

Character and . . .

Connection

Volume 11 / 2025

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The faculty and student essays presented here emerge from an environment of critique and review. Nevertheless, this invited journal of essays represents the authors' views and not necessarily the views of the Wendt Center for Character & Leadership or the University of Dubuque.

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The Character and . . . Journal is published by the Wendt Center for Character & Leadership at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa, and uses short notes and bibliography in the style of the 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

A Letter from the Heart

An Honest Message About College, Character, and Who You're Becoming

Liza D. Johnson
Mary K. Bryant
Anne E. Funke



Dear Students,

We want to talk to you, not in academic lingo or institutional jargon, but honestly.

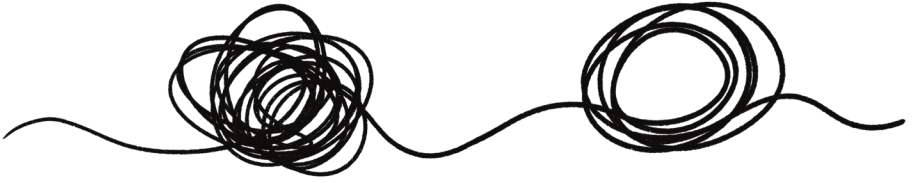
Heart to heart.

This isn't a policy memo or a slick brochure.

This is a letter. A love letter, really. To you. To your experience. To what college could and should be.

So let's begin.

You've probably felt it. That low-key ache that maybe something's missing in college. Sure, there are classes to pass, clubs to join, internships to land. You're doing all the "right" things. But deep down, do you ever wonder: *What's the point of all this?* Where's the part that helps you feel whole? Confident? Rooted? Like you're actually becoming the person you want to be, not just building a resume?



You're not imagining things. Something is missing. Yes, you get degrees. Yes, you learn how to cite sources and solve equations. And yes, you pack your schedules with studying, work, class, practice . . . But what about belonging? Purpose? Wellbeing? What about taking time to pay attention to how you're actually doing, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and just . . . as a human trying to be human? We hear you. We've heard you in classrooms, in Sylvia's cafe, in the colorful chairs on the quad, in late-night campus chats, in quiet moments of exhaustion and hope.

Also, if you've ever felt like college is just a really long, expensive escape room where everyone's pretending to know the clues, you're not the only one. (Hint: the key is often friendship. And snacks.)

That's why we're writing.

Because something important—something foundational—has been missing. Forgotten, even. And it's time to bring it back. We want to introduce what often gets overlooked but is at the core of who you're becoming: **character.**



We know. When you hear that word, you might think of a dusty bulletin board, or someone telling you to “be a good or excellent person” in the most vague and unhelpful way possible. But real character? It's not boring. It's not cheesy. And it's not extra.

It's actually the thing that makes life worth living.

It's your habits when no one's watching. It shapes your daily choices.

It's the courage to speak up. The patience to keep going. The empathy that shifts a conversation.

It's how you show up, for others and for yourself.

So why should you care? Because character is your superpower in a world that often forgets the value of being human. In a world full of quick clicks, hustle, and highlight reels, being kind is radical.

Showing up when it's inconvenient? Brave.

Listening deeply when you could scroll mindlessly? Heroic.

Telling the truth when it would be easier to ghost or gloss over? That's character, and it makes all the difference.



And unlike your GPA, prestigious internship, or follower count, character follows you *everywhere*.

Into your relationships. Into your future job. Into the moments when no one is watching and the moments when everyone is.

The truth is, college has too often become transactional. But that's not what it was meant to be. College should be relational, a space where you're seen, heard, known, challenged, supported, and celebrated.

And sure, it's easy for us to say there's more to life than a strong resume, but we also get it: that fancy resume is your ticket to paying off student loans, putting food on the table, having a comfortable home, and providing for your family ten years from now. When you're worried about survival, it's hard to focus on the intangibles, like cultivating your character and your vocation or calling in this world.

So here's a little secret: employers love to see good character and those so-called "soft skills" (though there is nothing soft about them) on your resume.¹ In fact, the World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report now refers to skills such as empathy, resilience, flexibility, self-awareness, an inclination toward service, and abilities that create community as *core* skills, ranking them among the top attributes employers seek, higher than many technical, cognitive, or physical skills.²

We don't tend to lead with the resume benefits of good character because, well, let's be honest. Things like humility, integrity, and empathy don't exactly scream self-promotion. But if it gets you in the door to building a

life that serves the common good, one that you ultimately find fulfilling and meaningful, we'll take it!

