COMMUNICATION PROGRAM RECEIVES STUDENTS BEFORE PROFITS AWARD

Valley City State University’s online bachelor’s degree program in communication has been recognized with a 2015–16 Students Before Profits Award for Best Online Bachelor’s in Communication and Public Relations by Nonprofit Colleges Online.

“We’re pleased to receive this recognition for our communication program,” said VCSU President Tisa Mason. “We take our role in equipping students with crucial skills such as communication seriously, and the name of the award—which puts students first—resonates with our student-centered philosophy at Valley City State.”

Available entirely online (in addition to being offered face-to-face), VCSU’s professional communication degree offers three concentrations: corporate communication, digital media management and media communication. A key component of the VCSU program is a professional internship during the junior or senior year which provides real-world, hands-on learning.

Nonprofit Colleges Online’s list of award-winning online communication programs can be found at www.nonprofitcollegesonline.com/rankings/best-online-bachelors-in-communication-and-public-relations.

The recognition is the second award VCSU’s communication program has received in 2015. In January the program was named to the Affordable College Foundation’s list of Top Online Communications Degrees for 2015.

53 VIKINGS NAMED NSAA SCHOLAR-ATHLETES FOR SPRING 2015

Fifty-three VCSU student-athletes were named North Star Athletic Association (NSAA) Academic Scholar-Athletes for the 2015 spring season.

To be eligible for the spring award, a student-athlete must have achieved a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.25 on a 4.0 scale and must have participated in a spring semester sport.

A complete listing of VCSU’s NSAA Academic Scholar-Athletes for the spring season can be found at www.vcsuvikings.com/article/1916.php.

WALSH, HOSKISSON PRESENT AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Rob Walsh, assistant professor of communication arts, and Dale Hoskisson, professor emeritus of education, presented a peer-reviewed paper, “Problematic Issues in Digital Storytelling,” at 2015 EdMedia, the World Conference on Educational Media and Technology held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, June 22–24.

The paper postulates a subtle but significant gap as storytellers transition from the traditional story to the digital story. The authors promote the belief that every story must contain four basic elements. Whereas traditional storytelling tends to encompass these elements intuitively, the digital storyteller must deliberate consciously or unconsciously the impact of these elements on his/her audience. Walsh and Hoskisson are preparing a manuscript for submission to a scholarly journal based on the comments and questions raised by the audience at EdMedia.
ONG PERFORMS AND TEACHES IN CHINA AND MALAYSIA

This spring and summer, music faculty pianist Geraldine Ong traveled to China and Malaysia to perform recitals and teach master classes.

In May, she toured China with North Dakota State University clarinetist Cecilia Kang; the two performed and did teaching residencies at Shanghai Conservatory of Music and Shenyang Conservatory of Music.

Ong also performed solo recitals and taught master classes at the University Putra Malaysia and Tenby International School–Setia Alam in Malaysia. In addition, she was invited to conduct a master class at the Music Stage, a local music school in her hometown of Seremban. Her performances and master classes were well received, and she’s been invited back to Tenby International School next summer.

PROFILES OF 2015 GRADUATES

Profiles of members of the Valley City State Class of 2015 follow. Engaged members of the student body, those profiled include an outstanding student-athlete from Minnesota, a couple from California (an elementary education teacher and a fisheries and wildlife major), and a homegrown Valley Citian who studied human services and was the undergraduate commencement speaker. The four students described here were part of VCSU’s largest graduating class, with more than 300 undergraduate and graduates students eligible to participate in the 2015 commencement exercises.

Sierra Even

After four years at Valley City State University, recent graduate Sierra Even is preparing to trade in the hardwood of the basketball court for the hardwood of a courtroom.

A native of Windom, Minn., and a four-year contributor on the Viking women’s basketball team, Even graduated in May with a double major in social science and Spanish. With her basketball and undergraduate career behind her, Even will be starting the next step in her life by attending law school this fall at Arizona Summit in Phoenix, Ariz.

