It takes a Wildcat Village to Ensure Student Success

At the WSU Opioid Awareness Fair this semester, Kim Crookston, a health promotion senior, was happily providing information to help individuals make healthy lifestyle choices.

She didn’t mind pausing for a moment to stand in the sunshine on the Stewart Bell Tower Plaza to share stories of her three children Lindsey, Ian and Andrew, all successful Weber State graduates. They all had a common experience as Wildcats: professors who treated them as equals and colleagues and organizations such as the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), Study Abroad, the LGBT Center and the orchestra that helped support and expand their academic interests.

For example, Kim described her son Ian as an Ogden High student who enjoyed social activities more than academics. At WSU, he majored in history where “Faculty inspired and rewarded ambition,” Kim said. “They encouraged him to ask and answer questions about how the world works.”

Thanks to faculty encouragement and financial help from OUR, Ian travelled to Kyrgyzstan to collect oral histories of survivors of the ’61 massacre on the Chinese Soviet border. That research eventually helped him get into Harvard to pursue a master’s degree. Now he’s working on a Ph.D. in Russian history at Stanford.

As a professor and chair of the Department of History, Dant has
Ian reports proudly that his Weber State education was equal to Ivy League instruction because professors took him under their wing and took him to conferences and film festivals and historic sites. Kim said it was all those activities, organizations and people who helped her family succeed beyond their expectations.

Weber State’s student success initiative is all about meeting students’ needs, so they thrive on campus and graduate successfully. At the fall back-to-school breakfast, President Brad Mortensen challenged each employee to report his or her efforts to help and support students. More than 500 people responded, including Alvaro La Parra Perez in economics, who said he creates an open environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and remains flexible to meet with students at their convenience.

Jesse Checkman, in the Money Management Center, said he tries to show new students where something is rather than give them directions, and his goal is to make each student feel needed, wanted and appreciated.

Student Success Center director Leslie Park acknowledged the huge amount of effort required by a great number of people to improve retention and graduation rates, but she said the direction is positive with a 1 percent improvement in retention in fall 2019.

“Part of what I would say is a huge thank you to the campus,” Park said. “We have not let anyone coast. We’re asking everyone to be more proactive. That’s tiring, but for individual students we’re able to reach, the difference is life-changing.”

The Crookstons found the support they needed with every organization and individual on campus. “Everyone was just so willing to give of their time and their talents and their advice,” she said. “The Crookstons appreciate Weber State.”

After eight years teaching online sections of 1704 Information Navigator, archivist Jamie Weeks has had plenty of experience alerting students to missing assignments, poor attendance and failing grades.

This semester she decided to employ Starfish to update all 120 students about their standing early in the semester. For those doing well, Starfish automatically generated an email with “kudos” in the subject to prompt the students to take a look. The message read, “I want to compliment you on your performance in Information Navigator. I notice and appreciate the dedication and hard work you’ve demonstrated so far. Keep up the good work!”

Six students replied immediately and expressed appreciation such as: “Thank you so much. I needed this so much right now.”

The response took Weeks by surprise.

“We were encouraged to send a message to the students,” she said. “I did it just to see what would happen. I’m going to continue to experiment with Starfish. What if a simple message helps hold six students?”

In the 2018-19 academic year, 789 faculty sent 12,952 Starfish messages that provided some form of student feedback.

Knowing how overwhelmed faculty sometimes feel, criminal justice chair Brent Horn decided he wouldn’t suggest his department take on another responsibility without his full participation and understanding of Starfish.

“I have asked all my faculty to flag students in the second week of class who haven’t attended, then I collect those flags, and I email students,” Horn said. “About half of them email back. In my mind, that’s positive. We let the students know we are paying attention and are concerned.”

Horn said the benefit of Starfish is that faculty can craft an accompanying message of explanation about the grade.

“As an example, one faculty member sent an email that says, ‘Now the first test is over, you only scored at this level, so come and get some help. Come and talk,’ Horn explained. “Rather than the student looking at the class and thinking, ‘Well I got a D, I’ll still be OK.’ Faculty know those critical points. They can give students instructions about what to do.”

Horn and Weeks both support the student success initiative and view Starfish as one tool that deserves a try.

“My feelings changed from being very skeptical to being very positive about the opportunities it has to connect with students and show them we care,” Horn said.

For help in getting started, weber.edu/starfish has tips and a tutorial as well as list of each college’s Starfish advisor.
demonstrated exceptional qualities of leadership to her colleagues and students in the 18 years since joining Weber State. In addition to her scholarly work, Dant remains popular with students because of her engaging teaching style.

