Nicole Hindman has always had a passion for learning about animals, plants, and insects. When in high school, she first learned about the Theory of Evolution; it gave her “a lens to appreciate life at a deeper level.” The decision to major in biology, with an emphasis on ecology and evolution, was thus easy to make.

The decision to enroll in the University of Northern Iowa wasn’t too difficult, either. She found the atmosphere “very welcoming” when she visited UNI.

“I liked how, in comparison with Iowa State University and University of Iowa, this campus was smaller and had a more collegiate feel with the majority of the buildings being on a central campus,” she says.

“I also really loved how a greater emphasis was put on the education aspect instead of research, which is very common at universities, especially in the science fields,” she adds.

Hindman feels her decision to enroll in UNI has paid off.

“I’m really happy with the opportunities and experience UNI has given me,” she says.

“All of my classes were taught by actual professors and not teaching assistants, and they were all extremely willing to assist me with anything that I went to them with,” she adds.

It has also been easy to get internships, jobs, and leadership experiences, which, she says, could have been much more difficult at a university larger than UNI.

She has found the majority of the undergraduate courses to be challenging to an appropriate level — never impossible but not easy either.

“The main challenge has been organizing and prioritizing my time to make sure it’s all done when it needs to be, which can be exceptionally difficult when all of the tests and papers seem to be due in the same week,” says Hindman, who is also getting a certificate in Public History.

Professor James Demastes’ field zoology class has been her favorite.

“The class taught us how to identify local animals by their common and scientific names, which has made me more aware of the variety of animals that live in our area,” she says.

The field trips were especially exciting, she adds. “They were not only informative and fun, but also led me to make some lasting friendships. Dr. Demastes is also my favorite professor at UNI, and has been a great help to me in and out of class.”

As part of her internship, Hindman is currently working on a project called My National Park, an online exhibition that attempts to “articulate the personal relationship people form with America’s national parks.”

The project “has allowed for some really interesting interdisciplinary dynamics between the biology, history, and geography departments,” she says.

“I was chosen to help manage the website, to provide the biological side of the exhibition, and to state the parks’ importance in light of conservation,” she adds.

Hindman also works at the UNI Botanical Center.

“Not only has it instilled a great love for plants, taught me how to take care of them, and given me a great line in my resume, but it has also given me a second home on campus,” she says.

“Billie Hemmer and Stephanie Witte are the best managers a student could ask for. The greenhouse and the people in it are what I’m going to miss the most about UNI when I graduate,” she adds.

Working with Linda Nebbe at the Black Hawk Wildlife Rehabilitation Center has been another high point.

“I never thought I’d have the chance to give an owl a bath, bottle-feed baby raccoons, and hold baby foxes,” she says.
“Linda is such an amazing, giving person, and I’m so happy I was able to help her care for these wonderful animals.”

She works as a UNI STEM Ambassador, too. “My favorite part about being a STEM Ambassador has been seeing kids getting excited about science,” she says. “At the STEM fairs that I’ve helped at, it’s been extremely gratifying seeing their faces light up when they felt the amazing texture of a succulent or watching them figure out what animal a skull came from.”

“I would like to believe that my job has helped inspire a love of science in kids that might one day grow up to do exactly what I’m doing,” she adds.

Her advice to students interested in major in STEM subjects is quite simple. “So many people think ‘I can’t do math and science’ and ‘science is too hard’, and that attitude just prevents you from even enjoying and appreciating how awesome STEM subjects are,” she says.

“Don’t be scared away by classes like calculus and organic chemistry, because they’re entirely possible to do well in and there are tons of resources on campus to make it easier,” she adds. “STEM majors have so many different aspects to them, and you can go on to do such a variety of different things.”

Hindman wants to continue inspiring in people excitement about science. After she graduates in May, she plans to move to Ohio and hopes that she will get a job at one of the zoos, botanical centers, natural history museums, or nature centers there.

“Once I get a better handle on what specific topics I’m interested in, I’ll probably go back to school to get my graduate or doctorate degree,” she says.

Nicole Hindman invites you all to Expedition GREENHOUSE

March 23, 2016
12:00 noon – 3:30 p.m.