STEM STORIES

Student Profile

November 2015

TRANSFERRING WITH EASE

Each year, hundreds of students transfer to the University of Northern Iowa to continue their education at this institution. In fact, this year alone, 978 students made the decision to transfer after previously completing coursework at a different college or university. In 2013, Benjamin Nettleton decided that UNI was the right fit for him and made the transition to life at a 4-year college after completing his associate’s degree at North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) in Mason City, Iowa.

Nettleton is now a senior majoring in biology: ecology, evolution and organismal biology-honors research, with minors in earth science and general business concepts. He is finishing up his fifth year of school.

“I fell in love with UNI during a campus visit in high school,” Nettleton explained. “I fell in love with the campus and the environment and was attracted to the small classes and campus size. I wasn’t 100% sure what I wanted to do with my life though, so I saved some money by living at home and did two years at NIACC to get my AA degree.” Nettleton began classes at UNI as a declared business major but also took a biology class, Organismal Diversity, with Dr. Jim Demastes after completing a summer internship with the Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board.

“My boss at the conservation office could tell that I loved what I was doing and that I cared about conservation more than a typical intern,” described Nettleton. “So he encouraged me to take a biology class to learn more.” After a few weeks, Nettleton decided to declare a minor in biology with plans to continue in business. However, by the end of his first semester here, he chose to completely change his career path and switched to a major in biology and a minor in business.

Changing his career path opened him up to a whole new world of research and experiments. This past summer, Nettleton conducted research under Dr. Kenneth Elgersma through the Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP).

“We were studying the abundance in diversity in pollinators in biofuel crops,” Nettleton explained. “One of my main goals in conducting research was to see if it was something I enjoyed as I began looking ahead to graduate school.” Nettleton collected data during the summer and created his research poster which he presented to faculty and peers at the end of the summer. Now as Nettleton looks ahead to graduate school, he is seeing how big of an impact UNI will have on his future.

“Over these past few years at UNI, I have felt at home within the biology department here,” Nettleton said. “The professors have cared about me and they have met with me often. They have a passion to get to know you in the classroom because they’re not just here to do research, they are here to teach. Because of this, I have had opportunities to get research experience but I also have personal relationships with my professors. That gives me the opportunity for letters of recommendation...
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“My plan right now is to go for my doctorate after completing graduate school and then one day become a professor of biology,” Nettleton said. “My professors these past three years have done a lot for me and helped me so now what I want to do for future students in the field.”

Nettleton was selected to present his research poster at a national conference for undergraduate research.