Improving financial aid services

Technology helps provide new and better loan processing, student employment and scholarship support services for students

“Modern electronic technology in Stout’s Financial Aid Office enables us to provide new and better services for students, and to do so much more quickly and efficiently,” said Suzanne Carlson, director of the Financial Aid Office.

Carlson noted three areas in her office in particular, where technology has had a tremendous impact for students: loan processing, student employment and scholarship support.

Approximately 5,000 students a year depend on student loans to meet a portion of their educational costs, Carlson pointed out. Until recently, their financial aid application process took two to nine months, which became a hardship for some students. It is now a simple process:

• When UW-Stout notifies a student of loan eligibility, an electronic record is placed in a secured electronic mailbox where the loan guarantor picks up the record.
• The guarantor obtains insurability, promissory note signature, makes the loan and returns the record to UW-Stout’s electronic mailbox.
• Funds are electronically transferred to the university bank account for delivery to the student.
• The FAO pulls the electronic data from the mailbox and transfers it to the mainframe. The university computer posts the student’s account and, if aid funds exceed university charges, a “check for change” is automatically cut.

“Just this fall we implemented the paperless loan process which enables us to process approximately 1,300 financial aid student accounts overnight,” Carlson said.

The office was also approved as an experimental site under the U.S. Department of Education Quality Assurance Program which exempts Stout from multiple disbursement requirements. That means that UW-Stout will receive one electronic disbursement (check) instead of two for each loan borrower. Prior to this, there were two checks for each borrower each semester, which was an inefficient process.

“By using new technology, our Financial Aid Office gets loan information out more quickly, delivers funds faster and can address special circumstances earlier in the process. It reduces errors, reduces paper, and reduces the cost and space associated with handling and storing paper records.”

Student employment is another area Carlson pointed to that is using technology to improve services.

The challenge of managing this program is bringing students and employers together early in the semester to meet the students’ financial needs and the employers’ work schedule,” Carlson said.

She noted that for years, the Financial Aid Office maintained a job placement bulletin board in Bowman Hall. A 12-page paper listing was sent to students who couldn’t get to Bowman Hall. Carlson said that in 1995-96, her office responded to 500 requests for paper listings, which is about 6,000 sheets of paper.

Campus employment is now using the Internet. Students simply access UW-Stout’s ‘GameDay’ and click for the hypertex for the financial aid homepage and job openings in work study and state employment. Or students search for a position by job classification—office jobs, maintenance, managerial. Supervisors are able to use e-mail to update employment needs.

At Financial Aid Office job fairs, computers are set up so that students can obtain a work authorization form and review their financial aid status on the spot. Jan Womack, vice chancellor for Administrative and Student Life Services, has noted that payroll statistics indicate these innovations are effective in helping both students and employers. “Eighteen percent more students were placed since we initiated job fairs,” Womack said.

One other area that technology has greatly improved service is that of scholarships. “We know students need better alternatives than huge loans,” Carlson said.

“Through technology, our (financial aid) office provides two excellent scholarship search programs, available throughout the campus.”

“Tuition Funding Sources” is a program that helps students search for local scholarship opportunities. When they find a match, the program can generate and print a general letter of inquiry from the student.

UW-Stout students are also trained to use “FastWeb,” an Internet program that is updated weekly and lists more than 180,000 resources. “Students can establish a mailbox which they can check periodically,” Carlson said. There is no charge to the student for these searches.

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UW-Stout has found that scholarship search technology can make a big difference. “Stout students have received approximately a 15 percent increase in funding this year,” Womack said. “Scholarship services help students, families and taxpayers.”

With more than 60 percent of its students seeking financial aid, the university will continue to expand and use advanced technology as a tool for improving services and creating economies in many areas, Carlson and Womack agreed.

Building a better mousetrap

New UW-Stout program puts industry’s progress in students’ hands

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Editor’s note: This story ran in the Eau Claire Leader Telegram on December 14, 1996.

The seven members of the first-ever graduating class in manufacturing engineering at UW-Stout spent a semester studying a “hopter copter.”

The goal of the class was to redesign the hand-held whirling toy so it could be manufactured by automation with the ultimate goal of being able to produce it using a helicopter-like flying toy faster, cheaper and improved quality.

The class graduates today.

“A manufacturing engineer is taught to design things about it and I wanted to stay in the area.”

Eventually, Bob Meyer said, the goal is to have the system developed by the students used to make enough money to begin production.

“It’s a very hands-on, process-oriented form of engineering,” Meyer said. “That’s the heritage at Stout.”