It's not about being perfect. It doesn't mean never making mistakes.

It's about being *real*—honest, grounded, and good.

And let's be clear. That doesn't mean being a doormat or pretending everything's fine.

It means having the strength to stay soft in a world that can feel sharp.

It means cultivating the courage to take a stand and the heart to care deeply.

In short?

Character won't just help you get ahead. It'll help you become someone worth following, someone you can be proud of.



You may not know this, but for more than two decades, the Wendt Center has been at the heart of the University of Dubuque's mission to encourage students to live lives of purpose, grounded in developing good character on campus and in our communities.

We're not sharing this to brag (okay, maybe just humble whisper). We're sharing this because we want you to know what's already in motion and what's coming next.

For years, we've worked to cultivate lives of purpose and encouraged service that matters. It's all grounded in what we believe: character counts. You may have heard of our Wendt Character Scholars. These students are part of a program that asks them to intensively reflect on, talk about, and act with good character and how they want to serve our community and the world.

As our most visible initiative, a lot of people think it's all we do. But we do so much more. We offer mini grants to help faculty and staff bring character conversations inside and outside of the classroom. We host inspiring guest speakers every semester. We lead World View and Personal Empowerment, courses designed to help you wrestle with big questions and strengthen the skills to grow not just as a student, but as a human.

We also quietly celebrate those who lead with integrity, courage, and kindness through our Character Awards at Honors Convocation, not to put them on pedestals, but to show that everyday character is worth noticing (and worth building).

And we're just getting started. Right now, we're developing Pathways to Purpose, a new experience for every UD student who wants college to offer more than just a polished resume. We are growing, evolving, reimagining what it means to develop character and what it means to do that with you, for you, and alongside you.

We're not here to fix you. You're not broken. We're here to walk with you, to learn with you and from you. To offer a roadmap for what it looks like to become not just a knowledgeable graduate, but a whole human with good character. Someone who feels a sense of purpose or calling to create good in the world.

And yeah, we get it. Some of this might sound like fluff. Like a motivational poster wrapped in a TED Talk, dipped in rainbow sprinkles. But here's the thing: it's not fluff. It's foundational. This is about becoming the kind of person who is present for others. The kind of person you have the potential to be.

Let us share, with a little heart and humor, why we are still talking about character.



Character is not a buzzword. Not a box to check. Character is how you act when there's nothing to gain. It's how you treat people who can't do anything for you. It's the internal compass you rely on when the GPS fails.

An example comes to mind. A couple years back, a caring faculty member started up UD's Peer Support Program to train a group of students who weren't chasing credit or spotlight. They simply wanted to be ready when a classmate needed a listening ear or a helping hand. It was character in action, plain and simple. Students doing the right thing—a good thing—simply because it was right and good.

This kind of genuine care can't be forced or faked. While AI might craft a heart-warming essay (we know, ironic), it can't have empathy. It can't make moral choices or sit with a friend having a rough day. That's on you. That's human. And that's what we're here to grow. That's the whole point of UD's emphasis on the Student Success Commitment you signed at Spartan Start (Yes, that moment when the UD president sat down with *you*, in the middle of his probably-back-to-back meetings, to talk about *your* future. It wasn't just a photo op. He meant it). That's why, on the back of that commitment, you were asked about who you are and who you want to become. Because it matters.

Remember looking at UD's mission statement in your World View class freshman year? It's all laid out right there. Sure, we obviously value knowledge and degrees (kind of a given for a university, right?). But *right alongside* scholarship is the call to live lives of worth and purpose. What matters most goes beyond academics, and we're committed to forming the whole person, not just the intellect. That includes moral development, a commitment to service, and all the things that make us deeply human.

