



University of
Northern Iowa

2023-28 STRATEGIC PLAN: **BUILDING OUR TOMORROW**

VISION

We serve the public good through excellence in teaching and learning, scholarship, and service.

MISSION

The University of Northern Iowa creates, empowers, and innovates to enrich Iowa and beyond.

GOAL 1: Innovate for Learner Success

Enhance access and support services for all learners through an innovative and relevant academic curriculum and out-of-class experiences.

GOAL 2: Access for All

Create a living, learning, and working environment with access for all.

GOAL 3: Empower Communities to Shape Their Future

Empower and engage learners and communities to confront challenges and seize opportunities that advance the public good.

GOAL 4: Steward Resources Effectively

Align and effectively utilize University resources to improve access, affordability, and quality.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PLAN

A systemwide review by the Iowa Board of Regents highlighted opportunities to better align the UNI Strategic Plan with Regent priorities and Iowa's evolving needs. In response, UNI dedicated much of the 2024–2025 academic year to a collaborative revision process, allowing the university to assess progress and sharpen direction.

While advancing priorities tied to learner success, access, engagement, and stewardship, the university also strengthened the plan itself to improve clarity, alignment, and accountability. Approved in February 2025, the revised plan now serves as a unified framework for decision-making and resource allocation—positioning UNI to accelerate progress through the remainder of the strategic cycle.



GOAL 1: INNOVATE for learner success

Today's learners balance work, family, and place-bound lives. UNI has redesigned academic pathways around how learners actually progress – through accelerated degree options, clearly defined credentials, expanded online access, and high-impact practices embedded in programs. By intentionally aligning curriculum with experience, the university has strengthened persistence and completion and continues to prepare graduates to step confidently into meaningful professional futures with confidence and purpose.

GOAL 2: ACCESS for all

Access means more than admission – it means connection, clarity, and care. UNI has designed campus systems so learners can navigate expectations, find support early, and stay connected through transitions. Through mentoring, affordable pathways, flexible learning options, and clear onboarding, the university has removed barriers related to cost, time, and place. These efforts have created an environment in which all students can persist, belong, and progress confidently toward graduation.

GOAL 3: EMPOWER communities

Learning extends beyond campus through partnerships that advance the public good. UNI students, faculty, and staff continue to collaborate with communities to address workforce needs, strengthen local economies, and solve real-world challenges. Through applied learning, engaged scholarship, and reciprocal partnerships across Iowa, the university prepares learners with practical skills while working alongside communities to shape sustainable, shared futures.

GOAL 4: STEWARD resources

Stewardship means aligning resources with mission and impact. UNI has directed financial, physical, and human capital toward access, affordability, and academic quality. This has included optimizing scholarships, reimagining spaces, strengthening partnerships, and planning for sustainable enrollment. Through intentional investment and operational discipline, the university has reduced barriers for learners while maintaining long-term resilience and the capacity to meet Iowa's evolving educational and workforce needs.



University of
Northern Iowa



UNI SERVING THE PUBLIC GOOD

INNOVATE

Learner-Centered Pathways That Work

In response to statewide teacher shortages and the need to accelerate teacher preparation while maintaining high instructional quality, UNI teacher education faculty redesigned elementary education around a simple question: how can future teachers enter classrooms sooner without compromising preparation? The result was a three-year elementary teaching degree that maintains licensure standards while removing unnecessary time and cost. Students move through a tightly aligned curriculum, supported by advising, clinical experiences, and cohort-based learning, allowing them to graduate earlier and meet Iowa's urgent demand for educators while staying rooted in their communities.

ACCESS

From Access to Graduation

UNI's approach to access for all centers on designing campus environments so that students can connect early, understand expectations, and locate support when they need it. Through early-intervention analytics, structured onboarding, academic coaching, and targeted financial assistance, the university identifies risk factors before they become stop-out events and connects students to timely support. These investments have produced the highest three- and four-year graduation rates in UNI history and retention rates that significantly exceed both institutional and Carnegie peers, reducing student debt while increasing return on investment for Iowa families.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS

Goal 1

Online and distance enrollment increased **16 percent**, exceeding the plan's growth target and confirming sustained demand for flexible pathways.

Goal 2

First-time, full-time student retention increased to **84.7 percent**, keeping UNI on track toward its 85 percent target. Four- and six-year graduation outcomes continue to improve, reflecting the impact of clearer pathways, stronger early connections, and a more navigable campus experience.

EMPOWER

Learning Through Service and Partnership

To increase access to internships, many of which are typically unpaid, alongside structured career preparation modeled on successful campus programs, UNI faculty have envisioned the UNI Humanities Hub, and received a \$2.5M grant to support the Hub. The initiative embeds paid internships directly into humanities curricula, connecting students with nonprofit organizations, community partners, and employers across Iowa and the Midwest. By linking classroom learning with real-world application, the Humanities Hub expands career preparation while reinforcing UNI's role as a collaborative partner in addressing community needs.

STEWARD

Aligning Resources With Student Opportunity

Recognizing that enrollment growth is essential to effective resource stewardship, the University of Northern Iowa now partners with all 15 Iowa community colleges to deliver UNI@IACC. By reducing structural and logistical barriers related to cost, location, and time, this partnership provides seamless access for students completing their associate's degrees to finish their UNI bachelor's degree in high need fields including elementary and early childhood education, accounting, criminal justice, and business management. UNI@IACC reflects the university's broader commitment to aligning financial, academic, and operational decisions with access, affordability, and long-term sustainability.

Goal 3

UNI expanded community and economic development client projects from **3,953 to 4,662** over three years, exceeding interim benchmarks and remaining on track for continued growth. This sustained increase reflects the university's broader commitment to community-engaged learning and applied scholarship in service of the public good.

Goal 4

The UNI@IACC enrollment count as of fall 2025 census was **539**, more than double our enrollment in the inaugural year (252 in fall 2022). Since fall 2022, 348 UNI@IACC students have graduated with their bachelor's degree, with the number of graduates growing each year.