Using a computer, students redesigned the helicopter and Phillips Plastics made the blade. The major redesign was replacing a number of thin rubber bands in the handle of the toy with one piece of medical tubing to power the blade.

“Fewer parts, less complication and the ability to have the toy produced through automation was the outcome,” said Eric Meyer, 23 of Oakland, Minn., one of the seven graduates.

Eventually, Bob Meyer said, the goal is to have the system developed by the students used to make enough of the product to have it marketed.

Graduates of the manufacturing engineering program are expected to have at least a 920 or 98 percent placement.

“The outlook I think is just tremendous,” Bob Meyer said.

Mike Gramse, president of MRG Tool and Die of Fairbault, Minn., whose son Rodney is one of the graduates and is planning to work in the family business, said there is a demand for the students’ skills.
Changing drinking behaviors

It’s an innovative and controversial approach to dealing with young people’s drinking, Allen Ebel admits, but the bottom line is, “it works,” Ebel said.

Ebel, Stout’s Alcohol and Drug Education Program coordinator, has been developing his “Skillful Drinker Training Program” for more than eight years. During that time, it has been thoroughly tested at Stout, and educators have been pleased with the success. “This is an alcohol education program that really changes drinking behaviors,” Ebel said.

In fact, the program has been so successful at Stout that a number of schools have obtained Ebel’s alcohol education curriculum—several state and private schools in Wisconsin, West Virginia University, the University of Arizona, Marshall University at Huntington, W.Va., and Hamline University in St. Paul, Minn.

Ebel based his work on research done by educators who conceptualized the use of behavior change models and alcohol moderation skills training to reduce alcohol abuse by students in institutions of higher education.

The approach is to provide students with skills to take control of the amount they drink and to make them aware of the serious health and safety consequences of drinking too much.

“It gives them the tools to moderate, to plan, to make sure they don’t get into trouble with their drinking,” Ebel said.

Ebel acknowledges that there are those who believe that this kind of training somehow encourages, or at least condones, young people’s drinking. However, according to research, 90 percent of college students drink. “We cannot just stick our heads in the sand,” as one educator put it.

Students themselves say that adults are not providing the right kind of training for safer alcohol consumption, Ebel reported. “Students relate this to the type of sex education that only preaches abstinence while avoiding the training that would help sexually active people protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and disease,” Ebel notes.

Instead, “young people are cut loose with no training on how to drink safely,” Ebel points out. He has observed that many of them have little or no experience with alcohol and don’t know the effects of varying amounts of alcohol on the nervous system.

Ebel’s program teaches young people to be “conscious” drinkers. During the four weeks they are attending classes, Ebel has students record how much they drink under what circumstances when they are out. They then learn to calculate their blood alcohol concentration at any given time. “It’s eye-opening information for many of the students,” Ebel said.

“You have to show them that they are personally at risk,” Ebel said. “Then you have to show them what they can do to reduce that risk.”

Students very often change their attitudes when they understand that safe drinking skills can be taught and practiced, Ebel reported. “They are surprised at how much there is to learn about safe drinking techniques,” he said. “Once exposed to the common sense ideas in this curriculum, they realize that skillful drinker training is as logical as safe sex training or safe drivers training.”

Ebel noted, “Students come to realize and appreciate an approach to alcohol education that makes sense and that as one student put it, ‘gives you tools that you can really use.”

Ebel compares teaching safe drinking to teaching safe driving. “Like driving, drinking can be a dangerous activity that requires education and practice,” he said, adding that in both situations, people must learn the consequences of certain behaviors and learn the laws and rules that govern those activities.

“Adults don’t just hope that their young people will learn to drive safely, but some parents seem to hope that by some miracle, their young person will pick up the skills for safe and responsible drinking, if they indeed choose to drink,” Ebel said.

“When we learned that young drivers were causing a disproportionate number of accidents and deaths on our highways because of their inexperience and cavalier attitudes, we didn’t simply restrict them from driving until they were older,” Ebel said.

“Our society made a myriad of changes that helped to deal with the problem. We set new standards for automobile safety, we improved roads, we instituted new laws and, most importantly, we assured that every person had adequate training in safe driving skills before they were given a license to drive,” Ebel said that it becomes apparent in classes that young people don’t even know the amount of alcohol it would take to kill them.

According to statistics, an estimated 18,000 traffic deaths a year are alcohol related, as are more than 10 million injuries, Ebel pointed out, adding that “we owe it to our young people to educate them in this aspect of life as much as in any other.”

