

PREMIER



Connections Through Time

A 150th spotlight linking family ties, gratitude, milestones with legacy

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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



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FROM THE DEAN



Dear Friends,

As the University of Northern Iowa celebrates 150 years, we've been reminded of the ties that bind us together: our commitment, traditions, people and community.

For the College of Education, our perspective on this journey blends old and new.

With our identity in teacher education, we're part of the spirit of that first day of classes in 1876 on College Hill. Elements of what we do and teach – the fundamentals of teaching, the coordination of clinical experience – are a throughline in history. A shared dedication to quality across expanding disciplines and programs connects the eras. We've changed and adapted while keeping our focus on what counts: our students' success.

Thousands of faculty, staff and students have shaped the past 150 years, each with a story to tell. We're proud to include a few in this issue, from faculty family legacies to graduates of a milestone sesquicentennial class.

So many stories connected to our history share a steadfast commitment to progress. As we turn to the future, the college reflects that same resolve as we press forward with new programs, new ventures and new partnerships. For example:

- **Broadening options** with the new Bachelor of Arts in special and inclusive education.
- **Expanding opportunities** through the new Master of Arts in Teaching in secondary education for adult learners.
- **Accelerating pathways** with the new Degree in 3 option for elementary education.
- **Strengthening partnerships** through the TEACH Studio collaboration with Rod Library.
- **Extending our reach** with EdVantageUNI, connecting educators, students and families to UNI's education-related programs and services.

This year the college is focused on the value of community, how we are strengthened by people connected with purpose. The 150th anniversary celebration has been a wonderful affirmation of what the power of working together with intention and common goals can achieve.

As alumni, donors and friends, you are an essential part of our community and this story. Thank you for joining us on this journey – past, present and future!

Colleen Mulholland
Dean, College of Education

A NEW ERA

Special and inclusive education BA broadens options

It's the start of something new in the College of Education.

Earlier this year, the Iowa Board of Regents approved a new Bachelor of Arts degree in special and inclusive education at the University of Northern Iowa, which launched this fall. The program's approval follows a change in Iowa state code allowing bachelor's degrees in special education for the first time.



Learn more
about special
and inclusive
education!

The degree marks a significant step forward in preparing educators to meet Iowa's ongoing demand for highly skilled special education teachers. It also builds on a longstanding and highly popular minor in special education teaching that leads to one of three endorsements, depending on a student's area of focus.

With the new special and inclusive education major, students will meet

the requirements for all three endorsements: Instructional Strategist I: Mild and Moderate K-8, Instructional Strategist I: Mild and Moderate 5-12, and Instructional Strategist II: Intellectual Disabilities K-12.

"This degree expands what we offer," said **Sarah Vander Zanden**, head, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education. "Three endorsements means a teacher could work in many

classrooms, in many ways."

The program also comes in response to student interest in a full major and feedback from school districts. District leaders report not only more special education positions to fill, but also a growing need for educators who can work collaboratively across general and special education settings. The comprehensive degree provides greater flexibility for both future teachers and

the schools that hire them.

The need extends beyond filling vacancies. Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse, and educators at every level are expected to support students with a wide range of learning, behavioral, communication and social-emotional needs. As schools continue to prioritize inclusive learning environments, districts are seeking teachers who understand how to meet



REVITALIZED COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

The launch of UNI's special and inclusive education major reflects a growing recognition that all educators need the knowledge and skills to support students with diverse learning needs. One example of that commitment can be found in the university's revitalized chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).

CEC is an international organization focused on supporting people with disabilities, particularly students with disabilities and the educators who work with them. According to **Tara Tedrow**, assistant professor of instruction in special and inclusive education, the organization's mission aligns closely with the goals of the new major.

"Every teacher will eventually work with students who receive special education services or have diverse learning needs," she said. "What's good for students in special education is good for all students."

In fall 2024, Tedrow noticed there were no active student chapters of CEC in Iowa, making it a priority to rebuild a presence at UNI. Her involvement in Iowa CEC leadership as a past president helped drive the effort. Today, meetings are held virtually to ensure online students and students with varying accessibility needs can participate.

Students involved in the organization gain access to a variety of professional opportunities through CEC membership, including webinars, training modules, continuing education opportunities and extensive professional development resources, many of which are available at no cost.

For Tedrow, the chapter serves as a professional community that helps future educators build the skills and support networks needed to create inclusive learning environments for all students — a goal that sits at the heart of UNI's new major.



Carrie Heinzerling, left, and Megan Allen

these diverse needs.

A key part of the program is its clinical experience, which enables students to get in the classroom and put their knowledge into practice.

“We expect our students to deeply understand theory, practice and application, and these clinical experiences play a big role in putting those pieces together,” said Vander Zanden.

For graduates of the College of Education who are now leaders in the field, the new major reflects a broader shift in education — that special and inclusive practices are no longer confined to a single classroom or role, but necessary for educators across the profession.

Carrie Heinzerling ('98, BA, elementary education; '07, MA and ASC, principalship) currently serves as principal at Lowell Elementary in Waterloo. Over the course of her career, she has observed an increase in the complexity of student needs. Students may come to school using communication devices, requiring significant behavioral supports and

needing intensive academic interventions — or all three.

“We need to train not only our teachers but our instructional assistants with strategies and skills to work with students who have more complex needs,” she said.

That's where the special and inclusive education program comes in.

“This major allows students from UNI to come into our schools and see their needs firsthand prior to getting their first teaching position,” Heinzerling said. “I always think staff need to be in the ‘right fit’ place, and this gives university students the opportunity to see if they are up for the challenge that working in special education offers.”

Similarly, **Megan Allen** ('09, BA, elementary education; '20, ASC, principalship), serves as special education director for the Waterloo Community School District. She shared that the district continues to face challenges related to staffing and providing professional learning opportunities that meet the

needs of complex learners.

“As leaders, our responsibility is to create structures that support educators, strengthen collaboration between general and special education, and ensure decisions are driven by student needs and outcomes,” she said. “When we do that well, we create environments where students with disabilities are not only supported but belong, and are prepared for their future.”

Allen hopes to see more educators already in the profession consider a transition into special education, something she believes the special

and inclusive education major can help facilitate.

“Those who bring experience from general education bring a strong instructional foundation and a well-developed toolbox of strategies that can be incredibly powerful in supporting students with disabilities,” she said. “When that experience is paired with strong special education preparation, it strengthens the entire system.”

The Waterloo Community School District's Professional Development School partnership with UNI is an important part of that vision. The partnership, which provides education students with experience in dedicated classrooms in Waterloo, reflects the district's belief that effective special educators develop through both strong preparation and meaningful hands-on experience.

“I believe that when educators feel prepared, supported and successful in their roles, the demands of special education become more manageable,” Allen said. “My hope is that we continue building systems



Ashlyn Metcalf works with a student.

that set both teachers and students up for that kind of success. Because when educators thrive, students do as well.”

The launch of the special and inclusive education major is just one step in the College of Education’s broader vision for educator preparation. While the minor in special education remains

a popular complement for other teaching majors, faculty are exploring a potential dual endorsement pathway in elementary education and Instructional Strategist I — a move that could further prepare graduates to meet the needs of diverse learners and demands facing today’s schools.



Ashlyn, left, and Bobbi Metcalf

ALL IN THE FAMILY

For **Ashlyn Metcalf** and her mother, **Bobbi Metcalf**, special education is a shared passion.

Ashlyn, a 2026 UNI graduate in elementary education with a special education minor, recently began a position as an instructional strategist at Waverly-Shell Rock (W-SR) Middle School. Bobbi, a 2001 graduate in K-12 mental disabilities, has spent years teaching special education at the middle and high school levels in the Denver Community School District. Together, they reflect on what drew them to the field, the importance of inclusion and what it has meant to support one another along the way.

What drew you both to special education?

Ashlyn: I grew up watching my mom practice her own passion of inclusion for everyone. We also have a couple family members who have special needs, so in my family, making accommodations came as second nature. It wasn’t something I ever had to figure out in the classroom setting. I was already used to making the world around us work for everyone.

Bobbi: My nephew, Taylor, was born when I was 12 years old. Shortly after his birth, it became evident that he was going to require extra support and love. Taylor was soon diagnosed with autism and there began my journey with special education. I wanted to learn everything I could about how to help him and others like him.

What’s it like having your mom’s support, who knows firsthand the realities of special education?

Ashlyn: She has been my biggest role model and cheerleader. I remember when I was first learning about IEPs (individualized education programs), I could ask her any question I had without fear. I knew that she was once in my place, too. It’s really the best of both worlds because she’s my mentor teacher and my mom all in one.

What’s it like watching your daughter follow a similar path?

Bobbi: Special education has always been a big topic of conversation in our household, so it’s a full-circle moment watching her begin her own journey into inclusive education. It actually feels less like she is following in my footsteps and more like she is creating her own path alongside me.

What excites you most about your new position?

Ashlyn: I’m very excited to take all the pieces of the amazing teachers and professors who have gotten me to this point and create my own space. W-SR has a huge focus on being student-centered and teaching the whole child. It excites me to be part of a school district that feels as passionately as I do about seeing students flourish in their own unique ways.

What changes in special education have you seen since becoming a teacher?

Bobbi: The biggest change I have seen is in acceptance and inclusion. When I first began teaching, the conversation was often centered around deficits and what students could not do. Over the years, I have seen a much greater emphasis placed on meeting students where they are, building relationships and helping them become confident, independent learners.

What benefits do you see by having this new major option for future UNI teachers?

Bobbi: As someone who has worked in special education for many years, it is encouraging to see universities investing in programs like this because schools truly need teachers who are passionate about inclusive education and who are equipped to meet the needs of all learners.

CONTINUING TO ADAPT: DEGREE IN 3

Following an announcement of an accelerated pathway to a bachelor's degree in elementary education — dubbed the Degree in 3 — about 15 students started at the University of Northern Iowa this fall expecting a successful, but shorter, stay in Cedar Falls.

They share a profile: incoming students who are willing to commit to the pace of a year-round program to complete their degree in three years, including student teaching.

“Prospective students seem excited about a fast track,” says **Jenny Connolly**, director of advising for the College of Education. “Motivated, organized students who are committed to graduating as fast as possible ... that’s who we expect to find this program attractive.”

A faster pathway to elementary teaching

This option to complete a degree earlier, save money and begin teaching sooner offers future educators yet another pathway toward becoming an elementary educator. It joins the traditional on-campus BA for incoming freshmen and transfer students and the Online Transfer Program and Purple Pathway for Paraeducators for placebound students.

The new pathway **maintains the standard curriculum of 120 credit hours** for completion and the same expectations for clinical experiences in K-6 settings. Students will complete coursework year-round, including winter and summer sessions (as needed), followed by student teaching. Graduates will also qualify for Iowa’s K-8 literacy endorsement in reading. They could lead their first classrooms as soon as fall 2029.

