and taught for 26 years. In Iowa, that included positions in State Center and Colo — teaching all grades K-7 — before she moved to Arizona in 1986. There she taught in a one-room schoolhouse up a mountain road from Tucson at the top of Mt. Lemmon, which served the local community and resort families. Through the years, she also worked as a legal assistant, volunteered at an art museum, and, always active, served as president of the Women's Golf Association in Arizona.

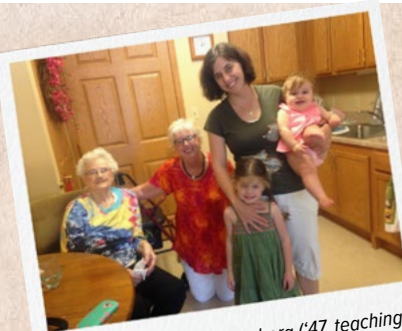
“A lot of change came around in my lifetime,” she says, noting the first computers at school. She was known for welcoming challenges. “One day, one teacher came to my room and said, ‘Florence, I have seven boys beyond my need this year, would you take them? I was told if anyone can, Florence can.’ And I did, for several years.”

Now 93, Koch fondly remembers good professors and student teaching in Waterloo. “Cedar Falls is a great school. I always felt at home, felt very good being there, loved it, and my family all came to see me graduate. It was really a great privilege to graduate from there. If I had lived closer, I would have tried to get my BA. I came back for my 50th with my ex-roommate, we just had a wonderful time,” she says.

Following Koch to UNI was her son **Jeff Koch** ('80 BA, history teaching) and granddaughter **Amanda Burns** ('10 BA).



Ladine Koenigsberg Elwood ('78, elementary education) and her mother Loretta.



Loretta Schwartz Koenigsberg Maxedon certificate), Ruth Koenigsberg Maxedon ('72, elementary education), and Kristianne Maxedon Buck ('07, MA, TESOL) with daughters Evelyn and Lyla.



about teaching. I learned a lot about the profession from him.”

Borcherding's mother Raelene always wanted to be an English teacher. “Reading, writing stories and diagramming sentences brought her happiness,” she says. For her grandmother, however, teaching was an opportunity among limited choices at a different time, in the 1940s. But she also loved what she chose.

“As one of 10 children, she and several of her sisters chose teaching as a post-Depression way of supporting themselves financially,” Borcherding says. “She loved teaching fifth grade and loved math. She thought she was pretty good at it; so good at it that she challenged a math professor to a tennis match. If she won, she received an A in his class. She lost the match, but did receive the A!”

### The right choice

Career trends ebb and flow. Even teaching, which contributes to society's educational foundation, has had its moments of flux. At these times, these teachers remind themselves and others of the moments that

encouraged them throughout their careers.

“When a parent would let me know that their child loved being in my class or loved doing a certain project or activity, those comments are heartwarming, to say the least. It makes a teacher feel appreciated,” says Weber.

“I don't think anything beats having students tell you at the end of their four years that you made a difference in their lives — that you challenged them and they've become doctors because of it, or that you've opened their eyes to career paths they'd never thought were for them, or that you simply just believed they could pass your class or even graduate,” says Yarrow. “That sort of tangible change is something undeniable. Those moments are the reason I know I made the right choice.”

As the 150th class enters UNI this fall, the next generation begins its journey to add to the legacy of UNI Teacher Education. Their forebears wish them well.

“Just keep growing and improving yourself,” Martin advises. “The teaching profession is always changing, and you have to be able to change with it.”



Allia Yarrow ('15, biology education) and her grandfather, Keith Yarrow ('63, mathematics teaching).

“I don't think anything beats having students tell you at the end of their four years that you made a difference in their lives — that you challenged them and they've become doctors because of it, or that you've opened their eyes to career paths they'd never thought were for them, or that you simply just believed they could pass your class or even graduate.”



# FINDING A FUTURE IN PHILANTHROPY

For the past seven years, **Adam Haselhuhn** has led fundraising efforts for cancer care as senior director of development at UnityPoint Health Des Moines.

So it's fitting that this past summer, he graduated with his master's degree in philanthropy and nonprofit development from UNI.

"I decided it was time to get a master's degree in order to take the next step in my career," Haselhuhn explains. "I knew that someday down the line, if I wanted to lead a department or organization, it would be beneficial to have that degree and the experience."

His time in the program

has been nothing short of impactful. He especially appreciates the opportunity to earn a degree from UNI online, while still being "in person" over Zoom.

"I've found the majority of the coursework to be incredibly practical and relatable to real life," Haselhuhn says. "I also was able to choose my own research area, which I'll be able to utilize at work. Long term, having a master's degree will open more doors and ensure I can have the career success I want to achieve."

Haselhuhn chose UNI for his advanced studies because of how much he enjoyed his undergraduate years at the university, when he

studied political science and communications. He initially picked UNI because it was "just right" in size.

"I wanted the big school experience, but the personalized education of a small college," he says.

As an undergrad, Haselhuhn served as student body president, a role that helped him develop many of the professional skills he still uses today. Being part of Greek Life in Sigma Phi Epsilon introduced him to many of his closest friends, and he even had the chance to meet the Dalai Lama and First Lady Michelle Obama when they visited campus.

"I have so many staff, faculty and administrators that were so influential in my college experience — and many that I keep in touch with to this day," Haselhuhn says. "In my 'extra' year of undergrad, I worked as the coordinator of the College Hill Partnership, which gave me real-world experience working with business leaders, university officials, government officials and the community to develop the College Hill neighborhood."

## Exploring philanthropy

After graduation, Haselhuhn wasn't sure what career path to take. At the encouragement of mentors at UNI, he explored the world of philanthropy. His first job was at Simpson College as part of the annual giving team. He later joined Central College, where he served as director of annual giving and stayed for five years, eventually becoming director of development.

Haselhuhn feels grateful that this is the field he landed in.

"I didn't even realize that philanthropy and fundraising for nonprofits was a career path," he explains. "I love having the opportunity to build genuine relationships with people to help them make a difference in their community."

Some of the highlights of his career are recent ones. This past year, Haselhuhn met Al Roker from NBC's "Today Show," who was the keynote speaker at Rally Against Cancer — the annual fundraising gala he oversees. Another milestone: being named a 40 Under 40 winner by the Association of Healthcare Philanthropy in 2023.

All these experiences have led to where Haselhuhn is now — at UnityPoint Health, making a meaningful impact on the lives of Iowans every single day through his work. With his master's degree, he'll be even better equipped to lead change.

"Wherever the future leads, I know I'll be prepared thanks to my two UNI degrees," he says.

# A REWARDING PATH TO RESEARCH

While working as a substance abuse counselor at an outpatient clinic in Davenport, Iowa, **Sean Austin** ('12, MAE; '14, EdS) noticed a troubling pattern.

"I was observing so many people, even in the short time I was there, coming through treatment and then returning again shortly thereafter after encountering further issues related to substances," he explains.

As someone whose job was to help those individuals, Austin felt he was either falling short or the system was.

This recurring issue inspired Austin to seek a deeper understanding. He had primarily been working with adults. Many of the conversations he had about their substance use history (which research supports) revealed that those with the most chronic addictions often started using substances early, often in middle school.

