Presidential Column
Tisa Mason, Ed.D.

‘Big Six’ enhance students’ long-term success

How exciting it was to be part of one of the largest commencement exercises in the history of the university! These newly conferred academic degrees offer our most recent alumni opportunities for new beginnings. These new beginnings are so full of promise and hope. And it was with both pride and confidence that I conferred degrees.

The pride comes from valuing the hard work and the many accomplishments of our students. The confidence emanates from the knowledge that VCSU is truly a student-centered institution. As hard as our students work to earn their degrees, it is often the faculty and staff who care so deeply about our students that make their effort worthwhile. Our faculty and staff inspire the dreams of our students, help them discover their talents, and fuel their passion to complete this segment of their life’s journey.

According to research by Gallup Education, that deep ethic of care correlates with long-term career and life success. Gallup’s research indicates that graduates who strongly agree they had the following six experiences as students performed better on every measure of long-term success compared with graduates who did not share these experiences:

1. A professor who made them excited about learning
2. Professors who cared about them as a person
3. A mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams
4. Worked on a long-term project
5. Had a job or internship where they applied what they were learning
6. Were extremely involved in cocurricular activities

Bingo! These “Big Six” serve at the center of who we are as a community. Here are just a few stories students have shared with me:

A professor who made you truly excited about learning
“My favorite professor is very challenging because he is so unconventional and requires students to step out of their comfort zone. He covers new, interesting topics and never asks students to complete the same project twice. He does not rely on testing but requires you to thoroughly understand the topics taught through group discussion. He even encouraged me to attend graduate school—something I had never even considered. He always encourages my best work.”
—Ashley Limesand on Rob Walsh

A professor who cared about me as a person
“When I first stepped onto the VCSU campus...this professor provided me with the courage to improve my speaking, writing, and other academic skills. She always keeps in touch with me. Her strong sense of compassion made me feel at home as she helped me solve many of the problems I faced throughout college.”
—Yi Wang on Jodi Shorma
A mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams

“I received a job offer to teach in my hometown—where my fiancée and I have always wanted to live. However, I still had to finish my coursework and do my student teaching. I had no idea how I was going to be able to work through all of the elements of degree completion in a timely manner and in the correct order. With the help of my professors, all aspects of my program will be completed, and I will be able to transition into my new role as a teacher. I will student teach in the fall and begin as a full-time teacher in January. I knew I had made the right choice coming to VCSU because the professors truly care about each and every student and want all students to achieve their dreams.”
—Wendy Eszlinger on Kim Knodle, Lee Kruger, and Jodi Shorma

Worked on a long-term project

“My professor encouraged me to apply for a research grant through the VCSU Student Opportunities for Academic Research (SOAR) program. When I received the grant, he took on the role of my faculty advisor. During the research process he took time to meet with me multiple times per week throughout the year. This summer he will help with an internship. Time and time again he has shown that he wants students to be the best and the brightest. I am so happy I had the opportunity to work with him.”
—Tarah Cleveland on Razib Iqbal

So as I looked out at the audience last Saturday, it was more than symbolic for me to see the faculty and staff seated front and center because it is through their direct efforts that our students experience the “Big Six.” And it is why VCSU delivers more than a degree—it provides a passport so that our students thrive, not only in college, but also in their overall careers and lives. Indeed, Commencement Saturday was another great day to be a Viking!

Everyday Decisions with Long-Term Impact

I was once asked “What will you do today that will make you proud in a year?” Thinking about that question reminded me that everyday decisions do impact the long-term future of our beloved university. I am very blessed to be surrounded by so many strong, strategic, positive people who make daily decisions focused on producing long-term impacts for themselves, their peers, and the university.

It is in this spirit that I highlight one such group that makes daily decisions that result in longer-term success—our women’s basketball team. Recently Coach Jill DeVries shared with her team that she had heard a speaker talk about proactive coaching and leadership. In reflecting on the speaker’s remarks, she said “I could not help but think how lucky I am to have the group of student-athletes in our women’s basketball program that we do.”

The speaker outlined six choices that student-athletes make:
• Coachable Spirit
• Confidence
• Work Habits
• Competitiveness
• Mental Toughness
• Selflessness

Coach DeVries said it was clear to her that these women demonstrated each of these traits, both on and off the court. She told her team how proud she was not only of their athletic success but also of their academic success. Seven of the 13 team members earned a perfect 4.0 GPA (President’s Honor Roll), 9 were above a 3.5 GPA (Dean’s Honor Roll), 12 of 13 had above a 3.0 GPA and the 13th student-athlete was very close to a 3.0.

Many of these women also hold important leadership positions on campus such as members of Student Senate, orientation leaders, and Viking Ambassadors, to name just a few, not to mention holding jobs, serving in internships, and doing community service work. Coach DeVries declared that it is these women who give the VCSU women’s basketball program its wow factor: different, noticeable, and appealing. And finally she thanked them for having an uncommon commitment to excellence both on and off the court. Well said, Coach!

Clearly these women wake-up each morning knowing that they will make daily decisions based on long-term
impact, decisions which they will be proud of in a year and probably for the rest of their lives.