Upon announcing the new pathway — UNI’s first, formally designated undergraduate accelerated program — plenty of questions arose. Is this for freshmen only? Can you bring in college credit? What’s different from the increasing percentage of students who enter UNI today with college credit already in hand — and finish earlier already?

Among the answers: the program, at its core, was built to ensure it could accommodate incoming freshmen with few or no existing college credits, says **Robin Dada**, head, Elementary and Middle Level Education. But flexibility remains.



Learn more
about the
Degree in 3.

“As the state’s largest program in elementary education, our goal is to continue to offer options that meet student interests as well as workforce needs. This is a specific year-round program, with the curriculum built accordingly. At its very core, we wanted to make that work,” she notes.

One new option among several

Connolly says the actual fit for the program is very individual. As advisors worked with both prospective students and current freshmen considering switching to Degree in 3, variables including commitment to a three-year pathway, existing credits and comfort with the year-round curriculum were part of the dialogue.

Degree in 3 for elementary education is an on-campus, residential program. In spring 2026, about 600, or 70%, of the more than 800 elementary education majors were students on campus. For the College of Education in general, about 40% are transfer students, including online and on-campus students. About 79% come in with some type of college equivalency credit.

With such a diverse mix of elementary education majors, advisors work with students and their individual circumstances to craft a road to degree completion that may end up taking more or less than four years, depending on majors and minors, credit status — and the type of experience students seek while on campus.

“What the Degree in 3 offers is a plan of study that motivated students can count on from day one,” Connolly says. “It may not be for everyone, but we’re here for students who seek this option.”

It has its incentives, including tuition support for summer sessions, a student teaching stipend to offset living expenses and dedicated advising, academic, career and wellness support.

The final attraction: starting a teaching career a year earlier. “The combination of less time on campus and added financial opportunities puts students an estimated \$70,000 ahead in contrast to a traditional four-year path,” notes Dean **Colleen Mulholland**.

Planning for success

Creating this additional version of a curricular schedule required collaboration and campuswide conversations, particularly in working through what the summer experience and coursework will look like.

“The College of Education has developed capacity in seeing varied opportunities for completion through the work with the Online Transfer Program and Purple Pathway for Paraeducators. Neither are the same as the Degree in 3, but our flexible thinking helped to identify courses that might best fit in summer vs. the long semesters,” Dada says.

AS PROFILES CHANGE, PROGRAMS ADAPT

The variety of programming in elementary education reflects changing student profiles across the college and university. The College of Education Advising and Teacher Education Success team tracks trends, including:

COE Majors At-A-Glance:

- Nearly 80% of incoming freshmen transfer in an average of 21 hours of credit
- 40% are transfer students (higher than the UNI norm)
- Today’s students are more focused on their budgets, time and careers.
- Residential students still prefer in-person courses, while the number of students in online degree options continues to increase
- Adult learners are a greater mix of younger and older adult students
- As criteria change, including the inclusion of elementary education within degrees that meet qualification, more are qualifying for TEACH grants: 760 in 2024-25, up from 366 in 2020-21
- Over 1,100 undergrad majors result in **3,000+ advisor appointments annually**

Current plans call for an eight-week, on-campus summer session; a winter break option will be offered as needed.

As with adjustments that happen along the way for many students, those enrolling in Degree in 3 have the flexibility to move into the “traditional” four-year degree at any time, Connolly says.

“All of our students are on their own path. With our multiple pathways, we do our best to support who students are and where they are, whether they’re placebound or campus-based, freshmen or transfer students,” she adds. “Degree in 3 gives yet another choice, something that benefits our students as well as prospective employers and communities our graduates serve.”

TEACH STUDIO:

A Space to Learn and Collaborate

Future teachers gather around tables testing educational technology they may one day use in their own classrooms.

Nearby, a student smiles as she recognizes a clue to a favorite children's book in a colorful mural. Another rises from soft seating beneath an artfully crafted tree to browse materials for an upcoming clinical placement.

These scenes represent the vision behind the newly refreshed TEACH Studio, a reimagined hub for future teachers in the Schindler Education Center jointly developed by UNI's Rod Library and the College of Education.



“We saw this as an opportunity to create a model school media center and library with space for collaboration and as a place for students to gather.”



A choice to collaborate

TEACH is short for Teacher Education and Collaboration Hub. The studio emerged from conversations that began more than five years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders from the library and the college recognized that resources supporting teacher education students were spread across multiple locations.

“It became very clear we had overlap that was causing confusion for students,” says Dean **Theresa Westbrook**, Library Services. “We wanted to find a way to collaborate and elevate these really important services.”

At the same time, faculty in UNI’s Educator Preparation Program were redesigning the undergraduate teacher education curriculum. That work aligned naturally with the vision for an updated learning space.



“Expanding access and exposure to adaptive and educational technology will help prepare our pre-service teachers for their future work.”

“We saw this as an opportunity to create a model school media center and library with space for collaboration and as a place for students to gather,” says Dean **Colleen Mulholland**, College of Education.

The redesigned curriculum places strong emphasis on understanding the needs of different learners and how technology can support instruction.

“The different ways all children learn became a throughline in the curriculum,” Mulholland says. “We also recognized that technology, however defined, would be present in future teachers’ experiences in everything they’re doing. We needed a space that would foster the use of technology and help students understand how different kids learn differently.”

An enhanced educational space

Built with input from stakeholders across campus, a new vision emerged for the space previously known as Instructional Resources and Technology Services. It now combines the permanent home of Rod Library’s youth collection with enhanced educational technology and other existing resources and tools in a flexible learning environment.

At the center of the TEACH Studio is the curated youth collection which models best practices in school and public libraries and accounts for nearly one-third of all Rod Library circulation. Following the consolidation of materials previously

housed in IRTS and the library, the collection moved to the studio in June 2025. Pre-service teachers can access picture books, children’s and young adult literature and non-fiction, learning games, manipulatives and technology tools.

“This is a space that offers a variety of resources to help the pre-service teacher learn to teach. Whatever they need, they can get it all here. These resources help them in their coursework, field experiences and support the learning needs of students in their classrooms,” says **Katie Nedwick**, TEACH Studio coordinator.

Students can also practice presentations in a multimedia room equipped with a green screen and digital video technology or explore robotics and coding in a technology playground. A new student lounge adds to the study nooks and collaborative workspaces where students can gather.

Expanding educational technology

Since reopening in summer 2025, the technology playground has become one of the most popular features of the TEACH Studio. The area allows students to explore coding and robotics tools, app-enhanced learning kits and hands-on, screen-free educational toys that build computational thinking.

The studio’s technology offerings will continue to grow thanks to a \$130,000 grant from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust. The funding supports five modular collections

— Access & Adapt, Create & Communicate, Code & Construct, Design & Display and Tech on the Go — that expand access to instructional and assistive technology.

“When we were redesigning the curriculum, we knew new technology could not be an afterthought,” Mulholland says.

Magdalena Galloway, associate professor of instruction, works closely with faculty and students to integrate those resources into coursework and field experiences. Students can test tools, check out equipment and practice instructional strategies.

“Tech resources are visible and easy to use,” Galloway says. “That encourages experimentation and creativity.”

Adds Nedwick: “Expanding access and exposure to adaptive and educational technology will help prepare our pre-service teachers for their future work.”

A welcoming environment

The studio's physical design creates a welcoming atmosphere. Seating in the lounge, presentation room and in the central stacks area supports both collaboration and individual focus. Fabric-and-wood tree structures inspired by a beloved feature from Rod Library and colorful noise-dampening felt sculptures add special touches.

Students quickly embraced the refreshed space. In its first 10 months, the TEACH Studio welcomed approximately 30,000 visitors.

“When I started in this position, I thought I may have to do some outreach to get students and faculty to use the space,” Nedwick says. “But they started using it from the get-go.”

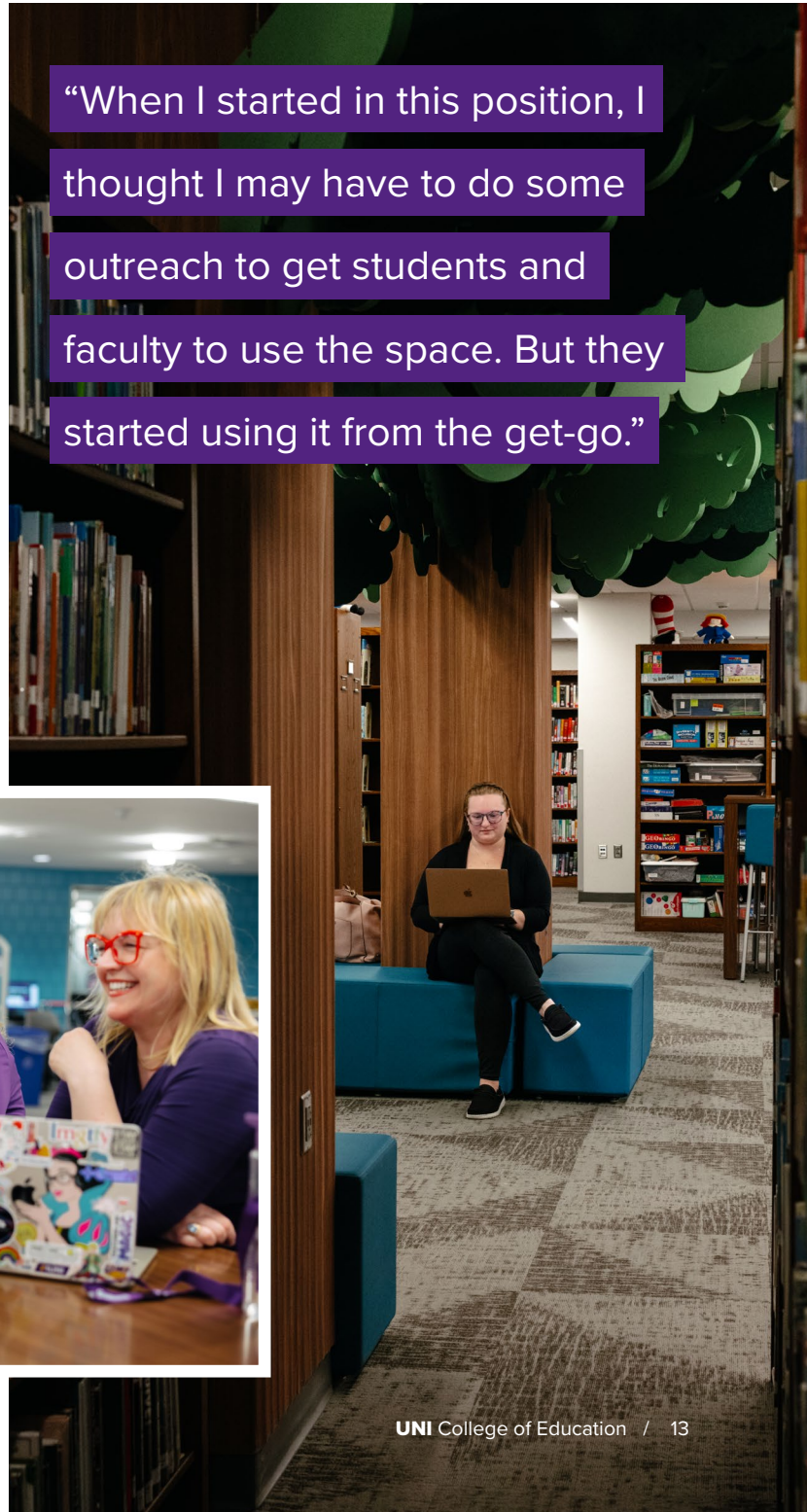
Galloway says the TEACH Studio reflects how learning spaces themselves are changing.