Austin decided he needed to work in the school system to address the problem at its roots and help young people avoid that trajectory.

In 2011, he enrolled in UNI's school psychology graduate program in the College of Education, in part because of the generous graduate assistantship support he received.

Austin started his studies around the same time **Nicki Skaar**, the school psychology program coordinator, began reworking the curriculum to make it more relevant,

specifically in helping students learn how to impact not just individuals but entire systems, like school districts. Austin particularly pointed to Skaar's systems course as instrumental in giving him a framework for reaching broader student populations.

## A turn to research

After earning his graduate degrees, Austin worked as a school psychologist with Heartland AEA for five years before starting his doctorate in special education at the University of Oregon. Upon graduating four years later, he was immediately hired as a research associate in the university's Educational and Community Supports research unit in the College of Education.

"I'm getting to work on the cutting edge of research on the problems of practice that I observed as a substance abuse counselor and a school psychologist," Austin says. "I have the opportunity to follow the ideas that I have and test them."

One recent project focused on reducing the use of exclusionary discipline in schools — an important yet often overlooked aspect of education, Austin shared. The project aimed to uncover ways to keep more students in school and better equipped to handle adversity.

For Austin, the work he's doing at the University of Oregon is a full-circle moment. He's now collaborating with renowned



"It set me up well for the rest of my career — the way they trained me to teach, the standard of professionalism they upheld — and helped me solidify who I wanted to be as a practitioner. I've tried to carry that through with my work as a researcher as well."

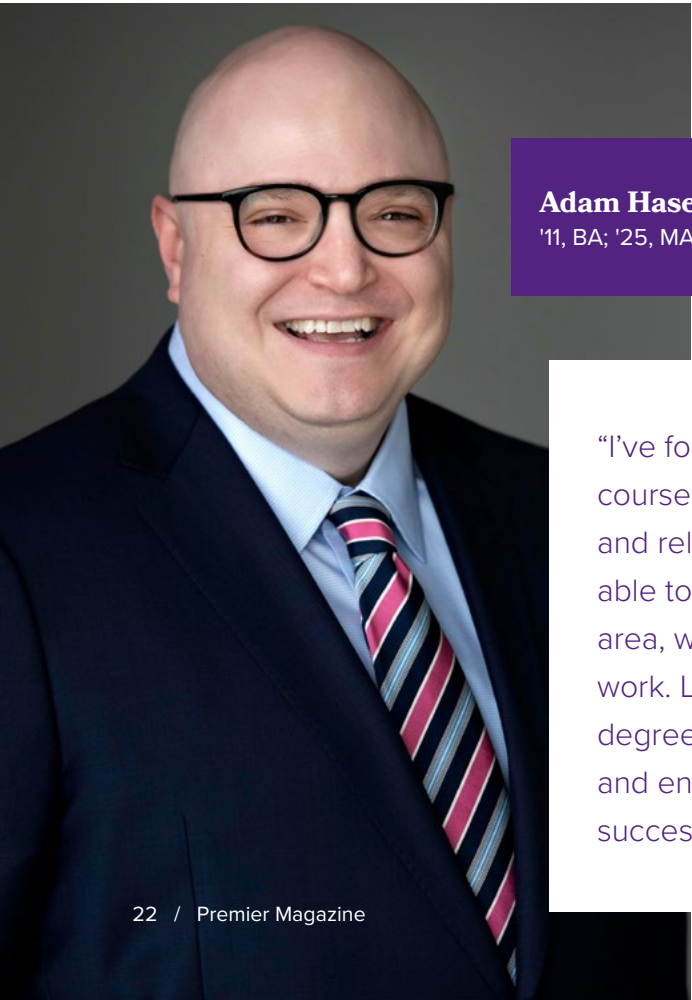
researchers in the field, including some he cited during his studies at UNI.

"It's really rewarding to be on the other side of it," he says. "I didn't realize I was going to do research, even going into my PhD, but I realized this was the right fit for me because I was going to school every time I saw a problem that needed to be solved."

Austin credits his time at UNI, particularly his work with Skaar, as foundational in shaping his understanding

of how society and systems function.

"The combination of coursework and in-field experience I got at UNI gave me a lot of confidence going into my initial interviews for school psych jobs," he says. "It set me up well for the rest of my career — the way they trained me to teach, the standard of professionalism they upheld — and helped me solidify who I wanted to be as a practitioner. I've tried to carry that through with my work as a researcher as well."



**Adam Haselhuhn**  
'11, BA; '25, MA

"I've found the majority of the coursework to be incredibly practical and relatable to real life. I also was able to choose my own research area, which I'll be able to utilize at work. Long term, having a master's degree will open more doors and ensure I can have the career success I want to achieve."





Lindsey Wilson  
‘09, BA

MAKING A  
MEANINGFUL  
IMPACT

Nebraska Teacher of the Year

Lindsey Wilson (‘09, BA) has always been drawn to creativity and learning about people. She’s also had a lifelong love of art. So when she arrived on UNI’s campus in the mid-2000s as an art major, it made perfect sense.

But to her surprise, an introductory education course sparked a new interest. As she explored art education, her path evolved into a dual major in elementary and middle level education with an art endorsement.

“With every practicum, I fell more in love with the profession,” Wilson says. “UNI offered a wide range of field experiences in different school settings, and I began to truly believe I could make a meaningful impact in the classroom thanks to the solid foundation I was building.”

Wilson began her career as a sixth grade math teacher in Omaha before stepping into the role of gifted and talented facilitator and magnet coordinator at her school. In that position, she helped launch the first-ever middle school zoo academy in partnership with Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium. She also led the science curriculum and organized the region’s largest middle school science fair.

Today, Wilson teaches seventh grade science, math and social studies at Bennington Public Schools in Bennington, Nebraska.

Recognition and rewards

Along the way, she’s been recognized with the Alice Buffett Outstanding Teacher Award, the Michele Ricard

Science Teacher Award, and most recently, she was named the 2025 Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

But even with the awards and recognition, one of the greatest highlights of Wilson’s teaching career has been supporting student science research.

“There’s nothing more rewarding than watching students light up as they explore topics they’re passionate about,” she says.

She and her students have traveled across the country for immersive research experiences that include days of hands-on investigation and discovery. She’s especially proud to have helped launch and lead her district’s very first science research team.

For Wilson, the heart of teaching is creating a classroom where every student feels like they belong.

“I always hoped for that kind of space as a student myself — one that’s welcoming, inspiring and full of possibility,” Wilson says. “As a teacher, I get to build that space every day. It’s about making students feel seen, heard and empowered to find their place in the world.”

Wilson credits UNI with giving her the tools to make that kind of impact.

“Like many new teachers, I was nervous when I first stepped into my own classroom, but I quickly realized how well-prepared I was,” she says. “The skills, knowledge, and experiences I gained at UNI continue to support me every day.”

IOWA REGIONAL  
TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

The Iowa Regional Teachers of the Year Award, created by the Iowa Department of Education, celebrates outstanding educators from nine regions across the state. In 2025, three College of Education alumni received this prestigious recognition. Each also was a finalist for the Iowa Teacher of the Year award.

