12-2014

The Update, December 2014

University of Northern Iowa. College of Humanities, Arts and Sciences.

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University of Northern Iowa alumnus, Gary Kelley’s, BA Art 1968, illustrated book Harlem Hellfighters has been chosen by the New York Times as one of the top 10 children’s books of the year. Released in September, Harlem Hellfighters joins the list of award-winning collaborations between Kelley and author J. Patrick Lewis. And the Soldiers Sang, an illustrated version of the true story of the 1914 Christmas Truce released in 2011, won the Horn Book award for picture books.

Chronicling the achievements of the First World War’s all African American 396th infantry, a regiment recruited in New York, the Times review applauds Harlem Hellfighters saying, “Lewis’ poetics are perfectly complemented by Kelley’s evocative pastel illustrations, which both inspire and unsettle. The men are rendered with a stoic simplicity that conveys dignity and perseverance.”

“The U.S. Army would not trust them to fight because they were black,” said Kelley in an interview with the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier in early November. “The French said they wanted them, so the regiment was sent to France.

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Art Department Head Jeffery Byrd recently performed
at the City Gallery of Kalisz in Poland and at Gruntaler 9
Performance Space in Berlin.

MUSIC

Melinda Boyd, Associate Professor of Music History,
presented a research paper, “Dolly Parton's Kindertotenlieder,”
at the annual national meeting of the American Musicological
Society, in Milwaukee, WI on Nov. 9.

COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

The Department of Communication Studies hosted a dinner
and special performance at the UNI Interpreters Theatre on
Oct. 11 to celebrate the career of Phyllis Scott Carlin, who
retired earlier this year after 38 years at UNI.

• Nichole Zumbach Harken started a blog that combines her
storytelling/ethnography and Chris Martin’s (communication
studies) teaching background. She has pledged to blog about
her family’s experience with autism for 366 days straight. She
reports an average of 150 readers from across the world every
day. The blog site is 366daysofautism.wordpress.com.

• Cate Palczewski’s book, Disturbing Argument (Routledge,
2014) has just been published. The edited volume represents
the best of the scholarship presented at the 18th National
Communication Association/American Forensic Association
Conference on Argumentation. Palczewski will be the invited
featured speaker at Penn State conference on debate as civic
education, March 5-7, 2015 and the “esteemed scholar” for
the DePauw Undergraduate Honors Conference, April 16-
18, 2015. She will also be a seminar leader at the Rhetoric
Society of America’s Summer Institute, June 1-7, 2015 at the
University of Wisconsin—Madison.

SCIENCE

The journal, Revista de Biología Tropical / International Journal
of Tropical Biology & Conservation featured Professor Mark
Meyers in the publication as a part of the Fifty Years of the
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Program. Several alumni are also quoted in the publication in
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School of Music Events

SCIENCe STUDENTS TRAVEL TO MINNEAPOLIS

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NOBEL CONFERENCE

Science students and faculty at the University of Northern Iowa traveled to Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, MN to attend the 50th Anniversary of the Nobel Conference on Oct. 7 and 8. It was a truly interdisciplinary trip that involved two Biology vehicles, an Earth Science van, students from Biology and Physics, faculty from Biology and Chemistry & Biochemistry, funding from the Department of Biology, Joel Haack, Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences, and Lyn Redington, Director of the Department of Residence. In all, 37 faculty and students attended the event. Eric Peterson, faculty member in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry did his undergraduate work at Gustavus Adolphus, he wrote, “I very much enjoyed returning to my alma mater – I was able to see my old advisor and several other professors as well as wander the campus between sessions – The conference was also very good, and of course it was great to spend some time with the other occupants of McCollum Science Hall”

Biology graduate student Jason Ratcliff stated, “Thank you and well done for the opportunity! The presentations were both engaging and inspiring. I have returned to Cedar Falls with an expanded reading list!”

The Nobel Conference is an annual event that showcases past Nobel laureates and researchers who are among the top in their fields.

The travel to this year’s event was stimulated in part by the desire to provide freshmen students in the Department of Biology Living and Learning Community with a chance to travel and interact with other science students and faculty.

Talks at the Nobel Conference covered a variety of areas that included energy and climate change. Dr. Steven Chu, former U.S. Secretary of Energy under President Obama and 1997 Nobel Prize winner in physics, evolution at the molecular and planetary scale spoke as well as others such as Dr. Sean Carroll, an evolutionary developmental biologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Other technology driven lectures included lectures like Dr. Harry Gray’s. He is the Director of the Beckman Institute, California Institute of Technology. He spoke about solar-driven water splitting.