“Instead of a traditional computer lab or a quiet-only space, it's now a flexible, active environment where students can gather, study, create and collaborate,” she says.

The collaborative spirit behind the TEACH Studio is reflected in its visitors. The space has welcomed college classes, children from the UNI Child Development Center, local educators, students from Cedar Falls and Waterloo schools, and leaders from the Iowa Department of Education.

“We are doing important work here,” Nedwick says, “and I'm thrilled to share that with others.”

“When I started in this position, I thought I may have to do some outreach to get students and faculty to use the space. But they started using it from the get-go.”



Filling Gaps in Secondary Education:

The new Master of Arts in Teaching



Learn more
about Master
of Arts in
Teaching.

In fall 2025, University of Northern Iowa launched a new online pathway to teaching: the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in secondary education.

The program allows individuals with a bachelor's degree in a content area like math, science or business to channel their expertise into secondary school teaching by completing coursework in teaching across five semesters.

The 34-credit-hour graduate program addresses two pressing needs at once: enabling working professionals to transition into teaching while helping Iowa school districts fill hard-to-staff positions.

Becky Wilson Hawbaker, head, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, oversees the MAT program — currently the sole graduate program housed within her department. She said the MAT grew out of the success of UNI's online teacher preparation programs, including the Purple Pathway for Paraeducators and the Online Transfer Programs for early childhood and elementary education.

Those programs generated increasing interest from individuals seeking similar opportunities for secondary licensure, particularly working professionals with undergraduate degrees in content areas such as math, science, art, English, social studies, business and world languages.

*Clinical Associate Professor Megan Balong, left,
and Becky Wilson Hawbaker*



"I also routinely field calls and emails from school districts who cannot fill open teaching positions, particularly those that require secondary and special area licensure, so there is a definite demand," Hawbaker said.

At its core, the MAT is designed for people who are passionate about their subject matter and feel called to teaching as a way to make a greater impact. To accommodate working professionals, the program was built with flexibility in mind. It uses rolling admissions, allowing students to begin in any semester and attend either full-time or part-time.

All courses are offered online and in the evenings through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

Although UNI's College of Education is often associated with elementary and early childhood education, the MAT in secondary education expands the college's reach and legacy in educator preparation.

"Because the content preparation is already complete, the focus of the MAT is on how, rather than what, to teach," Hawbaker said.

As both a department head and instructor, she has found that MAT students bring a wealth of professional and life experiences to the classroom.

"In our class discussions, they can make connections and applications that are wider-ranging, and they ask so many great questions," Hawbaker said.

For some students, returning to school has come with challenges, including learning new technologies and online learning platforms. Others are balancing significant personal and professional responsibilities while completing graduate coursework.

"But all of us have supported each other in learning, showing grace with our mistakes, and finding success together," Hawbaker said.

The program's initial enrollment goal for fall 2025 was 10 students. More than 20 students were on track to be in the program by fall 2026, and the first graduating class is expected in spring 2027.

Cheryl Meller, recruitment coordinator for the college's Office of Graduate Studies and Research, has seen interest from a

"In our class discussions, they can make connections and applications that are wider-ranging, and they ask so many great questions."



Scott Steffen,
MAT student

"Don't be afraid to try. Don't quit. The experience of life is the best part."

wide range of prospective students. Some are still completing their bachelor's degrees and discovering a desire to teach, while others graduated more than 25 years ago and are looking for a career change.

"Many of our potential candidates are motivated by seeing shortages in local schools and feel a calling to work with youth," Meller said.

She has also seen interest from individuals already working in schools as paraeducators or in administrative roles who discover a passion for working with students and decide to pursue teaching.

Meller notes a common question — or misperception — is the program's focus. It's intended for students to build upon their undergraduate degree — for example, an engineer ready to teach science or STEM education vs. an artist ready to switch to teaching English. She works with students' individual queries to help determine whether the MAT program is the right fit and recommends other pathways based on each student's individual goals.

Since the MAT program launched, Meller has observed an especially strong interest in science education — a welcome development given the state's ongoing teacher shortage in that area.

One such student is **Scott Steffen**, who decided in his 50s to pursue his goal of becoming a science teacher.

"Science is an exciting and fascinating field that I enjoy sharing with people," he said. "Teaching is a place where I can share that excitement with other people."

Steffen has especially enjoyed a key part of the MAT program: clinical experiences in schools.

"It's been really fun," he said. "The students and teachers expect you to be part of the classroom. You are included in everything and receive usable criticism, especially from the students."

Ultimately, the program's early growth demonstrates both the demand for flexible pathways into teaching and the desire many professionals have to share their expertise with the next generation.

For other students considering the MAT program in secondary education, Steffen shared this bit of advice:

"Don't be afraid to try. Don't quit. The experience of life is the best part."

A MILESTONE Class

Meet five College of Education graduates as we commemorate UNI's 150 years.

As the University of Northern Iowa celebrates its sesquicentennial, the members of its classes within this celebratory year prepared for their own next chapters. From future teachers and school leaders to nonprofit professionals and school psychologists, these graduates reflect on the experiences that shaped their time at UNI — and what it means to be part of a memorable class.



Rhendi Oelmann



Shivani Pahuja

Rhendi Oelmann

Town: Dike, Iowa

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education Online Transfer Program

Rhendi Oelmann worked as a paraeducator in the Dike-New Hartford Community School District preschool classroom for 14 years — an experience that steadily cemented her love for teaching young children. She knew she wanted a degree in early childhood education, but balancing full-time work and raising three children made returning to school difficult. When she learned UNI offered an online program, she enrolled immediately.

Today she says that, without that program, she wouldn't have earned her teaching degree.

Now that she's graduated, her next step is close to home as a preschool teacher in the Hudson Community School District.

"Being part of UNI's 150 years means an incredible amount to me, both personally and as a mother," Oelmann said. "I am able to show my three children that you are never too old to chase your dreams. It serves as a reminder, for them and for myself, that you don't have to have your entire life figured out by a certain age, despite what society might tell you. Graduating as part of this historic milestone proves that your educational journey can happen exactly when the time is right for you."

Ryan Cunningham

Town: Sumner, Iowa

Degree: Superintendentcy Advanced Studies Certificate

Ryan Cunningham served as a school principal for 18 years and knew he wanted to finish his career as a superintendent. Because he considers UNI the leader in educator preparation in Iowa, it was the clear choice for completing his superintendent program.

Being part of UNI history is especially meaningful to him.

"UNI is home and has served our family so well for generations," he said, noting a long line of people in his family who've graduated from the university.

For Cunningham, the two-year superintendentcy program and the ongoing support he received from faculty and cohort members are among his biggest takeaways.

"UNI prepared me to lead from day one," he said. "I am currently the superintendent at Sumner-Fredericksburg



Ryan Cunningham

and felt ready because of my UNI experience.”

Cunningham says the degree also prepared him to help lead the creation of a new charter school, Future Frontiers, where he serves as superintendent as well.

Shivani Pahuja

Town: Waverly, Iowa

Degree: School Psychology
Master of Arts in Education/
Educational Specialist

For a number of years, Shivani Pahuja worked as a special education associate in Waverly — an experience that ultimately became a turning point in her career.

“Working closely with students with diverse learning and behavioral needs helped me realize how much I wanted to understand child development, learning and mental health in a deeper way,” she said. “That motivation ultimately led me to pursue the school psychology program at UNI.”

As an immigrant building a new life and career in the United States, Pahuja appreciated the strong sense of community and the opportunity to learn through both coursework and real-world experiences.

“Coming from another country and becoming part of a university with such a long-standing tradition in educator preparation makes me feel proud and grateful,” she added. “It reminds me that education has the power to connect people from different backgrounds through a shared purpose of helping others.”

Clare Sweeney



One thing that especially stood out to her during the UNI Sesquicentennial Celebration was learning more about the university's history and legacy in education.

“It gave me a greater appreciation for the generations of educators, counselors, and school professionals who came before us,” Pahuja said.

Clare Sweeney

Town: Moline, Illinois

Degree: Bachelor of Arts
in Recreation, Tourism and
Nonprofit Leadership

As executive director of the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance within UNI's Community Engagement Department, Clare Sweeney got to see firsthand the planning that went into all the events celebrating UNI's 150th anniversary, including an opportunity to help host an RTNL reunion during Homecoming.

For Sweeney, being part of the university's celebration

is something she will carry with her for the rest of her life, especially as one of many members of her family who have graduated from UNI.

Next up for Sweeney is a position in the aquatics department at the Two Rivers YMCA in Moline, Illinois.

“Going off into the ‘real world,’ I could not feel more prepared and am excited to show the world what a UNI graduate can do,” she said.

Davis Manternach

Town: Cascade, Iowa

Degree: Bachelor of Arts
in Elementary Education

One thing that stood out to Davis Manternach about being part of UNI's 150th celebration was learning more about the university's history and its longstanding commitment to preparing educators.

“It was interesting to see how many traditions and values have remained constant while the university continues to evolve,” he

Davis Manternach



said. “The celebration gave me a greater appreciation for the impact UNI has had on Iowa and beyond.”

His biggest takeaway from the elementary education program was the importance of relationships.

“Whether it was professors, mentor teachers, classmates or students, the connections I built helped shape me into the educator I am today,” Manternach said. “I've learned that teaching is about more than academics. It's about creating a supportive environment where students feel valued, capable and inspired to learn.”

This fall, he is doing just that as an elementary teacher at Southdale Elementary in Cedar Falls.

“As I begin this next chapter, I will carry with me the lessons, relationships and values I gained during my time here,” he said. “I am proud to be a Panther and proud to be part of 150 years at UNI.”