**Blake Hammond** (‘00, BA, elementary and middle level)  
*Heartland Regional Teacher of the Year*  
*Science teacher*  
*Merrill Middle School, Des Moines Public Schools*

**Kevin Gartman** (‘15, BA, business teaching; ‘20, MAE/ASC principalship)  
*Central Rivers Regional Teacher of the Year*  
*Business teacher*  
*Montezuma Community School District*

**Susan (Susie) Stark** (‘00, BA, early childhood; ‘07, MA, elementary education)  
*Grant Wood Regional Teacher of the Year*  
*Second grade teacher*  
*Cedar Rapids Community School District*

CLASS  
NOTES

Class Notes are compiled from information sent in personally by alumni and from news releases. If you would like to share your news, scan the QR code or mail to UNI Alumni Association, 304 Commons, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0284.



Have you moved and need to update your mailing address? Send an email to [alumni@uni.edu](mailto:alumni@uni.edu) or call 319-273-2355 to update your information.

From July 1, 2024 to June 10, 2025

1980s

**‘88 Catherine (Plog) Leipold, BA, MA ‘95, ASC ‘95,** Buckingham, was named a finalist for the 2025 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. She is a geometry and International Baccalaureate mathematics teacher for grades 9-12 at Waterloo West High School.

**‘89 Lori Randall, BA, MA ‘95,** Osage, was named a recipient of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. She is retired from Lincoln Elementary School in Osage.

1990s

**‘91 Lisa Raine, BA, MA ‘95, ASC ‘97,** Vancouver, WA, retired from the Washington Education Association after 30 years of service as the labor union director for educators.

**‘91 Rodney Zehr, BA, MA ‘02,** Mason City, received the 2024 Outstanding Faculty Award from the Community Colleges for Iowa. He was nominated by North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City, Iowa.

**‘99 Mindy (Dugdale) Fisher, BA, MA ‘10,** Waterloo, received a 2025 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a special education teacher at Hansen Elementary School in Cedar Falls.

**‘99 Jason Lau, BA, MA ‘02,** San Rafael, CA, was appointed as trustee by the San Rafael City Schools Board of Education, effective 2/14/2025.

2000s

**‘00 Blake Hammond, BA,** Des Moines, was named the 2025 Heartland Regional Teacher of the Year. He is a science teacher at Merrill Middle School.

**‘00 Angela (Kuennen) Schneden, BA, MA ‘06,** Ankeny, was named a recipient of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. She teaches at Prairie Trail Elementary School in Ankeny.

**‘00 Susie Stark, BA, MA ‘07,** Marion, was named the 2025 Grant Wood Regional Teacher of the Year. She is a teacher at Viola Gibson Elementary School in Cedar Rapids.

**‘03 Quentin Hart, MA,** Waterloo, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Iowa Legislative Black Caucus. He serves as mayor of Waterloo.

**‘03 Kelli Snyder, BA, EdD ‘12,** Dunkerton, received the Educator of the Year Award from the Iowa Athletic Trainer’s Society 4/11/2025. She is an associate professor and program director of athletic training at UNI.

**‘04 Ellen (Staerk) Weishaar, BA, ASC ‘20,** Geneseo, IL, was named principal of Williams Middle School in the Davenport Community School District for the 2025-2026 school year.

**‘07 Emily Borcharding, BA, MA ‘12,** Cedar Falls, received a 2025 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a 6th-12th grade math and Virtual Academy teacher at Expo High School in Waterloo.

**‘08 Rachael (Halse) Holland, BA,** Cedar Rapids, was named one of the 40 Under 40 for 2024 by the Corridor Business Journal. She is vice president of growth and sales with AMPERAGE Marketing & Fundraising.

**‘08 Lindsey (Leonard) Wilson, BA,** Bennington, NE, was named the 2025 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. She is a science and social studies teacher at Bennington Middle School.

2010s

**‘13 Rachael (Swisher) Hoffman, BA,** Waterloo, was named one of the Cedar Valley’s 20 under 40 by the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier for 2024. She is a private wealth advisor with U.S. Bank Private Wealth Management.

**‘14 Amanda (Harris) El Hamdouni, BA,** Waterloo, received a 2025 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a first grade teacher at Orange Elementary School.

**‘15 Kevin Gartman, BA, MA ‘20, ASC ‘20,** Montezuma, was named the 2025 Central Rivers Regional Teacher of the Year. He is a high school and junior high business teacher with the Montezuma Community School District.

**‘16 Amanda Khader, BA, MA ‘17, EdS ‘19,** Des Moines, works at Magnolia Connection, a clinic in Norwalk providing psychological testing and therapy services for children.

**‘17 Shakari Baker Bruce, BA, BA ‘22, MA ‘25,** Waterloo, received a 2025 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a second grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary.



# THE NEXT TOMORROW



**Sunni Kegebein**  
Director of  
Development

sunni.kegebein@uni.edu  
319-273-7319

What an exciting time to support Panther Nation!

A year ago, we noted the University of Northern Iowa had already surpassed its initial goal of \$250 million for the *Our Tomorrow: The Campaign for UNI*.

A year later, we have gone above and beyond the stretch goal of a record-breaking \$300 million, thanks to wonderful benefactors like many of you.

I thank you. Our faculty and staff thank you. And most importantly, our students thank you.

Your support has played a critical role in sustaining the history, tradition, progress and impact that we celebrate as UNI launches its sesquicentennial celebration (1876-2026). With each gift, you have helped nurture the hopes and dreams of countless educators and school administrators, recreation and nonprofit professionals, teacher librarians, school psychologists, student affairs professionals and more.

With your continued support, the future promises more potential:

- **Equip the newly refreshed TEACH Studio**, a re-imagined, model media center now housing the Rod Library's youth collection in Schindler Education Center.
- **Strengthen the foundation for teacher preparation, placement and assessment** – including an exciting **new opportunity to support our mentor teachers** and school district partners.
- Make **rural education accessible and sustainable** through funding to extend the reach of graduate programs and support collaboration for professional development to improve practice and retention.
- Continue to **rally for funding to lessen the burden of the ultimate unpaid internship**: student teaching.

Most importantly, we want to help you match your goals with our needs. I often share a list of funding priorities in six categories: student scholarships, faculty and staff support, community outreach and partnerships, academic programming, technology and equipment, and capital projects, all developed with faculty and staff input. As we look to “what’s next,” it’s a great place to start.



Give now at

[foundation.uni.edu/Premier](https://foundation.uni.edu/Premier).

## A giving perspective, comments from College of Education donors

“UNI is a great place, and I want to see it continue to thrive.”

— Paulette Webb (‘84, BA, Community Recreation)

“I sincerely believe I received the best mathematics teacher preparation possible at the time ... I was proud to represent UNI when I was named one of three state finalists for math teacher recognition one year. I hope I paid it forward.”

— Galen Howsare (‘72, BA)

“I have been teaching for the past 37 years. My daughter is a 2022 grad and also an educator. I have a sister, brother-in-law and three nephews that are UNI grads. Purple and gold definitely runs through our veins.”

— Terry Rex (‘88, BA)

“My wife and I both felt it important to donate money each year to our respective colleges. I have consistently donated to UNI for more than 35 years.”

— Larry Bradley (‘73, BA), who served as an elementary educator and principal in Alaska for 28 years.

