FROM THE VP

Message from Les

Some twenty-plus years ago, the late Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, wrote Campus Life: In Search of Community in response to the social conditions of the time. He argued there was a perceived unhealthy separation of in-class and out-of-class activities and observed that students spent little time outside the classroom pursuing intellectual interests. He lamented that the focus on learning was diminished.

In 2004, NASPA and ACPA, the two largest student affairs professional associations, took on a new initiative to respond to the rapid changes occurring in the higher education landscape. In Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience, these two organizations surmised that social and cultural changes, along with emerging technologies, shifting demographics, and the proliferation of public policy demands, would have profound effects on the ability of institutions to realize their missions, let alone satisfy the expectations of students. They concluded that learning must be reconsidered and, in order for transformative learning to occur, learning must happen throughout all aspects of their lives.

There is much we can say about learning today and where and how it occurs. Many have debated the value or worth of the on-campus experience and if it will be valued in the future. At Michigan Tech, we have the good fortune to witness learning daily as it occurs, both in and out of the classroom. Some of the partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs highlight this “reconsidered” learning. The Women in Engineering learning community is heading into its third year; engineering fundamentals department chair Jean Kampe worked with staff in Housing and Residential Life to create a residential educational experience for thirty women who share common academic goals and interests. And next year, we will take that collaboration a step further when Associate Professor Dave Poplawski will serve as faculty-in-residence within the Computer Science learning community, providing academic support and rich mentoring for this group of like-minded learners.

This edition of The Student Affairs Connection provides numerous glimpses and living examples of where learning occurs. From studying different cultures and picking up languages, to being active on research projects or participating in intercollegiate athletics, it’s obvious that learning occurs in all shapes and sizes at Michigan Tech.
Michigan Tech’s Center for Diversity and Inclusion piloted the Transfer Scholars Research Program (TSRP) in the fall of 2012 with ten students. The purpose of the program is to increase the successful matriculation (to a four-year university) and retention of community college students. The program focuses on scholars who are first-generation, underrepresented students majoring in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) who transfer with at least a 3.0 GPA and have an interest in pursuing a graduate degree.

In addition to receiving a $1,000 stipend, scholars arrive on campus two weeks before fall semester to participate in faculty-led seminars, attend biweekly professional development workshops, and complete research proposals.

Seminars are designed to teach students how to design, develop, and conduct research. During the course of the semester, scholars are required to attend biweekly professional development workshops facilitated by faculty, corporate representatives, and Michigan Tech staff.

Some topics include
- exploring undergraduate research opportunities at Tech
- applying to graduate programs
- from corporate America to academia: rewards and challenges
- interpreting data collected from the field
- developing a meaningful relationship with your faculty mentor

—Sezi Fleming
MICUP/MI–LSAMP Transfer Transition Program at Michigan Tech

The Michigan College and University Partnership/Michigan Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation partnership at Michigan Tech entered its thirteenth-year in the summer of 2012 with twenty-four students—ten of whom transferred to Michigan Tech in the fall.

The MICUP/MI–LSAMP Transfer Transition Program offers low-income, first-generation, and/or underrepresented community college students a summer research internship experience at Tech. The program is designed to promote and encourage the successful transition to four-year institutions throughout the state. The program partners with Delta College, Grand Rapids Community College, and the Wayne County Community College District.

Applicants are required to have a minimum 2.80 GPA, complete at least one year of community college (including one math and one science course), and be interested in continuing their education at a four-year institution. MICUP participants receive:

- A $2,500 stipend for the research internship
- Room and board from Michigan Tech’s Housing and Residential Life
- A scholarship for a 3 credit summer course

—Sezi Fleming

Student Spotlight: Kailey Feuerstein

Third-year molecular biology major Kailey Feuerstein is a Grand Rapids Community College alumna, former MICUP student, and a current Transfer Transition Scholar. She was recently awarded the competitive More Graduate Education at Mountain States Alliances (MGE@MSA) Western Alliance to Expand Student Opportunities (WAESO) scholarship. This includes an all-expense paid trip to the annual student research conference hosted by Arizona State University in Tempe. Kailey’s research, “Characterizing the Cell Viability of PK-13 and Mesenchymal Stem Cells in Modified Cell Culture Medium,” was part of the poster session on March 4, 2013. As a bonus, Kailey will also receive a $200 stipend for presenting and attending the conference.

—Sezi Fleming
While our students are clearly crazy smart, many are also crazy busy. It’s easy to look at this and wonder why students don’t just back off, drop their involvement level, and focus on academics. Students may not even be able to communicate why they engage in this vicious cycle, but there are some theories that help us understand the importance of involvement in a student’s development. Two of the most common are from Alexander Astin and Arthur Chickering.