Family Ties

Some families pass down recipes, traditions or treasured heirlooms. Others pass down a calling rooted in a place.

For **Barry Wilson** and **Becky Wilson Hawbaker**, and **Dennis and J.D. Cryer**, that place is the University of Northern Iowa. Their family's stories are intertwined with the College of Education. Across generations, they've shared classrooms, colleagues and a commitment to preparing future educators.

A legacy begins

Barry Wilson's journey began in 1973 after completing doctoral studies in educational psychology. The Perry, Iowa, native found a home in Cedar Falls.

"UNI was a perfect match," he recalls. "Its long-standing reputation for preparing outstanding teachers aligned closely with my interests, professional goals and doctoral studies."

Over the next 30 years, Wilson taught, chaired

"I think every day about living up to the legacy of the incredible faculty I learned from."



J.D. and Dennis Cryer



Educational Psychology and Foundations, led accreditation and helped develop a teacher education assessment system.

His daughter Becky grew up inside that world. Weekends often meant tagging along to Schindler Education Center while her father worked. Malcolm Price Laboratory School became a second home from preschool through 12th grade.

"I didn't just benefit from four years of UNI's excellence in teacher education," says Hawbaker. "I was immersed in it from age four on."

After earning her teaching degree and completing graduate work elsewhere, Hawbaker returned to Price Lab as a teacher before moving into teacher preparation and clinical experiences. Today, she heads the Department of Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, leading faculty that includes colleagues once hired by her father.



"I think every day about living up to the legacy of the incredible faculty I learned from," she says, mentioning **Judy Finkelstein, Joan Duea, Stephen Fortgang, William Waack, Marc Yoder and Jody Stone** as well as her father.

Growing up UNI

Dennis Cryer first arrived on campus as a student-athlete from Treynor, Iowa, playing baseball and earning bachelor's and master's degrees. After completing a doctorate and teaching elsewhere, he returned to his alma mater in 1976 to join the College of Education faculty in health education.

Cryer taught, coordinated the division and oversaw student internships. He coached baseball at Price Lab and worked internationally with students through the Global Health Corps.

For his son J.D., campus was simply home.

He remembers walking to the union with his father,

playing in his office and family trips connected to Panther athletics.

Like Becky, J.D. attended the lab school. When studying at the University of Iowa, his father encouraged him to try Camp Adventure. That experience cemented his decision to become an educator. Eventually he earned an administrative certificate and doctorate from UNI. After teaching and serving as a PreK-8 principal at Price Lab, he coordinated UNI teacher education before joining the Elementary and Middle Education faculty.

For J.D., the most memorable moments came when professional and personal lives intersected.

"I would find myself sitting next to my father at faculty meetings and think, this is weird, but cool," he says. "Where else could a son work with his father, as a colleague and professional, on a shared goal of helping educate future teachers?"



Barry Wilson and Becky Wilson Hawbaker



A Hub for Education and Educators

Fifty years ago, the College of Education celebrated the dedication of the Schindler Education Center.

Completed in phases from 1970-1973, the six-story building represented a bold investment. Known simply as the Education Center for 20 years, it featured state-of-the-art spaces including television-equipped classrooms connecting to a communications center in the lower level and options like movable walls. In 1990, it was renamed Schindler Education Center after alumna **Dora Hood Schindler** donated \$1 million to UNI in honor of her late husband and educator **Alvin** ('27).

The center entered a new era in 2017 with a major renovation that transformed now outdated classrooms and lecture halls into flexible, collaborative and technology-smart learning spaces. A gift from the Gerdin Family Foundation created a natural light-filled central commons area with "learning stairs" bridging first and second floors. The renovation earned LEED certification for its energy efficient-design.

As the facility anchor for the college — which also includes space within the Wellness and Recreation Center and Nielsen Field House — it remains a focal point for educators and education at UNI.



*"The Education Center is the most visible testimonial to **Clifford Bishop** as a builder. He had visions of a structure that would be an impressive and powerful statement about the importance of professional education at this institution. He was able to convince the faculty that dreams, when accompanied by resourcefulness and resolve, could produce far-reaching results. Today the Education Center reminds us of our historical commitment to professional education and helps us fulfill that commitment."*

Remarks at a 1983 memorial gathering for Bishop, Department Head of Education (1950-1970) and champion for a new teaching facility.

Another side to COE

Physical Education for Men and Physical Education for Women brought their own history to the College of Education when added in 1968.

What began as "physical culture" led to a physical education department in 1909, followed by separate departments established in 1929 that remained for the next 50 years.

A broadened scope including athletic training, kinesiology, public health, recreation, leisure studies and nonprofit leadership led to a new School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) in 1979. It was renamed the School of Health, Physical Education and Leisure Services (HPELS) in 1990 and, in 2016, the School of Kinesiology and Health and Human Services (KAHHS).

In 2018, the school separated into two departments. All but recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership programming transferred to a new School for Health and Human Sciences in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences in 2023.

The Elinor A. Crawford and William R. Thrall Hall of Excellence, named for its benefactors who led physical education for women and men, continues to honor alumni, students and faculty in the fields originally associated with HPELS.

Writing the next chapter

Together, the Wilsons and Cryers have witnessed decades of change — from chalkboards to digital classrooms, from the Iowa Communications Network to Zoom, and through shifts in departments, demographics and educational priorities.

They haven't witnessed history. They've helped shape it.

"To be part of this great teacher education program myself and then have my son join me in this program makes me proud," says Dennis Cryer. "It means a lot to share this journey and know that the work we both have done will help build a strong foundation that will serve future students."

J.D. Cryer sees that legacy in everyday moments — running into former students at the Iowa State Fair, a track meet or the grocery store and hearing about classrooms they now lead.

UNI's strength, Barry Wilson says, has always been its people. He is confident the next generation of faculty will continue the university's tradition of preparing teachers.

For Becky, carrying that legacy forward is a privilege and responsibility. She takes pride in her family's 60-plus years of service and in UNI's enduring mission.

"UNI has always felt like home to me. I endeavor to help make it feel that way for the next generation of students."



Len Froyen and his wife, Gail (Annable) Froyen ('59, BA, '87, MA), who served as a librarian at the Price Lab school.

Len Froyen:

A Story of Gratitude

Len Froyen has spent a lifetime studying, shaping and sharing a story of gratitude.

For nearly half of the University of Northern Iowa's 150-year history, Froyen has been part of its story. The 92-year-old has experienced the institution as a student, faculty member, department head and emeritus professor.

His memories begin in fall 1953, when he arrived on the Iowa State Teachers College (ISTC) campus and moved into Stadium Hall beneath the bleachers of Latham

"Every day, I was writing and telling my story. The story is all about relationships. I want the centerpiece of that story to be gratitude as the antecedent of joy."

Stadium. What might have seemed an unlikely residence became the perfect introduction to college life.

"In a short amount of time, you developed a small family in that room," he recalls. "When we walked across campus, we greeted one another. There was such a sense of camaraderie."

That sense of connection deepened in the classroom. As a student, Froyen enrolled in Iowa history simply because Leland Sage was teaching it. Sage quickly became more than a respected historian.

"I adored that man. To me, he was the epitome of a professor," he says.

Sage listened to students, encouraged them and treated them as individuals. The example left a lasting impression.

After earning a degree in social science teaching, Froyen completed a master's degree in counseling at Michigan State University. At 25, he became ISTC's youngest faculty member, teaching social studies at Malcolm Price Laboratory School for two years. He then was a guidance counselor in Independence, Iowa, before returning in 1963 as a faculty member in

Education and Psychology for State College of Iowa.

When teaching, he carried Sage's example with him.

"I tried to be excited about things students brought with them to class," he says. "When students could somehow understand what it meant to be a student, that's what I really liked."

The first head of Educational Psychology and Foundations within the newly established College of Education, he also helped create one of UNI's enduring traditions: the convocation ceremony marking a milestone for newly admitted teacher education students.

By the time he retired in 1994, Froyen had witnessed the transformation from ISTC to SCI to the University of Northern Iowa. Along the way, he crossed paths with leaders Malcolm Price, J. William Maucker, John Kamerick and Constantine Curris; longtime department head Clifford Bishop; and four College of Education deans. He particularly remembers that Maucker regarded the faculty as family and chaired faculty meetings himself.

Retirement never meant leaving UNI behind. A member and past president

Bedrocks of Learning and Teacher Prep

Today's College of Education is forever intertwined with the organizational roots of an institution dedicated solely to teacher education for its first 85 years.

Learning how and what to teach with the actual practice of teaching were embedded in Didactics and Practice, the first coursework for the Iowa State Normal School cited in 1876.

Moving forward as the Iowa State Teachers College in 1909, some version of Professional Instruction in Education and Training in Teaching served as educational anchors for the next 117 years.

- **From 1913 to 1970, the former was either Education or Education and Psychology.** Curriculum related to preparing future teachers, school administrators and, eventually, school psychologists and postsecondary education professionals. Through 2025, iterations of this original structure remained as the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies.
- **The latter, renamed Teaching in 1914, carried the mantle through 2025 for field observation and clinical experiences.** This included the operations, staffing and curricula associated with the training schools.

Through the years, the college added Special Education, moved library science into Curriculum and Instruction and witnessed the evolution of its health and human services programs.

While names have changed, the commitment to excellence in undergraduate and graduate education across a spectrum of disciplines remains.



of the UNI Emeritus Association, Froyen worked with university leaders to establish the Lyle Schwarzenbach Memorial honoring deceased faculty and staff who had dedicated at least 10 years of service to the institution.

His interest in gratitude continued as well. In 2013, he published "Gratitude: Affirming One Another Through Stories," later used in UNI human development courses. Building on that work, he and colleague **Radhi Al-Mabuk** co-authored "Gateway to Forgiveness and Beyond" in 2018.

Whether teaching, counseling, serving as a deacon in the Catholic Church or volunteering with

local organizations, Froyen fosters relationships that lead to loyalty and gratitude that sustain those connections.

"Every day, I was writing and telling my story," he says. "The story is all about relationships. I want the centerpiece of that story to be gratitude as the antecedent of joy."

For Froyen, Panther pride remains an enduring expression of gratitude for the mentors, classmates, students, colleagues and institution that shaped his life.

"We were proud to be students at Iowa State Teachers College," he says. "Today students still feel at home here."

