

**New UI class helps students design their lives**

 B.A. Morelli • Iowa City Press-Citizen •
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Jamie Farr sat in the back of a University of Iowa lecture hall, soaking up the life story of a man who years ago hitchhiked to college with an ACT score of 19.

Mitch Kelly tried new things, took chances and followed passions, he told the students in
explaining his life path to where he is now — a UI clinical associate professor, a husband and father, a mentor for prospective UI athlete recruits and once UI’s representative for national teacher of the year.

“It is kind of funny how life turns out,” he told the packed room of about 100 students in the Becker Communication Building.

Farr, 20, a junior from Iowa City, thought introspectively as she listened.

“What in my own personal life, when I am his age, will be that important to me?” was going through her mind, she said. “Maybe I should take more opportunities when I’m in college, try some of the thing the university has to offer, rather than just go to school to get what you want later.”

That is the point of the new course called “Life Design: Building Your Future" — get students thinking not just about academics, but about their lives and what they want out of it.

Kelly was the latest in a series of speakers to visit and share their life’s tale with the class.

David Gould, academic coordinator of the Interdepartmental Studies Program, developed and teaches the one-credit hour, eight-week course. He credited leaders in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for taking a chance on the course Gould said is one of the only ones like it in the country.

In its short life, the class has already filled up back-to-back sessions this fall, he said.

“They want to make sure they are doing something that makes sense. You are throwing a dart at a job in hopes it will make them happy,” Gould said. “I wanted to teach a class that could really be a guide to them.”

Some other guests have included the founders of Zappos and Panchero's and Bosnian refugee Amir Hadzic, the head soccer coach at Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids.

One assignment was for students to identify a mentor and draft an essay mapping out their life, Gould said.

“The course is designed to help them find things they are intrinsically passionate about,” Gould said. “Be able to find your signature strengths, things you can get lost in, things you can be remarkable at, and then have it be something that not only provides for you but also gives your life meaning and purpose.”