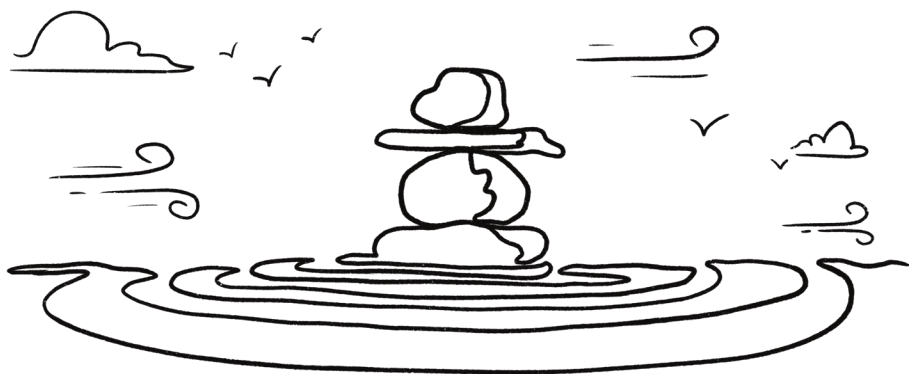
Today, in a world full of machine-learning and lightning-fast AI solutions to technical problems, those human qualities matter more than ever. As you head out into the world, build your career, and make your mark, that's what will set you apart and help you find meaning in what you do.

Going into the medical field? A machine can generate a list of medications, suggest a diagnosis, maybe even simulate a compassionate conversation



with a patient. But it takes a real human being to think outside the realm of known medical procedures and patterns or to see what's *beyond* the symptoms, to understand the emotional weight, the personal context, and the messy, complicated feelings people face when they're making life-changing decisions about their health. That's not something you can automate. That's character in action.

And that brings us back to the Wendt Center. Since 2004, we've been working to build a culture of character and purpose at UD. Over the years, we've heard all kinds of feedback. Some students have said the program changed their lives, while others have been more critical. We've tried out a lot of different approaches in response—some that stuck around, and others that ran their course or shifted in new directions.



And now, here we are in a new moment. With a new director at the Center and a new president at UD, we took some time to pause, reflect, and ask ourselves: where have we been, and where do we need to go next?

One answer stood out. Something vital was missing from the traditional approaches: engaging the heart. For years, the Wendt Center emphasized character development through head and hands: thinking critically about moral decisions and acting through service to others. And that work matters. It's made an impact. But we've realized it's not enough. It's not the whole picture of character.

We need the heart.

Emotions aren't fluff. They're not there for us to suppress or hide. They're powerful tools for insight, compassion, and courage! They are data from us

to us. And we can use that data to make good choices and build healthier relationships. Emotional intelligence, knowing how to name, navigate, and use our feelings well, isn't just about feeling better. It's about living better. Leading better. Loving better. Being a better, more kind human in a sometimes unkind world.

Also, we're just going to say it: character without emotional depth is like a smoothie without fruit. You can blend all you want, but you're still just drinking ice. So, we're adding heart back into the mix. We're shifting from character development that assumes emotions will tag along, to one that intentionally acknowledges, honors, and engages them.



Let us tell you a quick story. There was a student—let's call her Riley—who made an appointment with the Vocation, Career Services, and Community Engagement Center to discuss options for serving the community. They helped her identify her interpersonal strengths and pointed her in the direction of mentorship. She enjoyed the experience, but something happened when she mentored a younger student struggling with loneliness. Riley realized she was good at listening—really listening. She started intentionally checking in more, reflecting on her interactions with others, and making sure the people around her felt seen and heard. She was becoming the person others came to when they needed support. That shift wasn't about grades or accolades. It was heart work. And it changed everything.

Stories like Riley's remind us of what's possible.

College isn't just about cramming for midterms or perfecting your coffee-to-sleep ratio . . . right? Like we said, it can all feel a bit transactional. But whether you're in it just for the degree or really trying to experience something special, there's a big question waiting:

Who are you becoming while doing all this?

You might be thinking, *Alright already—you've made your point. Character and purpose matter.* So what now? What do you actually do about it?

That's where our new character framework comes in. It offers a practical approach to align your intentions, feelings, and actions, it outlines pursuits to guide your goals, and it suggests strategies to help you move toward these goals, day by day, choice by choice.

And we're keeping our approach simple: Head. Heart. Hands.



Head—For thinking big thoughts, asking better questions, spotting red flags (in research and relationships), and figuring out what's actually right (not just what's due at midnight).



