FROM THE VP

Message from Les

“They are struggling to maintain balance as they attempt to cross the gulf between their dreams and the diminished realities of the world in which they live. They are seeking stability but live in an age of profound and unceasing change. They want to believe in the American dream and are optimistic about their future but pessimistic about the future of America. They want intimacy but are weak in communication skills and live in a hook-up culture world. They want to play by the rules but are unsure of what the rules are due to disruption in the economy, the impact of technology, and the flattening of the world around them.”

This is the mindset of today’s college students according to authors Art Levine and Diane Dean in their recent book, Generation on a Tightrope.

It’s hard to fathom that the students in the above profile are the same students arriving on Michigan Tech’s campus. Just a few weeks ago, well over 700 students participated in Make a Difference Day; this is a nearly 40 percent increase over previous years. These same students showed up in droves to assist when fires occurred in our library in October and Heritage Manor in August. They spend lengthy hours in research labs working with faculty on new discoveries and long hours on snow statues in the bitter cold of winter. They are willing to be involved in University decisions and are enthused about the environment in which they reside. Despite the gloom and doom picture that Levine and Dean paint, Michigan Tech students are tenacious, well grounded and seemingly better prepared to deal with the challenges of our complex world.

It is that spirit that we serve.

Welcome to the redesigned Student Affairs Connection, focused on providing readers a portrait of today’s Michigan Tech student. In this edition, you will find information about our students, their feelings about Michigan Tech, their career success, how they pay for college, and helpful insights about their parents.

In newspapers, television shows, blogs, and even presidential town-hall meetings, we’ve all heard and read commentary questioning the value of a college degree and lamenting the inability of college graduates to find jobs or repay loans. While more often than not these voices paint a somewhat bleak portrait of the future, we all should feel blessed that this future is uniquely different for a Michigan Tech graduate. You’ll discover the reasons why inside.

Enjoy!

Signed
No one who helps with move-in weekend would be surprised by a recent study that found the average college student owns more than 2,000 pounds of electronic gadgets. Despite the trend towards smaller, more versatile devices, students have more belongings in the form of tablets, laptops, video game consoles, etc. than ever. These tangible belongings hold important places in their rooms and their lives. Yet, when asked, college students consistently rate their belongings more important than their belongings.

Recently, Enrollment Services asked Michigan Tech students what made Tech unique. The cultural and natural environments, scenic beauty, academic reputation, and rigor—as well as student-to-opportunity ratio, of course—all were important to our students. What all of that creates is a sense of belonging.

In these focus groups, one student remarked, “We’re clearly not a suitcase college, so it’s like a second family up here.” The idea that our students feel connected to the University community is reflected in the recent results of Michigan Tech’s student satisfaction survey. The percent of undergraduate students who agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I have a sense of belonging at Michigan Tech” has risen from 80 percent in 2008 to 88 percent in 2012.

So why is this important? Freeman et al. (The Journal of Experimental Education, Spring 2007) studied the effects that a sense of belonging makes in first-year students. They found that students’ subjective sense of belonging in their academic environments is an important factor associated with positive school-related experiences. Their findings suggested that the sense of belonging is associated with academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, factors that are key to educational success.

What can we attribute to this rising sense of belonging our students feel? One student commented, “It’s never a bad thing to know faculty and we know them here at Michigan Tech. My friends back home just don’t get that.” Throughout these focus groups, we noted a pronounced sense of difference from their high school friends who attend other institutions. “Faculty members don’t just do their jobs, they’re engaged and committed to the students and the University,” said one student. Another commented on the connection to University traditions such as K-Day, Parade of Nations, Family Weekend, and Winter Carnival, saying “I begged my high school friends to visit me for four years. They finally came for Winter Carnival and were like ‘OH MY GOD!’ They loved it.”

This leads to a transformational experience. Last spring, on the Saturday evening after commencement ceremonies, our Financial Aid Office received a note from a mother celebrating her son’s graduation, saying “the entire Michigan Tech experience took a sometimes awkward, self-titled ‘nerd’ and turned him into an amazing man with the confidence and courage to go after his big dream no matter where it takes him.”

More than ever, our students are quite aware of the experience their tuition provides them. For better or worse, they are looking for signs of a return on this investment. For those of us charged with marketing the benefits of a Tech education and recruiting students, these are the types of intangible returns that become clear only after a prospective student visits campus; meets with faculty, advisors, and staff; or talks with a current student. While these factors may be harder to articulate than a high placement rate or average starting salary, they are certainly just as important, expressed well by a

Today’s Students: The Importance of Belonging
Enrollment Highlights

Fall 2012 preliminary enrollment numbers are in and 6,945 students are enrolled this fall, 86 below last year’s enrollment. While new undergraduate enrollment increased by 27, total undergraduate enrollment decreased by 105 due to a large graduating class.

