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Deepening Student Engagement & Meeting the Demands of the 21st Century Workplace

Globalization, technology, interactive teaching styles and engagement in the workforce are all creative ways to deepen a university student's experiences and Oakland University has a foothold in all of these initiatives.

Two afternoon sessions at the conference focused on exploring new approaches to leadership and enhancing global opportunities for students. Four speakers at one session discussed innovative OU programs designed to "Deepen Student Engagement Through Experiential Learning, Virtual Technology and Service Learning."

Xiadong Deng, associate professor, MIS at OU's SBA, described the SBA's three models of global engagement. Through a Chrysler grant, the SBA brought together OU students and faculty with students and faculty from partner business schools in China to work on projects facilitated by companies such as Ford Motor Company.

Depending on the model, OU students may visit China, Chinese students may visit OU and in other cases, students and faculty interact through videoconferencing within the SBA's new global interaction room.

"We used a partnership strategy to educate, provide internship opportunity, develop research and become involved in outreach projects," Deng said. "Our next step is to include Chinese business within the models and have more opportunities for visiting scholars and dean visits."

Beth Talbert, special instructor, communications and journalism at OU, shared a number of interactive activities which focus on both critical and creative thinking in the classroom. "Learning is not a spectator sport," she said. "For students to internalize what they're learning, they must be responsible for their learning, define their own projects and evaluate their achievement."

Cathy Cheal, assistant vice president of OU's E-Learning and Instructional Support, also believes interactive activities are the key to student success.

"When people think about e-learning, they think about automated content. In reality, Web 2.0 tools, such as IM, Wikis, RSS feeds, blogs, video and virtual world environments are highly interactive. We have found that students can actually learn to write better and more quickly using discussion boards and chat rooms because other students who are good writers serve as role models. They don't get this modeling when they write a paper and turn it in to a teacher."

OU's e-learning programs include Moodle, for chat sessions and discussion and Elluminate, which offers video conferencing. OU also has a space in Second Life, the virtual world environment.

Michael Earl, president and CEO, Oakland Family Services, spoke about the pivotal role two OU students played in helping the Family Service Alliance for Southeastern Michigan.

"Oakland Family Services and other service organizations in the region were facing reduced resources at a time when needs for our services were on the rise. We had a vision to consolidate our services, but it can be a thin line between vision and hallucination. We didn't have the resources to turn our vision into reality until we turned to OU's Experiential Learning and Innovation Program (ELI)."

Under the program, two SBA students put together a project plan, analyzed business processes, identified re-engineering opportunities and developed a business plan for consolidation. "These students had great attention to detail, interviewing everyone and documenting every process," Earl said. "They had superb listening skills which was vital to the success of the project."

The second educational session focused on leadership and career development initiatives which help students transition into the workplace. Panel speakers included Donna Free, special instructor, accounting at OU's SBA; Bill Macfarlane, (SBA '85), vice president and CIO, North American Continental Automotive Systems; and David Rooney, SBA's executive in residence.

"As an employer of SBA's students and graduates, I'm pleased to see professors placing increasing emphasis on critical thinking, technology and international business. These skill sets are imperative to future success, for the student, but also for our firm and the clients we serve," said Ursula Scroggs, president, Derderian, Kann, Seyferth & Salucci, a CPA firm in Troy.

SUMMARY

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