# PAYING IT FORWARD

Teaching alum scholarships honor past, support future



**JoLeen Eiklenborg** confidently knew she wanted to become a teacher as early as her freshman year of high school — and that there was no other choice for

her than the University of Northern Iowa. She would follow in her mom's footsteps, who was an educator herself after earning her teaching certificate from UNI and teaching in a one-room schoolhouse.

Eiklenborg was drawn to the College of Education for its strong reputation and because she felt it helped students become lifelong learners who were ready for the world. She also saw that professors truly invested in their students, ensuring they could succeed and were professionally prepared for any teaching or administrative career.

Eiklenborg earned her physical education teaching degree and minors in health, sports medicine and traffic safety from

UNI in 1980, followed by a fulfilling teaching career. In 1992, she also earned a Master of Educational Administration, which led her career to Texas at the State Education Agency, Regional Education Center, and later Texas State Health Services. She was also an adjunct professor with Texas State University.

Now, she's paying it forward to other students in the College of Education.

“I want to give back to UNI because of the opportunities they've given me and for making me ready to be a lifelong learner and be successful wherever my endeavors have led me,” she says. “Everyone should have the opportunity to attend UNI and obtain the skills, knowledge and experience so when they graduate, they are leaders, ready to achieve their lifelong goals wherever they go.”

For many years, Eiklenborg supported UNI financially on an annual basis when she'd receive a call from a student fundraiser. But then she realized she wanted to do more. That led her to establish two endowed scholarships: the Isabelle and Harold

Eiklenborg Scholarship, named in honor of her parents, and the JoLeen Eiklenborg Scholarship. The funds were created to support students from all backgrounds — particularly those from Grundy County, where Eiklenborg is from — who are pursuing a degree in education.

“Let's get the people who want to be educators to come to UNI and focus on their education instead of finances,” she says.

Eiklenborg herself worked part-time through college, but she hopes that with the support of her scholarships, students will have the opportunity to dive more deeply into their studies.

Ultimately, UNI's College of Education prepared Eiklenborg for life — and to make a difference through her career and volunteer work. She wants exactly that for other students: to be ready to go out and conquer after they graduate.

“UNI put us first,” she said. “We were going to be great future teachers for our future students.”

# DONOR HONOR ROLL

Thank you to the following donors who made cash contributions to the college between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Names with (\*) indicate Dean's Inner Circle members, who gave \$1,000 or more to the Dean's Fund for Excellence. Names in bold indicate UNI Legacy Society members who have named UNI in their estate plans.

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Rebecca and Travis Wilson



## CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER:

# A Place of Care and Learning

Established more than 30 years ago in response to a need for on-campus childcare, UNI's Child Development Center has made a lasting impact.

Today, the center provides care for 62 children — ranging from six weeks of age to five years old — who are primarily children of UNI faculty, staff and students. It's supported by 10 lead teachers and a team of 50 student staff members. Every day, it strives to create a safe and nurturing environment that fosters each child's learning and development.

But the space is more than a childcare center. It also serves as a learning lab for UNI students pursuing degrees in early childhood education and related fields.

"It gives them the chance to get hands-on experience by working as staff, volunteering or fulfilling their field experience hours — an important part of their college learning," says **Maria Ackerson**, center director.

### RAISING FUNDS FOR PLAY

The Child Development Center is currently fundraising to update and improve its outdoor playground — an initiative that reflects the center's continued dedication to creating engaging and developmentally appropriate spaces for children.

Outdoor play is fun, but it's also important to a child's physical, social and emotional growth. As the current playground begins to show its age, Director Maria Ackerson says improvements are needed to ensure the space remains stimulating and up to modern safety standards.

The planned updates — including new equipment and thoughtful design changes — will reduce injury risks and make the space more accessible for all children, including those with special needs.

The results? Happier, more active kids, and future teachers who are even better prepared to lead.



Interested in supporting the Child Development Center? Scan here.



Inside the center, there's a strong emphasis on child-directed learning. That means children are encouraged to explore, play and build knowledge through teacher-guided activities and hands-on discovery. This method is proven to support their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

The center's impact reaches far beyond the classroom, too. By offering high-quality childcare, it enables UNI families to better balance their academic and professional responsibilities.

### A recognized asset

One of the center's proudest accomplishments is its accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a prestigious designation that highlights its commitment to excellence in early childhood education.

"It's a national mark of quality that not every center earns," Ackerson explains. "For parents, this means peace of mind knowing their children are in a safe, supportive and enriching environment that follows the highest standards in early childhood education. For UNI students, it's a great place to learn because they get to work in a setting that models best practices."

The center recently renewed its accreditation with an impressive overall rating of 96%. Even more remarkable: all three classrooms scored a perfect 100%.

That's a big deal.

"The center is an incredible asset to our campus," says **Allison Barness**, assistant professor of early childhood education. "It not only provides high-quality care and education for young children, but it also serves as a living laboratory where our teacher education students can observe, engage and grow as professionals. The opportunity for hands-on experience in such a supportive, real-world environment is truly invaluable."

## REGENTS' CENTER FOR EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION



## 'ALL ABOUT BALANCE'

## NEXT UP FOR SCALE-UP

A key focus for the statewide Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education (RCEDE) is encouraging STEM in early childhood (birth through age 8) — an area often overlooked.

One way the center achieves this is through the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council's Scale-Up program, which provides high-quality STEM education resources to PK-12 youth, both in and out of school, along with training for educators to implement them effectively.

The RCEDE, located within the College of Education, is one of several centers across the state that offers the program, having applied for and been accepted every year since 2017. Educators can visit the Scale-Up website to see all participating centers and apply to take part.

**Beth VanMeeteren**, RCEDE director and professor in early childhood education, noted that most applicants for UNI's program work with preschoolers. This is because from preschool through third

grade, the focus is largely on literacy and math, leaving a gap in STEM education. The goal is to show preschool educators how STEM fits into their daily curriculum.

This year, RCEDE offered a program called "All About Balance," which provides a classroom kit of materials that encourages children to explore balance, both with objects and with their own bodies.

VanMeeteren has seen the impact of these classroom kits firsthand.

"The teachers who do it say it brings the joy back to teaching for them, because just doing literacy and math year after year gets draining," she said.

Interestingly, participating in STEM activities can also promote literacy skills. "We find that kids get so excited about what they're figuring out that they want to write about it and learn more," VanMeeteren says. "So there's a reciprocity between literacy and STEM learning."

She's also heard from teachers that students who typically test low in literacy often excel in STEM activities — surprising both educators and students.

However, in Iowa, science is not emphasized until fourth grade. By then, VanMeeteren notes, "we've punched it out of them."

"Starting this from the beginning — the research agrees," she says. "Learning STEM in middle school and high school is important, but it needs to start earlier."

Overall, STEM helps students learn to think critically, solve problems and view the world through a new lens. This sense of curiosity is important for later educational success, particularly in the sciences.

With the Scale-Up program, educators receive a complete kit of materials, along with two days of in-person professional learning. They get to explore the materials themselves through "teacher play" and discuss best practices with experts at RCEDE.

There's also been an exciting partnership with Panther Products, through which UNI students produce the STEM materials for the kits, further reinforcing the university's commitment to hands-on, impactful learning experiences.

### BOOK SERIES PROMOTES STEM FOR EARLY LEARNERS

Educators seeking to promote STEM in early childhood can turn to a series of books that provide high-quality, research-based resources for early learning.