Michigan Tech now has the largest class of graduate students in Tech’s history. The total graduate head count is now 1,322, an increase of 19 or 1.5 percent over fall 2011. Graduate enrollment rose to 18 percent (from 17 percent) of the total student body, following objectives articulated in the enrollment plan.

The number of female students in the College of Engineering continues to climb, to 835 from 795 last year. The percent of women in the College of Engineering is now above 20 percent, up from 19 percent last year and 16 percent in 2005. The number of first time undergraduate females enrolled in engineering is now 199, almost double the number in 2004.

Total domestic underrepresented student numbers are up by ten to 433 or 6.2 percent of our student body.

First-year to second-year undergraduate retention held relatively steady at 83.2 percent, up from 80.9 percent two years ago.

The number of those living in University housing is up six percent to 2,275.

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senior this fall who emailed Career Services: “Last night, I was blown away once again by how awesome this University is. Even though I am an out-of-state student that pays a lot to go to Michigan Tech, I love the fact that we have employees here that truly care about our futures and will organize events like the Industry Panel just to benefit us.”

Thank you for helping to instill this sense of belonging in our students.

—John Lehman
There have been a number of articles written in the past few years about today’s parents. Terms such as “helicopter” and “lawnmower” are frequently used to describe the level of involvement they have in their children’s lives, not only while they are still at home but more notably when they head to college. We all have stories to share about encounters with parents, the demands that they have made, and have heard jokes about building space in the residence halls just for parents. But how do the parents of today differ from the parents of the past?

There has been a pivotal shift in the K–12 education system over the past fifteen years involving parents and technology that appears to be directly related to this “helicopter” phenomenon. Prior to advancements in technology, if parents had a question about their student they would have to either ask their student or call the teacher. With the creation of web-based programs such as PowerSchool, K–12 educators are now able to keep parents informed of daily classroom activities, homework assignments, and attendance without directly interfacing with parents. No longer are parents reliant upon asking their student if they have homework; they are now armed with the knowledge to ensure their student completes their assignments. Parents have become so accustomed to knowing every detail about their student’s academics, they find it difficult to restrain themselves and allow their student to become young adults. As students are entering the University and beginning to establish independence, many parents are struggling to make the adjustment to college life.

Parents do play an important role in the success of their student during the college experience but often need assistance in understanding the transition their student is making. To aid in this transition, parents are introduced to Michigan Tech’s Parent and Guardian Philosophy at Parent Orientation which states:

*Michigan Technological University views students as young adults who are in the process of becoming responsible, accountable, and capable. We respect their growing independence and hold them accountable for decisions they make. We also respect their privacy, but don’t always promise confidentiality; and, if needed, we will get others involved to ensure their well-being.*

As such, we view parents and guardians as our partners and will collaborate with them to the best of our ability to assist their student. However, we prefer to work directly with students in order to foster their growth and development. Parents and guardians are encouraged to continue to strengthen the relationship with their student by assuming the additional role of mentor and coach.

Since today’s parents are in regular contact with their student (some daily), parents are encouraged to become our partner to help guide their student to resources and services on campus rather than intervening on their behalf. By providing parents with the tools to direct a student to the services they need, we are sending a common message of supporting student independence and sense of self-responsibility.

—Heather Simpson

References


Satisfied Students Stay

Student experiences play an important role in determining student success. Faculty and staff work hard to provide a community where students learn and live, but in the end, students are the ones who know where we as an institution have succeeded and where improvements are needed.

Student Affairs surveys undergraduate and graduate students about their satisfaction with experiences at Michigan Tech. This Student Satisfaction Survey provides us with a snapshot of overall satisfaction, both in and out of the classroom, and produces information that is a catalyst for change across campus.

In 2012, the survey response totaled more than 1,400 undergraduate and 300 graduate students. The results demonstrate satisfaction with faculty and staff willingness to help: 92 percent of undergraduates strongly agree or agree with this statement.

Undergraduates showed that they are very or somewhat satisfied with the availability of faculty and academic advisors. Eighty-nine percent expressed satisfaction with faculty availability and 84 percent with academic advisor availability; graduate student responses were similar.

The satisfaction level with commitment to diversity was at an all-time high at 84 percent for undergraduate students, up from 77 percent in 2008. For graduate students, this satisfaction level is at 78 percent, up from 75 percent. We also asked undergraduates if tuition is worth the educational experience. Unfortunately, satisfaction with this question has shown a downward trend from 65 percent in 2008 to 52 percent in 2012.

