

Why Faculty and Staff Call UNI the Place to Stay

the whole person. Employees enjoy generous sick and vacation time accruals, including Family Caregiving Leave that allows staff to use sick leave to care for loved ones. The Catastrophic Leave program enables eligible colleagues to donate vacation time to those facing extended medical challenges, ensuring no one has to navigate hardship alone. Annie Karr, associate director of marketing and conferences for UNI Housing & Dining, appreciates the flexibility UNI offers. “The amount of paid time off we get is great, as well as the flexibility in my schedule. Both help contribute to a healthy work/life balance,” she said. She also noted UNI’s retirement contributions — whether through TIAA or IPERS—are far above the standard match she’s seen elsewhere.

Joe Silva, a cook with UNI Dining, speaks to the deeper value of working at UNI. “There are the reliable set hours and great benefits of the job, but here there is also a grateful feeling to be had knowing I am appreciated for doing the work I do, how I do it, and who I do it for,” he said. “Although my lifestyle, responsibilities and needs have changed throughout the years, working for UNI Dining has greatly helped me meet those changes and challenges in life. Actually and honestly, I can say I have never truly had a bad day working at UNI Dining.”

That appreciation is more than anecdotal — it’s institutional. UNI celebrates its employees through formal recognition programs like the Panther First Awards, which honor staff contributions to campus life and student success. These internal accolades complement the many external awards UNI faculty and staff receive for their work in research, teaching, service and innovation.

Christina Geweke, assistant vice president of business operations, has experienced firsthand how UNI’s culture supports both personal and professional growth. “The flexibility to balance work and family has allowed me to be present for the people who matter most while still contributing meaningfully to the university’s mission,” she said. Geweke has pursued two master’s degrees and is now working toward a doctorate, supported by UNI’s tuition reimbursement program and the ongoing encouragement from colleagues and leadership. “The university’s culture of continuous learning and professional

development has been a powerful motivator,” she said. “A love of learning is both welcomed and celebrated here.”

That culture of growth and exploration is especially evident in the stories of faculty like Danielle McGeough, associate professor in Communication and Media. A UNI alum, McGeough returned to campus to teach in Performance Studies — a field that blends storytelling, theory and embodied experience. Over time, her interests expanded beyond the classroom. She launched a podcast, “Plan Goal Plan,” which now ranks in the top 1.5% globally. Rather than asking her to choose between academic research and real-world application, UNI encouraged her to bridge the two. “UNI has been an ecosystem where I can follow my curiosities, grow as both a scholar and practitioner, and reinvest that growth into my teaching and community work,” she said.

That kind of innovation is not limited to faculty. Jesse Heath, employee relations coordinator, has led initiatives like TEDxUniversity of Northern Iowa and professional development conferences — all with the support of leadership that values creativity and trust. “Leadership encourages creativity and trust, not micromanagement — and that makes all the difference,” he said. The size of UNI’s campus plays a role in that dynamic. With a mid-sized employee base, ideas can move quickly, and individuals have access to decision-makers. It’s a place where initiative is noticed and impact is possible.

And while the work is meaningful, the environment matters too. Crumley noted the beauty of the physical campus and the camaraderie among staff. “We often take for granted how working in such a vibrant setting can really lift your mood,” she said. “These students keep us young!”

School spirit shows up in fun traditions like Panther Friday, when faculty, staff and students across campus wear purple UNI gear to celebrate being part of the Panther family. Even local businesses join in, with employees sporting their own Panther Pride.

Across all these stories, a common thread emerges: UNI is a place where people are empowered to grow, connect and contribute to something larger than

themselves. Whether it’s a faculty member shaping future storytellers, a registrar guiding students toward graduation, or a dining staff member ensuring students are nourished and supported, the work at UNI is infused with purpose. As Geweke put it, “UNI does not just employ people — it empowers them.”

In a region known for its strong work ethic and community values, UNI stands out not just for what it does, but for how it does it. It’s a place where careers evolve, ideas flourish and people matter. And that’s why, for so many, the University of Northern Iowa is not just a great place to work — it’s the place they choose to stay.