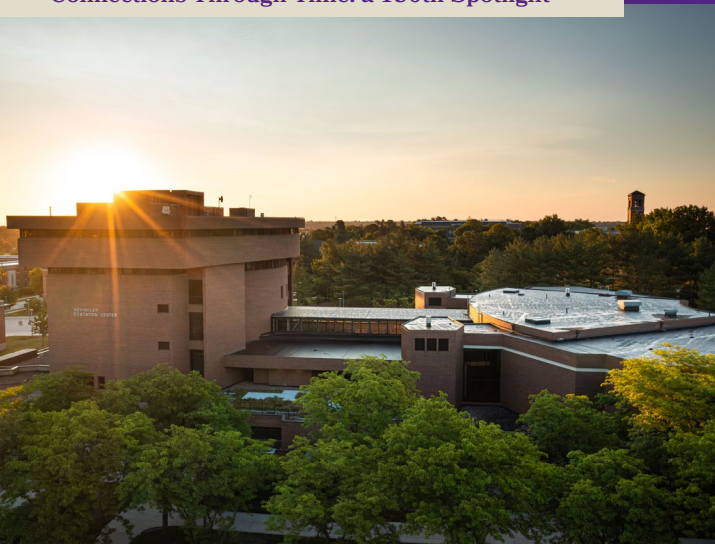
A Practical Approach to Learning

Getting hands-on experience is a hallmark of University of Northern Iowa. It's a philosophy that traces back to its earliest days in teacher preparation.

The launch of a formal training school in 1892 was the beginning of a 120-year trajectory that led to the Campus School in 1912 (renamed the Campus Laboratory School in 1944 and now Sabin Hall) and a new home in the Malcolm Price Laboratory School, open from 1953 to 2012.

Over its existence, the training school model evolved into a setting for training, observation, curricular development and research, impacting both educator preparation and growth of teaching as a profession while educating local elementary and secondary students.

Today's teaching majors continue to learn through clinical internships and student teaching locally and across Iowa and beyond. Counterparts in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership and graduate programs benefit from focused experiences built within their preparation as well.



Strength in Teaching, Then and Now

For its first 85 years, this institution existed for a single stated purpose: preparing teachers.

As the Iowa State Normal School became Iowa State Teachers College (ISTC), State College of Iowa (SCI) then the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), leaders gradually recognized that broader academic offerings could strengthen, rather than diminish, teacher preparation.

James Gilchrist, Homer Seerley, Orval Latham, Malcolm Price and J. William Maucker each helped guide that evolution while protecting the university's defining dedication to educators.

In 1948, President Price urged ISTC to become "a truly outstanding professional college for the education of teachers," and the faculty reaffirmed its single-purpose mission. Yet within a decade, with only four standalone teachers' colleges remaining, perspectives had changed. Research requested by Maucker showed teacher education flourished within broader institutions without losing prestige. In 1959, the faculty approved bachelor's degrees that did not require teacher certification and the Board of Regents authorized the transition to SCI in 1961.

As Maucker later observed, ISTC's strong faculty and curriculum had prepared it for this moment all along: "It seems not to be understood that we are a liberal arts college and have been for 30 years." Six years later, he led the transition to university status.

Today, UNI's mission has expanded, but its foundation remains true to its roots. One in four undergraduates pursues a teaching major, continuing a 150-year commitment that the College of Education proudly carries forward.

Leading the Way

Nine deans have guided the College of Education since 1968, beginning with Howard Knutson, the associate dean for instruction for SCI before he led the transition to the new college. Dean Colleen Mulholland leads today's college as it advances teacher education while expanding opportunities across all its academic programs.

Howard Knutson, 1968-1976

Dale F. Nitzschke, 1976-1980

Fred D. Carver, 1981-1987

Thomas Switzer, 1989-2002

Jeffrey W. Cornett, 2003-2007

William P. Callaghan, 2002-2003 (interim), 2007-2010

Dwight C. Watson, 2010-2015

Gaetane Jean-Marie, 2016-2019

Colleen S. Mulholland, 2019-(Current)

UNI College of Education Timeline

1876 **Iowa State Normal School opens to prepare teachers**

1892 Training School establishes hands-on clinical teaching
1904 Bachelor of Arts in Education approved

1909 **Iowa State Teachers College begins**

1912 Training School building opens; renamed Campus Laboratory School, 1944
1953 Master of Arts in Education approved
1953 Malcolm Price Laboratory School opens

1961 **State College of Iowa**

1967 **University of Northern Iowa**

1968 **College of Education begins operations**

1973 Education Center completed; dedication in 1976
1982 Doctor of Education degree added
1988 Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education established
1990 Building renamed Schindler Education Center (SEC)
1995 National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) added
1999 Institute for Educational Leadership launches
2010 Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy founded
2012 Malcolm Price Laboratory School closes
2013 Regents approve Center for Educational Transformation (CET)
2017 Major renovation completed for SEC
2023 CET closes; health-related programs move to College of Social and Behavioural Sciences (CSBS)
2025 Academic units realigned into:
Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences
Elementary and Middle Level Education
Learning, Leadership and Community
Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education
2026 NPPS closes, EdVantageUNI announced

A Legacy of Play and Purpose

150 Years of Recreation and Leadership at UNI

By Kathleen Scholl, PhD,
and Rodney Dieser, PhD,
LMHC

Scholl and Dieser are professors in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership in the Department of Learning, Leadership and Community.

Long before it became an academic major, recreation was central to education in Cedar Falls.

At the site that would become the University of Northern Iowa, children at the Cedar Falls Civil War Soldiers' Orphans' Home learned through movement, nature and play as well as through books. They explored creek beds, gathered fruit and formed connections outdoors, showing that learning happens everywhere — and recreation is central to human development.

In 1926, the “Annals of Iowa” published George Gallarno's recollections of childhood at the Soldiers' Orphans' Home. After his father died while serving in the Civil War, Gallarno and his siblings moved there. Education was central to daily life, but so were recreation and nature, including explorations of Dry Run Creek.

Today, the Recreation, Tourism and Nonprofit Leadership (RTNL) program carries forward that legacy, preparing students for careers in youth recreation, community education, parks

and recreation, nonprofit organizations, and outdoor education and camps.

A major influence on the academic and professional practice of recreation and nonprofit leadership was the social settlement movement. By the early 1900s, more than 400 settlement houses operated across the United States, including Jane Addams' Hull-House in Chicago. Located in immigrant and low-income neighborhoods, they combined education, social services and recreation for youth and adults. Addams and playground leader Joseph Lee helped establish the intellectual foundation for the modern parks and recreation movement through research, advocacy and innovative recreation programs.

Amid emerging national ideas about recreation and play, UNI began offering coursework that would lead to degrees in recreation and nonprofit services. Beginning in 1912 with Playground Methods, the university established an academic foundation. Coursework expanded through the years with a focus on theory, equipment, supervision, play function and program design and recreation's connections with youth organizations, education and community-building. After World War II, courses like Community Recreation and the School (1952) reflected the growing need for recreation opportunities.



Over the following decades, recreation became a recognized academic field. In 1976, UNI established the Bachelor of Arts in recreation, transforming the program from a physical education component into a leadership-focused degree.

As the profession matured, UNI strengthened its commitment to professional standards. In 1986, the program earned accreditation from the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT).

The inclusion of nonprofit leadership prepared students for careers in youth-serving agencies and community-based organizations in a growing nonprofit sector. The

leisure services MA followed in 1992. As the program evolved — including a transition to leisure, youth and human services — the curriculum broadened to include tourism, youth development and community leadership.

By 2020, the program's name — **Recreation, Tourism and Nonprofit Leadership** (RTNL) — reflected its expanded interdisciplinary scope, which included environmental and community engagement.

Today, RTNL reflects more than a century of growth. From playground leadership to nonprofit management, the program prepares students to lead, serve and strengthen communities through meaningful experiences with lasting impact.

SYNERGY AND OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER ED

As an undergraduate student at University of Northern Iowa, **Michael Gleason** was heavily involved in Camp Adventure. Early on, program founder **Christopher Edginton** saw his potential. He suggested that, if Gleason pursued a master's degree, he'd have the opportunity to serve as a graduate assistant in the program.

When Gleason learned more about the postsecondary education (PSE): student affairs Master of Arts program, he knew it would be the perfect fit.

"I wanted to create meaningful learning opportunities for college students in the same way my mentors had done for me," he says.

Today, Gleason is putting his master's degree to work as the newly named vice president for academic and student affairs at Clarke University. Previously, he was an associate dean for graduate studies at Wartburg College and the Irving R. Burling Distinguished Professor in Leadership. He has taught both undergraduate and graduate students, helped grow graduate programs and promoted academic innovation.

"What I really enjoy is that I can apply what I've taught within leadership programs to the administrative work I provide within higher education," Gleason says.

Being effective in higher education

Through his master's program at UNI, Gleason gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of higher education — something that continues to help him in all of his roles today.

"As a student, you don't always see how much work goes into creating the systems and infrastructure for student success and learning," he says.

Through coursework in legal issues, college student development, assessment and finance, Gleason learned about the importance of effective administration in higher education and how he could best support students.

"While the types of students we serve will always be changing, it provides insight into the developmental stages of students and why considering those is critical in the design of any initiative to serve students," Gleason says. "Regarding leadership, the program taught me a great deal more about myself and the strengths I bring to serving students, as well as the areas that are not my strengths and how I can build teams that complement my strengths."

Michael Gleason

'06, BA; '09, MA

"I wanted to create meaningful learning opportunities for college students in the same way my mentors had done for me."

Finding the intersections

Gleason is proud of how his work centers on intersections of different higher education cultures — whether between student affairs and academic affairs, the institution and community or graduate and undergraduate education.

"I really enjoy working to create infrastructure and support in these spaces where I think students can learn the most and we can create dynamic learning experiences," he says.

Much of that perspective was shaped by the PSE: student affairs faculty, who brought both academic preparation and practitioner experience into the classroom.

"I think that really impacted the way that I view higher education and the synergistic opportunities that exist between worlds we sometimes see as separate, such as academic and student affairs," Gleason shares. "The content of the program was great, but the modeling of professionalism in higher education really stands out to me the most."

CREATING A WELCOMING PLACE TO EXPLORE

School libraries are so much more than just a place to check out books.

That idea was reinforced again and again as **Katie Seavey** journeyed through the College of Education's School Library Studies Program for her endorsement as a teacher librarian.

"The program challenged me to think about the library as a space for collaboration, inquiry, literacy, creativity and connection, and that mindset has shaped the way I approach my work every day," says Seavey, who served as a teacher librarian at Riverdale Heights Elementary School in the Pleasant Valley (Iowa) School District before assuming her current role as an instructional coach.

The flexibility to grow

The program's flexibility initially drew Seavey to enroll in advanced coursework offered through the online program at UNI. As a busy mom, teacher and wife, she found the completely online program both accessible and realistic.

"I had also heard from others that the program was manageable while working full time, which was a huge factor in my decision," she says.

Upon earning the endorsement, Seavey became even more passionate about helping students feel like reading belongs to them. Her philosophy: "I want reluctant readers to feel less intimidated, curious kids to have a place to ask questions and explore ideas, and every student to know the library is a place where they are welcome exactly as they are."

