STUDENTS LIVING CARDINAL, GOLD AND GREEN

Building and Sustaining the Cyclone Connection

College life can easily become an overwhelming experience, but finding connection and community can make all the difference. Student leaders at Iowa State University work to build and support community on campus – helping every student feel more connected with one another and creating a home away from home.

These students offer leadership and guidance in strengthening connections between peers and being that person willing to make that first connection. All work together to create and nurture social sustainability and the assurance of belonging.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

When students first arrive on campus, the reality that their new life in college is finally starting can be daunting. There is so much to do, see and learn, that the whole process can feel overwhelming. Student leaders in campus positions help students feel welcome and connected. These leaders serve in various connection roles, including welcoming new students, providing campus tours, hosting residence hall events and helping students dive into the Iowa State experience.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

This month's Students Living Cardinal, Gold and Green feature highlights the students helping to ensure Iowa State feels like home – showcasing the work of Cyclone Aides, Student Admissions Representatives (STARS), Resident Assistants and Destination Iowa State (DIS) Team Leaders.

Cyclone Aides

Cyclone Aides are a group of select students who work to welcome new students to Iowa State University, through creating nurturing and sustaining a positive Cyclone experience.

The role of an aide includes introducing new students to campus, assisting with DIS and preparing students for academic advising appointments. The position offers students the opportunity to improve their professionalism and public speaking ability while also forming new friendships. Students are selected based on qualities such as leadership, creativity and previous work experience.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Valerie Cook, a sophomore studying Spanish and secondary education, offered her perspective as a Cyclone Aide, "The position is very dynamic throughout the year, and a Cyclone Aide's roles and responsibilities change as the semester progresses. Some weeks might involve helping with orientation and welcoming new students, while others involve supporting and planning campus events or helping students find the resources they need."

Cook was drawn to serving as a Cyclone Aide because she has always loved working with people. Cyclone Aides were the first connection on campus to help her

feel welcome. She wanted to give other students that same welcoming experience.



Photo Courtesy of Valerie Cook

Building those first student connections is an important role in being a Cyclone Aide, especially with students who are new to campus. Cook described that being friendly and open can start building these new connections.

"I think being approachable and making students feel comfortable asking questions is a big part of building connections," Cook noted. "Even small interactions can help someone feel more confident and welcome on campus. I want students to know that there are people here who are excited to help them and want them to succeed," she said.

Belonging is an important aspect of being human, and the more students feel like they belong in their environment, the more connections they are likely to build. College is a place where students from all backgrounds come together, and Cook shared that as a Cyclone Aide, helping to create a space where all students feel like they belong is key to supporting a socially sustainable environment at Iowa State.

"Students come to ISU from many different backgrounds and experiences, and not everyone starts college with the same level of familiarity or confidence," Cook said. "Whether we answer questions during orientation or help students become more familiar with campus, we help them build the connections they need to succeed. These connections can help students feel more supported throughout their college experience, not just during their first few weeks," she added.



Photo Courtesy of Valerie Cook

These ideals of creating an environment where students can feel like they belong and being an approachable face makes Cyclone Aides a successful program in bringing students together and supporting social sustainability at Iowa State.

Serving as a Cyclone Aide is an excellent opportunity to help foster new student connections at Iowa State University, all while gaining and fostering valuable life skills such as professionalism and leadership. To learn more about becoming a Cyclone Aide, visit the Cyclone Aide webpage on the Iowa State University Admission and Aid website.

Student Admissions Representatives

STARS are a group of student ambassadors that have the essential role of oftentimes being the first impression of Iowa State to prospective students. Their roles include providing tours of campus and residence halls, assisting with Experience Iowa State events and Group Visit Day tours. Their work builds connections with potential students before they become Iowa State students and offers them a glimpse of the welcoming community that awaits them.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Jayden Quinn is a senior majoring in journalism and mass communications and serves as a STARS Tour Guide. What drew her to this role was the opportunity to show prospective students how

they can start building their own community at Iowa State.