I must, however, take exception to one of Coach DeVries’s comments. Coach DeVries is not just lucky. Okay, maybe as the saying goes, she works hard at being lucky. Regardless, she works hard to recruit women who have those six winning characteristics; with skilled execution, she creates a culture which amplifies those characteristics on and off of the court, and with great pride, she holds each team member up and celebrates how their daily decisions have long-term impact.

VCSU is filled with caring, dedicated people—like Coach Jill DeVries—who wake up each day and know exactly how to answer the question “What will you do today that will make you proud in a year?” And that is another reason why it is a great day to be a Viking!

**FACULTY SENATE REPORT**  
*Anthony Dutton*

Greetings to all! My name is Anthony Dutton, Ph.D., and I am the newly elected president of the Faculty Association at VCSU. As June 1 is my start date, and there isn’t much for me to update you on, I thought I would take the chance to introduce myself and give a quick preview of what is on the horizon for Faculty Senate.

I have taught at VCSU for the better part of 13 years, teaching Spanish in my early years, and history since fall 2009, when I took a tenure-track position. My personal history with the institution, however, goes back to the early 1990s, when I enrolled as an undergraduate. I’m a product of the NDUS, with a B.S. in education (history and Spanish) from VCSU, an M.A. in history (European) from UND, and a Ph.D. in history (North American) from NDSU. I came to my dissertation topic, the history of tourism in Baja California Sur, Mexico, after spending a semester abroad at a sister university of VCSU, and so much of my academic life has been shaped by the NDUS. This year is my second as chair of the Social Science Department at VCSU, and my first of two as Faculty Association president.

Over recent years, Faculty Senate acted to balance committee loads for faculty by consolidating committees with related functions and eliminating unnecessary assignments, working to meet a directive from our last Higher Learning Commission review to address expanding faculty workloads. I anticipate Senate examining the impacts of changes over the last three years and overseeing a workload audit, to identify how faculty responsibilities and demands on time potentially differ from the balance identified in contracts. Senate itself will also be significantly affected by recent structural changes in the academic areas at VCSU, with the 5-member divisional representation eliminated to create a departmental model maxing out at 12 members (although this year we will number 11). It is unclear how that may affect our work, but we are primed to move forward in the fall term.

**STUDENT SENATE REPORT**  
*Madelyn Zane*

Hello, my name is Madelyn Zane, and I am the new VCSU 2015–16 Student Body president.

Over my two years at VCSU, I have been a part of many organizations, including DECA, North Dakota State DECA officer team, Viking Ambassadors, L2L mentor, Student Senate member and many more. I will be finishing my business degree in May 2016.

VCSU will always be one of my favorite places, not only because of the education I am receiving here, but for the fact that I met my boyfriend and some lifelong friends here.

What I see in the future for VCSU Student Senate is change. We will be having a larger membership with each department having a representative and all the other at-large members.

We will also be having a representative at the NDSA level, with Tyler Manske as the Student Affairs Committee chair.

Having both will look great for our senate. To make this year fresh, we will be moving forward with a theme of “FRESH.” More information on that to come. Overall, 2015–16 will be a fresh change for Student Senate, and I am excited.
STAFF SENATE REPORT
Kaleen Peterson

Over the summer months, VCSU Staff Senate continues to make progress on all of the projects we started this past year. We carried out our first official Staff Senate Welcome of a new employee, which will be part of the onboarding process rolling out soon by HR. The face-to-face casual meeting is meant to provide an early connection to shared governance and information regarding the staff member’s broadband group, but mostly a friendly face in the new employee’s first days as a member of the Viking Family.

Cabinet has been very open to our ideas stemming from the Employee Satisfaction Survey results, and we are excited to be able to implement a number of suggestions that came directly from staff members. To address concerns about communication on campus, Cabinet embraced the following:

1. The agenda and minutes of Exec Team will be emailed out to the campus so that staff are aware of items before decisions are made.

2. A representative from Facilities has been invited to sit on Exec Team.

3. A committee meeting, indicated as valuable on the Employee Satisfaction Survey (and the purpose of which had morphed significantly from its intent years ago), will now be run by Staff Senate beginning in July 2015. Every office and department on campus will be invited to the renamed Campus Inter-Functional Forum, a standing monthly meeting open to all, with the report-out format remaining. This is meant to support open communication on campus and serve as a venue to share the little (or big) things that are going on so that everyone can feel informed and engaged.

In order to prioritize our efforts, we recently surveyed staff to determine what projects Staff Senate should continue and discontinue. To comply with our Constitution and Bylaws, we have added a number of senators to Staff Senate, which will increase contributions through new voices and opinions and a more distributed workload. Coaches are represented on the new Staff Senate group, beginning in July, and a number of staff have expressed that this will help bridge the gap between Athletics and other staff due to our different locations on campus, work schedules, and more.

VCSU Staff Senate has a lot to be thankful for—namely a president and Cabinet who are open to ideas, want to work with us to improve any concerns, and support our role on campus without question. We are excited for the year to come, continuing the projects we have started and continuously proving to our colleagues that we are here to listen and advocate on their behalf.