Her success story is not uncommon at Valley City State, where small class sizes and numerous cocurricular opportunities lead to well-rounded students ready for bigger challenges. For some, it’s the small class sizes, caring faculty and staff, or reputation as a teacher’s college that drive them to attend VCSU. For others, including Even, it’s cocurricular activities such as athletics.

For Even it was basketball—a mainstay in her life since fourth grade—that led her to VCSU in August 2011. The Viking women’s basketball team had just qualified for the NAIA National Tournament for the first time in school history, and Even was eager to help build on that success.

“It was a winning program, and that’s what I wanted to be a part of,” she said of Viking women’s basketball, adding that the small class sizes and campus environment also appealed to her.

Coming from a town of just under 5,000 people, Even quickly felt right at home at VCSU and Valley City.

On the court, Even played in two NAIA National Tournaments and was part of the 2012–13 squad that set a school record with 24 wins. She was one of four Viking seniors this past season—along with Stephanie Pedersen, Sadiqah Jihad and Megan Trautman—who finished their careers with an impressive 78-44 record (.693 winning percentage) and winning records in all four seasons.

Individually, Even averaged 6.6 points and 4.1 rebounds per game during her career and started all 56 games in her junior and senior seasons. She was one of four Viking seniors this past season—along with Stephanie Pedersen, Sadiqah Jihad and Megan Trautman—who finished their careers with an impressive 78-44 record (.693 winning percentage) and winning records in all four seasons.

She averaged about 20 minutes and 5 points per game in both her freshman and sophomore seasons as the Vikings advanced to the NAIA National Tournament. She started all 25 games her junior season, averaging 25 minutes and 8.1 points per game. She continued to emerge in her senior season, starting all 31 games and averaging 8.5 points and a team-high 30.6 minutes per game. Her versatility allowed Even to play anywhere from point guard to power forward during her career.

But despite all her and the team’s accomplishments on the court, Even said it is the relationships with her teammates that she’ll remember the most.

“I’m going to miss hanging out with them,” she said. “It’s like your second family, and sometimes your first family because you don’t have time to go home.”

Off the court, Even succeeded in the classroom as she found a balance between basketball, school and activities. She made the President’s List (4.0 GPA) one semester, and four times she made the Dean’s List (3.5 GPA). She was named an NAIA Scholar-Athlete in both her junior and senior seasons as she
maintained a cumulative GPA over 3.5 throughout her career. She was president of the Spanish Club and was even able to spend a summer studying abroad in Seville, Spain.

This spring, her four years of hard work paid off—and will lead to more hard work—as she was accepted into Arizona Summit Law School in Phoenix. The dean of admissions there told Even the personal statement she wrote for her application stood out from others, in part because of her diverse experience at VCSU, including basketball, studying abroad and an internship with the Barnes County State Attorney's office.

She plans to complete the two-year “fast-track” at Arizona Summit and eventually work in family law. She’ll make the move with her longtime boyfriend Thomas Cortez—a four-year starter at kicker for the VCSU football team—who will attend graduate school at Arizona State University.

Speaking about a week before Commencement, Even was excited to begin the rest of her life but hinted that she wasn’t ready to leave VCSU.

“It hasn’t hit me yet. I feel like I haven’t been here for four years—I feel like it’s only been two,” she said. “I have a lot of good memories here.”

Karlie (Thompson) and Josue Hernandez

Karlie (Thompson) and Josue Hernandez haven’t been married the whole time they’ve lived in North Dakota; the wedding actually happened three days after their arrival in the summer of 2011.

The couple had moved to Valley City from Bakersfield, Calif., where they had been a couple since 2005, their junior year at Ridgeview High School. Both throwers—shot put and discus—on the track team, they had known each other since freshman year, but Cupid’s arrow didn’t strike until Karlie came to Josue’s aid when he was accidentally struck by a 12 lb. shot thrown by a teammate. The sight of him lying on the ground injured (no worries; no significant harm was done) was self-revealing for Karlie, and the two have been together ever since.

It was also track and field that brought them to Valley City, with then-coach Galen Morton recruiting the two to come throw in North Dakota for the VCSU Vikings. (Karlie threw for two years at VCSU, but Josue’s athletic career was unfortunately cut short by injuries.)