As a teacher librarian, Seavey enjoyed helping students realize that authors are real people with quirks and interests just like their own. During author spotlights, students get excited discovering small connections, whether it's a favorite food, hobby or childhood experience.

"Those moments make books and authors feel less distant and more relatable," Seavey says.

She also worked hard to create a library environment where students feel safe exploring what they genuinely enjoy reading without judgment.

"For some students, that might be nonfiction, audiobooks or a funny series they can't put down," she says. "I truly believe it only takes one book to turn a student into a lifelong reader, and being part of that moment is one of the best parts of my job."



Katie Seavey
'24, Endorsement

"I want reluctant readers to feel less intimidated, curious kids to have a place to ask questions and explore ideas, and every student to know the library is a place where they are welcome exactly as they are."

Mentoring the future

Seavey was honored to mentor future teacher librarians in practicum placements.

"Education is facing increasing demands, tighter budgets and difficult staffing decisions, and library positions are sometimes part of those conversations," Seavey says. "Because of that, I feel strongly that future teacher librarians need to see the full impact this role can have within a school community."

When practicum students spent time in her library at Riverdale Heights, Seavey hoped they left with a deeper understanding of all the possibilities the position can offer and the difference it can make for kids.

"I wanted them to understand the importance of being visible, involved and indispensable within their schools," Seavey says. "In many ways, it feels full circle because I remember learning from educators who helped shape my own understanding of what a library program could be. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help support the next generation in that same way."

CARING FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL



Sarah Marston

'15, BA

During her time as an elementary education student with minors in literacy and special education at UNI, **Sarah Marston** discovered a passion for learning about other cultures and building community — whether through playing cello in the orchestra or helping establish a Navigators campus ministry English club that welcomed international students.

That early interest in connection and inclusion eventually led her to an opportunity abroad with Common Grounds International Academy in India, a small private school working to build a more inclusive learning environment to meet community needs. Marston, a 2015 graduate, knew it was the right move.

There, she led the growing special education department, with a focus on coaching teachers.

“They were so eager to learn, ready to try new ideas and soon started to come to me to get input on ideas and to share celebrations,” Marston says. “It was exciting to be a part of starting something new in the region. It came with challenges, but we also had a lot of freedom to be creative and explore.”

One area she helped develop at the school was play-based learning for younger students.

“I quickly realized that our students who started with us in play class were naturals at including peers with disabilities,” she says. “Sometimes, we as adults would worry and try to plan out all the details, but kids would jump right in to include their friends in meaningful ways. It was also important to take time to celebrate and share stories of success to build up our inclusive culture and encourage all involved that this was worth it.”

Celebrating inclusive environments

Today, as a level two special education teacher in her hometown of Clinton, Iowa, Marston continues to focus on building and celebrating inclusive learning environments through collaboration.

It was at UNI that Marston solidified her career path, particularly through an Honors Program seminar on disabilities and society that sparked her interest in special education.

“In building an inclusive environment, each person deserves a sense of belonging and has something to offer the community.”

“This course challenged my thinking in the best possible way,” Marston says. “It helped me to re-imagine what is possible, to consider what limitations we as a society put on people and to build a focus on caring for each individual.”

One faculty member who made a lasting impact was Faculty Emerita **Kim Miller**, who Marston recalled modeling important values of creativity, high expectations for all and inclusion for all learners.

Marston also completed an honors thesis with **Sarah Vander Zanden** as her adviser on multimodal storytelling with English language learner students.

“This was a meaningful experience to explore how we can value and make connections to students' experiences, and to make space for all voices in our classrooms,” she says.

For Marston, who is pursuing a master's degree in special education, her teaching career is overall grounded in her faith and a commitment to serving students well.

“In building an inclusive environment, each person deserves a sense of belonging and has something to offer the community,” she says.



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, go to alumni@uni.edu or mail to UNI Alumni Association, 1126 Bartlett Hall, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0284.



Moved or need to update your address? Email via alumni@uni.edu, call 319-273-2355 or update online at alumni.edu/update.

From June 11, 2025 to June 22, 2026

1960s

'66 Joy (Neal) Kidney, BA, West Des Moines, published her fifth book titled "Meadowlark Songs: A Motherline Legacy."

'69 Nancy (Porter) Edwards, BA, Anamosa, has volunteered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness for more than 25 years.

1970s

'77 Debbra (Purvis) Laneville, BA, Medina, OH, taught 42 years at all grade levels from preschool to high school. She taught in seven states with each position providing valuable life lessons that turned into a book titled "You Can't Make This Stuff Up – Life Lessons from Special Kids."

'72 Dennis Wenthold, BA, Miami, FL, originally from Calmar. He met his wife, Mireya Bernal Greco ('70) at UNI. A teacher for 14 years, he taught in the Virgin Islands; Council Bluffs, Ft. Myers, Florida, and Panama. A special achievement during his 24 years as a school administrator in Florida was seeing his East Naples Middle School students earn the school's highest score ever on the State Assessment Test. Through the years, he also coached high school basketball (20 years); volleyball, baseball, softball (9); and track and soccer (3). He owns and operates a bed and breakfast called "Cabanas Potosi" in El Valle de Anton, Panama. "If I could go back in life, I would do it all again."

1980s

'83 Lisa Schwartz, BA, Council Bluffs, along with husband Don Schwartz, completed 43 years of teaching and coaching with the Council Bluffs Community Schools.

'84 Lisa (Wadle) Vander Lugt, BA, Cascade, retired in June 2025 after 25 years in her last position at Aquin Catholic Elementary. She is looking forward to relaxing, reading and a little travel.

'86 Debra Shelton, MA, Duncombe, retired in June 2023 after 45 years as an early childhood special education teacher and consultant.

2000s

'04 Traci (Roberts) Wildeboer, BA, BA '07, BA '11, Cedar Falls, received a 2026 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a 2nd grade teacher at North Cedar Elementary.

'04 Jared Smith, BA, Waterloo, was named one of the 2026 Top 10 School District Superintendents in the U.S. by Education Insider Magazine. He is the superintendent of the Waterloo Community School District.

'08 Oksana Grybovyh Hafermann, EdD, Cedar Falls, was named an American Council on Education Fellow for the 2026-2027 academic year.

'09 Jill (Lenz) Ridder, BA, Woodbine, received the 2026 Milken Educator Award. She is the principal of Woodbine Elementary School.

2010s

'15 Molli (Mabie) Wellman, BA, Cedar Falls, received a 2026 Gold Star Award for outstanding teaching in Black Hawk County. She is a kindergarten teacher at Immaculate Conception in Waterloo.

'18 Dylan Shaffer, BA, Coggon, received the 2026 Iowa STEM Teacher Award for the Northeast Region. He is an 8th grade science teacher at Monticello Middle School.

2020s

'21 Chandler DeWees, BA, Cedar Rapids, is bridging the nonprofit and business sector as a business development manager with Rinderknecht Associates and Merit Construction Company. His projects include partnerships with schools, hospitals and community organizations across Cedar Rapids.



'It Changed Everything'

Overseas teaching leaves lifelong impact



Linda Nemitz's teaching career took her far and wide.

After graduating from University of Northern Iowa with an elementary education degree in 1978, she taught in Iowa for seven years. Then, in the mid-1980s, the economy shifted during the farm crisis and teachers began getting laid off. Nemitz

remembers thinking teaching was supposed to be a reliable profession and wondering what she would do next.

That's when she came across the Overseas Recruitment Fair at UNI. Her former counselor at the university encouraged Nemitz to check it out, initially just to gain interview experience and explore options outside Iowa and the Midwest.

But for her, the experience was much more than that.

"It changed everything for me," she says.

Nemitz ultimately spent more than 25 years teaching primarily preschool and kindergarten overseas in Colombia, Egypt, Italy and Japan, typically moving every four years. She loved

learning about different cultures and ways of life while also bringing those experiences back into her classroom.

Inspiration for a legacy

Nemitz credits the Overseas Recruitment Fair with altering the course of her life, which recently inspired her to make an estate gift to the UNI Overseas Teacher Recruitment Program and Study Abroad.

After retiring, Nemitz had started thinking about the legacy she wanted to leave behind. Since she doesn't have children of her own, she decided to create a planned gift for UNI's College of Education to support future teachers through scholarships. She especially likes the idea of helping students pursue teaching experiences overseas, something she didn't even realize was possible when she was a student.

"I hope my impact will be for any of those who need a boost or some help financially or even just the encouragement of, 'Look what's out there. See what you can do with this opportunity,'" Nemitz says.

Teaching overseas opened up opportunities Nemitz had never imagined. While UNI prepared her well academically, international teaching gave her more freedom to develop programs, try new ideas and pursue professional development in ways she hadn't previously experienced.

"It made me realize how important lifelong learning is, especially in professions like teaching," she says.

Over the years, Nemitz stayed connected to UNI, especially through the overseas placement services program. At one point, she returned to campus to serve on a panel about international teaching opportunities and enjoyed sharing her experiences with students.

In many ways, UNI has been a grounding force in Nemitz's life. It not only gave her an education, but it also changed her life in ways she never could have imagined.

It's exactly what she hopes her gift to the College of Education will do for others.



SIMPSON NAMED ENDOWED VISITING PROFESSOR

Katie Simpson, clinical assistant professor, Elementary and Middle Level Education, has been appointed the Gretchen and Francis Pallischeck Endowed Visiting Professor.

The professorship, honoring her leadership and contributions to elementary education, is supported by an endowed fund which provides a stipend for the next two years.

Simpson becomes the fourth faculty member benefiting from an active, named endowed professorship.

"Endowed professorships and endowed fellowships give us the ability to further elevate our faculty and provide additional recognition," says Dean **Colleen Mulholland**. "That was a specific focus for *Our Tomorrow: The Campaign for UNI* for the college and remains a priority."

A '150TH' THANK YOU

"As we wrap up UNI's 150th anniversary, we are deeply appreciative of the outpouring of support for the College of Education and the people who make it thrive. This year has highlighted the strength of our community and the shared commitment to empowering our students, faculty and staff. We simply could not do this work without our incredible alumni, donors, community members and academic partners."

— Nate Clapham,
Assistant VP, Collegiate Development

IN THEIR WORDS ...

Comments from College of Education donors

"We decided to establish a special education scholarship a few years ago. My wife's last position before she retired was as a para in the special education department at Minnetonka High School. Having devoted her life to helping people with special needs, we know that kids pursuing this field are doing it as a labor of love and will never get paid their worth. We thought maybe we could make their decision a little easier."

— Dave Baker ('87, BA), who met his wife Beth ('BS, 98) when they were RAs in Noehren Hall.