One parent put it this way: “I can tell my son not to have premarital sex, but if at some time he decides to, consciously or impulsively, I want him to at least do so responsibly. I guess I would have to say the same thing about drinking.”

Employment prospects still great for Stout students

Employment rate for grads reported

Placement for recent UW-Stout students is 98.3 percent, according to figures released in the annual employment report. Of those employed, 90.6 percent are reporting being at jobs in or related to their majors.

Some 90.2 percent of the graduates responded to a survey used to compile the report, which covers the December 1995, and May and August 1996 graduating classes. UW-Stout graduates, working in 28 states, earn a median salary of $25,000, compared with $24,000 in the last reporting period.

The employment success of UW-Stout students is no accident, and it doesn’t just happen,” said LaMont Meinen, director of Placement and Co-op Services. “It is through the dedication of faculty and staff, career-oriented majors, relevant work experiences, a pro-active approach to placement, and hard work by the students that brings it all together.”

Meinen said that during the 1995-96 school year, 413 of the 301 companies scheduled to recruit on-campus canceled their schedules because of the lack of students signing up for interviews. In addition, there is a severe shortage of graduates in technology education, packaging, applied math and graphic communications management.

Ebel noted that school districts are back recruiting on-campus, and they indeed have little or no experience with alcohol and don’t know the effects of varying amounts of alcohol on the nervous system.

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Spring break study brings “startling” results

“...Mexican bars and nightclubs are targeting underage students at destinations near the USA–Mexican border. Buses are being provided in South Padre Island, Texas, to enable underage students to visit bars in Mexico.”

During the spring break season, more than half a million college students will descend upon beach destinations to engage in potentially damaging or even life-threatening behavior that is apparently accepted—and even paid for—by their parents or other adults, according to a national study conducted by two UW-Stout researchers.

From its innocuous beginning as the College Swim Forum of 1938, this American phenomenon has developed into a monster of momentous proportions. “Extreme behavior such as binge drinking, drug taking and sexual promiscuity” are pretty much accepted or in fact, expected, according to a research study recently released by Bharath M. Josiam, an associate professor of hospitality and tourism, and George L. Smeaton, a professor of psychology, along with Uta C. Dietrich of the North Coast Public Health Unit, NSW, Australia. This is the first national study of its kind that has been done on one of America’s biggest, longest celebrations, according to the researchers. “We were surprised nothing had ever been done on this phenomenon and this particular human behavior,” Smeaton said. “This is the only country that sets aside an entire week dedicated to 24-hour partying.”

Conducted in Florida, the study surveyed nearly 800 students from around the country regarding alcohol and drug consumption as well as sexual behavior during spring break and the month prior to it. “Our findings are quite startling,” the authors said. In 1988, it was estimated that during the six-week spring break “season,” 400,000 college students vacationed in the Daytona Beach, Fla. area. Many cities now, however, have cashed in on the spring ritual and cater to hundreds of thousands of college students each spring.

In fact, Panama City Beach, Fla., where this particular study was done, entices students to come there by ads such as the following: “Perhaps the best thing about spring break is the partying.” Of the nearly 800 students who were interviewed, 393 were college age, 6 percent were college-age and 10 percent were high school-age. Ninety-four percent of the respondents in this study were college age, however, with the remaining 6 percent comprised of junior high, senior high and graduate students. Among college students, the percentage of males reporting being intoxicated on a daily basis while in their college towns, rose from 25 percent to 75 percent reporting being drunk daily during spring break. Among females, the percentage rose from 7.5 percent at home to 43.6 percent, an increase of nearly 600 percent.

“The amount of drinking being done during spring break frequently reaches hazardous levels,” the researchers report. During break, more than 40 percent of males and 33 percent of females reported being drunk daily. Thirty-three percent of males and 10 percent of females reported being drunk more than once a day. In fact, more than 20 percent of males and 3.5 percent of females reported being drunk “continuously” while on break.

“Given the fact that vomiting typically occurs at a blood alcohol level of 1.20 and consciousness is typically lost at a level of .300, it is clear that drinking on spring break frequently reaches hazardous levels,” the researchers report. As with alcohol, drugs were abused more often during break than at home. Marijuana was primarily the drug of choice. Approximately half of all respondents were offered illegal drugs, and almost a third abused marijuana. In each case, marijuana abusers were found to be consuming higher levels of alcohol than non-users. “This indicates that marijuana is not a substitute for alcohol; rather it appears to place abusers at higher risk for binge drinking,” Josiam and Smeaton note. “This has a compounding effect.” Smeaton said.

