Every day good news about the quality of our academic programs, the outstanding teaching research and engaged outreach by our faculty, involvement by our students, and dedication of our staff are reflected in various emails that come across my desk. Thanks to University Communications yesterday, in “Today’s News” and via emails to me from two deans we learned that:

Today’s News
In a staff editorial, the Akron Beacon Journal lauds the success of last weekend’s Black Male Summit and recounts highlights of the event as well as local initiatives that tie in to the vision of the summit.

A team of researchers led by UA assistant professor Ge “Christie” Zhang received an NIH grant to continue working on a patch to repair damaged heart tissue. Akron Legal News has the story.

WAKR-AM reported on a new removable adhesive developed at UA that has earned a National Science Foundation grant to help it move toward the commercial market.

From Deans Krovi and Haritos
Our Information Systems student team from the College of Business Administration excelled in a regional competition hosted by Ball State University! They came in “second” in the project category and “third overall,” out of 12 teams, in which projects and cases are presented by the student to a team of six IT executives. Dr. Liping Liu is the faculty advisor.

100% of our initial corrosion engineering class is employed upon graduation. We are creating the intellectual capital for helping to solve an annual $400B US-wide issue.

These are just a few of the outstanding accomplishments we learned of yesterday; so, you can only imagine the depth and breadth of accomplishment reported about our faculty, students and staff for an entire academic year!

This all comes about by a robust and persistent focus on the quality of our academic programs linked to the on-going development of our faculty and staff to the benefit of our students. Because we take accountability to our students, ourselves and the State seriously, there is an on-going effort to continuously improve.

You will see in the OAA report, information about the two workdays, attended by faculty, staff and students, that we had in March. They were lead by associate vice president Stacey Moore and the Retention and Completion Steering Committee and the University Council Student Engagement and Success committee.
The first workday focused on assuring all of our offices and units understand their roles and responsibilities in executing the Plan, filling-in gaps in the plan and to focus more attention on the issues of reducing and eventually eliminating the achievement gap.

The second workday was the “formal launch” of the Plan headlined by Dr. Timothy Renick, vice president for enrollment and student success from Georgia State University. Introduced by vice president and vice provost for student success Candace Campbell-Jackson, he highlighted the success that Georgia State University has had in student persistence and completion that further validated our objectives and strategies and provided additional ideas for our being more “anticipatory” of our students’ needs. You may recall that Amazon received a patent on “anticipatory” services so items can be delivered as you need them without your even placing an order. Now that goes beyond “concierge services.”

Following a Workday, Professor of Marketing in the College of Business Administration, Deborah Owens emailed to the group, “To all, Great discussions yesterday. I have to say, it greatly exceeded my expectations! Great team effort as always - the best group I have worked with on campus to be sure.”

It further highlighted the “power” that our UA Analytics system will have in “alerting” us to situations and circumstances that suggest a significant discussion is needed either about a student’s behaviors that link to their academic success or suggestions for their consideration of alternative majors. We look forward to previewing this “system” of informatics with the Student Issues and Success Committee at an upcoming meeting.

Speaking of assuring student success, you have heard about the vision in college strategic plans for significant experiential learning in the educational experiences of our students. While we have a lot more we can do to assure this is a part of our institutional DNA, we have some programs that already do just that.

In February, the division of student affairs hosted the 10th annual Hearts for Humanity. It raised funds that were used to support students traveling on our Alternative Spring Break.

This year 84 students traveled to Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. While some other students chose these states for their sunshine and beaches, these particular students chose an alternative spring break to improve communities.

They built hiking trails and painted and cleaned cabins; they removed invasive plants and created an oyster reef and they sided a house and installed windows.

Their TWEETS said: “This was definitely one of the best weeks of my life. I wouldn’t trade this experience for anything” and “Ppl make your experience no matter what you do; S/o to asb Georgia for the awesome times and memories. Friends for life.”
Now you need to know, I had a bit of a time figuring out what Ppl meant, it is people-“People make your experience,” and from the worldwide web S/o could mean “significant other,” “shout out,” or “sudden ovation.” Well it is “shout out” to alternative spring break Georgia.

Vincent Tinto in our Student Success Summit last year, indicated that one important attribute of a campus with higher retention and completion rates is “learning communities” or “living-learning communities.”

As you know, over the previous year we have featured faculty members from various colleges to “call out” their contributions to the success of The University of Akron. Beginning today and over the upcoming meetings, we hope to present, faculty and students who are involved in various ways to enhance and advance student and UA success.

Today we feature “learning communities.” Ms. Fedearia Nicholson, assistant vice president for student success will introduce our students and faculty members.

For your information, she has been recognized by Kaleidoscope magazine as one of 40 emerging diverse professional leaders under the age of 40; and was named in 2009 as one of the 30 for the Future recipients. She is working on her doctorate in urban studies and public affairs at UA. Fedearia it is all yours.....