Plans are under way to attend next year’s Nobel Conference where the overarching theme will be on the science of addiction. It continues to be the goal of the science departments at UNI to provide students with opportunities beyond the classroom to experience science and to have interactions with others in their fields of study.

Written by Dr. David Saunders

FACULTY RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY AWARDS

FACULTY AWARDS

These awards are presented to tenure track faculty with one or more successful grants or multiple submissions

- Julie Kang, Biology
- Josh Sebree, Chemistry and Biochemistry
- Olly Steinthorsdottir, Mathematics

INTER-DISCIPLINARY AWARDS

These awards are presented to faculty or staff who connected with others from different departments or from different disciplines and have implemented successful grant funded projects.

- Leisl Carr Childers, History
- Bettina Fabos, Communication Studies

05
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“They really loved Danielle Shearer’s poster, so they have decided to commission its use for future events as well. Through repeated viewing, the public will begin to associate that poster with the Walter House [Friends of Cedar Rock headquarters], like a pictorial logo of sorts,” Behrens said.

“I feel very honored and delighted to even be considered by the Friends of Cedar Rock. It is nice to know that something I worked so hard on will have a purpose in the future promoting a historical landmark here in Northeast Iowa,” said Shearer, junior graphic design student.

Department of Theatre Head Eric Lange said, “Gary [Kelley] always takes a great interest in learning the story of the play and seeking input from the creative team working on the show. His designs are powerful and intuitive, and often explore little details that related back to the characters and story of the play.” Kelley has also contributed work to the North American Review, America’s longest running literary magazine housed here on Campus. He has created the cover art for many of the issues, along with many in-magazine artworks to coincide with the stories.

Behrens’ Digital Image Design course is taught in Kamerick Art Building for all art majors. In the class so far, the projects have all been community and real-world based, something that Behrens’ thinks is valuable for students to experience.

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Students created work for the Hearst Center for the Arts and Cedar Rock State Park.

“Hearst Center’s poetry for the Hearst Center’s 25th anniversary commemoration. The poem and student imagery books were published with the help of CHAS funding and were donated for fundraising purposes to the center. Each student received a copy as well.”

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DANE JACOBSON
Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry

Dane Jacobson graduated from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in Biochemistry. He is now a Fellow in Pediatric Critical Care Medicine at Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital at Stanford University in Palo Alto, CA, a pediatric ICU.

“There are very few other venues in life that allow a person to have such an immediate and lasting impact on patients and their families. I get to see families at their most vulnerable time and I get to help them through that one way or the other. Plus, children are just better patients than adults,” Jacobson says.

He began his studies at UNI at the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry as a segue to continue his studies and get an M.D certification. He would eventually do this through the University of Iowa as medical certifications are not offered here at UNI. However, he considers his experience here invaluable.

“Of course I was provided with the knowledge and tools required to both get me into medical school and to help me succeed therein,” he said.

But practical knowledge isn’t the only important factor, he says. Networking and relationships are also critical. In his graduating class, three others went on to medical school, one of which obtained a PhD in biochemistry.

“In a relatively small graduating class, having these colleagues sets an infectious standard for success,” he remarked.

His successes at UNI also contributed to his success in the medical community. He received the Purple and Old Gold Scholar award at graduation as well as the Larrie D. Sarff award for Resident Education. This award is given to one graduating resident who contributes the most to other residents. However, after graduation at UNI, Jacobson didn’t attend medical school right away.

“After graduating from UNI I spent a year bouncing between teaching General Chemistry at Hawkeye Community College and working as a compound pharmacy technician at a local hospital,” he said.

The next year, he attended medical school at the University of Iowa, graduating in 2011, then traveling to the Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee to complete his residency.

Today, Jacobson works in academic medicine, training physicians to be better physical care providers. “I’d like to contribute to the body of knowledge of critical care medicine through clinical research,” he said. But regarding his legacy, he said “I’ll like to be remembered as kind and generous, and to think that once I’m gone there will be a part of the world that was better for my having been in it.”

JACK DOSTAL
Department of Physics

Jack Dostal started his career here at UNI, graduating in 1996 with degrees in Mathematics. Now, Dostal teaches at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC. After completing his degree at UNI, he received a Master of Sciences from Iowa State University and a PhD in Physics from Montana State University-Bozeman. However after graduating from UNI, he was unsure of what to do with his degree in Mathematics. He decided to study astronomy at ISU as a graduate student, but developed an interest in teaching by becoming a teaching assistant.

“I enjoy teaching a great deal, and in my current position that is what I get to do as the emphasis of my job. The material might be similar from semester to semester, but the students are always different,” Dostal said.

