Earlier this winter I had the opportunity to participate in a workshop focused on encouraging middle school girls to explore careers in STEM. That experience helped me better understand the pivotal role Valley City State University plays in providing a talented workforce in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—clearly fields essential to the advancement of our state, country, and world.

While the need for students prepared to excel in these areas continues to increase, we still appear to struggle with helping young people—and in particular girls—believe that they have the intelligence and confidence to thrive in these exciting fields. It is not uncommon for college faculty advisors to hear a student self-proclaim “I’m not a science person” or “I can’t do math”—but where does that all start? And more importantly, how can we reverse such self-proclamations?

Although I have known for a long time that the STEM acronym refers to a particular set of academic disciplines, what I didn’t realize is that it involves a methodology, a way of teaching that features learning-by-doing, experimenting, and inventing. And that same methodology is utilized in both science and non-science disciplines. It’s like bringing the playground inside!

One of the sessions the middle school students participated in was “Have Your DNA and Eat It Too,” where they learned about making edible models of the double helix using licorice, toothpicks, and mini-marshmallows. Fun! Middle school students also built rockets, parachutes, and roller coasters.

The students were excited, learning, and enjoying an amazing day of activities—they were experiencing STEM. I doubt anyone proclaimed that day that he or she “wasn’t a science person!”

So what did I learn about VCSU’s pivotal role? That the VCSU STEM program’s unique role, realized though the Great Plains STEM Education Center, is not simply about a list of academic disciplines. It’s more than that. It’s about kids and teachers. It’s about inspiring confidence and excitement in hands-on-learning activities—activities that our teachers must have the resources, support, and knowledge to create. That is why VCSU proclaims that our goal is to infuse STEM into K-12 classrooms, one teacher at a time.

It’s how we inspire confidence, ignite learning, and work to ensure that a college faculty advisor no longer has to hear a student self-proclaim “I am not a science person” or have to witness great anxiety over “that awful math requirement.”

And it is, of course, one more reason that it’s a great day to be a Viking!

p.s. Visit k-12stemchallenge.com to learn more about how VCSU is advancing K-12 STEM education.
THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE (CC) falls under the purview of the VCSU Faculty Association. The CC provides oversight regarding new programs, changes to programs, consideration of university-wide effect, and ensuring that resources are adequate to implement change. The committee works closely with the vice president of academic affairs and the registrar of the university and assists in providing an ongoing process of evaluation of academic requirements of the university.

Currently a proposal is in place to define membership and procedures for curricular changes. This committee has been affected by the change from divisional to departmental representation, and the proposal will include a change to an at-large representation of five faculty members.

Also defined is the sequence of procedures for curricular change suggestions to the CC. The CC has forwarded proposed updates of policy and membership to the Faculty Senate. The Senate subsequently forwarded the proposal to the University Policy Committee (UPC) and Constitution Review Committee (CRC). After a final review of the work of the UPC and CRC, the Senate will forward it on to the Faculty Association for consideration. The proposed changes will be presented for a first reading by the association in April and a ballot measure in May.

VCSU historically has relied on a biennial catalog published during the spring of even years. The process of curriculum change resulted in a flurry of activity during the fall semester prior to the publishing of a catalog. Enacting change has been a heavily paper-driven process and currently consists of multiple steps required to approve changes for publication. The CC would receive an avalanche of paperwork regarding proposed changes, work through the required steps, and would forward the CC approved changes to the Faculty Senate for final approval before placing in the next catalog. This process was exacerbated when issues were identified that would require rerouting a change back to an earlier stage due to discovery of incomplete forms, clarifications needed, or wording issues.

This past catalog was delayed due to the growing number of changes, and as a result VCSU is in the process of changing to an annual catalog utilizing a catalog management solution to allow publishing in a timely manner.

This spring VCSU began implementation of a digital catalog management system that requires conversion of the current catalog. Once the current catalog is migrated, a curriculum management module will allow digital workflow for updates and changes. This process will allow digital-routing capabilities and will provide an online dashboard to allow determination of the status of a curriculum change. The system will track changes from earlier versions, including the author of the changes, and will provide continual archiving to allow catalog evolution. Once the final changes are in place the management system will allow publishing to the web, mobile devices, tablets, or PDF generation for on-demand print capabilities.

From my understanding of the process, it is anticipated the first digitally managed catalog will be a two-year catalog (2016–18) with an eventual move to an annual catalog. As with any new endeavor I anticipate some growing pains but, from my perspective, there should be significant change in efficiency as we grow with this system of curriculum change and management.

VCSU’s Staff Senate met with the subcommittee that is reviewing and editing the Staff Senate Bylaws and Constitution. This group streamlined the content so that policy will align with current practice and a few new changes to policy can be put into practice. We plan to send the updates out to all staff for feedback, hold an open forum for discussion, make edits if necessary, secure approval, and utilize the new Constitution and Bylaws beginning this summer.

