

Contact: Rachel Boon

**PRESENTATION: NEXT STEP: PROVIDING PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL EXIT
EXPERIENCES AND CARE TO GRADUATING STUDENTS**

Executive Summary: The Next Step program is a required part of a student's academic program within the Department of Communication & Media at the University of Northern Iowa. The program is truly one of a kind as it is infused within the curriculum and crosses all evident and invisible university boundaries to provide transition programming for graduating students. Students leave the program more prepared and with less anxiety to transition to the next phase of their lives by learning about communicative professionalism, navigating/negotiating a job offer, health benefits, taxes, retirement/investing, relocation, gaining independence and more.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Nichole Zumbach Harken is an Assistant Professor of Instruction and Director of Internships in the Department of Communication and Media. Her research focuses on students' experiences graduating from higher education and their (un)preparedness for life post-college.

Prof. Harken is as Iowa as they come - growing up in a fourth-generation farm family in eastcentral Iowa, she went to a small, rural K-12 school and graduated with 52 of the finest humans. She was a first-generation college student and went on to earn her BA, MA, and EdD from the UNI. She has never lost touch with her roots of working hard, being pragmatic in approaches to knowledge and learning, recognizing the value of public education, and caring deeply for students. The Next Step program was born from her own experiences, talking with alumni, and carefully cultivating cross-functional collaborations on and off campus. The program has now touched the lives of nearly 500 students.