Heart—For feeling deeply, caring honestly, and not ghosting emotions. This is where empathy, awareness, and some legit emotional intelligence live. This is where “*I should*” becomes “*I want to*,” and where connection, not perfection, starts.



Hands—For getting out there, doing the work, showing up, and making things better, even if it's just holding the door or helping change the world. But real talk: if your heart's not in it, your hands are just checking boxes. When the heart leads, the hands follow, and that's when things get real.

Think of it this way: if character were a musical trio, the head is the composer, the heart is the singer, and the hands are the drummer keeping rhythm. Take one out, and your band sounds like a mess. But together? Magic.

And we've seen the magic. There was Theo, who never thought much about emotional intelligence until his roommate lost a parent. Suddenly, it wasn't about roommate agreements or who took the trash out. It was about showing up. Theo learned how to sit in silence, to offer compassion, to just be present. That, friends, is heart-level character.

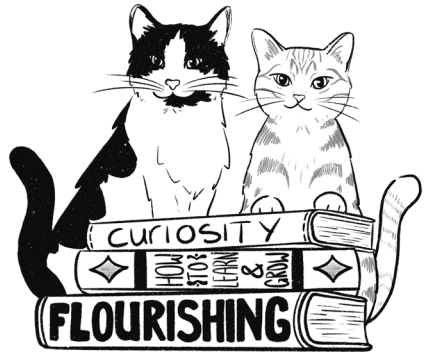
That's where the four pursuits come in. (Yeah, we know "pursuits" sounds like a medieval quest, but stick with us for a minute.) These are the big themes that help you live out that head-heart-hands combo in real ways, every day.

They're not some abstract idea. They're about becoming someone who makes a real difference: in your friendships, your future career, your community, and in how you treat people.

So let's break them down:

Seeking Knowledge and Insight

Because having a worldview beats just having a Wi-Fi password. This is about asking bold questions, staying curious (even when it's hard), and letting your values—not just your GPA—guide your thinking. Here, you'll grow character strengths like curiosity to explore ideas, perseverance when things get tough, humility to keep learning, truthfulness in your thinking, and integrity in how you live it out.

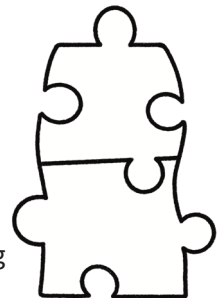


Supporting Wellbeing

Because burnout isn't a personality trait. This means caring for your mental, emotional, and spiritual health, and showing up with hope even when life feels messy. This is about building a life (not just a resume). You'll build strengths like compassion for yourself and others, patience in the waiting, gratitude in the grind, hope when things feel uncertain, and resilience when they fall apart.

Strengthening Community

Because no one thrives in a vacuum (unless you're a Roomba). None of us does this alone. This is about creating meaningful relationships, celebrating differences, and



building spaces where everyone can belong and thrive. It helps you strengthen things like compassion to understand others, respect to share space, honesty to build trust, accountability to follow through, and inclusivity to make sure everyone's in the conversation (and in the room).

Serving Others

Because leadership isn't just being in charge, it's being *of service*. This is the kind of action that doesn't just check a box, but actually changes lives (yours included). You'll grow strengths like courage to take the first step, purpose to stay grounded, justice to do what's right, stewardship to care for what matters, and practical wisdom to know how to help in a way that actually helps.



So where will you actually see this character stuff show up? Let's start with academics—because that's kind of what you're here for.



We're embedding this approach in academic life, but not in a "let's add a sentence to the syllabus and call it a day" kind of way. We mean it.

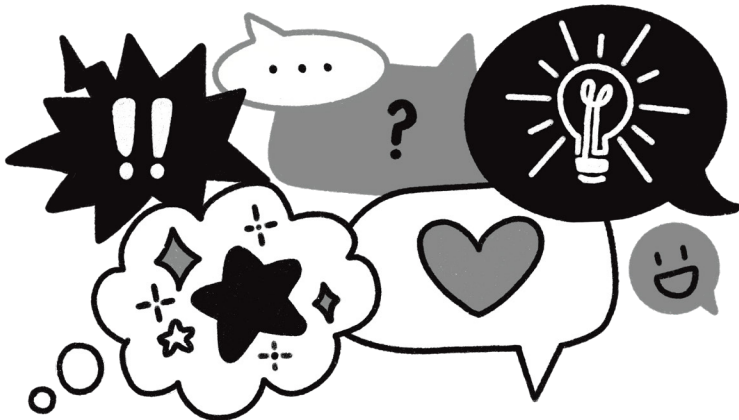
Every academic department has character learning outcomes. These aren't just about what you're majoring in, they're about who you're becoming. They're designed to help you learn how to think deeply, lead with integrity, and stick to your values (even when things get tough).