During his days at UNI, Dostal said that the things he experienced and learned were incredibly valuable to his career.

“I think the opportunity to do undergraduate research is something that is extremely valuable; I got involved in two or three different projects and got pushed out of my comfort zone each time,” Dostal remarked.

Dostal worked on projects related to holography and modern physics while in his undergraduate classes, “both of which were excellent early hands-on courses,” he said. It was a “hands-on approach has stuck with me as an effective way of learning.”

Work in the Department of Physics was not the only great learning experience for Dostal. He was involved in several different on campus organizations such as a variety of jazz bands, the Panther Marching Band, Alpha Phi Omega, Kappa Kappa Psi, Physics Club and a few others.

Several of these organizations are related to music, something that Dostal holds close to his heart as well as something that he hopes one day he can research.

“Music has always been a first love,” he said, “I even use my trombone in my physics classes when we study sound and waves.”

As for his hopes for the future, Dostal hopes to continue teaching at Wake Forest University, a position that he greatly enjoys. But he also hopes to research acoustics and offer classes about it.

“I’d like to get to the point of offering some more senior undergraduate courses in acoustics. My current position allows me the time to follow interests in several different directions, which is how I ended up rediscovering acoustics,” Dostal said.
CARA WRIGHT
Department of Earth Science

Since graduating in 2013 with a B.S in Geology, Cara Wright has been successful in working for the state government in Minnesota by ensuring environmental protection, a career that Wright feels is critical to human health. She attributes this passion to the UNI Department of Earth Science.

“I enjoyed working on projects and homework with our close-knit geology group and I liked that classes were small so that we felt comfortable asking questions, which made for a great learning environment,” Wright said.

She also attributes the attention to research based learning a positive experience in her educational career. “I also liked working with Dr. Walkers to complete my undergraduate research in which we planned a Bank Erosion Hazard Index study and I got to present it to the Dry Run Creek Watershed Board,” she said.

Wright was also a part of several on campus organizations while at UNI. She was a member of the Golden Key International Honor Society, The National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, The University of Northern Iowa Honors Program and Sigma Gamma Epsilon.

Wright has not been out of the university setting for long, but she is already finding success in the field. In her current position, Wright is responsible for interpreting and enforcing Minnesota Pollution Control Agency permits, a job that requires working with a wide variety of media.

MPCA is an agency that Wright holds in high regard for their efforts in the environment, and also one that she is proud to serve.

“I love being part of an agency whose focus is protecting human health and the environment. The work I do helps preserve the cleanliness of our rivers, lakes, and groundwater, which I feel is important and makes it easy to go to work every day,” Wright states.

In the future, Wright hopes to stay with the MPCA while moving around the agency in order to learn how to better protect the environment.

She offers advice to struggling graduates who wish to find a job in their field.

“It took me a year, probably hundreds of applications, and many interviews, but I love my job and I could not have found a better first job! It can take persistence and a lot of effort, but you shouldn’t give up or settle for a job you don’t really want,” Wright said.

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Since graduating in 2013 with a B.S in Geology, Cara Wright has been successful in working for the state government in Minnesota by ensuring environmental protection, a career that Wright feels is critical to human health. She attributes this passion to the UNI Department of Earth Science.

“I enjoyed working on projects and homework with our close-knit geology group and I liked that classes were small so that we felt comfortable asking questions, which made for a great learning environment,” Wright said.

She also attributes the attention to research based learning a positive experience in her educational career. “I also liked working with Dr. Walkers to complete my undergraduate research in which we planned a Bank Erosion Hazard Index study and I got to present it to the Dry Run Creek Watershed Board,” she said.

Wright was also a part of several on campus organizations while at UNI. She was a member of the Golden Key International Honor Society, The National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, The University of Northern Iowa Honors Program and Sigma Gamma Epsilon.

Wright has not been out of the university setting for long, but she is already finding success in the field. In her current position, Wright is responsible for interpreting and enforcing Minnesota Pollution Control Agency permits, a job that requires working with a wide variety of media.

MPCA is an agency that Wright holds in high regard for their efforts in the environment, and also one that she is proud to serve.

“I love being part of an agency whose focus is protecting human health and the environment. The work I do helps preserve the cleanliness of our rivers, lakes, and groundwater, which I feel is important and makes it easy to go to work every day,” Wright states.

In the future, Wright hopes to stay with the MPCA while moving around the agency in order to learn how to better protect the environment.

