

**MTU**  
**Academy of Sciences and Arts**  
**Academy of Sciences and Arts Dinner and Induction Ceremony**  
**October 1, 2015**

Good evening everyone! My name is Bruce Seely, Dean of the College of Sciences and Arts. I am delighted to welcome you to the 21st Distinguished Alumni Banquet and Induction Ceremony for the Michigan Tech Academy of Sciences and Arts. As always, I am deeply honored to preside over this event, which is almost the most satisfying responsibility of the office I am honored to hold -- second only to the joy of fall and spring graduation ceremonies. The Academy banquet continues a tradition launched by my predecessor, Max Seel, in 1995. The two rows of plaques – 57 in total – that hang in the hallway outside the college offices signal the success of his idea. He happily returned to the faculty this summer and intends to retire as a physicist, so he is back in the department that hired him in 1986. But we all know that this Academy was Max's creation, and only part of a great legacy for Michigan Tech.

Our purpose this evening is the induction of a new member into the Academy of Sciences and Arts. This year we are introducing a new category of member, for Distinguished Young Alumni. The college's department chairs and I wanted to open avenues that would increase representation of all units in the Academy. The challenge here is obvious: several departments or their degree programs came into existence recently enough that graduates have not had time to attain the stature exhibited by the many existing Academy members. In fact, nearly half of the degrees offered in college (including many in long-established departments) were not available 15 years ago. These include psychology, exercise science, sound design, entertainment technology, and anthropology, as well as software engineering, bio- and chem-informatics, engineering physics, communication, culture and media; industrial heritage and archeology, environmental and energy policy, atmospheric sciences, human factors, math's business analytics concentration, and data science, among others. To allow more areas to be included within the Academy, and to fully represent the departments in the college, we decided to emulate the Alumni Association's

recognition of outstanding young alumni and alumnae whose careers early-on exhibit high performance and a trajectory of distinguished accomplishment.

We will honor the inaugural member in this Young Alumni category, a graduate Department of Visual and Performing Arts. I propose to set the stage for our induction with my recent practice, namely offering a few comments about the history of the department from which our inductee graduated. Since so many of the college's faculty and chairs were recently hired, such a backward glance seems warranted.

Activities that today are part of the agenda of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts often have deep roots on campus, sometimes reaching to the earliest days of the Michigan College of Mines. Not long after its founding, a glee club and dramatic performances contributed to campus life. More formal efforts can be dated to the Little Theater (1940) and the formation of the Pep Band in 1963. Don Keranan launched a jazz program in 1967, and an Arts Division was part of the Humanities Department for many years and provided the structure to support an expanding list of campus activities in music, art, and theater. The dedication of the Walker Arts and Humanities Center in 1985 contributed enormously, especially as the Black Box (now McArdle) Theater in what had been the locker room of the old gymnasium, provided a very flexible venue for all types of events.

I can identify three pivotal moments in the continued development of arts and performance endeavors at Michigan Tech. The first took place in 1993, with the creation of the Department of Fine Arts. The impetus for this move included the changing trajectory of the Humanities Department, whose faculty were committed to relatively new undergraduate and graduate majors. The Arts faculty, on the other hand, had no majors to tend to, but instead centered their attention on the enrichment and broadening of students' lives on campus. These differences understandably prompted occasional tensions about resource allocation and missions. The approval by the Board of Control in December 1993 of the proposal forming the department reflected an institutional commitment to the continuation and improvement of the arts at

Michigan Tech. The unit began with 8.5 faculty – 4.5 in theater, 3 in music, and 1 artist, as well as a part-time shop foreman, a part-time concert master, and a funds for student workers to serve theater productions. During the planning process, the arts faculty hopefully asked to add a 3-dimensional designer, a graphic artist/photographer, and a gospel choir director. Alas, the department remained at its original size for several years. The faculty nonetheless focused their efforts on helping students understand and experience creativity, and accepted as a central responsibility supporting the cultural life of the campus and community. As Max Seel commented in October 1993 during the discussion about forming the new unit, “Fine Arts has the important role of preventing a Michigan Tech education from being one-dimensional.”