"By introducing prospective students to campus organizations, resources and opportunities available ... I can help them find their place here," Quinn said.



Photo Courtesy of Jayden Quinn

As a STARS Tour Guide, Quinn leads groups around campus, highlighting main locations around Iowa State. "I typically give two-three campus tours a week depending on visitor numbers and needs. I will spend the hour each tour walking around central campus with the visitors, explaining Iowa State traditions and landmarks as well as talking about the six academic colleges," Quinn noted.

Quinn expressed that one of her favorite parts of her role is having conversations with prospective students and sharing her connection to ISU. These conversations become the start of a new connection at Iowa State and leave prospective students with a positive experience.

"I especially enjoy when they ask me to share my experiences ... because it makes the tour feel less like a presentation and more like a conversation. Sharing my own stories... have made for impactful connections that tie back to Iowa State, Quinn shared.

While tour guides work to create connections at Iowa State University, they also help to foster a socially sustainable environment on campus. "I see my role as supporting social sustainability by helping create a welcoming and inclusive environment," Quinn said. "Coming to college can be an intimidating and challenging stage of life. By introducing prospective students to campus organizations, resources and opportunities available at Iowa State, I can help them find their place here," she added.


Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Collectively, STARS serve the essential role of connecting prospective students to that first great college experience at ISU. To learn more about becoming a STARS Tour Guide, visit the STARS Tour Guide webpage on the Iowa State University Admission and Aid website.

Resident Assistants

Resident Assistants (RAs) are student leaders serving in campus residential housing communties. They develop programs and activities for hall houses, serve as a resource to students and help to provide education and awareness of programs and policies. Their work helps build connections within residential life at ISU.


Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

RA responsibilities also include creating living spaces that foster growth among students, which makes Iowa State University the perfect place for students to live and thrive. As described by the Iowa State University Department of Residence, "The Resident Assistant is responsible for developing a strong community that welcomes and supports all community members."

Nick Michel is a senior majoring in landscape architecture, who serves as a RA. Michel was drawn to being an RA because he wants to create moments for his residents that spark opportunities.

"My own RA connected me to someone who sparked something in me, and I strive to create similar catalyst moments for my residents, helping them find opportunities and community," Michel said.



Photo Courtesy of Nick Michel

As a RA, Michel also has the opportunity to make direct and postive connections to other roles and events at Iowa State University. This can include connecting with events such as DIS – and, in turn, connect his residents. "As student leaders, we're empowered to foster connections and create moments that change lives, jus as others did for us ... moving our generation away from our phones and into meaningful action," he offered.

Michel also shared that being a student leader empowers him to create moments that change student's lives, and support a sustainable future, which is a connection that resonates far beyond time spent on campus.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

"Being an RA is inherently about sustainability, even if it's not always obvious. While I'm passionate about the environment, I truly believe that empowering others to take action in their passions is the foundation of sustainability," he added."

When people are passionate about something, they're more likely to create meaningful change, whether it's in their community, their careers, or the world," Michel continued. "The job is rooted in social sustainability and creating connections. A single bond can create a ripple effect of positive outcomes that lead to a healthier and more fulfilling life."

The outcome of these positive connections can include, "healthy habits (like attending class or practicing self-care) and emotional well-being (through the release of oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin or endorphins)," he said.

Fostering these connections right where you live is incredibly important for each student's success at Iowa State University.

To learn more about becoming a RA and making a difference in residence hall life, visit the Resident Assistants webpage on the Iowa State University Department of Residence website.

Destination Iowa State Team Leaders



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

DIS Team Leaders are students who lead the freshman orientation event Destination Iowa State, held at the beginning of each semester for the new academic year.

As described by the Iowa State University Admissions and Aid website, DIS is "the official launch into life as a Cyclone." The DIS event consists of games, food and connection building. DIS leaders play a vital role in curating a space where students feel excited, connected and welcome.

