

Several times a semester, I meet with a student advisory group to listen what's on their minds and let them know what's on my mind.

The lineup of about a dozen students changes each year, but it began as a way to gain student input on difficult decisions the college was wrestling with because of declining state budgets. I recall one student telling me that as a future alum, she wanted to look back at her college and be assured it was still among the best programs in the nation. It was invaluable to hear these kinds of insights and concerns.

Since then, our topics have expanded. We've talked about a wide range of areas. They commented on our strategic plan draft. (One even volunteered to work with our strategic planning committee, which I gratefully accepted.) They brainstormed new ways to recruit high school students and to communicate with current students.

We've talked about how important it is for a new student to make friends through learning communities, and whether students in our majors need more living-together learning communities in the residence halls. We've discussed the need to develop more courses that link science to societal issues.

My favorite part of our meetings is to open it up to let the students talk about whatever's on their minds.

Some talk excitedly about the employers they met at our annual career day. Some share conversations they had with freshmen about how they're adjusting to campus and how they've felt welcomed. Some talk about the record number of members in their student clubs. Last fall, one proudly spoke of a first-place showing of the soil judging team at a regional competition, and the individual honors bestowed on team members.

I deeply value the thoughtful input I hear every time I meet with these students. When I walk into the room and see them gathered, it is a highlight of my week and reinforces the important work we do together at Iowa State University.



Wendy Wintersteen  
Endowed Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences

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