The department brought commendable vigor to these efforts. Key figures included Mary Ann Beckwith, Milt Olsson (the first department chair), and Richard Blanning. A quiet person blessed with a marvelous sense of humor and quick wit, Dick was at the center of the theatre activities. He had arrived on campus in 1977 to teach speech and drama. He initiated an Arts Laboratory that included a mime ensemble, comedy team, dance group, music ensemble and singers, and theater group. Reflecting his wide personal interests, Blanning spent his sabbatical leave in 1992 working on a locally-written musical with Mike Irish, pursuing his own sculpture projects, and writing multiple novels. By 2000, he had directed more than 50 plays at Tech. Such energy was typical of the new department, which also developed the Echoes of Heaven gospel choir directed by Ineta Harris, the deeply irreverent student improv group The Troupe, overseen by Sue Stevens, and a series of very popular Madrigal Dinners.

This energetic and active faculty group benefited from the second main milestone in the arts – the Rozsa Center for the Performing Arts. Planning and fund raising began in 1994, and ground was broken on this \$20 million facility in 1998. The inaugural events occurred in October 2000 – pianist James Tocco (who also had appeared on campus in 1985) and the Grand Rapids Symphony. The generosity of Ted and Lola Rosza, Jim and Verle Klungess, Bob and Virginia Horner, and Jim and Margaret Black among many others helped create this marvelous space. The advantages extend well beyond the end of traveling to Calumet or local churches for

concerts. The VPA calendar for that inaugural year of 2000-2001 showed what could happen with the space in the Rozsa, and their program of departmental functions included 18 departmental concerts and dramatic presentations, a guest artist, and the Copper Country Art Exhibition. Highlights included Handel's *Messiah*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Guys and Dolls*. Since then Rozsa has provided an amazing venue and a laboratory for students in music and theater, highlighted in my mind by performances by Alan Parsons in spring 2006 and fall 2007.

The presence of the Rozsa also spurred development of undergraduate degree programs that matched the expertise of VPA faculty and with Michigan Tech's mission. Degree programs had been discussed before, with a program in technical theater or technical theater and engineering apparently installed in 1981. Perhaps 3 students graduated in 1982, but the viability of the program proved problematic. In 1993, the faculty's discussions about forming the Fine Arts Department included preliminary plans for a unique BA in Creative Theory and Arts. But the new Rozsa venue and the addition of new faculty with backgrounds in technical theater (Christopher Plummer and M.C. Friedrich) allowed the department to propose sustainable undergraduate degrees in sound design, theater and entertainment technology, and audio production and technology. The University Senate approved these degree programs in 2005.

These implementation of these plans after 2006 marked the third milestone for the department. The key was the unit's decision to rename itself the Department of Visual and Performing Arts to better reflect the existence of more than the visual arts activities usually connoted by the term "fine arts." The new degrees, the main stage and facilities in the Rozsa, and the McArdle theater, provided the opportunity and possibility of demonstrating how an arts unit could fit into and contribute strongly to the mission of this technological university. The result is an undergraduate enrollment that has averaged 68 over the past three years – with about 45 pursuing the sound programs. Importantly, the department still embraces the opportunity to introduce and nurture the interest of science and engineering students in the arts, music and theater. The integration of the Rozsa complex and its staff into VPA, a development pursued over the past year and now

completed, should help this dual mission. The result is a reasonably health staffing situation with a faculty roster that includes 4 in music, 3 artists, 6 in theater and sound, 2 administrative staff, and 6 technical staff, some of whom double as instructors. These recent changes at VPA have almost completed a process launched about a decade ago, or just about the time that our newest Academy member graduated from VPA. So let's get back to the business of the evening.