Astin’s Theory of Involvement states that “students learn by becoming involved.” Simply put, our students are more likely to be successful if they become involved both inside and outside the classroom.

Chickering’s Theory of Psychosocial Development gets more in depth and lays out vectors of development, such as developing confidence, managing emotions, etc., that contribute to the formation of a college student’s identity. Chickering refers to these vectors as “major highways for journeying toward individuation.” On these highways, each student progresses at a different speed, has different stops to make, and has a unique path. College is a time for development, and it’s easy to forget how much our students are going through academically and personally.

How do we support our students while they navigate these winding paths? In Student Affairs, we’ve aligned our values with those of the University. We strive to motivate students to understand, embrace, and value community, scholarship, possibilities, accountability, and tenacity. Through these values, we can make a big impact in helping our students along their journey.

Ultimately, it is up to the student to take the first step. While students celebrate Keweenaw Day as a half day of classes, the significance is much deeper. It’s at K-Day that students begin to grow roots here at Michigan Tech, and they start to feel a sense of belonging. While we have student organizations like club sports, Greek organizations, and cultural groups, we also have groups that focus on more unique things, like hula hooping or watching cartoons. While some of these may seem insignificant at first, I guarantee that, to the students, this involvement is very meaningful.

In these organizations, our students are becoming involved, navigating those vectors, and practicing Michigan Tech values. A student leader I work with emailed me recently and noted, “as my involvement has risen, so has my GPA. I also managed my leadership and extracurricular activities and my academics with three jobs here on campus.”

She has had a lot on her plate, but she has been able to make the connection between these experiences and her success, both inside and outside the classroom.

In the end, we all play a vital role in student development. Not all
students make the connection between involvement and learning, but we can help. Sometimes all it takes is tapping a student on the shoulder and asking, “Have you considered joining this organization?” Or, “I think you’d do great working on this project.” As the below diagram shows, we first help students get connected. Once they have some roots started, they begin to feel that sense of belonging and develop focus and purpose. Ultimately, this empowers them to reach success.

It’s important to remember that everyone measures success differently. For many, a diploma equals success. For others, success means obtaining a good job. However, for some students, success is based on their involvement. The friends, the meaningful experiences, and the Tech community they will always call home enrich their academic experience and prepare them to confidently go out and create the future.

—Joe Cooper

Student Involvement Highlights

Active Registered Student Organizations: **233**

Students Involved in One or More Student Organization: **4,350**

Students in Executive Board Positions: **609**

Number of Faculty/Staff Advising Student Organizations: **195**

References


Assessing Student Engagement in Educational Practices

This past year, Michigan Tech participated in two national surveys sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

The NSSE collects information from first-year and senior students about their participation in programs and activities institutions provide for learning and personal development. The results are organized in five areas of what NSSE defines as effective educational practice: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. The survey results provide information on how undergraduates spend their time at college and what they gain from inside and outside classroom experiences.

The University’s Assessment Council has used these survey results as one way to identify strengths and weaknesses compared to peers when looking at the University’s Learning Goals. For example, the results indicate that Tech students rate highest in the learning goal areas of technology and creative and critical thinking. The areas showing deficiencies are global literacy and communication. Michigan Tech is focusing on these two areas for University-wide assessment in 2013–15 using direct measures in both the general education and degree programs. It is important to note that results show evidence of some improvement on both measures when compared to the 2009 NSSE results.

Designed to complement the NSSE, Michigan Tech’s faculty were asked to complete the FSSE. The survey measures faculty expectations for student engagement in educational practices that are linked with high levels of learning and development. The survey focuses on faculty perceptions of how often students engage in different activities, the importance that faculty place on various areas of learning and development, the nature and frequency of faculty-student interactions, and how faculty members organize their time both in and out of the classroom. A few of the results are illustrated below.

If you are interested in the full results for NSSE and FSSE, visit the Academic Affairs Assessment website at www.mtu.edu/provost/assessment/student-learning/nssse-fsse.

—Beth Lunde

FSSE 2012 Results

Percentage of faculty who reported they place quite a bit or very much emphasis on the following in their courses: synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences:

Lower level – 86 percent  Upper level – 88 percent

Students responding “very much” or “quite a bit” of their coursework emphasized synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences:

First-Year – 64 percent  Senior – 68 percent

Percentage of faculty who reported more than half of students from their courses do the following: frequently asked questions in class or contribute to class discussions:

Lower level – 15 percent  Upper level – 20 percent

Students responding “very often” or “often” did the following: asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions:

First-Year – 45 percent  Senior – 60 percent

Percentage of faculty who reported it is important or very important that students at their institution do the following: culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.):

Lower level – 90 percent  Upper level – 93 percent

Students responding to whether they had done or plan to do the following before graduating: culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.):

First-Year – 62 percent  Senior – 84 percent
With English as the lingua franca for most professions (including academia), the sense of urgency for Americans to learn a foreign language has been diminishing for quite some time. It would be easy to argue that English, instead of belonging to just one or a few countries or cultures, has instead gone global.

