NIU freshman Jenée Carlson named Newman Civic Fellow

By Mark McGowan
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NIU freshman Jenée Carlson has been honored among the 2016 class of Newman Civic Fellows.

Carlson, who is a business major and NIU Research Rookie, is making an immediate and powerful impact on campus thanks to her passion to improve the food security in her hometown and university community.

“I chose to major in business as a means to help people by using proven business practices to address social issues in the world,” Carlson wrote in her application.

“Growing up in this area, I was well aware that there was high rate of poverty surrounding the college campus, but never thought about how it affected college students,” she wrote. "As I arrived on campus, going to the dining hall quickly became a routine of mine, but I soon realized that this was not a routine of every college student."

The Newman Civic Fellows Awards, made possible through the generous support of the KPMG Foundation, honors inspiring college student leaders who have demonstrated an investment in finding solutions for challenges facing communities throughout the country.

Through service, research, and advocacy, Newman Civic Fellows are making the most of their college experiences to better understand themselves, the root causes of social issues, and effective mechanisms for creating lasting change.

These students represent the next generation of public problem solvers and civic leaders. They serve as national examples of the role that higher education can – and does – play in building a better world.

Carlson’s Research Rookie project,
which she began in September, led her to visit the Huskies Student Food Pantry.

“For the past five months I have been observing and volunteering at the pantry while initiating a college-wide survey focusing on the extent to which hunger exists on campus,” Carlson wrote. “My goal is for this research to lead to a more ‘right-sized’ food pantry to better address food insecurity on our campus, which will better the lives of all students and our community.”

She will present her findings Tuesday, April 19, during Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day.

NIU President Doug Baker, in his nomination of Carlson, noted the first-year student’s work to identify strategies that will secure the existence of the food pantry.

“Jenée discovered that food insecurity is not merely an issue that occurs in high-poverty neighborhoods, but that there are a number of students on the campus struggling to make ends meet without adequate resources to ensure consistent access to quality food,” Baker wrote.

“Her mentor, Dennis Barsema, notes that, ‘Jenée is a passionate and committed student, with a heart for serving the needs of her community,’” the president’s nomination continued. “Jenée epitomizes the qualities of a servant leader, and we are grateful for her efforts to help us to ensure that we are best serving all of the students at Northern Illinois University.”