"Funding education students is important to me as I was a recipient when I entered in the fall of 1969. I was the oldest of seven being raised by a single mom as my father had passed the summer after my freshman year in high school. I did obtain academic funding, but also received additional grants which also did not need to be repaid. For this, I am forever grateful."

— Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel ('73, BA)

"I am currently wrapping up my first year teaching in Des Moines Public Schools after spending seven years in Houston. Thanks to the elementary and middle level dual major, I qualified for the TEACH grant and teacher loan forgiveness and am in a place where I can help a student looking to make an impact on future generations. It only made sense to give back today. Go Cats!"

— Sam Hinman ('17, BA)

DONOR HONOR ROLL

Thank you to the following donors who made cash contributions to the college between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026. 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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and Kirk Winemiller

THE SCHOLARLY ROAD TO AN EdD

For students in the Doctor of Education program, the capstone experience is the dissertation — a significant scholarly endeavor.

In EdD programs like UNI's anchored in Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) principles, this work is often conceptualized as a Dissertation in Practice. Unlike a traditional PhD dissertation, which may focus primarily on generating theoretical knowledge, a Dissertation in Practice is grounded in addressing complex problems that emerge directly from educational settings such as schools, colleges, community organizations and leadership contexts.

"In many ways, the dissertation becomes a bridge between scholarship and practice," said Sohyun "Soh" Meacham, associate dean of graduate studies and research and EdD Program lead. "It is not simply an academic requirement. It is a process through which students learn how to become thoughtful scholar-practitioners who can critically examine problems, use evidence responsibly, and lead change with greater confidence and clarity."

Students work closely with a dissertation chair and committee to develop a proposal, conduct research, analyze findings and write the dissertation. The process concludes with a final oral defense in which students present and discuss their work with their committee at the proposal and completion stages.

An integral part of this work is the support of faculty, who play a key role in helping students navigate the innate complexities that come with balancing doctoral study alongside full-time careers, family responsibilities and leadership obligations.

"Dissertation work is intellectually demanding and often emotionally demanding as well," Meacham said. "Beyond providing scholarly guidance, faculty mentors help students develop confidence, maintain momentum and work through the inevitable uncertainties that arise during research and writing."

Although the process is rigorous, it is also highly developmental.

"Students often describe it as one of the most transformative intellectual and professional experiences of their lives," said Meacham.

The best topics, she added, emerge from students' lived professional experiences because those are the issues they understand deeply and genuinely want to improve.

Recent dissertations from College of Education graduates highlight how scholarly research can address real-world challenges in schools and communities.



Jill Schany, EdD '25

Currently: English teacher at Emmetsburg High School

Dissertation Title: Socioeconomic Status and Educational Opportunities Through the Eyes of Students and Teachers: Diverse Realities, Shared Insights

Schany's research examined how students and teachers in rural schools perceive educational opportunity and equity, revealing both shared concerns and differing perspectives.

"One thing my dissertation highlighted is that educational opportunity in rural schools is a lot more complex than people sometimes assume. A lot of the conversation around equity in education focuses on urban or suburban schools, but rural schools have their own unique strengths and challenges. I found that students and teachers often viewed those challenges differently.

"Teachers tended to focus more on systemic issues like staffing shortages, limited funding

or not having enough advanced coursework available. Students, though, talked more about their lived experiences such as whether they felt supported by teachers, whether they felt prepared for college and whether some students had advantages because of family connections, reputation or social status in the community.

"Overall, I think the biggest lesson from the research was that equity in rural education is about much more than just funding or programs. It's also about school culture, relationships, expectations, access to opportunities and making sure every student feels seen, valued and capable of success regardless of their background."


Tiffany Evans, EdD '25

Currently: Teacher librarian in Waterloo Community School District

Dissertation Title: An African American Teacher Librarian's Transformation with Culturally Diverse Literature in a K-5 School Library: An Autoethnography

Evans, one of the College of Education's first Holmes Scholars, explored the role of culturally diverse literature in elementary school libraries while reflecting on her own growth as an educator and librarian.

"I decided to pursue an EdD as a personal goal of continuing learning and to hopefully inspire the students I work with to do so as well. I also felt it was important, as a woman of color, to provide representation for students and show them that there are no boundaries, regardless of what you look like or where you come from, when it comes to academics.

"I would describe my dissertation research as unique. Hopefully it contributes to the field of literacy and highlights the importance of children seeing representation through literature. My research helped me learn more about myself as a practicing librarian and what was important to me when curating curriculum and materials for the school library.

"Looking back, the process of writing a dissertation has given me the confidence to know that all things are possible and that, through my experiences in education, I have a voice that can impact the profession of teaching. The knowledge I gained through the dissertation process gave me the opportunity to look beyond the four walls of a classroom or library and explore research I probably would not have discovered had I not gone through an EdD program."


John Jimo, EdD '25

Currently: Faculty member at Emmaus University

Dissertation Title: Practice Makes Ready, Not Perfect: Exploring Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of their Pre-student Teaching Practicum Experiences

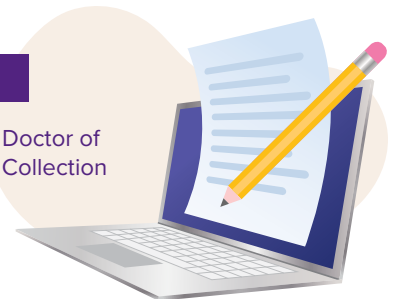
Jimo, the 2025 recipient of the David Bills Outstanding Dissertation Award by the Iowa Academy of Education, explored the lived experiences of nine pre-service teachers during a pre-student-teaching practicum, examining how their relationships, roles and sense of fit with cooperating teachers influenced their developing teacher identities and preparedness for student teaching.

"This research emphasizes the vital role mentor teachers play in preparing classroom-ready teachers and underscores the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship in promoting positive perceptions, experiences, and outcomes as pre-service teachers prepare for successful and rewarding careers in teaching.

"I think the most meaningful moment of guidance during the dissertation process was the committee's critical, constructive feedback after my proposal presentation. They felt that my initial theoretical framework did not align with my study's purpose and research questions. Their recommendations led me to an incredibly relevant and helpful theoretical framework that grounded and strengthened my study."

From UNI ScholarWorks:

- **420 papers** in the UNI Doctor of Education Dissertation Collection
- **288,863+** downloads



EdVantageUNI:

Expanding Educational Support Across Iowa



As a leader in preparing future teachers, school administrators and related education professionals, the array of programs and resources offered by the University of Northern Iowa is vast.

Finding your way to the services and programs you seek, however,

isn't always easy. EdVantageUNI, a new UNI center, intends to improve that experience. More importantly, this entity — approved by the Board of Regents this past summer — provides a framework which supports new services and partnerships to meet the goals of schools, educators and families across Iowa.

An extension of the College of Education, the new center creates a single front door to all education-focused services available across campus while positioning UNI to expand outreach and support for Iowa schools and communities.

Customized professional learning is a cornerstone of the initiative, allowing school districts to partner with UNI on tailored coursework and training designed to meet local workforce and instructional needs.

"This gives us a structure and a focus to provide one-stop service and access," says **Colleen Mulholland**, dean, College of Education. "We're excited about the new fee-for-service offerings we can provide in addition to connecting everyone with existing programs."

EdVantageUNI services include:

- **PK-12 tutoring**, staffed by UNI students.
- **Customized professional learning**, with outreach to school administrations set to begin upon hiring of staff.
- **Convenient access to career advancement resources** for working educators, particularly endorsement and graduate certificate programs as well as master's and doctoral programs.
- **A one-stop connection to youth camps, professional workshops and other educational outreach** supporting families and working educators.

EdVantageUNI will also **play a role in sponsoring new Iowa public charter schools** under legislation passed earlier this year. UNI will share charter authorization responsibilities with the state, a role university leaders say aligns with the center's mission of educational innovation and support.

The center will operate as a revenue-generating nonprofit model similar to outreach enterprises already established at UNI.



More information is available
through EdVantageUNI.

NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR PLAYGROUND SAFETY CLOSES

The **National Program for Playground Safety** (NPPS), a respected source for best practices and certifications in playground safety at University of Northern Iowa, closed in June.

For more than 30 years, the center helped playground professionals, educators and community members in cities, school districts and organizations worldwide keep playgrounds safe and well-maintained. Clients have ranged from individuals seeking certification in safe playground practice to the Department of Defense.

Citing increasing volatility in contracting and a growing overlap of services provided by other organizations, the College of Education requested Iowa Board of Regent approval for the closure.

"Countless lives were positively impacted by the NPPS," said Dean **Colleen Mulholland**. "We extend our sincere appreciation to all current and former faculty and staff, including former directors **Heather Olsen** and **Hannah Doyle**, who helped make a lasting difference in the safety, health and happiness of children everywhere."

JACOBSON CENTER PREPARES FOR TRANSITION AS DIRECTOR RETIRES

With the June retirement of **Lori Norton-Meier**, director of the Richard O. Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy (JCCL), preparations for a national search for a new director are under way.

Norton-Meier joined JCCL in 2020. Among initiatives implemented during her tenure were the addition of the UNI Literacy Initiative, a professional learning experience for in-service educators; a Young Readers and Writers Project; and grant-funded research projects such as a collaboration between Iowa, Kentucky and Washington state to grow K-3 teacher leaders in science and literacy.

During this transition, JCCL will continue its support of the UNI Literacy Clinic, through which pre-service teachers provide 1:1 tutoring for elementary students after school.

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE



LEGACY AWARD TO ROBIN FOSTER

Robin Foster, principal of West Elementary, part of the Mid-Prairie Community School District, has received the 2026 UNI Educational Leadership Legacy Award from the University of Northern Iowa.

“Robin has been a successful principal at Mid-Prairie, while also mentoring aspiring leaders in our principalship program and advocating for educator preparation at UNI,” says Matt Townsley, associate professor in Learning, Leadership and Community.

Foster holds a BA in elementary education, an MAE in educational leadership and an advanced studies certificate in superintendency from UNI. She previously served as principal of East Elementary in Kalona and an elementary teacher in Center Point-Urbana.

The annual award goes to alumni demonstrating core values of leadership, service or change in honor of educator and school administrator **Vernon Kirlin** (‘46, BA).

STUDENT HONORS

Student Leadership Awards

At the 2026 Student Leadership Awards, College of Education honorees included:

- **Mara Blevins**, elementary education; Servant Leadership Award, James L. Maas Emerging Leader Scholarship
- **Amory Brown**, elementary education; Servant Leadership Award
- **Hailey Rydberg**, elementary education; Beverly Funk Barnes Student Excellence Award
- **Lauren Bussanmas**, elementary education; Promising Young Alumni Award

TEXTBOOK EQUITY CHAMPIONS HELP STUDENTS SAVE

College of Education faculty were recognized as “Textbook Equity Champions” for helping students save more than \$68,000 on textbooks in 2025. Their efforts contributed to universitywide savings of \$744,000 in 2025 and \$3.6 million overall through free and low-cost course materials.