The subcommittee created by Staff Senate to look at new employee needs has also been busy. We were updated on their progress as they continue to visit with HR about how the ideas they have can be put into the onboarding process of new employees. We hope to address some issues new employees have, such as a lack of direction right at the beginning of employment, supervisors being
unable to train in certain areas, and just basic knowledge of things such as Outlook, the calendar, how to use the phone, and more. This effort is aimed at not only helping our new employees settle into their jobs at VCSU, but increasing Viking Pride, connection to colleagues, and campus morale.

In collaboration with the director of institutional research, both the VCSU Staff Senate and Faculty Senate recently administered an Employee Satisfaction Survey. The purpose of this anonymous survey was to gather faculty and staff input about workplace engagement, perceptions of workplace interactions, and overall campus climate. The response was overwhelming, with over 50 percent of VCSU employees participating and providing many comments. Staff broadband groups will meet this month to discuss the results, brainstorm, and present actionable ideas for improvements to Cabinet.

Over Spring Break, Staff Senate repeated a Staff Appreciation activity that got good feedback last year. We presented every staff member with a peppermint patty and a note of appreciation because they’re “worth a mint to VCSU.” We also provided everyone with a package of Extra gum with instructions to pay it forward—thank a colleague who they appreciate or who they think gives a little “extra” to make VCSU a great place. Staff Senate members then collected all of the gum and notes and delivered them to the staff members. This was met with good response and participation.

We have been and will be hosting quite a bit of Student Events on campus. Student Senate, along with Diversity Services here at VCSU, sponsored a great speaker, Cris Llinares, on women’s empowerment for International Women’s Day. We also helped sponsor a “Late Night” event on Friday, Feb. 27. It was themed “Winter Show,” and it was geared towards getting students interested in the North Dakota Winter Show hosted in Valley City every year. We are also putting on a Community Easter Egg Hunt and a Campus-Wide Easter Egg Hunt. This will be fun for our elementary kids in the area as well as our college kids.

We’ve been working hard looking over university policies lately. We are guiding the revisions of an academic integrity policy and a grade complaint policy. The next one up to bat is the student grievance policy.

I will also be attending the Legislative Assembly in Bismarck on March 25 to help VCSU as well. I look forward to the day!

All VCSU students have been working hard and look with eager eyes toward our Spring Break!

DECA STUDENTS DO WELL AT STATE

Four VCSU business students recently returned from the state Collegiate DECA competition with six medals. Freshman Carson Sorby from Valley City was one of those students. He won the Sales Presentation event, placed second with classmate Staci Hovlad in the Business to Business Marketing competition, and finished fourth in the Banking and Financial Services experience. His experience at the competition/conference culminated with his election to a state vice president position. 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.

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MOST AFFORDABLE ONLINE COLLEGES FOR BACHELOR’S DEGREES FOR 2015

College Choice ranked VCSU No. 7 in the nation in its list of “2015 Most Affordable Online Colleges for Bachelor’s Degrees.” The rankings were based on total cost, number of online degrees offered and regional accreditation status.

2015 RANKINGS OF MOST AFFORDABLE ONLINE COLLEGES FOR BACHELOR’S DEGREES (COLLEGE CHOICE)
1. Brigham Young University–Idaho
2. Fort Hays State University
3. Baptist College of Florida
4. Lamar University
5. Chadron State College
6. Baker College
7. VALLEY CITY STATE UNIVERSITY
8. Amberton University
9. Ohio University
10. Western Governors University

INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITY FULFILLED

Last summer sophomore Tarah Cleveland, a software engineering major at VCSU, served as an intern at Microsoft in Fargo. She worked on the Dynamics User Experience Research Team researching user personas, used internally to develop software that makes business processes easier for companies that purchase Microsoft software solutions. In addition to assisting with research, Tarah also organized and conducted interviews with human resource generalists, human resource assistants and software systems implementers. In addition, she was able to travel to Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Wash.

NAIA STUDENT-ATHLETE ADVISORY GROUP

Courtney Dixon, a junior from Casselton, was named to the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Association of Student-Athletes (ASA); she is one of only 27 student-athletes nationwide selected to serve on the ASA, an advocacy group for student athletes.

MUSIC STUDENTS IN NATIONAL BAND

Three senior music education majors—David Burgess, Courtney Pederson and Bradyn Good—were selected by the College Band Directors National Association to participate in the National Intercollegiate Band. The students, selected from over 270 applicants, represent VCSU’s first student musicians selected for the impressive ensemble. They will perform at the CBDNA National Conference at Vanderbilt University in March.