But here's the thing: based on honest feedback from faculty, we've learned that these outcomes aren't being used consistently or in ways that really matter to students. That's a problem. And we're not here to ignore it or gloss over it with a fancy spreadsheet. We're here to fix it. Our goal? To make character learning meaningful, relevant, and actually woven into your academic life, not just a dusty line in a syllabus or a checkmark in a curriculum plan from 2012.

That said, we've already got some real wins to build on:

Take Adam Hoffman, for example, who led science students on a study abroad trip to Sweden to study the country's sustainability efforts. The course included a visit to IKEA and discussions about finding balance between the demands of a business and its impacts on environmental, economic, and social impact in order to both make people's lives better and respect what our planet needs to remain healthy.

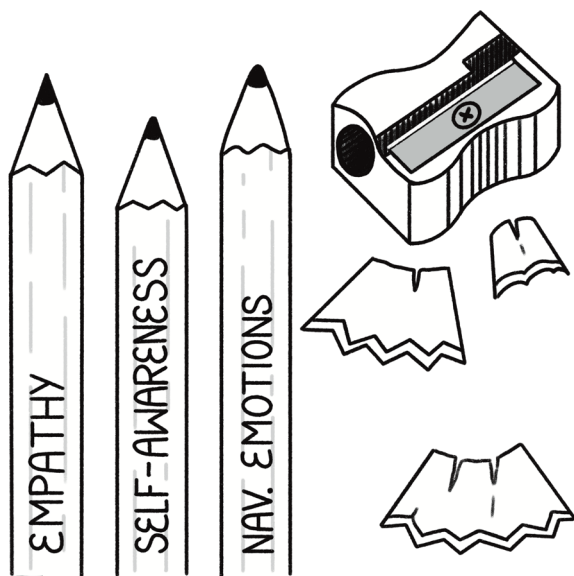
Or Amy Baus, who is supporting psychology students' character growth by using special lab kits that challenge students to intentionally develop virtues such as curiosity, perseverance, humility, and integrity as part of their exploration of the content.



And then there's the World View Seminar series. In your first year, you'll take World View Seminars I and II, classes designed to help you explore what a life of purpose means to you, and to begin figuring out what you truly value and want your life to be about. Later on, you'll take a Senior Capstone course in your major, where you'll pull together everything you've learned and reflect on how your character has grown since the day you came to campus.

World View classes are a little different from most others you'll take here. They're not about mastering a specific subject or memorizing a bunch of facts. Instead, they're all about you. They're about figuring out who you are, what you care about, and how you might use your gifts to make a difference. You'll reflect, explore big issues shaping the world, and wrestle with one BIG question: What's my vocation or purpose?

Another example is the Personal Empowerment course. Yes, that's the name of a class—and yes, it's for credit (3 of 'em!). But it's also a low-key superpower bootcamp. This course is about shaping, strengthening, and sharpening the stuff that *really* matters—empathy, self-awareness, navigating emotions—helping you handle life's curveballs, not just classroom quizzes. You'll reflect, wrestle, grow and even learn how to name your feelings (without breaking into a cold sweat!). Beyond personal growth, it's about connecting your strengths to something bigger: how your vocation can serve the common good. This course helps you start asking, "How do I show up in the world in a way that matters?"



And before you say, *Hey, I've already thought about all this. I know myself and my purpose!*—well, let's be real: Can anyone ever master knowing themselves? Or have all the answers? There's always more to learn or discover, and these courses give you the space to do just that.

But character development isn't just happening in the classroom.

Let's talk about Student Life, coaches, RAs, library, Bridge, and the ASC staff. They are helping you build character in ways you might not even notice (but definitely feel).