Inductees into Michigan Technological University's Academy of Sciences and Arts must meet several criteria. They must have graduated from a program of the College or one of its predecessors. They also must have brought distinction to themselves, their academic department, the College of Sciences and Arts, and Michigan Technological University through participation, commitment, and outstanding leadership in their profession and through public service. Election to the Academy publicly recognizes our appreciation and pride in those alumnae and alumni for their exemplary achievement and professional excellence. Members of the Academy now include distinguished academics, leaders of industry, members of the National Academy of Sciences, a Hollywood executive, and the University's sole winner of a Nobel Prize - Melvin Calvin (1964). Each recipient receives an engraved plaque with their photograph; a copy also will be displayed in the Walker Arts and Humanities Center to serve as an inspiration for our current students and for our faculty and staff. Michigan Tech is committed to graduating superbly educated individuals who serve their professions, students prepared to thrive in the arenas of graduate and professional schools, and leaders who have recognize the various influences and interactions of science, technology, the liberal arts, language, and arts on all of our lives. The members of the Academy and the person to be inducted this evening have shown these qualities in exemplary careers and lives. They are inspirational role models who have provided a splendid example for all of us.

**Distinguished Young Alumni** are graduates who exhibit these patterns and attributes at an early stage of their careers, and have begun to bring distinction upon themselves, and to their department and the university. They, too, serve as role models for our current students in the many fields of study in the College of Sciences and Arts.

In addition to the plaque, the College presents Academy inductees with a beautiful, original photograph of the Keweenaw taken by emeritus Humanities faculty member and photographer Joe Kirkish. The picture, displayed on the easel next to the podium, captures the beauty of the Copper Country that surrounds Michigan Tech and forms such a significant component of the memories of many of our graduates. Please feel free to examine Joe's picture after the ceremony.

According to our tradition, the department chair introduces the new member to be inducted. Thus, **let me ask Jared Anderson**, Chair of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts, to start this process for us.

**Jared Anderson:**

On behalf of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts it is my privilege, this evening, to honor an alumnus of the department and to induct him into the MTU Academy of Sciences and Arts. Would **Kenneth Showler** please come forward.

Ken Showler enrolled at Michigan Technological University in the fall of 2002, as an electrical engineering major. He fit right into campus as an instructor at the Mount Ripley Ski Hill and a serious mountain biker. But 3-½ years later, Ken's interest, skills (and incidentally most of his electives) prompted his transfer into the newly available BA in sound design under primary mentor Christopher Plummer. Ken had been involved in several Rozsa/VPA theatrical, musical, and recording studio projects/events as a musician, sound designer, and technician. Sound mattered to Ken, for he also worked as a WMTU Radio DJ and staff member, and played in rock/blues bands at local venues. Along with Joe Kirklin, Ken was among the first students to complete the sound design and audio production programs in Visual and Performing Arts. Both were recipients of "Contribution to the Arts" awards sponsored by VPA and the Houghton Rotary Club.

Shortly after graduation, Ken married April, also a graduate of Michigan Tech (BS Management Information Systems, 2005) and began a short internship with the Detroit Chop Shop, a sound effects production house. Ken then landed a full-time position as an audio production engineer at Forest Post Productions in Farmington Hills, MI, providing recording, mixing, sound design for local and national commercials and long-form media. Laid off after about a year because of the “Great Recession”, Ken’s strong computer skills landed him a fortuitous freelance gig a couple weeks later, developing video playback systems for a theme park attraction mock-up in London. This job brought him into contact with his next boss from the audiovisual systems integration company Bond Communication. Within a month, Ken had joined Bond and he and April headed to Abu Dhabi, as the attraction was destined for the Ferrari World theme park. They remained in the Persian Gulf area for about two years, with Ken working as a designer and programmer on several significant audiovisual installations, including Ferrari World, the Dubai Aquarium, the Yas Island Marina Hotel, and the “At the Top” experience at the world’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai.

