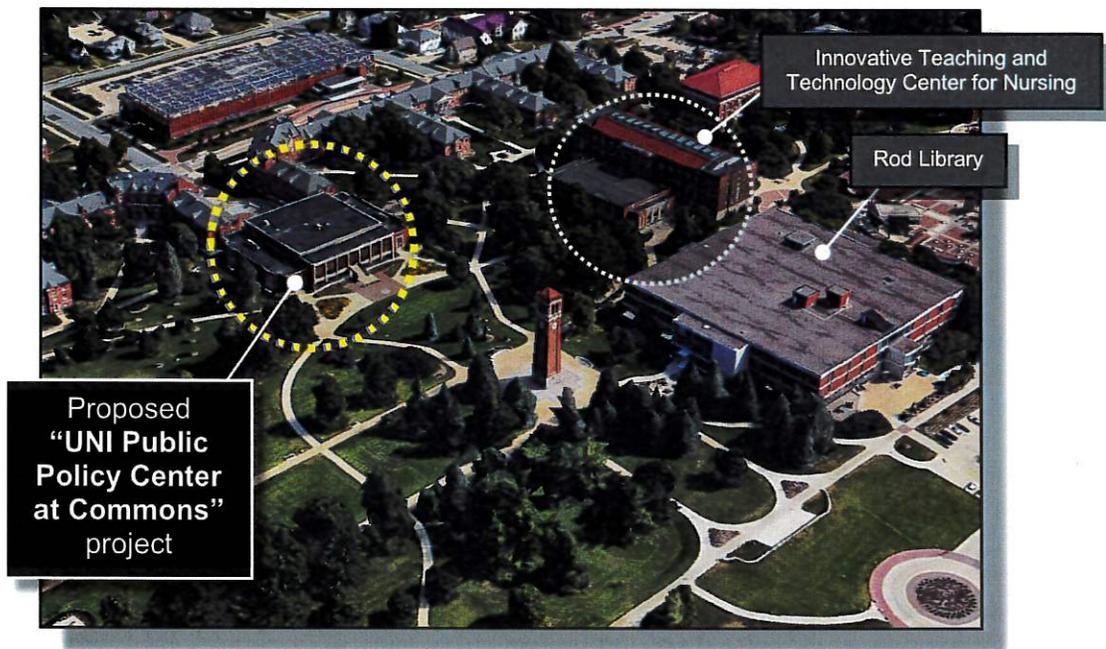


a. Deferred Maintenance Example #3 of 3
UNI Public Policy Center at Commons



The Commons building on the University of Northern Iowa Campus has a variety of deferred maintenance issues, including HVAC systems, windows and roof. The University of Northern Iowa proposes to renovate the Commons into a hub for outreach and civic education. The Commons has long been used as a center point for civic and community building, first serving as a campus dining center and union building and more recently as a home for the UNI Foundation and a meeting place for community events such as the Iowa Board of Regents meetings. UNI will build upon this tradition by adding a new Center for Civic Education (which is pending Iowa Board of Regents approval at the September meeting) to the Commons that will educate the next generation of leaders for Iowa.



University of Northern Iowa's Central Campus,
looking northeast

Statement of the Problem

The University of Northern Iowa proposes to renovate the Commons into a hub for outreach and civic education. The Commons has long been used as a center point for civic and community building, first serving as a campus dining center and union building and more recently as a home for the UNI Foundation and a meeting place for community events such as the Iowa Board of Regents meetings. UNI would build upon this tradition by adding a new Center for Civic Education (which is pending Iowa Board of Regents approval at the September meeting) to the Commons that would educate the next generation of leaders for Iowa.

The University would accomplish this by completely renovating the building. A new, more prominent entrance would be created. ADA access would be improved and provided to all levels of the building. Deferred maintenance would be addressed that would renew the building's role as a showpiece of the University.

Project Description

Historically, a university "commons" served as the social and dining center of the institution. In early American history, a town commons served as the civic and social center of the community,

hosting events, civic discourse and building community. The University would blend these two concepts by making the current Commons into a hub for outreach and civic education.

