I just returned from a magnificent “gratitude trip” to Arizona, where I heard many stories from alumni and friends who expressed their love for Valley City State University by “paying it forward” through scholarships, service, good will, and numerous other ways which help the university excel. That is a theme which continues to resonate as I learn more about VCSU—the endless number of people who feel VCSU gave so much to them that they in turn express their gratitude by paying it forward.

The stories told to me at these VCSU alumni events varied. Some wanted to go to a different college but life’s circumstances dictated otherwise. Many struggled financially to make it through. Some started at VCSU but later transferred. Others knew all along that VCSU was their college of choice and plans were easily followed through. And yet others experienced the university not as a student but as a member of the faculty or staff or through a university board/committee—or perhaps as a spouse. I loved listening to stories of how some met their soul mates during their college days, roommates who stayed in touch over the years, and sounds of delight when during introductions long lost friends were suddenly reunited. And I, of course, thoroughly enjoyed the stories of mischief!

But what really stood out is that everyone described an incredible community where others believed in them and where the faculty, coaches, staff, and citizens of the Valley City community were committed to making sure VCSU students experienced an affordable, high-quality education. Their gratitude was loud, their love for their alma mater unwavering.

Several years ago Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam popularized the notion that the United States was suffering from a decline of social capital (Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community). Social capital focuses on the idea that social contacts, or people who trust and assist one another, can affect the richness of individuals and groups.

Boy is VCSU rich, full of people helping one another individually to succeed and collectively to contribute to the greater good. We count our riches in our people: outstanding faculty; accomplished artists, musicians, teachers, scientists, executives; students excelling in their studies; winning athletic teams; a variety of active and effective shared governance groups (Faculty Senate, Student Senate, Staff Senate); engaged alumni serving their professions and communities; and citizens who call VCSU their university whether or not they have ever taken a class.

At VCSU, we do not bowl alone. We invest in one another. We pay it forward. We are difference makers—and that is another reason why it is a great day to be a Viking!
With the recent change from a 5 division to a 12 department organization, the VCSU Faculty Senate is mulling options regarding committee make up and affected policies. The current governance structure of VCSU Faculty Association committees is a mix of divisional and at-large representation. Committees with at-large representation have largely been able to function as before, but the Faculty Association is in a transitional stage as we work towards changing the constitution to reflect departmental representation. Even though departments have been established, governance as outlined in the constitution remains based on divisional representation until changes are enacted. This past year three areas requiring expedited attention were identified: Faculty Senate representation; evaluation, tenure and promotion process and policies; and Curriculum Committee representation and policies.

This article will highlight the underlying process and procedures undertaken to bring a ballot proposal forward regarding Faculty Senate representation to the Faculty Association for consideration. Constituent opinions were mixed whether Faculty Senate needed at-large or straight departmental representation. The senate directed the formation of a subcommittee to explore options for senate representation. The subcommittee developed three options for consideration.

Currently, with a five-member senate, the constitution requires unanimous consent to enact a motion. Short of a unanimous vote, matters must be forwarded for discussion and vote of the Faculty Association. With a larger group of senators, implicit was the need for determining a quorum and a minimum majority percentage required in each option to pass motions. Three options were identified for Faculty Association consideration: a 12-member senate with one member from each department, a variation of the aforementioned 12-member senate with a yearly opt-out option for small departments with insufficient resources to staff a senate position, and, a 7-member at-large senate where each department could forward one nominee for at-large consideration chosen by Faculty Association ballot.

A survey detailing the three options was developed, and individual faculty responded regarding option preference. The survey also afforded respondents opportunity to explain the reasoning behind their choices and potential concerns for further consideration. Two options emerged for further consideration—the 12-member option with an opt-out and 7-member at-large. At a recent Faculty Association meeting, the options were discussed extensively, and the majority of attendees supported the 12-member opt-out option for further development. Additional proposals regarding choosing officers and terms were discussed. The Faculty Senate voted unanimously to forward for development a scenario where the president and vice president would be selected from the 12 senators by a Faculty Association vote. This was an effort to limit the number of faculty needed to conduct the business of the senate. It was decided to propose the secretary would not come from the sitting senators and would remain an at-large position.

The proposed constitutional changes are now under review by the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC). The CRC is charged with further development of proposed changes, and once completed, a first reading will be held at a Faculty Association meeting. During the first reading, members will be able to discuss and propose potential changes. Following this vetting, the second reading will be a simple yes or no vote to enact constitutional changes.

The senators have done solid work in this process, and I am pleased with their commitment to bring forth a proposal based on a feedback process that allowed constant evolution. Needless to say this is just one example of what has been a very busy year.

VCSU’s Staff Senate remains busy, with many projects ongoing.

Staff Senate has created a subcommittee to review and edit the Staff Senate Bylaws and Constitution. This group has been tasked with aligning policy with practice and vice versa. The goal is that this work will be complete by summer 2015.
Another subcommittee has been created by Staff Senate to look at new employee needs. The topic of new employees having a lack of direction and supervisors being unable to train in certain areas has come up. Day-to-day tasks for those new to the university, such as using a copier code and knowing how to make a calendar appointment in Outlook, will be easier once this new system is put into place. HR has agreed to include items in the hiring packet given to new employees related to this effort.