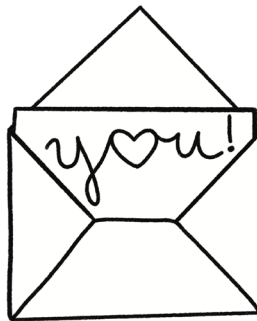
And real talk: character isn't limited to classes or clubs. It's alive every day, in the people who keep our campus running smoothly behind the scenes.

These folks aren't part of some curricular activity, they're staff who make our campus feel like *home*. From facilities to housekeeping to food service, they live out character in quiet, everyday ways, without needing applause. If you want to see character in action, look no further than the folks who are too humble to toot their own horns. We're tooting for them.

Bridget (Housekeeping)—She doesn't just clean. She *connects*. Bridget builds community one conversation at a time. She'll stop, chat, listen, and leave you feeling seen.

Dean (Groundskeeping)—Tables, chairs, setups, teardowns . . . he's the wizard behind the scenes of many UD events you never thought about twice. But it's his quiet commitment and care that builds a community more solid than any folding table ever could.

And of course, we're not even scratching the surface. There are so many people across this campus showing character in the ways that matter most. So to all the quiet rockstars, the behind-the-scenes UD Spartans who are doing the right thing when no one's watching: we see you, we appreciate you, and we cheer you on.



In fact, want to help us keep the celebration going? If you see a faculty or staff member modeling character in their work, their teaching, their leadership, their kindness, let us know! We want to recognize them for infusing character into their corners of campus and showing the rest of us how it's done.

Because here's the thing. We're all in this together.



And just to be clear: this isn't only for Wendt Character Scholars. As much as we cherish them, we're here for all students—across majors, interests, and life experiences.

We're not saying you'll walk away from every experience radically transformed (though we wouldn't hate that). But you might leave with a new friend, a better question, or—at the very least—a cookie. That's a pretty good start.



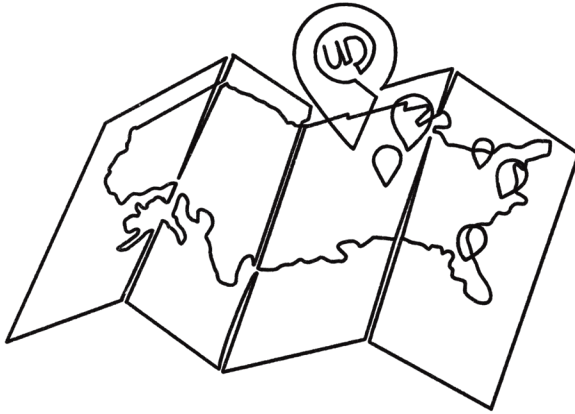
How will we know this is working? We believe in assessing what we care about. Not to impress anyone, but because you matter. Your growth matters. Your story matters.

Have you heard the saying, "you have to measure it to treasure it"? It's a classic, and for good reason. In higher education, feedback from students is one of the best tools we have to discover what's working and how to meet your needs. But here's the part that really matters: we're not just collecting your input. We're learning from it and using it to make things better.

So, yes. You might see surveys from us or get the occasional "tell us what you think!" message. We promise not to overdo it. Survey burnout is real! But know that it's all in an effort to hear your perspective—what's going well, what could be better, and how we can make this experience more meaningful for you.

We're not keeping this to ourselves. (Breaking News: People *like* seeing and hearing about good character. Who knew?) Other colleges are asking the same questions we are. They're searching for ways to educate the whole person. By sharing our story, we hope to spark something larger—a movement of heart-led, whole-person education across higher ed.

This isn't just a "UD thing." It's part of a bigger conversation. What's the *real* purpose of higher education? Is it just job prep or is it also about becoming the kind of person who can handle hard things, lead with empathy, and live with purpose? (By now you can probably guess where we stand on all of this.)



Over the past year, we've taken part in these conversations all over the country. We've been to conferences and seminars in North Carolina, Indiana, Florida, Washington, D.C., Tennessee, and more locally, at the University of Northern Iowa and Loras College—literally down the street. (Shoutout to the grants that helped us make it happen.) We've met with educators, students, and changemakers who all care deeply about this work and who believe that character and purpose should be baked into the college experience, not just sprinkled on top.

We want UD to be known not just for the work, but for the goodness. For leadership that is as kind as it is bold. For people who don't just graduate, but grow.

