

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**FACULTY PRESENTATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA:  
“UNI’S CORNERSTONE PROJECT: CULTIVATING A FOUNDATION OF SUCCESS”**

**Action Requested:** Receive the presentation.

**Executive Summary:** UNI’s First-Year Philosophy Statement asserts that “A positive first-year experience is the cornerstone of students’ success in college, and by extension, their careers and lives. The University of Northern Iowa recognizes the importance and value of this positive first-year experience for students, and the need for the university to facilitate students’ effective transition to the university by providing a variety of experiences, opportunities, and foundational skills to help them become successful students.”

UNI developed and implemented a multi-faceted *First-Year Cornerstone* pilot course to address its First-Year Philosophy concerning student learning. The course is designed to foster a supportive academic and experiential environment that challenges and inspires students to actively engage in learning. The goal is for students to develop a broader world view, practice responsible decision-making, open their minds to new possibilities, be engaged citizens, and be prepared to be members of pluralistic communities. The course fosters a welcoming and safe environment that is sensitive to the individual needs, backgrounds, and experiences of first-year students. Furthermore, the course is designed to facilitate connections and points of contact with faculty, other students, staff, and support services. Through their active involvement in campus life, Cornerstone students are introduced to the community values of respect, caring, ethical responsibility, inclusiveness, and intellectual and social engagement.

Academic rigor is the standard in the Cornerstone course. The course outcomes are consistent with the writing and oral communication requirements of UNI’s Liberal Arts Core (LAC); additional outcomes have been included in the areas of student success and civility. The LAC Director has been instrumental in the development and implementation of First-Year Experience initiatives at UNI and expects *First-Year Cornerstone* to serve as a model for engaged learning and assessment at UNI and is used to continuously revise and improve the Liberal Arts Core.

LAC Director Dr. Deirdre Bucher Heistad and UNI student Samantha Heinze will outline major components, review objectives, and provide a summary assessment of the Cornerstone project. In addition to conference presentations by Dr. Heistad on the Cornerstone project, she was invited to serve on the proposal review committee for the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference on Students in Transition hosted by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Heistad has been a faculty member at the University of Northern Iowa since 2000. After completing her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, Dr. Heistad began her career at UNI in the Department of Modern Languages. Prior to becoming the Liberal Arts Core Director, Dr. Heistad served as an Administrative Fellow in the Provost’s Office.

Ms. Heinze is from Middle Amana, Iowa where she graduated from Clear Creek Amana High School in 2011. She is a sophomore Elementary Education major at UNI. She completed First-Year Cornerstone last year and will serve as a First-Year Cornerstone Peer Teaching Assistant in 2012-2013.