The responsibilities of their role consist of leading student conversations, creating bridges between students and expressing

passion and excitement for Iowa State University.

Most students remember that feeling of first arriving on campus and having that "oh wow I'm on my own" moment. Through creating connections, new Cyclones feel the support of those around them and realize they are far from alone.

DIS leaders are that first link in connecting students to a sense of community during their first few days at Iowa State.

Delaney Woollums is a sophomore majoring in wildlife and fisheries, conservation and ecology and serves as a DIS Team Leader.



Photo Courtesy of Delaney Woollums

"As a DIS leader, I worked ... to successfully integrate and connect with our new members. In a typical week... organizing and holding various educational and confidence-related meetings," Woollums said.

She shared that one of the most essential parts of being a DIS leader is that first impression that you make on students and ensuring that it is a good one. "Being a friendly face right at the beginning of the transition to college, a tough period for most, is essential in this role. Asking questions, creating a feeling of importance, and truly caring... were all priorities to me," Woollums said.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Having those friendly faces right at the beginning of college can help kickstart building positive, healthy and encouraging connections, and making campus not feel so daunting. It also supports a socially sustainable campus environment.

"The work done in this role supports social sustainability. By curating a tight-knit community, campus automatically seems smaller. College is suddenly not so scary, and there are people around to support and encourage you to become involved and make a difference," Woollums said.



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

To learn more about becoming a DIS leader and getting the opportunity to welcome new students to Iowa State, visit the Destination Iowa State Team Leaders webpage on the Iowa State University Admission and Aid website.

Tips for Building Connections on Campus

College can feel overwhelming. There is so much to engage in at any given time, but breaking it down by building connections with peers can help it feel a little more manageable. Toward fostering this growth of building connection, each student highlighted in this article also provided a piece of advice.

Cook discussed that embracing the feeling of uncomfortableness can sometimes be the key to creating the most meaningful connections. "I came from a small town, so I was used to knowing everyone," she noted. "Moving to a campus where you

are surrounded by so many new people can be overwhelming! My biggest piece of advice is to put yourself out there and be vulnerable, even if it feels uncomfortable at first."



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Quinn offered similar advice about jumping into new experiences – highlighting opportunities to connect with organizations. "My biggest piece of advice is to put yourself out there," she discussed. "Join any organization that interests you and see if it's for you. I have made my closest connections through simply trying something new and putting myself out there."

Michel emphasized everyday opportunities to connect and create new connections. "Just reach out. Say hi to people you know and those you don't. Be the one to create a catalyst moment. One hello could turn into a lifelong friendship," he said.

Woollums highlighted everything that college has to offer and the



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

benefit of taking advantage of expanding horizons. "Involve yourself in clubs, intramurals and activities outside of your major. Tap into all sides of yourself and your interests; college has so many opportunities, and it isn't worth it to pigeonhole yourself into one aspect," she said.

A Campus of Continued Connections

These student leaders also discussed the continued connections they have personally witnessed being built and sustained by students as a result of initial connecting opportunities.

"As a DIS leader, my work with our new members extended far beyond DIS," Woollums said, noting specifically the "plethora of knowledge about campus, opportunities, and collegiate life overall" that is garnered and the creation of an "even smaller, personal community in which connections can be built."

Michel reflected similarly, "Residents who attend DIS with the house tend to be more involved and engaged, and I've seen them grow by leaps and bounds, even inspiring others (inside and outside) the house to get involved as well."



Photo Courtesy of Iowa State University

Creating connections with students is one of the most important parts of college, and student leaders at ISU foster those campus connections. Ranging from joining clubs, saying hello to a stranger and simply putting yourself out there, every connection makes a sustainable difference individually and as a collective campus community.

The work, commitment and enthusiasm of these students is representative of the many Iowa State University students serving in campus leadership roles. These student roles build,enhance and nurture connection - to campus, community and beyond.

For additional ideas and resources to build connections at Iowa State University, visit the Get Involved webpage on the Iowa State University Live Green website.