Arriving in Valley City sight unseen was something of a culture shock for the two. The transition was easier for Josue, who had grown up in El Salvador and immigrated to California at age 13 with his family; he found that “life slowed down” in North Dakota.

Karlie and he had both attended Bakersfield College, a community college in their hometown, after high school, but Josue ended up leaving school and worked construction and did plumbing, traveling during the week and returning home on weekends. He was ready for the change.

On the other hand, Karlie was a little taken aback on arrival in Valley City. Small town, rural North Dakota was not for the native Californian at the beginning. But she quickly warmed to the area thanks to the “amazing people” they encountered at VCSU. “They took us in immediately and were very welcoming,” she says, and she quickly found her place in the university’s elementary education program. She had always wanted to teach, and a stint as a teacher’s aide at Bill Williams Elementary in Bakersfield and her initial experience in VCSU’s program confirmed that.

Crucial to her academic career—and her happiness in Valley City—was the support she received from VCSU faculty members. Jackie Owen welcomed her on day one, and Karlie formed an “instant connection” to Daisy Figueroa. Heather Kvilvang served as Karlie’s advisor, and Cindy Zahn helped her achieve a Title 1 reading endorsement. “They all reached out to me as a person, not just a student,” she says. “That was so important to me.”

Josue had read about the fisheries concentration in VCSU’s fisheries and wildlife science program on the university website prior to moving to Valley City, and it’s where he found his academic home once he arrived. Although he says “there’s been so many people” supporting him at VCSU, he gives much credit to professors Andre DeLorme and Casey Williams, and especially Prairie Waters lab manager Louis Wieland (his first direct supervisor for field work), for helping make his undergraduate experience a success.

That experience included two summers of research at Prairie Waters, VCSU’s environmental center in Kathryn, N.D.; a summer working for North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Dickinson; and research presentations at the 2013 National Conference for Undergraduate Research and the annual meetings of the Dakota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) in both 2013 and 2014. Josue also was a driving force in establishing VCSU’s AFS student subunit; he served as president in its inaugural 2014–15 year.

Karlie’s academic career was marked with honors. At the 2015 Senior Awards Luncheon, she was named Outstanding Student in Elementary Education for the VCSU campus. Along the way, she was named to the President’s and Dean’s Honor Rolls and awarded a Delta Kappa Gamma Scholarship, the Jenson and Johnson Memorial Scholarship, and the Ethel R. Hansen Memorial Scholarship.
Her hard work has paid off—this fall Karlie will begin her teaching career as the K-6 Title 1 reading instructor at Hatton Eielson Public School in Hatton, N.D., and she and Josue have recently purchased a home in the community.

Josue is spending the summer working for North Dakota Game and Fish at the U.S. Wildlife Service’s Valley City Hatchery. He’ll join Karlie in Hatton when the seasonal position ends and look for permanent employment.

The couple hopes to be in North Dakota for years to come. They now have many friends in the state and even some family—Karlie’s twin sister, Lindsey Thompson, came to Valley City to visit and ended up moving here in March 2012.

But regardless of where their lives’ journeys take them, Valley City State University will remain a special place for Karlie and Josue, and likewise, for those who know them at VCSU, the two will be thought of fondly for years to come.

**Jacob Olson**

It wasn’t the first time he’d been asked to speak at a commencement ceremony—he was the baccalaureate speaker at his graduation ceremony from Valley City High School—but Jacob Olson still considered the offer to address his fellow students at VCSU’s May 16 commencement a “once in a lifetime opportunity.”

As for that commencement address, Olson mentioned in a light tone “snowball fights of biblical proportions on the fields of McFarland” and the unofficial VCSU mascots, the campus squirrels. Invoking the university’s tagline, he also reminded those assembled that “the world needs difference makers,” that “we must evolve from a saying to a value that impacts our daily decisions.”

For now he’s scratching his acting itch, but Olson is looking to a future career doing recruitment in a human resources setting or coordinating events or programs for a nonprofit. Regardless of where he ends up, he’s left his mark at VCSU. Thanks, Jacob Olson, for making a difference at VCSU.