The researchers pointed out further that marijuana use was particularly high among fraternity members who were almost twice as likely to use marijuana as non-members, and fraternity membership was also associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption. Education programs directed at fraternity members may be particularly needed, the researchers said.

According to research, approximately 90 percent of college students drink alcohol. But both Smeaton and Josiam said they found the amount of alcohol consumed by students during spring break “startling.” Most “shocking,” however, was sexual behavior, the two reported. According to their findings, males had sex with more new partners during break than they had during a typical week at home. “Particularly interesting was the finding that males who reported having a committed relationship with a woman at home were far more likely to have new sexual partners during break than those who had no long-term partner at home,” Smeaton said. “Fidelity is not a value they seem to prize,” he added. It was also found that few who had sex during break used condoms consistently, even if a condom was in the room.

In addition to consensual sex, sexual aggression was also examined, and it was found that among women, those who reported higher levels of alcohol consumption were more likely to have been the victim of sexual aggression. Smeaton noted that being a victim of unwanted sex during an alcohol induced blackout can be another problem. “With hundreds of thousands of people vacationing in one location, there is also a strong possibility of bringing back sexually transmitted diseases,” Smeaton said. “A disease can be spread across a campus that perhaps that campus would never have been exposed to otherwise.”

Alcohol and drug use can be linked to a variety of negative consequences from severe sunburn and dehydration to sexual assault, unwanted pregnancy, disease, alcohol poisoning, drunk driving and accidents, the researchers noted. “The amount of drinking being done during spring break definitely needs to be addressed,” Smeaton said. “It has been found through research that parents are very often the ones financing spring break vacation. They need to be aware of the risks and dangers involved.”

Smeaton and Josiam agree that more education and an environment that marginalizes rather than glamorizes binge drinking is needed, and that more research is called for.

Spring Break: Not just harmless fun in the sun

**Alcohol Abuse**

- 40% of males and 33% of females reported being drunk daily
- 33% of males and 10% of females reported being drunk more than once a day
- more than 20% of males and 3.5% of females reported being drunk “continuously” while on break

**Drug Abuse**

- Approximately half reported they were offered illegal drugs
- nearly a third abused marijuana
- marijuana abusers were found to be consuming higher levels of alcohol than non-users
- fraternity members were almost twice as likely to abuse marijuana as non-members

**Sexual Behavior**

- males had sex with more new partners than in a typical week at home
- women who reported higher levels of alcohol consumption were more likely to be victims of sexual aggression
- few who had sex during spring break used condoms consistently, even if a condom was available in the room
WinTerM proclaimed a success

Students, faculty, administrators and support staff all have proclaimed WinTerM as a success. The new two-week session was held Jan. 2-17.

“Students were pleased to be able to focus on a single course, like Statistics, for a two-week period,” said associate vice chancellor Robert Sedlak.

• Radi Teleb, mathematics, statistics and computer science, said the students appeared to do better in the class and learned more than during the regular semester.

• Loretta Thielman, mathematics, statistics and computer science, surveyed her students and found that WinTerM helped them make efficient use of their time.

• Judy Rommel, human development, family living and community educational services, indicated that the WinTerM gave her an opportunity to teach a special topics course based on the specialty area of her human development classes. Typically, she has not had the opportunity to teach this material.

• Bruce Pamerpin, social science, taught a course over the WONDER network and had a number of community people enroll for credit or audit here and in Stevens Point.

• Dennis Vanden Bloomer and Abel Adebola, business professional taught a course on campus on international management.

A new bachelor of science degree in service management at UW-Stout was approved recently by the UW System Board of Regents.

The program is designed to prepare managers who can effectively and efficiently manage the design, development and delivery of a service, according to UW-Stout Provost George DePuy. An interdisciplinary committee prepared the formal proposal for the program, assisted by feedback from business leaders who regularly work with UW-Stout faculty, DePuy said. External consultants from the Graduate School of Business Administration at Harvard University and the First Interstate Center for Service Marketing at Arizona State University reviewed and unanimously recommended the proposal in 1995. “The university will truly set an important trend with the proposed program (which is) plans for the program began in 1995 when Stout was awarded a $75,000 grant from St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company to explore that possibility. “We are the only university in the country that the company is working with,” Lee said.

This partnering relationship with the construction industry will prepare students to meet the needs of the industry to explore that possibility. “We are the only university in the country that the company is working with,” Lee said.