Looking at overall satisfaction, the percent that say their experience at Tech has exceeded or met their expectations is 88 percent for undergraduate and 78 percent for graduate students. Ninety-one percent undergraduate and 83 percent graduate students say they would recommend Michigan Tech to others.

If you are interested in the full results, visit the Student Affairs Assessment website at: www.mtu.edu/student-affairs/administration/vp/committees/assessment/

—Beth Lunde

Satisfaction Survey Results: A Few Key Points

- **Percent of students that strongly agree or somewhat agree with “There is a commitment to diversity on campus.”**
  - 2008: Undergraduate 77, Graduate 75
  - 2009: Undergraduate 78, Graduate 76
  - 2010: Undergraduate 80, Graduate 74
  - 2012: Undergraduate 84, Graduate 78

- **Percent of students that strongly agree or somewhat agree with “Tuition I pay is worth the educational experience I am having at Michigan Tech.”**
  - 2008: Undergraduate 65, Graduate 76
  - 2009: Undergraduate 64, Graduate 76
  - 2010: Undergraduate 58, Graduate 53
  - 2012: Undergraduate 52, Graduate 52

- **Percent of students that say their experience at Michigan Tech has exceeded or met their expectations.**
  - 2008: Undergraduate 91, Graduate 87
  - 2009: Undergraduate 87, Graduate 78
  - 2010: Undergraduate 85, Graduate 81
  - 2012: Undergraduate 85, Graduate 78

- **Percent of students that say they would recommend Michigan Tech to someone else.**
  - 2008: Undergraduate 93, Graduate 88
  - 2009: Undergraduate 91, Graduate 91
  - 2010: Undergraduate 90, Graduate 94
  - 2012: Undergraduate 91, Graduate 83
College Education: A Sound Investment

It’s in the news, political candidates are debating it, and students are concerned about it: the high sticker price of colleges and universities. In a time when the economy of the US, and especially Michigan, is transforming into an intellectually driven workforce, Michigan Tech is playing a key role in supplying the demand for highly trained graduates.

Yet many question whether or not college is a sound investment. The truth is, there is no better time to earn a degree. A recent study by the Hamilton Project confirms that, for the last thirty-five years, “returns on college attendance are much higher than other investments such as stocks, bonds, and real estate.” Many skeptics may agree that the investment is still sound, however, access is limited due to the increased sticker price on the cost of attendance.

The College Board debunks this myth and confirms that the actual cost, or net price, for a four-year degree has remained relatively constant for the last four years; the net price has remained stable through the effective use of financial aid. In a time when federal grant programs, like the Pell Grant, purchase a significantly smaller percentage of tuition than they have in the past, it is increasingly incumbent upon Michigan Tech to shoulder the responsibility of assisting students. To offset the losses in state and federal financial aid resources, Michigan Tech invests nearly $30 million in undergraduate student aid programs.

This commitment to financial aid has resulted in students realizing their life goals by attending institutions like Michigan Tech. Nearly 90 percent of our students receive financial aid at the University, which minimizes the amount of debt they have to incur. The result of this ideal combination is a student loan default rate of only 3.1 percent, which is well below the national average of more than 9 percent. More importantly, there is a high demand for our graduates. With a 95 percent placement rate and starting salaries averaging nearly $53,000, Michigan Tech is still one of the best places in the US to get an education.

—Bill Roberts

Student Spotlight: Financial Aid

We recently had a chance to catch up with one of our students and see how financial aid affected her decision to attend Tech.

Sierra Goodine, a first-year civil engineering student from Green Bay, credits her financial aid as the key that opened the door to her Tech experience. She said that scholarships were a “tipping point for me to attend one of the best civil engineering schools in the country.”

When asked what effect financial aid has had on her collegiate experience, she replied, “my scholarship helped me feel that I really matter at Michigan Tech,” that financial aid has lifted “the worry of financing my education and allowed me to focus on my schoolwork.”

We have heard a great deal about loan debt in the national higher education debate. However, students like Sierra realize that Michigan Tech is as sound of an investment as there is.
Career Services Update

October 2, 2012 was a day that many students won’t soon forget—especially for those who are now receiving internship, co-op, and full-time job offers from companies who attended the Fall 2012 Career Fair. The event was a huge success with 280 companies and 890 representatives doing a whole lot of hiring. There was, and still is, cause for a lot of excitement and positivity in an economy where reports say that, nationally, 50 percent of new college graduates are unemployed upon graduation.