Think of us as a ripple, not a rock.

Let's talk about building character, without turning into a walking cliché. This isn't about perfection. It's about intention. Right here. Right now. In your 8 a.m. class, your awkward group project, your late-night walk, your big decisions (and yep, your "oops" moments too).

We're not here for theories that only live in textbooks. This is real-life, human stuff, the kind that helps you grow into who you actually want to be.

We call it ***Character in Motion: Becoming You, One Move at a Time***. Here's how to make that happen, not just on paper, but in practice.

Wait—you might be thinking—what's the difference? How do these strategies connect to the pursuits for growing character?

Think of it this way: the pursuits are the big picture—the four areas that we believe are essential to developing good character, a sense of purpose, and a life that serves the common good.

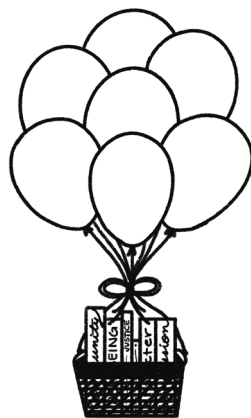
On the other hand, the strategies below are day-to-day tools and habits that will help you grow in any of the pursuits. They're practical, doable, and are most effective when used regularly, like reps at the gym for your character muscles.

Or, to expand the training metaphor, imagine you're preparing for a marathon. To run your best, you would want to make sure you've built up your endurance, strength, focus, and recovery. Those are like your pursuits, the capacities you're trying to strengthen. To build them up, you would use strategies like preparing training schedules, rest days, nutrition plans, research on best practices, and music and podcasts for inspiration.

The same goes here. These strategies are tools that support your character growth and can be used across all four pursuits. Whether you're learning about compassion from a mentor or taking time to reflect on a recent service experience, each strategy helps you build character in meaningful, lasting ways.

Ever heard of Aristotle? Yep, the Greek philosopher. His advice is over 2,000 years old, but it's surprisingly timeless. The human condition hasn't changed all that much, even if our tech has.

The strategies we use are rooted in his ideas, condensed and reformulated by Michael Lamb,³ one of today's leading thinkers on character. We've added our own spin⁴ to make them practical, relatable, and ready for you to apply right now.



Practice on Purpose—Character doesn't grow on autopilot. It takes small, intentional actions over time, whether it's starting a gratitude journal or setting a regular schedule to volunteer at a small non-profit in your community. And remember, it's called practice, not performance! That means having good character is a process, not an outcome. You won't always get it right, but you can always strive to learn from your attempts! As you consistently practice these actions, they will eventually become habits, ingrained into how you live and what you do.

Reflect and Reset—Life moves fast. If you never pause, you never process. Reflection helps you recognize what matters, what’s working, and what needs to shift. Reset when you need to. You’re allowed to grow and recalibrate.

Pick Your People—You don’t have to do this alone. Surround yourself with humans who lift you up, call you in (not just out), and help you stay grounded in your values. Character is contagious. Choose good company.

Learn from Legends—There are some impressive people out there, with brilliant minds and incredible stories we can model ourselves after. But mentors matter, too, and they don’t all need titles. Watch how your roommate navigates conflict, how your professor owns their mistakes, how your coworker treats others with quiet dignity. Everyone has something to teach. Stay curious. Learn from lives, not just lectures.

Spot What Shapes You—Your past, your culture, your habits—these shape you, but they don’t define you. You can’t always control what life throws at you, but you *can* control how you respond. And that response? It shapes everything. Seriously there’s a legit formula for this: $E + R = O$ (Look it up! Okay, okay, who wants to do *more* research? We dropped it in the endnote).⁵

Cue Your Character—Once you know what you’re striving for, make it easier for yourself by creating prompts that remind you of the person you want to be. What you see, you become. So set your sights well. Write that sticky note. Hang the quote. Post your purpose on your mirror or phone screen. Give your future self a moral reminder. A little visual cue can go a long way.

Converse and Connect—We don’t talk to walls—we talk to *people*. Because character doesn’t grow in isolation. It grows in conversations that challenge you, encourage you, and open you up. Ask better questions and connect the dots to take it to the next level. Really listen. That’s where the growth happens.

Where does that leave you?