“Dr. Dant has performed with extraordinary and constant competence as a popular and effective teacher, a dynamic and nationally recognized scholar, and as a willing and influential citizen of the campus and the community,” wrote Gene Sessions, professor of history and 1991 Hinckley Fellow, in a letter of recommendation.

**Exemplary Collaboration Award**

The **WSU PREP program** is a seven-week summer STEM bootcamp for high-achieving junior high students, focusing on populations that are often underrepresented in STEM fields including girls, minorities and first-generation college students.

The program is offered by WSU’s College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology with the support of the College of Science, and is made free to students through collaboration with partners including the Davis, Ogden and Weber school districts.

Over the course of three summers, students are exposed to classes in STEM subjects including math, engineering and problem solving. The program first started in 2015 with 72 students, and by 2019, the program had grown to more than 191 students.

While research shows that the program’s focus populations, female and ethnic minority students, tend to lose interest in STEM subjects once they enter middle school, more than five years of data has shown WSU PREP to be successful in the key areas of maintaining the positive views in math and science that students held at the end of sixth grade through the often-challenging middle school years.

**Mark Your Calendars for Inauguration**

The inauguration of Brad Mortensen as 13th president of Weber State University will take place on Founders Day, Jan. 7, 2020, at 1:30 p.m. The event will feature speeches from government leaders and distinguished alumni, as well as musical performances from WSU’s vocal ensemble. Mortensen joined WSU in 2004 and worked as Vice President of University Advancement for 11 years. Everyone is invited to attend the inauguration and enjoy light refreshments following.
WSU broke ground on the new Outdoor Adventure & Welcome Center on Oct. 8. The facility will serve as a hub for equipment rentals and all types of outdoor recreation. The 17,000-square-foot building will house a rock-climbing area, rope-access training center and rescue-training area, as well as a Welcome Center for the Office of Admissions to host visitor experiences.
For several years before I landed my first full-time academic position as an assistant professor of English at the University of Wyoming, I kept a daily journal. Reading entries from the time I started at UW in 1982 until I received tenure and promotion to associate professor in 1987, I am struck by how consistently I focused on my classes, my research, my work. I operated as an individual agent, occasionally noting department or college issues, but far more often, I was occupied with my own plans, schedule and goals. Those journal entries contain notes, almost essays, on the TV series “Murphy Brown,” several heist movies and feminist pedagogy; ideas about how to lead a class discussion on Sam Shepherd’s “True West” and far too many complaints about not having enough time to do anything as well as I wanted.

Over the years, I lost the habit of writing in a journal, but when I entered the Provost’s Office in summer 2015, I decided to start anew. My plan was to pause each afternoon, think about the day, and take note of what I’d learned about provosting. I followed the plan for three weeks. Reviewing those few paragraphs now, I am struck by how they differ from what I wrote while an assistant professor. Almost everything in the provost paragraphs is about meetings: “Met with X to discuss Y,” with X usually being a fellow administrator, dean, faculty or staff member, and Y ranging the gamut from the relocation of feral cats on campus to presenting a new degree proposal from health sciences to the Utah Board of Regents. A first meeting inevitably leads to follow-up meetings. The refrain common to entries from the 1980s and those from 2015 is my plaint about not having enough time.

What I’m about to say in comparing the two periods is pretty obvious to anyone who has moved from being a faculty member to being an administrator at a comprehensive regional institution of higher education. In the former position, many of your finest interactions are with students and focus on academic discipline areas in which you are knowledgeable. In the latter position, you are surrounded by people who work with students, and these people bring you issues and concerns about which you decidedly aren’t knowledgeable — so you build a team where members possess the expertise and experience to support you as you do the best you can to move the institution forward. Although I haven’t maintained a journal during these years as provost, I can say what has made these years worthwhile for me are the teams that have come together. Members worked with dedication and determination to implement student success strategies, academic planning, enhanced communication, changes in PPMs, changes in college leadership, increased Concurrent Enrollment offerings in math, more attention to Dev-Dev students, engagement with community anchor institutions to improve housing, health and education, ongoing exploration of digital literacy, more Spanish-language offerings through Continuing Education, and so on. Teams of people made these ideas come to fruition.