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Kappa Mu Epsilon (KME) is an honor society in Mathematics. The organization was founded in 1931 to promote an interest in mathematics among undergraduate students. The primary purposes of Kappa Mu Epsilon include furthering interest in mathematics in schools that place their primary emphasis on undergraduate programs, helping undergraduate students understand the important role that mathematics has played in the development of civilization, developing an appreciation of the power and beauty possessed by mathematics, providing a society for the recognition of outstanding achievement in the study of mathematics at the undergraduate level, and disseminating knowledge of mathematics to its members.

As an academic organization, KME's member's or students wishing to be initiated presentations are frequent and often end in member initiations.

“Each qualifying student is initiated into KME at our banquet held each December and Late April/Early May,” Dr. Mark Ecker, faculty advisor of Kappa Mu Epsilon, explained. “At the initiation banquet we encourage students to invite their parents and/or significant other in their life to share in a moment of their accomplishment; this a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the student’s hard work!”

“Not only have I met a lot of other students and teachers of mathematics, but I have learned a lot about different topics in mathematics from the presentations given at each meeting. I’ve learned about basketball statistics, number theory topics, and even how to create the game Yahtzee from scratch. It’s just great to meet with other people who have the same interests and passions that I do,” said KME President Elizabeth Johnson.

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Naturally, mathematics is the core feature of KME and the organization hopes to foster passion for mathematics that will translate into passion that can be utilized.

Teaching is something that being a part of a mathematics community brings naturally.

“We would all sit in my basement as I stood at my childhood chalkboard and carefully taught each concept to my classmates. Watching their frustrations ease and hearing their words of gratitude after they took each test really opened my eyes. I loved the feeling I got when their confusion became comprehension and when their glazed looks morphed into looks of excitement,” Johnson said.

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Bailey Knudson is a graduate student looking to graduate in May 2016 with a Master of Arts in Speech Pathology.

Knudson, from Guthrie Center, IA came to UNI from a small town 50 miles West of Des Moines, IA. The small town atmosphere of UNI appealed to her. But the small town atmosphere was not the only thing that brought her this university.

“The small class sizes and student to professor ratio were both surprises to me. Throughout my undergraduate career, I always felt a great connection between students and professors,” she said.

She also remarked about how the university has changed since she arrived. “My impression of UNI has changed over the years because now it feels like home,” Johnson said.

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The Department of Earth Science is a department dedicated to research. Earth Science is in particular demands in the field observation, testing and hypothesising. This is indeed the case with Earth Science's environment focused student led projects. For years, UNI's science departments have been focused on this type of learning, but this year several student projects have brought to light the importance of project based learning.

Research projects are not always confined to the likes of biology or physics majors. Non-STEM majors can also participate in learning about and connecting with the environment in real, tactile ways. This has traditionally been achieved through the creation of capstone courses that can be taught to any junior or senior student that has met the course math prerequisites, says Professor Mohammad Iqbal.

“I don’t see any significant differences between STEM and non-STEM majors in handling projects. They are all mature enough to connect with the natural world from their life experiences and conduct successful projects,” Iqbal says.

The subject matter for these projects can vary greatly, although naturally, the common theme is centered on the environment. For example, one student, Ashley Worthy, a senior double major in Earth Science and Environmental Science, conducted research about the effects of agricultural nutrient runoff into water systems. The research was designed to discover the effects on farm nutrient levels in the Cedar Valley.

“My personal reason for wanting to do this project leaned more in the societal issues relating to health impacts,” said Worthy. A significant project requirement, and also a source of real information, is actual community involvement. Many of these projects require the students to conduct interviews and surveys with the community or with industry or scientific experts.

“One of the most interesting parts of this project has been hav- ing the opportunity to talk to peo- ple,” says Worthy. “It is a problem that needs to be addressed from all sides.” Learning that is not research based may miss the mark in terms of real world impact, Iqbal says. “When students go out and see these interactions, they end up gaining knowledge and skills needed to address complex questions,” he said.

“My field of study is hydrology, which deals with movement, distribution and quality of water on the Earth. The difference between project based learning and traditional instruction is huge. It would be practically impossible to understand the hydrologic environment without being involved in field based projects,” Iqbal said.

Just learning is not the only goal of these projects. The effects of the findings are clear and real. Doing research this way may shine a light on glaring environmental issues that have real impacts.

“I believe we have a duty to protect our children, but I am not a doctor, an agronomist, or an economist to determine how best to solve this issue. I am however a geoscientist and can instead identify where problem areas are,” Worthy said.

Another real effect can be seen by research done by Britta Berry, a senior double major in Earth Science an Environmental Science. Over a course of nine weeks, Berry was able to collect data from three sites along the Cedar River that will impact future flood predictions.