Hopefully with some inspiration. Maybe even a nudge. You’re not here just to collect credit hours. You’re here to become someone who knows how to think deeply, feel honestly, and act with purpose.

Let’s build that together. We’ll bring the snacks. You bring the curiosity.



The essays that follow in this journal issue are meant to provide insights and ideas to help you on your way to growing your own character. You'll hear from our own Anne E. Funke, who shares work she did with UD's Volleyball Team to help them transform their team culture to one of care and connection through character development. Maybe it will spark some ideas for building bonds within your own social groups.

Joe Klinebriel brings us the world of live theater and the many ways it fosters character development in both the people creating it and the people watching it. You may never look at attending a play the same way again.

Nicholas A. Elder looks deep into the past and compares it to some of today's social media behaviors that can help or harm relationships. You'll find that humans haven't changed very much over the past 2,000 years.

And finally, your fellow undergraduate student Anna Haverland provides a response that is intended to help you, her peers, pick out the essential takeaways from each essay. Think of her insights and the connections she makes as a starting place for you as you determine what is helpful for you and your life.

As we move forward, our hope is simple: that you feel more seen. That you feel more supported. That you feel like your time at UD is forming you not just as a professional, but as a person with purpose, meaning, and goodness to share with the world.

Not just with a head full of ideas.

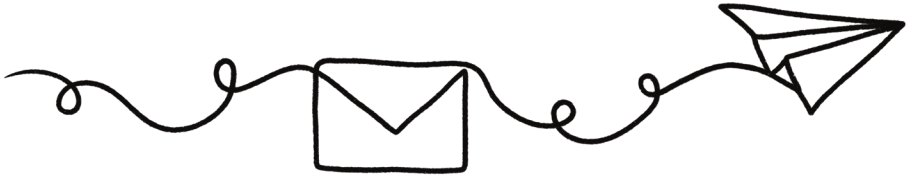
Not just with hands trained to act.

But with a heart that's ready to lead to genuinely serve others.

With gratitude and great hope (and maybe a high-five or two),

The Wendt Center

P.S. This isn't the end of the conversation. It's an invitation. Let's keep growing together. Please stop by the Wendt Center (above Admission Office) and say *Hi!* We have a cozy space to sit, chat, and grab a cold or hot drink. Cheers!



Liza D. Johnson, EdD, is the Director of the Wendt Center for Character and Leadership at the University of Dubuque, a center at the heart of the university's mission to educate and form the whole person. She leads and directs initiatives that foster character development, vocation, and a sense of purpose, supporting meaningful growth for students, faculty, and staff. Her approach emphasizes community engagement and creating intentional experiences that support the university's culture and mission.

Mary K. Bryant, Director of Media & Programming, has been with the Wendt Center since 2015. She has written articles on flourishing, integrity, and whole person education, edited the Wendt journal, and produced videos and podcasts exploring character. Mary earned a BA in Biology, Theatre Arts, and German and an MFA in Comparative Literature—Translation from the University of Iowa.

Anne E. Funke is Assistant Professor and Director of Worldview Studies at the University of Dubuque. She oversees the Worldview Seminar series, Personal Empowerment program, and supports the campus in developing skills and strategies around character, emotional intelligence, and vocation. Anne received her EdD in Educational and Professional Practice, researching female student-athlete wellbeing, and loves connecting with new people.

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Notes

1. It's not really a secret. There are plenty of surveys and interviews that back this up. See Colvin, Gardiner, Gray and Koncz, O'Connor, Zimmerman, Ivy Exec. (Also, please forgive us for the formality of citing sources. We want to show you we've done our homework and aren't just tossing around platitudes and feel-good advice.)
2. "The Future of Jobs Report 2025."
3. If you're the kind of person who enjoys a good philosophical deep dive, start

with Michael Lamb's chapter on the Seven Strategies. But if you're ready to go full-on ancient-Greek-nerd, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the original source—straight from the horse's mouth (or at least, as close as we can get after a couple thousand years and a few translations).

4. If you haven't noticed yet, we are huge fans of alliteration.

5. That little formula, $E + R = O$, comes from Robert Resnick, made famous by Jack Canfield (p. 6). It stands for "Event + Response = Outcome." It's simple, but kind of genius. And yes, it's a real thing.

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