The series includes "Investigating Water with Young Children," "Investigating STEM with Infants and Toddlers," "Investigating Ramps and Pathways with Young Children," and "Investigating Light and Shadow with Young Children," authored by Beth VanMeeteren, and "Investigating STEM with Infants and Toddlers," co-authored with **Sherri Peterson**, RCEDE program coordinator.

Published by Teachers College Press, these books offer practical, hands-on ways to integrate STEM concepts into everyday learning and are available for purchase on the RCEDE website.



Check out the book series.



# Summer Scholarship

For more than a decade, summer has meant something different for some University of Northern Iowa faculty members. It’s a chance to strengthen their scholarly insight, thanks to the support of College of Education Summer Fellowships.

**Soh Meacham**, associate dean of graduate studies and research, explains that up to 10 faculty members are selected as fellows each summer. Awards of \$4,000 each fund the development and continuation of research projects and scholarly writing.

“Providing the fellowship helps faculty members to keep on working on their research and deepen their scholarship,” Meacham says.

**The promise of ‘Big Paper’**

Among recent fellows were **Amy Staples**, associate professor of special and inclusive education, and **Sarah Vander Zanden**, head, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education. They continued their collaborative work on a project called “Big Paper.” The study examines how young children — specifically kindergartners — compose during Big Paper, an inclusive, whole-group, multilevel writing activity designed for early learners.

Staples and Vander Zanden were particularly interested in how the activity supports students as they transition from graphic to text-based composition. They also wanted to explore how students develop a sense of

authorship by supporting and collaborating with one another.

In spring 2024, a Big Paper session was held once a week in a kindergarten classroom, with that number doubling this past academic year. Staples and Vander Zanden also observed writing instruction weekly in two classrooms.

During the summer, their fellowship allowed them focused time to analyze preliminary data, refine research questions and plan for the coming school year.

“This fellowship was professionally invigorating and energizing,” Vander Zanden says. “It supported us financially and professionally. A portion of faculty work is dedicated to research, but during the academic year,

often the significant focus is on teaching. Analysis in a chunk of dedicated time was really productive — it allowed for focus and lots of collaboration.”

One major outcome of their summer work was the collaborative design of data collection protocols. Through their analysis, Staples and Vander Zanden identified three key areas to guide their focus: students, teachers and classroom spaces/practices.

“Our scholarship is valuable for the College of Education because it supports interdisciplinarity, encourages partnership with local schools and expands inquiry of an approach with previous promise.”

The duo continued their work on Big Paper with another summer fellowship in 2025, analyzing student compositions and presenting their findings at the Iowa Reading Conference in June.



Sarah Vander Zanden



Joan Bessman Taylor

**Summer 2025 Fellows**

**Morgan Anderson**, “Smartphones in Schools: Exploring Student Experiences of Attention”

**Gregory Bourassa**, “Revolutionary Education: A Challenge to Capitalist Schooling and the Organization of Being”

**Suzanne Freedman**, “The Long-Term Impact of a Forgiveness Intervention on a Sample of Incest Survivors’ Emotional and Psychological Well-Being: A Thirty-Three-Year Follow-up”

**Tara Tedrow**, “An Exploration of Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in Special Education Teacher Preparation: A Scoping Review”

**Carolyn Weber**, “The Collaborative Writing of a Course in Citizenship”

“The enthusiasm and natural authorship that occurs when students are truly free to communicate what they wish, how they wish and with whom they wish has held my interest for years,” Staples shares. “Students learn what matters to them and their peers, and teachers get to be an appreciative audience. From the COE Summer Fellowship, I enjoyed the gift of uninterrupted time to dig into the data and work collaboratively with Sarah to understand what it all meant.”

**Defining “age appropriate”**

Another summer fellow, **Joan Bessman Taylor**, conducted research on “Age-appropriate as a Guiding

Principle for Libraries” — an exploration of how the term “age appropriate” is used when selecting books for youth. In today’s climate of book banning attempts — often driven by concerns that children might read the “wrong” books — the term has taken on new weight.

“Despite its ubiquitous use as a term, and the assumption that everyone understands what it means, I could find no singular definition in the foundational literature of library and information science,” explains the associate professor of school library studies. “This made me want to investigate further to see who meant what by its use.”

Her research so far revealed significant differences across the fields of library science, education and law in how “age appropriate” is applied to book selection.

“While most legislation relying on the term refers solely to the chronological age of a hypothetical reader, education considers cognitive and emotional variation among children of the same chronological age; cites the various reading needs of those served based on grade level, instructional level and independent reading level; and recognizes these as potentially different from each other even when describing the same reader,” Taylor says.

The findings are already informing her teaching of future teacher-librarians as they explore book selection, cataloging, advocacy for library collections and supporting diverse readers across age spans and abilities.

Being a summer fellow gave her the opportunity to devote focused time to this work.

“It reminds me of the reasons I wanted to become an academic,” Taylor says. “It allows me to think deeply and uninterruptedly about things that matter to my discipline and to concerns beyond our institution. It takes me outside the mundane but necessary tasks that dominate my work and re-centers me.”



# CATS: FOREVER LOOKING FORWARD

Since the opening of the newly merged College of Education Advising and Teacher Education Success (CATS) Office three years ago, one goal has remained steadfast for its team: ensuring the best possible experience for the students they serve by continually improving what they do.



(Left to right) Meredith Pecinovsky, Jenny Connolly, Barbara Gager, Danielle Jennings, Amber Dullard, Jordan Wells, Mike Tate

The office uses its shared resources to support two overlapping sets of students:

- **College of Education (COE)** undergraduates in teaching and recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership, who benefit from advising services to support successful journeys through college as they prepare for rewarding careers;
- **UNI Teacher Education students** (about 66% of whom are COE teaching majors) who receive a multitude of services to support their progression to licensure.

**Jenny Connolly** joined the team as director of COE advising in fall 2022 from the College of Business. **Mandie Sanderman** served as assistant dean of assessment and clinical experiences prior to her departure in July 2025. Together, they and their teams have steadily strengthened their support of student success.

## A shared focus: teacher education

Many of the CATS Office initiatives naturally support teacher preparation.

Multiple efforts have focused on streamlining processes and creating helpful resources. For example, the teacher education admissions process has changed, with fewer requirements and a simplified application form. A shared Google Drive now offers helpful materials for professors, students and mentor teachers to assist with assessment, navigating the Anthology data management system and verifying background checks.

In response to new legislation that went into effect on July 1, 2024, the team developed eligibility requirements, an application and appeal process for students who may receive student teaching credit for working as substitute teachers or paraeducators. This opportunity to work part-time in the school system while still a student has proven to be a powerful, enriching experience.

“It gives our teacher candidates more confidence walking into a full-time job because they’ve been part of a school system aside from their student teaching,” Connolly says.

A new recognition initiative called **Excellence in Education** encourages UNI faculty and school district mentor teachers to recognize pre-service teachers for demonstrating excellence beyond expectations for their current level of educational experience. Launched in fall 2024, the effort garnered 207 separate submissions in its first year, recognizing students just beginning their journeys to those completing student teaching.