Did you know that India is considered the second largest English-speaking country? In fact, in a country with over a billion people who speak hundreds of languages, English is often the common language Indians use to understand one another.

And while we think that having a common language would bring together once disparate peoples, the opposite can and does occur. How we use English is equally important as being able to use it at all. English can unite us, but if not used contextually, it can divide us.

It is amazing how the slightest modification in how we speak or write can make or break key relationships—be they personal, professional, or political. The importance of having the knowledge to use English in a global context cannot be understated. As educators, we must continually stress the need for our students (and one another) to understand how different cultures operate.

Being globally competitive necessitates this.

How can we win over customers if we don’t know what they want?
How can we solve problems if we cannot customize our solutions?
How do we manage people if we don’t know what motivates them?
Common language does not necessarily mean common values. The more we expose ourselves to people from different (and differing) backgrounds, the more we can appreciate those differences and learn how to value what other people value. Being able to speak in English to the core of what matters to others is a skill that can and should be learned. Gone are the days when a rose is a rose.

—Thy Yang

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Melanie Hoffman and Brad Stebner are two of the nine Michigan Tech student-athletes who hold 4.0 grade point averages while participating in intercollegiate athletics. How do they do it?

“Organization and communication,” said Hoffman, an Academic All-American on the soccer team this past fall. “Time management is important. I make sure I give myself time to have fun, but when it’s time to work, I work hard.”

Hoffman, who owns the school record in the heptathlon, helped the soccer team to its first conference title in 2012. She is majoring in exercise science and biological sciences and plans to attend dental school following graduation.

According to Stebner, the keys to success are “dedication and balance. Being a student and an athlete are full-time commitments on their own. Doing them together requires a lot of effort, perseverance, and time management.”

Stebner, a hockey player, maintains his 4.0 GPA in biological sciences with a minor in psychology. He is a two-time winner of the WCHA Scholar-Athlete Award. With 4 goals and 16 assists in 95 career games, the defenseman hopes to pursue a professional career in hockey. He ultimately plans to attend medical school back in his home province of Alberta.

—Suzanne Sanregret
As we have learned how to live on our own, it has been up to each of us to sort out our own lifestyle choices and routines. For most of us, this important decision-making process started to take shape in the first years of college.

A regular sleep schedule is incredibly important. When sleep schedules are ignored, attention is inhibited, leading to a decrease in the ability to learn. Lack of sleep is the second leading cause of fatigue, second only to dehydration. For us as academic professionals, it is important to be sensitive when posting deadlines; sometimes an 8:00 AM deadline can mean a student staying up all night to complete the assignment. Keep other events in mind when planning exams and other large projects, and be aware of how much time students may need for other important happenings in their lives.

Many universities have a plethora of tools available to help with time management and organization. Set the tone of the course early on and let the class know what type of tools will be used to track their progress. Welcoming questions at the beginning of the class period is a good way to judge how well the class is digesting the material, and could lead to less procrastination and stress with future assignments.

Diet and exercise is another important part of student success. Remind students that daily exercise, either in increments or at one time, can help reduce the everyday stress brought on by college life.

Each student schedule varies significantly, but it’s important to keep in mind that each schedule is personal; there isn’t one solution that will work for every student. If nothing else, empathy and understanding can be the most meaningful things a college student receives.

—Whitney Boroski

FERPA: Letters of Recommendation

When writing letters of recommendation, keep the following FERPA rules in mind:

- Statements made by a person providing a recommendation based on personal observation or knowledge do not require a written release from the student.
- If personally identifiable information obtained from a student’s educational record (grades, GPA, etc.) is included in the letter, the writer is required to obtain a signed release from the student which:
  - specifies the records that may be disclosed;
  - states the purpose of the disclosure; and
  - identifies the party or class of parties to whom the disclosure can be made.
- The release must be signed and dated by the student. The Letter of Recommendation Permission form is available online.
- Letters of recommendation are part of the student’s educational record, so students have the right to read them unless they have waived the right of access.
- Permission forms and copies of letters should be appropriately discarded after one year.

—Theresa Jacques