Following a pattern, Ken met his next bosses while working with their product (7thSense Delta Media Server) at Ferrari World. He returned to the States and took a 13,000-mile road trip around America with April, before working for a couple of years as a freelancer for 7thSense. These jobs included working on commercial and film audio as well as audiovisual system design and controls programming. Eventually Ken moved into a full-time position with 7thSense, essentially running the “U.S. Office” out of his basement. Within three years, the company established 7thSense LLC in the US and opened a small support/service office in Southfield, MI. The company now has three employees, including another Tech grad! In April 2015, Ken and fellow partners Matt Barton, Ian Cannell, and Richard Brown assumed ownership of the company through a management buyout from Adam Neale and Ian Macpherson. 7thSense provides high resolution, uncompressed video playback products and support to respected visitor attractions globally. Ken feels very fortunate to be involved.

Ken is here tonight with his wife April, an alumna who earned a BS in Business in 2005, and daughter Lucy. Also with Ken are his parents Bob and Lynette Showler.

### **Bruce Seely: Final Remarks**

This evening always leaves me feeling renewed about the importance of the work accomplished in the college and the value that the variety and diversity of CSA programs and students inject into the larger university. This year, the Academy induction accidentally coincides with the that continually growing and expanding Fall Career Fair, which certainly serves as an indicator of the value of a Michigan Tech education. That Tech grads are in high demand by employers matters enormously, but this coincidence of scheduling – and the career path of our newest academy member -- also leads me to reflect, as we close the evening, on other ways of looking at the value of a university education.

Let me start by returning to the effort to bring the Department of Fine Arts into existence. Only the most naïve observer would guess that this happened without difficulties. Typical of the concerns that emerged were those addressed by Milt Olsson in 1990, when a *Lode* writer wondered whether “time spent looking at art would be a waste of tuition and tax dollars.” Milt’s firm rejoinder: “Art permeates our entire lives, in one way or another to the point where it is taken for granted” (*MTU Lode*, January 17, 1990). He sought to insure that our students would not miss art in their lives. Yet when the Board of Control approved the new department in 1993, one member added, “I don’t want this to be seen as broadening the University into areas” that would require substantial funding.

These comments conveyed the sense that somehow the arts mattered significantly less than other areas of academic inquiry. Fortunately, such thinking has not reflected the views of most leaders at Tech. Again in 1989 Milt Olsson captured part of the reason this support when he commented, “Our entire program has grown out of students interest, and I don’t think we have peaked yet” (*MTU Lode*, September 6, 1989). Indeed, VPA still has not peaked. A very large number – perhaps 60% of Tech’s students -- participate in some form of arts programs, and the Experience



Tech student fee allows even more students than ever before to attend arts events. The interest is there, and VPA faculty do a great job of helping students open that curiosity and interest. Against the backdrop of the Career Fair, it seems useful to reiterate that despite a rising tide of political and social opinion to the contrary, arts activities at Michigan Tech serve many students and benefit them deeply. Ironically, the absence of music majors actually allows Tech music students to receive a level of attention normally open only to majors at other universities. Those in attendance this evening heard the results from the players who entertained us earlier. And it shows in other ways as well. Mike Irish knows of more than one student whose job prospects were markedly improved precisely because of being a musician as well as an engineer or scientist. A couple of years ago, one young engineer reported that his interview went really well after his interviewer asked about the music activities listed on his resume. Since the interviewer was a jazz fan, the two spent most of the interview talking about their favorite performers. The interviewer later noted the decision to hire this jazz- playing chemical engineer was easy -- not because they both liked jazz, but because that interest revealed much about the student as a person.