Staff Senate, in collaboration with the director of institutional research, has written an Employee Satisfaction Survey. The purpose of this anonymous survey is to gather faculty and staff input about workplace engagement, perceptions of workplace interactions, and overall campus climate. Staff Senate received approval from Cabinet and is awaiting formal Faculty Senate approval in order to send this online survey out to all faculty and staff on the VCSU campus. Staff broadband groups will meet to discuss the results, a larger town hall meeting has been discussed, and ideas for improvements will be presented to Cabinet.

An interactive Staff Appreciation activity is planned for Spring Break week; we continue to stay apprised of developments with the POP (Prioritization of Programs) efforts on campus; and “Difference Is Me” awards are presented as we receive nominations. Staff Senate continues to work with HR for professional development opportunities and the proposed dress code policy.

A format change to consent agendas of submitted written reports from those who used to report in person and 90-minute meetings once per month, as opposed to 60-minute meetings, has been positive for our group, and we will continue to operate that way.

**STUDENT SENATE REPORT**  
*Michaela Halvorson*

The past month has been hopping with new things for Student Senate here at VCSU. Over Christmas break we updated our website, and I continued to work on the Martin Luther King Day of Service Committee on behalf of senate. And come the beginning of January we were ready to regroup and continue to work.

On January 19, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 51 VCSU students volunteered their time to give back to the community. We worked at the North Dakota Winter Show, delivered Meals on Wheels, made blankets for the Police Department and Abused Person Outreach Center to hand out, and finally worked with Project Ignite Light, an organization that helps abused children.

Student Senate recently filled our open positions with two new freshmen and two new organization representatives. We are really excited to get to work with the new folks. All of our senators are working hard on our goal to communicate better with our campus. We are hosting a “Get to Know Your Senators” event. It will include the usage of our Facebook page and get us some publicity. Student Senate will use this time to tell students about our plans for the rest of the semester.

Another important issue is the legislative bills that are being looked at this spring. We are educating ourselves and our campus about these bills. Our monthly NDSA meetings are helping us communicate with other colleges. This February, VCSU Student Senate is planning and hosting the NDSA in Bismarck. Even though we will be in Bismarck, we intend to showcase VCSU as much as possible to show our pride in Valley City State University. With this we look forward to the rest of our spring semester.

**TUFTE TO SERVE AS STAFF ADVISER FOR SBHE**

Emma Tufte, administrative and assessment assistant in VCSU’s School of Education and Graduate Studies, has been elected to serve as staff adviser to the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education beginning July 1, 2015.

Tufte currently serves as president of the North Dakota State Staff Senate, which represents all staff employees in the North Dakota University System. The Staff Senate identifies staff interests and issues, acts as a forum for the discussion of staff-related matters and facilitates communication on behalf of the campus staff members with the NDUS chancellor and the State Board of Higher Education. Tufte previously served the State Staff Senate as secretary and vice president. She has also served...
the VCSU Staff Senate as secretary, vice president, president and past president.

A graduate of Jamestown College with a bachelor’s degree in history, Tufte earned a master’s degree in education with a concentration in teaching and technology from VCSU in 2014. She began her work at VCSU in 2010.

Tufte and her husband, Tyler Tufte, a web developer at VCSU, are the parents of a three-year-old daughter, Adriana.

**BEST VALUE ONLINE MASTER’S IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS**

1. Ball State University
2. Indiana University
3. North Carolina State University–Raleigh
4. Fort Hays State University
5. University of Colorado–Denver
6. **VALLEY CITY STATE UNIVERSITY**
7. Lamar University
8. Dakota State University
9. College of St. Scholastica
10. Appalachian State University

**M.ED. TECH CONCENTRATIONS RATED HIGHLY**

VCSU’s online Master’s of Education (M.Ed.) program concentrations in technology and education, teaching and technology, and library and information technologies were ranked No. 6 in TopMastersInEducation.com’s annual “Best Value” rankings for online Master’s in Educational Technology degree programs based on cost, quality and accreditation.

The rankings, the Best Value Online Master’s in Educational and Instructional Technology 2014–15, recognized the “lowest priced, highest quality, regionally accredited online M.Ed. educational and instructional technology programs” in the nation.

**BEST ONLINE TEACHING DEGREES FOR 2015**

Affordable Colleges (AC) Online ranked VCSU No. 10 in its “Best Online Teaching Degrees for 2015.” VCSU was recognized based on the number of online teaching programs available, student-faculty ratio, six-year graduation rate, percentage of students receiving financial aid, educator preparation program accreditation and a peer-based value metric.

**VCSU STUDENTS FARE WELL IN STATE DECA**

Valley City State University DECA students successfully competed at the North Dakota Collegiate DECA State Conference held Feb. 8–9 in Fargo.

Participating for VCSU were Staci Hovland, a junior from Buffalo, N.D.; Carson Sorby, a freshman from Valley City; Dillon Thomas, a sophomore from Kalispell, Mont.; and Madelyn Zane, a junior from Newburg, N.D.

VCSU swept the Sales Presentation event with Sorby winning the event, Zane placing second and Thomas coming in third. In the Business to Business Marketing event, the team of Hovland and Sorby placed second. Zane also placed second in the Management Meeting competition and finished sixth in Retail Management.

Thomas finished fourth in the Human Resources event, and Sorby was fourth in the Banking and Financial Service events.

Each of the VCSU students will go on to compete at the Collegiate DECA International Conference to be held April 18–21 in Orlando, Fla.

Zane is completing a 2014–15 term as a state vice president; Sorby was elected to a state vice president position for 2015–16.

Advisors for the VCSU Collegiate DECA are business instructors Amber Aberle and Heidi Larson.