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**UI Life Design class helps students follow passions**

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David Gould

IOWA CITY — University of Iowa academic coordinator David Gould was having coffee with a colleague a few months ago, discussing student retention, connection and engagement in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

That sparked Gould, academic coordinator for the interdepartmental studies program, to develop a class aimed at helping students find purpose and meaning.

Gould’s new-this-fall course, “Life Design: Building Your Future,” just ended its first eight-week session, with 100 students enrolled. A second eight-week session will start later this month with 100 students.

“We deal with a lot of students looking at the emotional question of ‘why am I here?’” Gould said. “They go from class to class, but have no vision for how it fits into their life.”

College is a limited window of opportunity in a person’s life to explore what they are passionate about and what they enjoy doing, Gould said. He wants to help students avoid missing that window.

The first class session filled almost immediately, with little promotion among students, Gould said.

The course made use of frequent guest speakers, including Zappos Chief Executive Officer Tony Hsieh, author of “Delivering Happiness.” One guest speaker is a UI graduate who became a magician after earning his degree. The message to students: there isn’t one path to happiness, and doing what you enjoy is a good way to be successful and satisfied.

The students also set goals and considered how those aligned with their dreams, made a mentor map, navigated a scavenger hunt to learn about UI resources and wrote journal entries on topics such as “do-overs,” good deeds and gratitude.

“We talk about what truly makes us fulfilled and happy, we talk about meaning and purpose,” Gould said.



UI sophomore Elise Goodmann

Sophomore Elise Goodmann, 19, is an open major from Dubuque who says the life design class  helped her focus on an academic path. She plans to major in interdisciplinary studies.

“I knew I was passionate about a lot of things, but I didn’t know how to incorporate that into my studies,” Goodmann said.

Sophomore Jordan Decker, 19, also of Dubuque, said the class changed his thinking about college.



UI sophomore Jordan Decker

“I wanted to get tools to find my way to what I wanted to go to school for,” he said. “I think we saw great examples.”