In my last WSU News Provost’s column, I send my thanks to everyone on the Provost’s Office team (Eric Amsel, Bruce Bowen, Bruce Davis, Dana Gibson, Brenda Marsteller Kowalewski, Betty Kusnierz and Aubrey Jenkins Lord) for fueling the engine and keeping us all on track. I thank the dean teams — present and past — whose creativity, drive and commitment have been inspirational. I thank the faculty teams that have stepped up to take service positions in Faculty Senate, on committees reviewing peers, programs, or PPMs, or who have taken time to contact the Provost’s Office with concerns, suggestions or queries. I thank amazing teams of staff, who have risen to all sorts of new challenges associated with our heightened commitment to students. You have been major players moving WSU into a future that allows us to provide greater access and enhanced learning to our community. Thank you for letting me serve with you on your teams over the past years. And forgive me, please, for never providing you enough time to do everything as well as you all would like.
Faculty and Staff Accomplishments
#LouderandProuder

Jennifer Anderson, assistant professor of business administration, along with co-authors from the University of Arizona, published, “Is Greed Contagious? Four experimental studies” in the Journal of Behavioral Decision Making.

Zoology professor Rebecka Brasso co-authored “Happy Feet in a hostile world? The future of penguins depends on proactive management of current and expected threats” in Frontiers in Marine Science. She also presented “Are wetlands hotspots for bioaccumulation of mercury (Hg) for songbirds?” at the American Ornithological Society 2019 meeting in Alaska.

Teacher education associate professor Shirley Dawson co-authored and presented the paper “Purpose and Perspectives on Preparing Ethics Training for Preservice Teachers” at the National Society for Teacher Education in Ontario.

Criminal justice associate professor Mark Denniston published “The Role of State Constitutionalism in Determining Juvenile Life Sentences” in the Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy.

Moyes College of Education Dean Kristin Hadley and teacher education professor Sheryl Rushton presented the paper “Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of Themselves as Teachers of Mathematics: Epistemological Reset” at the International Society for Teacher Education in Ontario.

Botany professor Bridget Hilbig co-authored “Fungal pathogens and arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi of abandoned agricultural fields: potential limits to restoration” in Invasive Plant Science and Management.

Academic peer coach William Hittle received the NASPA Regions V/VI Outstanding Peer Educator Award.

Public relations instructor Leslie Howerton presented her paper, “Family Planning in Global Health Governance: A Political Economy Analysis of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Campaign for Contraception in Developing Nations,” at the International Association for Media and Communication Research in Madrid.

Health, physical education and recreation professor Yan Huang published “Gender Differences in the Role of Acculturation, Self-regulation and Self-esteem in Alcohol Consumption among Asian American Adults” in the Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, where it was named best paper for 2018-19.

College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology faculty Jacie Johnson, Kristen Arnold and Jeremy Farner presented at the Association of Interdisciplinary Studies Annual Conference on WSU’s annual Design Charrette and the Global Community Engaged Learning service project to Fiji with 37 students, staff, faculty and community members.

Communication chair Sheree Josephson presented “The Visual Age” at the VisCom 33 national conference in Mammoth Lakes, California. The presentation was based on the introduction of her forthcoming edited collection: Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media.

Zoology professor Jon Marshall co-authored “Patterns, Mechanisms and Genetics of Speciation in Reptiles and Amphibians” was published in Genes.

Child and family studies professor Chloe Merrill was elected to the Grove’s Conference on Marriage and Family Association’s board of directors.

Emeritus professor of zoology Robert Okazaki published with co-authors Zhichao Wang, Alireza Asem and Shichun Sun “The critical stage for inducing oviparity and embryonic diapause in parthenogenetic Artemia (Crustacea: Anostraca): an experimental study” in 2019


Vice President of Student Affairs Brett Perozzi published the article “Global Expansion of Student Affairs and Services” in NASPA’s 100-year anniversary publication, and “Leadership Development Through Transforming the Student Employment Process” in the book New Directions for Student Leadership.


Teacher education professors Stephanie Speicher, Melina Alexander and Forrest Crawford presented the paper “Social Justice and Teacher Education: A global perspective on social justice agency” at the International Society for Teacher Education in Ontario.

Economics professor Jeff Steagall presented “Influencing Changes to Nationalistic Policies Abroad: The Case of China and the U.S.” at the International Academy of Business Disciplines Conference in Florida.


Exercise and nutrition sciences professor Stacie Wing-Gaia wrote two textbook chapters, “Nutrition During Pregnancy and Lactation” and “Nutrition During Infancy, Childhood, and Adolescence” in William’s Basic Nutrition and Diet Therapy, 16th Edition.