Faculty adopting a free textbook in 2025 included: **Eva Chen, J.D. Cryer, Carrie Elser, Emily Hanson, Chris Kowalski, Heather Olsen, Amy Sandvold, Jim Stichter, Joan Bessman Taylor, Katie Towler, Sarah Vander Zanden** and **Timothy Weih**.

HALL OF EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZES GANSEN

Jaydon Gansen, a spring master’s graduate in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership, received the Graduate Student Award at the 19th Hall of Excellence, sponsored jointly by Recreation, Tourism and Nonprofit Leadership and the Department of Kinesiology and Athletic Training.

DISSERTATION EARNS TOP GRADUATE HONOR

Jennifer Hough (‘25, EdD) received the 2025-26 Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award during the Graduate Awards luncheon for: “Why Do I Have to Do This?: Examining General Education for CTE Students,” a study related to requirements for career and technical education students. Faculty advisors included **Morgan Anderson**, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, and **David Schmid**, Learning, Leadership and Community.

PROGRAMS AGAIN EARN US NEWS “BEST ONLINE” NATIONAL RECOGNITION

UNI online programs were represented in the 2026 “Best Online Programs” rankings by U.S. News & World Report.

Recognized programs included instructional design and learning technologies, school library studies, teacher leadership for international educators, early childhood education, elementary education, literacy education, principalship and special education. Undergraduate transfer pathways in elementary education, early childhood education and the Purple Pathway for Paraeducators also earned recognition.

INNOVATION GRANT SUPPORTS AI TOOL DEVELOPMENT

Magda Galloway, Elementary and Middle Level Education, received university innovation funding to support development of an AI-powered coaching tool designed to help teacher

FACULTY AND STAFF AWARDS

Teaching: Shelly Bromwich, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education

Professional Service: Megan Balong, Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences

Beverly Funk Barnes Staff Excellence: Cheryl Meller, graduate recruitment and event coordinator, Office of Graduate Studies and Research



Shelly Bromwich



Megan Balong



Cheryl Meller

candidates prepare for the Foundations of Reading Test required in Iowa and Wisconsin. The proposed tool will provide interactive feedback, constructive critique and revision guidance in a low-stakes learning environment.

UNI ALUMNI NAMED LOCAL GOLD STAR TEACHERS

Five graduates of University of Northern Iowa were among the Black Hawk County Gold Star Teachers recognized by the R.J. McElroy Trust and KWWL-TV. Among the honorees were College of Education graduates **Molli Wellman** (‘15, BA) and **Traci Wildeboer** (‘07, BA; and ‘11, BA).

NEWS & NOTES

NEW LEADERSHIP ROLES



As assistant dean of educator preparation, **Karinne Tharaldson** ('21, ASC) oversees

the operational infrastructure of educator preparation including systems, policies, partnerships, compliance and processes. Tharaldson joined the college in 2025 as assistant dean of assessment and clinical experiences, coming from the Cedar Rapids Community School District.



Theophile Muhayimana ('15, EdD), associate professor, is the new interim

head, Learning, Leadership and Community (LLC). After holding several positions in higher education in Rwanda, he joined UNI in 2019, focusing on principalship and teacher leadership for international educators.

Kathleen Scholl, professor in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership, will assist as LLC associate head.

TECHNOLOGY, AI SHAPE TEACHER PREP

The College of Education continues to expand how technology supports teacher preparation and student learning.

- GoReact – a video-based observation platform in use since 2021 – became the primary tool this fall for observing student skill

development during clinical experiences. The system allows university faculty and supervisors to provide feedback remotely while maintaining communication with mentor teachers and school partners. The approach increases flexibility and efficiency while allowing in-person visits to focus on students who would most benefit from additional support.

- **Magdalena Galloway, Robin Dada** and **Ron Rinehart** are helping UNI explore how artificial intelligence should shape educator preparation nationwide. They lead UNI's participation in "Creating Contemporary Curricula Community of Practice," a national initiative coordinated by ISTE+ASCD. UNI was one of 10 institutions nationally selected to participate.

NSF GRANT SUPPORTS RURAL STEM TEACHING INITIATIVE

A nearly \$5 million National Science Foundation grant awarded to **Dana Atwood-Blaine**, associate professor in Elementary and Middle Level Education (EMLE), will strengthen science learning and elevate the teaching profession in rural elementary schools across the Midwest.

Atwood-Blaine is principal investigator for the National STEM Teacher Corps Pilot Program: Midwest Alliance for Rural Elementary Science. UNI joins the University of Kansas, the University of Minnesota and Iowa State University in the effort.

Researchers are studying effective approaches to teacher preparation in rural settings to help build long-term support networks for educators across the region. The project focuses on strengthening hands-on science instruction while also supporting student learning in literacy and mathematics.

A cohort of rural elementary science teachers are receiving a \$12,000 annual stipend for four years to support professional development, mentorship and collaboration with researchers and education leaders.

CURRICULAR UPDATES INCLUDE 'ESPORTS' FLAIR

A new **esports administration minor and certificate** option, as well as an **esports coaching certificate**, lets students pair interest in gaming and digital culture with the practical skills of coaching, event management, leadership and media production.

The interdisciplinary programs combine coursework in recreation, communication and media, educational psychology and learning technologies. Students can earn standalone certificates or build a minor. The options complement numerous majors.

In addition, the master's in recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership was renamed **recreation administration** to better reflect the roles its graduates pursue.

GRANT CONTINUES TO GROW SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

A \$2.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education,

secured by Green Hills Area Education Agency in collaboration with UNI's School Psychology Program and six additional AEAs, continues a "grow your own" approach to address shortages of school psychologists in rural and high-need districts.

This is the third phase of an initiative which has produced 14 graduates. Participants complete a primarily online graduate program while committing to serve in rural Iowa schools for at least three years after graduation.

STUDENT TEACHING STUDY HIGHLIGHTS RURAL IMPACT

A College of Education analysis has estimated UNI student teachers generated approximately \$11.76 million in financial benefit for their rural schools between fall 2020 and fall 2024.

Nicole Skaar, professor in Learning, Leadership and Community, guided the study alongside graduate assistant **Ben Christensen** and university partners from the Institute for Decision Making and Wilson College of Business.

Researchers examined placements in 1,787 rural classrooms. They found the work completed by student teachers equates to approximately \$2.61 million annually in instructional value. The study noted student teacher contributions create important flexibility for licensed teachers while strengthening instruction for students throughout rural communities.

FACULTY PROMOTIONS

Five faculty members in the UNI College of Education earned promotions this year. Recognized were:

Full Professor: **Scott Ellison**, Educational Foundations and Postsecondary Education (EFPE); **Joan Bessman Taylor**, Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education (LESE).

Clinical Associate Professor: **Mary Beth Rygh**, EFPE (now retired).

Associate Professor: **Allison Barness**, LESE, and **J.D. Cryer**, EMLE.



Scott Ellison



Joan Bessman Taylor



Mary Beth Rygh



Allison Barness



J.D. Cryer

COLLEGE WELCOMES NEW FACULTY, STAFF

The College of Education welcomed these new additions this fall:

- Educational Foundations and Professional Experiences, **Kevin Kemp**, student teaching coordinator
- Elementary and Middle Level Education: **Janet Jahn**, assistant professor
- Literacy, Early Childhood and Special Education: **Katie Casper**, assistant professor,

special and inclusive education; **Jacob Steiss**, assistant professor, literacy education

Key professional staff additions have included:

- Child Development Center: **Tam Burt**, director, UNI Child Development Center
- College of Education Advising and Teacher Education Success: **Ruth Palmer** and **Macy Wright**, academic advisors

FELLOWSHIPS ADVANCE SCHOLARSHIP

Faculty members explored topics including AI in education, identity and belonging, use of robots and coding related to literacy, and special and inclusive education through this year's Dean's Summer Fellowships.

Grants for up to \$4,500 per project went to: **Xumei Fan**, LLC; **Seunghoon Han**, EMLE; **Oluwaseun Oti**, LESE; and a team of **Theresa Hirst**, **Amy Staples**, **David Hernandez-Saca**, **Tara Tedrow**, LESE, and **Kristine Donnelly**, EMLE.

RETIREMENTS MARK DECADES OF SERVICE

The College of Education celebrated six faculty and staff members whose retirements this past year represent decades of service to UNI. They included:

- **Robert Boody**, professor, 34 years
- **Barbara Gager**, academic advisor, 30 years
- **Roark Horn**, assistant professor of practice, four years (at UNI)
- **Lori Norton-Meier**, professor and director, Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy, six years (at UNI)

- **Mary Beth Rygh**, clinical associate professor, 15 years
- **Timothy Weih**, associate professor, 24 years

TRANSITIONS

The College of Education honored the passing of two emeritus faculty in the past year:



Kathy Oakland, part of the Department of Teaching, who passed in March 2026. She

retired from UNI in 2018 after a 26-year career which followed years of teaching speech and English to junior high and high school students.



Deborah Deemer, part of the educational psychology and foundations faculty for 28

years, died on July 4. She retired in June 2023.

The college was also notified of the death of May 2026 graduate **Ryle McFarland** of Muscatine, shortly after achieving her dream to earn her elementary education degree.

EVENTS STRENGTHEN ALUMNI AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

From conferences and lectures to service initiatives and recruitment events, the College of Education continued to bring together alumni, educators, students and community partners.

- UNI's **Sesquicentennial Celebration** added special energy to activities throughout the year, including college alumni tents and a gathering recognizing recreation, tourism and nonprofit leadership alumni. Faculty and

students also participated in the universitywide Spring into Service initiative, contributing volunteer hours through projects supporting schools, nonprofits and community organizations across the Cedar Valley.

- More than 400 prospective students and family members attended the annual **Made to Teach** visit day.
- The **Bill and Linda Tubbs Teaching Connections** focused on "Teaching for Democracy," bringing together educators and community leaders for conversations about civic literacy, Iowa social studies standards and the role of education in democratic engagement. Featured speaker was Beth Ratway with the American Institutes for Research.
- The 20th **African American Read-In** drew nearly 2,000 first graders from more than 100 classrooms and 50 schools throughout Iowa.
- Shinho Kim, Framingham State University, explored robotics-based STEM education in keynote and workshop presentations for the **Carlton-Mellichamp Lecture in Education**.
- The **Social and Emotional Learning Conference** welcomed 400 attendees exploring resilience, emotional intelligence and belonging in schools. Keynote Stephanie Jones, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and children's author Susan Verde led the list of speakers. Alumna and emeritus professor **Judith Finkelstein** added financial support this year through a donation to the UNI Foundation.



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