“She recorded water level fluctuations in the stream over the past several weeks to understand how that relates to factors like precipitation and dissolved solids under post- season, low flow conditions,” Iqbal said. “Information gathered through this project is useful to develop future flood models,” he concluded.

“Photos Courtesy of Ashley Worthy

Berry hopes the findings from the report will be put to good use.

“They will be able to use my data in future research as a background for any new topics. I also want to educate people on cause and effect relationships that can be brought forward by analysing easy to get data,” she stated.
STEM DAY
UNI Science Departments Hosted STEM Related Activity Day on Campus

The Departments of Biology, Chemistry & Biochemistry, Computer Science, Earth Science, Mathematics and Physics hosted the second annual UNI/Iowa Community College STEM Day on the University of Northern Iowa Campus on Friday, Oct. 31. More than 50 students and faculty from six Iowa community colleges attended the event.

Each participant chose three different academic departments in which to attend a specific session. In biology, student participants assisted in solving a fictitious cold case murder. They utilized the analysis of skeletal material, DNA, blood evidence, hair and fiber examinations and botanical knowledge to determine the cause of death. In chemistry and biochemistry, students were provided with simple spectrometers, made from cereal boxes and CDs provided by our department’s astrochemist, Dr. Sebree. The spectrometers were used to examine the differences in perceived color of visible light during emission, transmission and reflectance events. All three types of spectroscopy are used to get remote information about elemental compositions from other celestial objects.

Those who visited Computer Science learned of the curriculum as a part of the computer science major and about the career opportunities available in the computer science field. In the earth science department, students were able to examine the crystalline structure of minerals with petrographic microscopes, examine fossils and learn the various aspects of water quality analysis.

Multiple faculty were involved in hosting students in the Math Department. One group played a game that involved algebraic generalization strategies. The students worked to develop a winning strategy and then worked to extrapolate that strategy to various initial conditions. In a second session, students consider the following problem: Is it possible to hang a picture on the wall using TWO nails, so that by wrapping the wire around the nails in an interesting way, if either nail is removed the picture will fall down? Students played with ribbon to get started, but eventually turned the problem into one about curves on a plane avoiding two points, and then the group transformed it into a kind of algebra. The students found a way to solve the problem, and then started considering related problems. The third session in math involved the students in three chess-related activities that lead to combinatorics and number theory problems.

In Physics, the students attended a 30-minute presentation on career possibilities for physics graduates, after which they toured the research laboratories in the Physics Department. Among the labs visited were the Raman Spectroscopy Lab, the Magnetic Materials Lab and the Surface Physics Lab. Cindi Boyd, faculty member at Hawkeye Community College, emailed as soon as the event was over stating “thanks for another fabulous day! It was much enjoyed by all. All of the UNI faculty exuded hospitality and enthusiasm for their area of research and that was inspiring. Please don’t hesitate to ask me if there is any way I can help to promote STEM at UNI and collaboration between UNI and Hawkeye Community College. As an alumni of UNI I have a special fondness and respect for UNI.”

The STEM Day event at UNI continues to grow and plans are again being made to host the event next fall. The STEM Day is supported by UNI Admissions Office and the UNI Community College Relations Office.

Written by Dr. David Saunders

STUDENT AUDITIONS
School of Music Hosted the National Association of Teachers of Singing

November was a month of music. The UNI School of Music hosted the National Association of Teachers of Singing audition at the Gallagher Performing Arts Center in November. Musicians and students from around the state participated in the event.

UNI, with the help of over 90 student and community volunteers and the direction of the School of Music’s voice division faculty hosted the NATS district student audition annual event.

The event began on Nov. 8, hosting 250 students, 40 adjudicators and 45 pianists from various educational institutions across Iowa. The great turnout rate and professionalism of the students at the event was impressive, says Dr. Korey Barrett, professor of vocal coaching and collaborative piano at UNI.

“Our students acted as professional and courteous hosts, and those that sang represented our School of Music well,” Barrett said.

The UNI School of Music not only hosted this event, but had students participate in it. At the end of the auditions, several UNI students walked away with awards.

Cutler, a first place winner in the Division II category said that the event was a personal and professional challenge. “The event was definitely a challenge. I had never given a solo performance before so it was nerve-wracking, to say the least,” he said.

“I would also say that each round put more and more pressure on me to do even better than the last, but that ended up being a blessing in disguise,” Cutler said.

Despite the challenges that Cutler and other students faced, 11 UNI students won honors at the auditions, five of which were first place honors.

“I would say the success of the School of Music really speaks for itself. We are very blessed to have such talented and knowledgable staff who are eager to teach their students how to become the best they can be at their craft,” Cutler remarked.