Two programs would serve as the components of this initiative:

- Center for Civic Education: a new initiative pending Board of Regent approval that focuses on educating the next generation of leaders in the state of Iowa.
- UNI Foundation: which positions the University as a premier institution that provides an affordable and engaged education, empowering student and alumni to lead locally and globally.

Center for Civic Education

The Center for Civic Education serves the state by centering civic education and free speech in its activities. In particular, it:

- Promotes civic learning at Iowa's universities by encouraging curricular innovation and professional development to help members of the campus community develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate meaningfully as citizens.
- Enhances UNI's civic engagement activities through a wide range of programs and events that expose students and members of the public to divergent viewpoints on topics of interest and give them opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with one another, including the annual Constitution Day lectures, the Joy Cole Corning Lecture, and a Controversial Issues Series.
- Fosters civic learning among Iowa's pre-service and in-service teachers, offering them opportunities for continued professional development in civic learning.

The center would sponsor visiting scholars from across the country as well as faculty fellows on campus. It would coordinate a number of academic departments and initiatives to cultivate an intellectually compelling slate of programs that promote the public good as they engage students and members of the public. The center would have a conscious focus on bringing to campus a balance of different perspectives on various issues, to strengthen a person's understanding of the complexity in possible interpretations of societal issues and potential solutions.

The Center for Civic Education at UNI would be an invaluable asset to help students develop critical workforce skills to better support Iowa industry. UNI's Center for Civil Education is well-positioned to expose students to the variety of ideas and experiences they would need to moderate the narrowing perspective of digital media and engage with clients or fellow citizens in more productive ways. UNI has already established a strong foundation in civic education. It offers the first civic education undergraduate certificate and minor, and has received grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities for faculty and curricular is Iowa's leader in training teachers.

Proposed Project Funding

	Appropriations	Gifts	Total
FY 2026	\$ 4,720,000	-	\$ 4,720,000
FY 2027	17,682,000	-	17,682,000
FY 2028	10,000,000	-	10,000,000
FY 2029	-	-	-
FY 2030	-	-	-
TOTAL	\$32,402,000	-	\$32,402,000

Project Schedule

Planning and Design	12 months
Bidding	3 months
Construction	18 months
Occupancy	2 months
Total	35 months

UNI is the ideal institution for this center because:

- UNI has unique research capacities in Iowa history and politics. In January 2024, Senator Chuck Grassley announced a gift of his senatorial papers to UNI. These papers would join his U.S. House and Iowa legislative papers and an impressive array of other archival materials and collections that would attract scholars throughout Iowa and beyond, allowing UNI to promote research and scholarship in civic education and free speech.
- UNI is Iowa's leader in training teachers. With UNI alumni teaching in all 99 Iowa counties and all but 3 of Iowa's school districts, UNI produces teachers who instruct future Iowa citizens. The most effective means of increasing civic literacy and cultivating a robust consideration of free speech issues throughout the state comes through UNI.
- UNI has already established a strong foundation in civic education. It boasts the Regents' first civic education undergraduate certificate and minor, which would be operational in fall 2024, following two years of grant-funded course development and training for faculty in civic literacy and fostering free speech in the classroom.
- UNI has rich community partnerships and a proven record of community engagement. UNI is well positioned to expand on its nationally recognized success in exposing students to civic processes through activities like Panthers Vote and its robust network of community partners in the Cedar Valley and across the state. UNI is prepared to take civic education and free speech programs out to Iowa communities and to host pre-K-12 teachers, community leaders, and organizations for programming on campus.

UNI Foundation

The University of Northern Iowa Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization established in 1959. The mission of the UNI Foundation is to grow and sustain private resources and build relationships to support the University of Northern Iowa, its students, faculty, staff and programs.

To give UNI students the highest quality learning environment and to ensure that a UNI education continues to be affordable, private support has taken on an enhanced significance. The UNI Foundation is committed to providing the necessary resources to assist the University of Northern Iowa with its priorities.