“While our pre-service teacher candidates certainly don’t expect recognition for ‘going above and beyond,’ it is also appreciated by them when they realize that those extra efforts are noticed and appreciated,” Sanderman says.

Connolly’s advising team is focused on supporting students as a whole — whether they’re coming as high school or transfer students and whether on campus or online. A year

ago, staff created **Future Teacher Welcome**, a mandatory teacher education orientation to build community as well as set expectations. New processes like student teaching checks and graduation checks ensure students’ paperwork and requirements are on track.

## New curriculum impacts CATS, too

This fall’s implementation of an updated curriculum has impacted CATS as well, as the advising team worked first with current — and then incoming — students, to understand new options and approaches and set up new plans of study.

Another outcome: assessment now includes greater emphasis on professional dispositions, or durable employment skills — ‘soft skills’ which local teachers and administrators say weighs heavily on teacher success. Evaluations now better reflect these skills as well as skill in content knowledge and pedagogy.

Handling the operational aspects of clinical experiences is a major role for the teacher education side of the office. That group is responsible for securing agreements with school districts and finding mentor teachers for the more than 2,500 placements annually they manage throughout the Cedar Valley and well beyond.

Moving to two clinical internships in place of three required field experiences before student teaching has led to a reassessment of placement assignments — and strengthened relationships with area schools. As a result of feedback gained this past spring during meetings with partner schools, CATS is now changing its recruitment process for mentor teachers and working to streamline communication between building administration and UNI faculty and CATS placement staff.

## Getting to the goal line

With change an ongoing part of the educational landscape, the various members of the CATS team are ready to adapt. A number of the professional advising team also hold teaching degrees, including Connolly. They also bring strong expertise in student advising and placement gained from degrees and experience.

Step by step, they believe they’re making a difference in the student experience. That includes contributing to smoother, timely completion of degrees. And, taking into account that experience is also about connections and community in addition to policies and processes.

“We’re hoping to partner more with what our student organizations are doing and challenge students to go to community and campus events,” Connolly says. “How do you get outside your comfort zone? We want them to have a bigger network of humans. We want to encourage them to try new things, meet new people and go on the adventure.”



# NEWS & NOTES



## TEACH STUDIO: NEW NAME, EXPANDED RESOURCES

A refreshed home for teacher preparation and classroom experimentation opened this fall as the new TEACH Studio, the space formerly known as Instructional Resources and Technology Services (IRTS) in Schindler Education Center.

The model media center, a partnership of Rod Library and the College of Education, features:

- UNI’s premier youth collection, which moved from the Rod Library into the TEACH Studio in June.
- Cutting-edge and hands-on educational technology curated by ed tech faculty.
- A tech-enhanced stage for book talks, presentations and author interviews.
- A fully equipped classroom to use the collections, services and technology of the Studio.
- Resources to support traditional and online best practices in teaching.
- Collaborative group study and presentation spaces to support teamwork.
- Comfortable and cozy areas for reading and studying.

**Katie Nedwick** joined UNI as the TEACH Studio coordinator in July.

## SCIENCE OF READING MAKERSPACE OPENS

A new Science of Reading Makerspace offers a dynamic, hands-on learning lab where students, faculty and staff can explore creative, research-based approaches to literacy instruction.

“Rooted in a broad, inclusive view of literacy, the Makerspace empowers pre-service educators

to bridge theory and practice,” said **Sunah Chung**, assistant professor, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education.

Guided by the interdisciplinary Science of Reading framework, students can design and build classroom-ready tools using resources like a 3D printer, Cricut, laminator and tactile craft materials supported by evidence-based strategy. The

space is housed in SEC 512. Video tutorials and QR-coded instructions support independent use. Workshops and research opportunities are planned as engagement grows.

## DMPS PRINCIPALSHIP COHORT EARN DEGREES, AGREEMENT EXTENDED

The first cohort of 12 principalship candidates enrolled through a special agreement with Des Moines Public Schools graduated this past spring just as a new six-year agreement was announced to continue the partnership.

Known as the Purple Pathway for School Administrators, the synchronous/asynchronous program helps meet a need for administrative positions within the district, earning candidates either an advanced studies certificate or master’s in education. The 2025 cohort attended orientation at the DMACC Urban Campus in June; three more cohorts will follow beginning in 2027, 2029 and 2031.

## SEVEN FACULTY EARN PROMOTIONS, TENURE

Seven College of Education faculty earned promotion and tenure advancements in spring 2025. Receiving this academic recognition were:

- Full Professor: **Soh Meacham**, Dean’s Office/Office of Graduate Studies and Research.
- Associate Professor with Tenure: **Morgan Anderson**, **Theophile Muhiyamana**, **Shelley Price-Williams**, Learning, Leadership and Community (LLC).
- Associate Professor of Instruction: **Kenneth Hayes**, LLC

- Clinical Associate Professor: **Melanie Hill** and **Kady Korbel**, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences.

## NEW FACES AMONG FACULTY AND STAFF

The College of Education welcomed five new faculty in fall 2025, including:

- Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences: **Chelsie Byram**, clinical assistant professor
- Learning, Leadership and Community: **Papia Bawa**, assistant professor, instructional design and learning technologies; **Xumei Fan**, assistant professor, quantitative methods and assessment
- Elementary and Middle Level Education: **Seunghoon Han**, assistant professor
- Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education: **Oluwaseun “Seun” Oti**, assistant professor, literacy education

Other key professional staff in new positions this year included **Danielle Jennings**, academic advisor, and **Maxine Davis**, a longtime administrator with Instructional Resources and Technology Services who transitioned to program administrator in the Doctor of Education program.

## FAREWELL TO RETIRING FACULTY AND STAFF

The past 18 months have led to good-byes to faculty and staff who collectively have impacted students, colleagues and the university community through

nearly 200 years of service to UNI. Our best wishes to each:

- **Shuaib Meacham**, associate professor, literacy education, 11 years
- **Kim Miller**, clinical associate professor, teaching, 40 years
- **Karen Phillips**, secretary III, Dean’s Office, 38 years (12 with COE)
- **Denise Tallakson**, associate professor of instruction, 39 years
- **Deanne Ubben**, secretary III, curriculum and instruction, 26 years (9 with COE)
- **Kim Huckstadt**, assistant professor, superintendency, 10 years
- **Leigh Zeitz**, associate professor, learning technologies, 32 years

## NEW HOLMES SCHOLARS ATTEND AACTE



*Pictured: Tiffany Evans, Carrie Romo, Raven Kapayou, Nimisha Joshi*

Two new UNI Holmes Scholars, both focused on educational leadership, were among the UNI contingent at the AACTE national conference, part of UNI’s support for the AACTE program which mentors graduate students for positions of leadership within the field of education. They include:

- **Carrie Romo**, currently principal of Goodrell Middle School, part of Des Moines Public Schools.
- **Raven Kapayou**, a special education teacher at Meskwaki Elementary School for the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi.

The first two Holmes Scholars, **Tiffany Evans** and **Nimisha Joshi**, completed their doctoral programs this past spring.

## LUCY GIPPLE APPOINTED TO BOARD OF REGENTS



**Lucy Gipple**, an elementary education major with a minor in social and emotional

learning, was named to the Iowa Board of Regents this past February as the student representative for Iowa’s three public universities.

The New Sharon, Iowa, native is a graduate of North Mahaska High School.