This fall’s fair was the third largest on record and had to be held in the two largest venues on campus – the Varsity Gym and the Multipurpose Room at the SDC. In comparison, the Michigan Collegiate Job Fair, held in Livonia, had seventy-nine employers registered for their November job fair. Other regional universities, such as MSOE and UW Madison have less than 200 employers attending this year. The differential between job fairs says a lot about the quality of Michigan Tech students. These companies travel a long way for what they believe are some of the most talented students in the nation.

Career Fairs are big, loud, and generally very busy places; they can also be quite intimidating. With so many companies, students wonder whom to approach and what to say once they get to the front of the line. When it was their turn to speak, they must have impressed, because there were more than 4,000 interviews conducted on campus in the days that followed. The air of positive excitement was measurable at this valuable networking event.

Employers stated that Michigan Tech students have what they want in new hires. They also mentioned that our students are hardworking, dependable, dedicated, and creative problem solvers. Company reps say that our students are well prepared and very professional; many reported that they spoke to and were impressed by a number of first-year students, which gave them a strong and positive impression about future prospects.

When we talked to students, many were proud to announce they were scheduled for interviews right then and there, and others felt positive they would hear about interview invitations soon.

Career Services is thankful to so many faculty and staff who volunteered to help students prepare for this event, and they are very appreciative of those who allowed the use of their offices, conference rooms, or any available rooms the day after the Career Fair for those thousands of interviews: your generosity and dedication is reflected in the countless success stories we hear every year.

—Jim Turnquist

First-Year Mindset

Every year, Beloit College produces the Mindset List to lend a glimpse into the lives of modern college students. Here are ten of the entries for our current first-year students.

1. Their lives have been measured in the fundamental particles of life: bits, bytes, and bauds.
2. Bill Clinton is a senior statesman of whose presidency they have little knowledge.
3. There has always been football in Jacksonville, but never in Los Angeles.
4. Outdated icons with images like a floppy disc for “save” and a snail mail envelope for “mail” have decorated their screens.
5. There have always been blue M&Ms but no tan ones.
6. NBC has never shown It’s a Wonderful Life more than twice during the holidays.
7. They were too young to enjoy the 1994 World Series, but then no one else got to enjoy it either.
8. History has always had its own channel.
9. They don’t remember Arianna Huffington as a conservative.
10. They watch television everywhere but on a television.

You can find the rest of this list and others at: www.beloit.edu/mindset

Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

Marcy Levy Shankman visited campus in late September to work with students and staff to broaden their awareness and deepen their understanding of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL). The major points of the sessions surrounded how our emotions affect both our work and decision making, and the more we understand ourselves, the more effective we will be in our professional relationships with others. She is coauthor of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students, as well as articles on leadership education and EIL. To learn more about EIL or Shankman’s work, visit MLS Consulting at: www.mlsconsulting.net.

—Susan Liebau
If you’ve been in higher education for any length of time, you’ve likely heard of FERPA. It stands for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, and it is the Federal law that governs the privacy of student educational records.

Here are a few basic definitions that are essential to understanding FERPA:

- **Educational record**: any official record maintained by the University or a party acting for the University. Personal notes and law enforcement records, unless shared with another school official, are not educational records.

- **Directory information**: information about a student that may be released without the student’s consent; defined by each institution within FERPA guidelines.

- **Non-directory information**: information about a student that generally cannot be released without the student’s consent.

- **School official**: a person employed by the University in an administrative, supervisory, academic/research, or support staff position; a person with whom the University has contracted; and a person serving on an official committee or assisting another school official in performing their work.

- **Legitimate educational interest**: a demonstrated “need to know” by a school official who is acting in the student’s educational interest.

In the next edition we’ll talk about when it’s okay to release educational records, specifically non-directory information, without the student’s consent.

**Do you have any questions about FERPA that you would like answered? If so, email registrar@mtu.edu.**

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The Early Intervention Team (EIT) was created in July 2007 to review and screen potential at-risk students, critical situations, and incidents. The EIT consists of representatives across administrative areas: Dean of Students, Graduate School, Student Conduct, Housing, Counseling Services, Public Safety and Police Services, Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and International Programs. Through a website, a tip line, and outreach to faculty and staff, the EIT encourages reporting of troubled, disturbed, and/or disturbing students. Reports can be made by telephone to the Dean of Students (7-2212) or to deanofstudents@mtu.edu; or by calling Counseling Services (7-2538) or Public Safety and Police Services (7-2216). Additional information can be found on the EIT website: [www.mtu.edu/dean/eit](http://www.mtu.edu/dean/eit)

— Pat Gotschalk