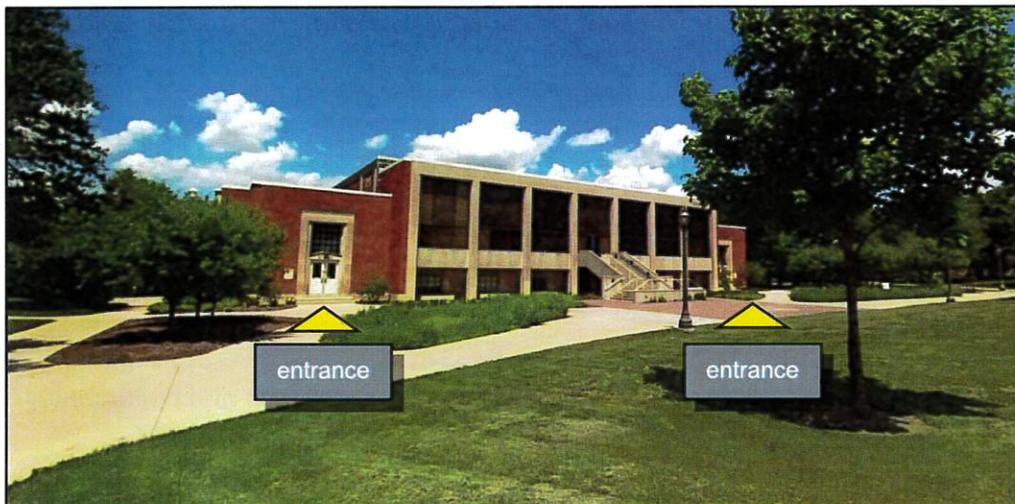
Over multiple decades, the Foundation has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support to student scholarships, faculty salaries and capital projects through both annual giving and the creations and growth of endowed funds. The work of the Foundation in securing private donations and grants is inextricably tied to a higher margin of excellence for the University of Northern Iowa. The most recent campaign surpassing the \$250 million goal is an outstanding exemplar of the work done by the Foundation to support UNI and the state of Iowa.

Justification for the Project

The Center for Civic Education (pending approval by the Iowa Board of Regents) would serve as a nationally recognized leader in research, teaching, and public outreach in free speech and civic education. It is established in response to directive 9 by the Iowa Board of Regents "to explore a proposal, including cost, to establish a widespread initiative that includes opportunities for education and research on free speech and civic education."

The Center would enhance civic education among university students, pre-K-12 students and teachers, and the broader public by developing and implementing effective civic learning strategies, encouraging respectful dialogue across differences, and offering educational resources on free speech and civic knowledge. It would serve the state of Iowa by centering civic education and free speech in its activities, and would promote the values of free speech, civic leadership, public service, and citizenship.

The Iowa Board of Regents has long recognized the importance of free speech and intellectual freedom in developing the critical thinking skills necessary to participate in a civic life. The DEI Study Group Report and Recommendations noted and reinforced this understanding as it cited the Board's Freedom of Expression policy which recognizes "that the primary mission of the institutions of higher education under its authority is the promotion of teaching, research and scholarship. In support of this mission, the institutions of higher education under the jurisdiction of the Iowa Board of Regents must provide many opportunities for members of the campus community to engage in the free exchange of ideas." The Study Group report recommended that Regent institutions "develop a proposal, including cost, to establish a widespread initiative that includes opportunities for education and research on free speech and civic education."



University of Northern Iowa's Commons, built in 1933

The pace of labor-market change increases annually. Many of the top jobs listed on LinkedIn did not exist a few years ago, and there is no way to predict with any accuracy what jobs will exist in the future or what "hard skills" students will need. Current research suggests that as students move into the labor market, they will need a combination of technical skills, coupled with what are often referred to as "soft skills." This is especially true as we move into an era dominated by AI.

Forbes recently interviewed Michelle Weise, founder of the Strada Institute of the Future of Work and author of *Long-Life Learning: Preparing for Jobs that Don't Even Exist Yet*. Weise rightly notes that our current digital environment surrounds us with information that we find agreeable and comfortable. This is problematic because empathy and emotional intelligence position people to out-perform or "better coordinate with machines" giving them an edge in hiring for future jobs. Developing empathy is difficult if people are never exposed to different or challenging points of view.

UNI's Center for Civil Education is well-positioned to expose students to the variety of ideas and experiences they will need moderate the narrowing perspective digital media and engage with clients or fellow citizens in more productive ways.