## MINI-GRANT SUPPORTS SUMMER LITERATURE PROJECT

**Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar**, associate professor, literacy education, received a \$5,000 Environmental Health Mini-Grant from the Center for Energy and Environmental Education to fund a project for the summer 2025 course, Children’s Literature for Diversity and Social Justice.

## SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONFERENCE DRAWS 400

Keynote speaker David Adams, CEO of the Urban Assembly in New York, explored how fostering emotional intelligence, resilience and belonging will be as critical as academic achievement in a complex future at this year’s Social and Emotional Learning Conference. Guest children’s author and practicing attorney Marc Colagiovanni shared his journey to create conversations between children and adults on important issues.

About 400 attended the day-long April event sponsored by the college with support from Cedar Valley United Way.

## FUTURE TEACHERS PLEDGE COMMITMENT AT CONVOCATION

Students pledging their commitment to the teaching profession were honored at the 61st Teacher Education Convocation held in September 2024. Waterloo Schools Superintendent Jared Smith (’04, BA) served as the featured speaker. The 62nd event was held September 13, 2025.

## TUBBS TEACHING CONNECTIONS PONDER'S FUTURE OF TEACHING



The 2024 Bill and Linda Tubbs Teaching Connections focused on “The Future of Teaching,” with topics ranging from an updated approach to the education workforce and how public charter schools work to how AI and technology continue to impact education.

Carole Basile, dean, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers’ College at Arizona State University, shared ASU’s road map for the “Next Education Workforce,” a strategic team approach to teaching-related staffing in K-12 schools now applied in 151 schools in 16 states.

As the event began, Linda Tubbs (’69, BA) shared a special message honoring her husband Bill Tubbs, who died in September 2024. The two have supported this event since 2017 through a donation to the UNI Foundation.

## CARLTON-MELLICHAMP LECTURE: ‘TEACHING LITERACY FEARLESSLY’

Carlton-Mellichamp Lecture in Education guest speaker Bianca Nightengale-Lee, Western Michigan University, addressed literacy education and its future with perspectives that spoke to both today’s and tomorrow’s educators during February’s lecture series.

Through a keynote address titled “Teaching Literacy Fearlessly: How to Get Into ‘Good Trouble’ for the Literacy Future of All Students,” to a faculty conversation and hip hop literacy teaching demonstration, she delved into topics ranging from “reading wars” to showing how hip hop can help educate young learners on “accuracy, automaticity and prosody.”

The lecture is supported annually by a donation to the UNI Foundation from Suzanne Carlton (’63, BA) and Duncan Mellichamp.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN READ-IN REACHES 92 CLASSROOMS

The virtual 19th African American Read-In drew about 1,800 first graders from 92 classrooms across Iowa in February. It featured Michelle Martin, PhD, University of Washington, as guest reader; and Bryan Collier, author and illustrator, for a draw-along. **Leigh Zeitz**, professor emeritus, joined in as Zeon the Magician. Students received a copy of “All Because You Matter,” illustrated by Collier and written by Tami Charles.

This educational initiative is hosted by the college in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English’s national read-in efforts.



# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE



## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP LEGACY AWARD TO SAI'S LISA REMY



**Lisa Remy**, executive director of the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) and former school superintendent for West Des Moines Community Schools, received the 2025 UNI Educational Leadership Legacy Award in June.

“Lisa was the unanimous choice for this year’s award. Not only has she had a storied professional career, she is also a go-to speaker in UNI leadership classes, presenting on such topics as motivating staff, creating a lasting vision and directing limited resources where they can have the most impact,” says **Sharon Dentlinger**, associate professor of practice with the educational leadership faculty. “She is one of the most recognizable and respected school leaders in Iowa and we are proud that she chose UNI for all of her training.”

Remy (’89, BA, ’90, ASC/EdD) has been with SAI since 2022. She began her career as a teacher in the Hudson Community School District before moving into administrative roles there and with West Des Moines schools. Her initiatives include project-based learning and expanding preschool programs.

The annual award, honoring the legacy of educator and school administrator **Vernon Kirlin** (’46, BA), goes to alumni who

demonstrate core values of leadership, service and/or change.

## RTNL PROGRAM ACCREDITED ONCE AGAIN

UNI’s Recreation, Tourism and Nonprofit Leadership (RTNL) program has again been granted accreditation through 2031 by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT).

In its November 2024 notification, COAPRT commended the program for its strong institutional support, comprehensive advising services, robust experiential learning opportunities and positive alumni feedback, particularly noting that graduates feel well prepared to enter the workforce. The RTNL program has maintained continuous accreditation since 1986.

In addition to a major and minor in RTNL, the program provides specialized certificates in areas such as youth work, outdoor education, nonprofit management and tourism.

## PRESIDENTIAL HONOR TO TEACHING ALUMS

**Lori Randall** (BA, ’89, MA, ’95) and **Angela Schneden** (’00, BA, ’06, MA) were among the six Iowa teachers named in January as the latest recipients of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST).

Both elementary teachers were honored within the mathematics category for 2022. They were selected from nominations originally submitted for 2021-23. The PAEMST award is the highest

honor in the U.S. dedicated to K-12 science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science teaching.

Randall is now retired from the Osage Community School District; Schneden is with the Ankeny Community School District.

## US NEWS ‘BEST ONLINE’ RANKINGS INCLUDE BA PROGRAMS

For the first time, College of Education online programming at the bachelor’s degree level joined graduate programs as being recognized as among the best in the 2025 U.S. News & World Report rankings for “Best Online Programs.”

In addition to eight master’s programs honored within the ranking, also recognized were the elementary education Online Transfer Program and Purple Pathway for Paraeducators bachelor’s degree programs.

The online coursework is offered in conjunction with the Division of Online Education and Individual Studies in the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education.

## ‘CEDAR ROCK’ RESEARCH LEADS TO NATIONAL AWARD



“Cedar Rock,” a book by **Rod Dieser**, professor of recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership, and co-author Kathryn Hund, has earned the Ney C. Landrum Park History Award from the National Association of State Park

Directors for its original research on state park history.

The historical souvenir book focuses on the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Walter Estate at Cedar Rock State Park in Independence, Iowa. Deiser’s knowledge of the estate also supported a collaboration with Travel Iowa, the park and Mason City tourism which has led to a new Iowa Travel website on Frank Lloyd Wright architecture in Iowa. The book previously earned Dieser an award from the Iowa State Historical Society.

## BOOK EARNS MEACHAM ACCOLADES

**Soh Meacham**, associate dean, graduate studies and research, received the “Outstanding Book Honorable Mention” from the Society of Professors of Education for her book “Supporting Korean American Children in Early Childhood Education.”

## FIVE COE GRADS AMONG LOCAL GOLD STAR TEACHING HONOREES

Honored for outstanding teaching as a Black Hawk County Gold Star Teacher this year by KWWL-TV and the R.J. McElroy Trust were **Shakari Baker-Bruce**, (’17, BA, ’22, BA, ’25, MAE), **Emily Borcherdig** (’07, BA, ’12, MA), **Amanda El-Hamdouni** (’14, BA), **Mindy Fisher** (’99 BA, ’10, MA) and **Courtney Solberg** (’18, BA).