The program will be housed jointly in the College of Engineering and Management. UW-Stout will eliminate the B.S. degree in home economics in business in order to house the program in the College of Engineering and Management. UW-Stout will eliminate the B.S. degree in home economics in business in order to house the program in the College of Engineering and Management.

The UW-Stout construction program awarded grant

Construction is a high-risk occupation. In fact, six people a day are killed in construction jobs, according to Dan Murphy, St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company loss control officer.

It is for this reason that UW-Stout has chosen to heavily integrate construction safety into every course possible in its construction program and to implement a new construction risk control minor.

UW-Stout was recently awarded a $75,000 grant from St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company to develop a new construction risk control minor.

“St. Paul Fire and Marine has expressed a commitment to funding years one and two,” said Hans Timper, UW-Stout’s construction program director. “Additional support will be sought from the industry for year three and beyond.” Timper said the program will be evaluated with the intent that the pilot be continued with additional funding for the future. Plans for the program began in 1995 when Stout was approached by the construction industry with a request to increase construction safety and risk control in the curriculum, Timper said.

Timper, along with John Olson, Stout’s program director for the M.S. in risk control, and Howard Lee, associate dean of computer engineering, technology, engineering and management, met with members of the construction industry to explore that possibility. “We are the only university in the country that the company is working with,” Lee said.

“The grant is unique in that the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company came to us,” Olson said. “Stout has a superb construction major. It is a logical extension and refinement of expertise—a merging of knowledge.”

This partnering relationship with the construction industry will prepare students to meet the needs of the industry, Timper said, by integrating safety, health and environmental content into the already existing program, and by developing and implementing the new minor, providing outreach and on-site training, and cooperatively developing a funded professorship.

Making News

Adequately compensating faculty and staff

One of the most critical issues faced by the University of Wisconsin System is to be addressed this year: adequate compensation for the faculty and staff, who are the heart of public higher education in our state. Decisions made on compensation, as part of the state’s biennial budget, will have an impact on the quality of the system for decades. In essence, the governor and the legislature will be deciding whether Wisconsin needs and deserves to maintain this excellent array of educational institutions.

The simple truth is that faculty and staff salaries have again fallen behind similar universities in other states, and something must be done about it.

The Board of Regents has requested a modest 4 percent increase for each year of the 1997-99 biennium. In doing so, the board acknowledged that increases of up to 5.1 percent could be justified, considering salaries at so called “peer institutions” in other states.

During the last biennium, faculty and staff received salary increases of only 1 and 2 percent respectively, causing them to drop below national averages. A systemwide Compensation Committee, using various economic indicators, found that because of this, UW System faculty will earn 4.37 percent behind their peers going into the next biennium. The committee concluded that in addition to the 4.37 percent increase needed to bring faculty salaries to reasonable levels at other universities, economic indicators show that an additional 2.9 percent increase is needed to keep salaries competitive. Thus, even the amount being proposed in the state budget will not fix the entire problem in the next two years. At least it will be a start.

I have said many times, and others would agree, that the University of Wisconsin System is the engine that drives the state’s economy. It provides educated people for the state’s workforce, and generates research and ideas that aid both business and society. But the backbone of the system comprises faculty and staff. Without these highly educated and dedicated individuals, we will not be able to maintain excellence and viability.

Faculty and staff do not go into higher education expecting to become rich, and few are. Dedication to teaching and expanding knowledge are the motivations for those that choose these life-long careers. Considering the amount of education and years of service required to secure these positions, many would be much better off economically choosing other professions. But at least they deserve fair treatment, when it comes to salaries.

At my institution, UW-Stout, our instructional faculty and staff rank among the highest in the state in measures of productivity. After significant efforts to bring their salaries to 99 percent of the national average, they have now again fallen to 95 percent of the average.

Clearly, if we do not do something about this now, we will lose our ability to attract new scholars and replace those who leave. The problem is further complicated at UW-Stout by the fact that faculty and staff in our specialized disciplines have the intellectual training and skills that are also prized by business and industry, where the economic rewards are much greater. I also want to make my pitch for our classified employees. Although most classified salaries are not functionless as part of the collective bargaining process, and the UW System is not directly involved, I believe we need to recognize the needs of these highly productive individuals as well. Classified employees are a vital part of the university and perform many valuable services at all levels of our operation. Indeed, we could not function without this part of our work force. I sincerely hope that the bargaining process will bring them the compensation they deserve.

I am aware that the state will be wrestling with many issues as we attempt to fund government operations from scarce resources. But while we struggle with these issues, we must keep in mind that compensation is a paramount concern.

Charles W. Sorensen