That's a great point to remember as we think about helping students make choices at Tech. Even activities that do not appear to advance one's career prospects directly often prove highly significant. I believe firmly in what this college emphasizes: educating the entire student, mind and body. Getting a job is increasingly the paramount consideration of many students and their parents. We understand that reality, and it is hardly a surprising viewpoint, given the rising cost of university attendance over the past fifteen years. But differing views do exist concerning the most helpful steps to launching our graduates. On the one hand, last week's *Chronicle of Higher Education* devoted its NEXT section to "The Credentials Craze" (September 18, 2015, pp. B-4 to B-37) and examined the rapid emergence of badges, awards, and many other efforts outside of traditional degrees designed to validate learned knowledge. Such efforts are apparently exploding on many campuses, but it does seem fair to ask whether this is another reflection of the mindset that awards trophies to every youngster in a youth soccer league. What does this proliferation of educational accomplishment indicators mean?

Interestingly, three months earlier, a different *Chronicle* author discussed another view of university education, suggesting that we ought to be sure we help students develop an essential ability much in demand by employers – how to think. (See (Barry Schwartz, “Intellectual Virtues,” June 26, 2015, pp. B-7 to B-10.) Barry Schwartz at Swarthmore, a liberal arts college that also houses an engineering program, suggested that employers are not very good at this process; universities, however, can best see this task accomplished. But we need to do much better, he added; he urged that universities emphasize the development of intellectual virtues that he, at least, considers essential to knowing how to think. His list included *love of truth, honesty, fair mindedness, humility, perseverance, courage, good listening, perspective taking and empathy*, and *wisdom*. I hope you can understand why universities are positioned to advance these abilities – we can both **expose** students to them and **allow students time for reflection** about them. Schwartz persuades me that these attributes will serve any graduate. But even at Swarthmore, Schwartz noted, it is not easy to ignore the pressure to give students only obviously useful skills; he saw almost every student taking a minor in computer science as a backup plan. But Schwartz argued – and others do as well – that so called “resume skills” do not necessarily make a college graduate a good person, good parent, friend, spouse or citizen.

Such talk sounds obviously (hopelessly?) old fashioned. Yet I believe that our role *IS* about more than preparing graduates for their first job. Carried too far, that short term focus encourages training more than education. It is easier, I will agree, to articulate this position when so many majors in CSA can fully enter their professions *only* after earning a graduate degree. But even non-majors benefit from classes and intellectual experiences that force them to consider who they are, the type of society in which they wish to live, and how they wish to go about creating the future. I wonder if Glenn remembers the Senate recommendation to amend the strategic plan in 2004 (Proposal 8-04), titled “The Role of Non-Engineering Disciplines at Michigan Tech.” The amended proposal finally approved stated, "Engineering, science and technology, and the business of technology will remain the focus of our University. We also recognize that other disciplines and degree programs are necessary for the University's long-term viability and that

they make significant contributions to the University's educational and research missions in a world where science, technology, humanistic and social issues are inextricably linked." I take real comfort in the fact that our honoree, like almost all of those who are already in the Academy, helps prove the validity of that proposal. Following his passions – even when those include so-called “soft” (and thus somehow “less valuable”) subjects such as art – still advanced Ken’s opportunities. His experiences demonstrate, I submit, the broader purposes universities can, should and must serve. Ken’s career seems to me a useful antidote for the very narrow prescriptions offered often and loudly these days about how to change higher education. Change is always required – but there is room for continuity as well. And changes need to be well considered, and not just in response to the issue of the moment.

It is past time for me to get off the soap box. So let me conclude by congratulating again our newest inductee to the Academy. Thanks especially for the time and energy you will devote to VPA majors and other students all day tomorrow. This interaction may provide the drive that sets some future inductee on the path to this very event. Those interactions are the most powerful benefit of asking Academy members to come back to campus.

I hope everyone has had a good time this evening amidst the delightful interactions, the great entertainment and superb meal, and the wonderful setting. My thanks to everyone who shared this evening and helped make it a success. Thanks for the pleasure of your company, and be sure to travel home safely. Good night!