## FACULTY CITED AS ‘TEXTBOOK CHAMPIONS’

Nine College of Education faculty members who adopted a free textbook in one or more courses were recognized as Textbook

## FACULTY AND STAFF HONORS

### University of Northern Iowa

Regents’ Award for Faculty Excellence: **Suzanne Freedman**, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, in recognition of exceptional contributions to students, teaching, learning, research and scholarship.

### Graduate College

Outstanding Graduate Coordinators’ Award to **Kenneth Hayes**, Learning, Leadership and Community.

### College of Education Faculty Awards

Teaching Award: **Sunah Chung**, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education.

Scholarship Award: **Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar**, LESE.

Professional Service Award: **Shelley Price-Williams**, LLC.

Dean’s Distinguished Leadership Award: **Robin Dada**, Elementary and Middle Level Education.

### College of Education Staff Excellence Award

**Amy Curley**, Secretary III/Events, Marketing and Development, Dean’s Office.



Suzanne Freedman



Kenneth Hayes



Sunah Chung



Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar



Shelley Price-Williams



Robin Dada



Amy Curley

Equity Champions by the Rod Library. They were among the 108 faculty across four colleges and the library who contributed to an initiative which saved UNI students more than \$2.9 million to date and about \$900,000 in 2024 alone.

Recognized were: **Megan Balong**, **Eva Chen** and **Carrie**

**Elser**, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences; **J.D. Cryer**, Elementary and Middle Level Education; **Sunah Chung**, **Amy Sandvold**, **Soh Meacham**, **Sarah Vander Zanden**, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education; and **Chris Kowalski**, Learning, Leadership and Community.

## CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

## STUDENT HONORS

### Student Leadership Awards

College of Education students honored for 2025 Student Leadership Awards this year were:

- **Emily Reeser**, elementary education; Beverly Funk Barnes Student Excellence Award & Outstanding Student Leader Award.
- **Ashlyn Metcalf**, elementary education; Most Promising New Leader in a Student Organization Award.
- **Katelyn Kane**, early childhood education; Most Promising New Leader in a Student Organization Award.
- **Clare Sweeney**, recreation, tourism, & nonprofit leadership; Emerging Philanthropist.
- **Francis Dugbartey**, student affairs; Rising Global Star Leader Award.
- **Izaiah Martinez**, early childhood education, Greek 360 Award.
- **Tamra Faubel**, elementary education and middle level education; Servant Leadership Award.
- **Madelyn Stepanek**, elementary education and middle level education; Outstanding Servant Leader Award.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

Acknowledged at this year’s annual celebration were:

- **Beth Van Meeteren**, Iowa Regents’ Center for Early Developmental Education, for “All About Balance” and **Lane Rogers**, recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership major, for work with the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance.
- **Marissa Schweinfurth**, recipient of a Veridian Community Engagement Fellowship and McElroy Trust award for projects connecting with pre-service and in-service teachers and the community.
- **Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar**, McElroy Trust awardee for a project with students and staff at the Waterloo Career Center.





# THE CHANGING CLASSROOM: HOW TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS

By **Magdalena Galloway**, *Associate Professor of Instruction*

When our teaching university was founded in 1876, the ballpoint pen was decades away from becoming a classroom staple. Fast forward to the early 2000s, where I recall three students sharing a single desktop in a computer lab. Today, students arrive with laptops and smart devices, accessing cloud-based content from anywhere. The computing power in our pockets now dwarfs that of entire labs just a generation ago.

Each wave of innovation has brought both excitement and anxiety. When Google launched in 1998, educators worried students would stop thinking critically. Instead, we taught them how to search smartly, with filters, Boolean logic and information literacy. Wikipedia raised similar concerns in 2005, yet it became a springboard for deeper inquiry. Now, GenAI presents the next challenge and opportunity.

As before, the goal isn't to ban the tool, but to grow, adapt, and prepare students to share it responsibly while harnessing its power to make us better.

**A legacy of innovation**

At the College of Education, we've long embraced innovative technology. When Iowa launched one of the nation's first public, statewide fiber-optic systems in the 1990s, UNI took a lead role, training over 9,000 Iowans to teach and learn remotely via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN).

That forward-thinking continued into the 2010s. UNI was among the first adopters of Zoom for remote

instruction and collaboration well before it became a household name. Our students used Docs, Sheets and Slides to create and share digital work before Google tools were mainstream. As Google's features grew, we integrated them into our teaching.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were ready — and we accelerated. The crisis reshaped public education, highlighting the urgent need for online pedagogy and digital equity. In response, we adapted our programs to ensure future teachers could thrive in these new environments, equipped with the tools, mindset and skills to lead in digitally connected classrooms.

To support our growing online student population, we apply Quality Matters and Universal Design for Learning principles to create and model flexible, accessible courses — continuing our tradition of designing learning that meets students where they are.

**Pedagogy in a digital age**

When working with pre-service educators, I emphasize foundational frameworks to help guide teaching in a digital world:

- **TPACK** (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) reminds us that effective teaching with technology is about intentional integration, balancing what we teach, how we teach and the tools we use to enhance learning.
- **Connectivism** sees learning as sense-making across networks of people, tools and ideas.



Students learn increasingly through platforms, devices, and algorithms that influence how information is accessed and understood. As AI and personalized technologies advance, pattern recognition, linking disciplines, critical thinking and engaging diverse perspectives are essential for navigating digital spaces.

- **Computational thinking** is a structured way to solve problems by breaking them into smaller parts, recognizing patterns, focusing on key details and creating clear step-by-step instructions. It applies across subjects and everyday life, and also helps us understand how computers and AI systems process information.
- **The 4Cs — communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking** — are essential soft skills that help students thrive in a connected world and prepare for future careers, including ones that don't yet exist.

**A commitment to evolve**

We are committed to flexible online and distance education that grows with today's learners. Our programs, ranging from bachelor's and master's degrees to certificates

and teaching endorsements, honor diverse goals, schedules and learning styles.

New micro-credentials include online graduate certificates that can be stacked toward a master's degree. One focuses on AI in education — among the first courses anywhere designed to empower educators to teach about and with Generative AI.

This year, the college joined the Alliance for Innovation in Teacher Education led by the International Society for Technology in Education (iste.org). This strengthens our commitment to prepare educators and their students for the demands of the digital age. The Alliance will create richer opportunities for professional development and guide how we collaborate with peer institutions, support faculty, model best practices and integrate technology with purpose.

As we near our 150th anniversary, the commitment to evolve honors our legacy of innovation and reflects a growth mindset — welcoming change as an opportunity to learn and improve. Just as classrooms once transformed with the ballpoint pen, today we embrace the digital tide. With technology now ubiquitous, knowing how to navigate it is as vital as knowing where it's headed.



Artificial Intelligence in  
Education certificate



Alliance for Innovation in  
Teacher Education Pledge

## SAVE THE DATES FOR OUR Sesquicentennial

Join us as we celebrate our 150th anniversary, marking a century and a half of transformation and impact. We will honor our legacy while celebrating the past, present and future.



**Homecoming 2025**  
SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 4

**TEDxUniversity of Northern Iowa**  
OCTOBER 25, 2025

**Day of Service**  
APRIL 8, 2026

**Homecoming 2026**  
OCTOBER 5 - 11

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