

Where People Matter: Why Employees Choose The University of Northern Iowa

On any given day at the University of Northern Iowa, parking lots fill with faculty and staff arriving to work. For Associate Professor of Instruction Nikki Zumbach Harken, mornings often begin with a smile and a honk — spotting a colleague from another department and sharing a laugh before heading to their respective buildings. “We don’t even work together,” she reflected, “but we were genuinely happy to see each other.” That moment, simple and joyful, captures something essential about UNI: it’s a place where connection runs deep, even across departmental lines.

UNI’s reputation as a top regional university is well established, but its role as a long-

standing employer in the Cedar Valley is equally significant. With around 1,600 employees, UNI offers the scale to support diverse careers while fostering a culture of familiarity and responsiveness. Employees aren’t just numbers — they’re collaborators, mentors and innovators. And for many, UNI is more than a workplace — it’s a community rooted in shared purpose.

That purpose is clear to Nicole Lehman, university registrar, who sees it reflected in every meeting and decision. “We are supporting our students in achieving their dreams and goals in every single role and office on campus,” she said. It’s a sentiment echoed across campus, where the mission of student success transcends classrooms

— it’s embedded in operations, services and strategy. This commitment is often seen in the personal connections faculty and staff build with students. They know them by name, ask about their weekend, and greet them in hallways and across campus — creating a sense of belonging that extends well beyond academics.

Terri Crumley, director of admissions, has spent over 25 years in higher education and describes UNI as a place where the student-centered mission is truly lived. “I see it every day in how faculty and staff interact with students, how decisions are made and how students interact with each other,” she said. “There is so much potential in every student who walks through our doors, and

UNI does a fantastic job helping them discover what more they can do — academically, professionally and personally.”

That sense of impact is a powerful motivator. Ryan Randall, director of annual giving programs, sees it in the energy of campus life. “I love to see the hustle and bustle of students becoming more educated during their time on campus,” he said. “As an employee at UNI, we have the ability to shape lives that will create a lifelong impact — not just in Cedar Falls, but throughout the world.”

Supporting that mission is a benefits package that reflects UNI’s commitment to



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We’re honored by this nomination- and even more honored that it came from our own employees. Thank you for recognizing the work we do together.

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