OSAS annual champions named

Each year, the Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS) recognizes campus partners who have assisted our office and staff in the mission of supporting students as they work towards graduation.

As part of the NIU community, OSAS values the skills, talents, and expertise held by the exceptional NIU faculty and staff and appreciates their invariable willingness to collaborate on a multitude of student success efforts. While the comprehensive college-wide support network at NIU is outstanding as a whole, there are particular individuals who consistently rise above the rest when it comes to partnering with OSAS and supporting student success. We are honored to acknowledge the following individuals and office with the 2013 Office of Student Academic Success Champion Awards:

ACCESS

ACCESS actively supports student success at NIU by assisting students in building important academic skills. ACCESS collaborates regularly and extensively with the Office of Student Academic Success through interactions with our Student Success Specialists, as well as by providing valuable information and resources to students at our Edible Education Series or MidSemester Check programs. Whether it be through A+—which provides support to students on issues such as time management, reading strategies, and managing test anxiety—or PAL—which provides free tutoring services—ACCESS is here to support the academic success of NIU students. Whenever we have needed assistance, the talented and dedicated staff at ACCESS have been there to go the extra mile!

Angie Byrd

In her role as the Associate Director of Registration & Records, Angie Byrd has tirelessly worked to support the mission of the Office of Student Academic Success. OSAS requires significant amounts of data and resources from Registration and Records on a daily basis, from calls made to students for Early Alert, information uploads for the MAP-Works surveys, and for the automatic uploading of information for the new Student Success Collaborative. Angie’s work has fostered a strong relationship between Registration & Records and OSAS, thereby making the exchange of student information seamless while working to protect the confidentiality of student records and data. Simplicity, the efforts and commitment of Angie and her staff allow OSAS to be successful in ensuring the success of NIU students.

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Universal design: How do you “UD?”

The idea of focusing on designs that benefit everyone is beginning to catch on across many fields, including in higher education

By: Debra A. Miller, Student Success Specialist

Do you remember the days when there were no curb cuts in any sidewalks? At NIU, many spaces are now equipped with motion sensors that turn on and off lights in classrooms and offices. More and more public places have ‘hands-free’ technology such as exit doors that open automatically, paper towels that dispense with the wave of a hand, and auditory-assisted crosswalk signals at street corners. Need to know where the local Starbucks is? Ask your Smartphone.

Traditional design generally focuses on the characteristics of “an average user” whereas accessible or barrier-free design targets people with disabilities. Universal Design (UD) approaches design and asks how will this benefit everyone? It is a concept that began in the field of architecture and in commercial products, but has quickly expanded into environmental initiatives, recreation, technology, the arts, health care, and now, education.

According to Thompson, Johnston, and Thurlow (2002), “ More than 20 years ago, Ron Mace (an architect who was a wheelchair user) began to actively promote a concept he termed "universal design." Mace was adamant that we did not need more special purpose designs that serve primarily to meet compliance codes because that often stigmatizes people. Instead, he promoted design that works for most people, from the child who cannot turn a doorknob to the elderly person who cannot climb stairs to reach their destination. Universal design was defined by the Center for Universal Design (1997) as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”

Conceptually, UD is simply practical and taps into one’s common sense, but is not widely known or utilized even though “design for all” has been around since the 1970’s. Burgstahler (2008) asserts that “UD promotes an expanded goal to make products and environments welcoming and useful to groups that are diverse in many dimensions, including gender, race and ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, ability, disability, and learning style.” The same can be applied to students in higher education.

Burgstahler (2008) states that UD has more recently emerged as a paradigm to address diversity in the design of a broad range of educational products and environments, including Web sites, educational software, instruction, student services and physical space.”

A cross-disciplinary group working on UD originally compiled seven general universal design principles which include: Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Tolerance for Error, Low Physical Effort, Size and Space for Approach and Use. Burgstahler (2008) asks, “What if there was a paradigm for higher education that would simultaneously address issues of equity, accessibility, social integration, and community? What if it could create more inclusive classrooms? What if it provided guidance for physical spaces, student services, and technology? UD in higher education can do this and more.”

We’ve come a long way since sidewalk curb cuts! Intentional application and implementation of universal design can and will continue to expand usability for the majority of people which will equalize access across many venues.

For more information on Universal Design and specifically how NIU is addressing UD, click on the following links:

- Principals of UD
- Survey of UD at NIU
- UD in Education: Principles and Applications Retaining Students with Disabilities Through UD NIU Adoption of UD
OSAS champions (continued from page 1)

Robert Fleisher

Bri Lauka

Ashleigh Spohn

Dr. Robert Fleisher, Coordinator of Theory and Composition and Professor for the School of Music, is a phenomenal advocate for his students’ success. He frequently collaborates with the Office of Student Academic Success to ensure that his students are receiving the assistance that they need in order to achieve their goals. Robert’s work has helped to connect numerous students from the College of Visual and Performing arts to the many resources our office has to offer. Robert is receiving an OSAS Champion Award for this excellence in collaboration as well as his determination to support students as they work towards graduation.

Bri Lauka has fully committed herself to the mission of helping students succeed at NIU since joining the College of Health and Human Sciences in 2012. As an academic adviser, she helps assist freshmen, sophomores, and pre-majors in exploring HHS majors and minors, and understanding program admission criteria. Additionally, Bri has been able to help empower students to be successful by utilizing MAP-Works for a better understanding of the students she is working with. She also serves on the planning committee for Mid-Semester Check. In her everyday work, Bri continues to be innovative in helping students succeed and in building meaningful relationships with campus partners.

Since joining the OSAS team in the spring of 2012, Ashleigh Spohn has fully immersed herself in the mission of helping students at Northern Illinois University. Ashleigh took on the role of Student Success Intern for the fall semester, meeting regularly with students in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. This opportunity allowed her to effectively apply many of the student development theories learned from her work towards a Master of Science in Adult and Higher Education at NIU. Ashleigh is always willing to lend an extra hand wherever it is needed in the office and can always be counted on to accomplish the task at-hand.

Success Question of the Month

Q: How can I request a workshop on a topic related to student success?

A: The Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS) offers a variety of workshops for student groups, classes, events, and other campus organizations. Typical topics for academic workshops include academic success and campus resources, academic success tips, goal-setting, time management, and registration tips.

Additionally, Financial Cents, OSAS’s financial literacy program, offers workshops on various financial issues students may face, including building your first budget, managing your student loans, understanding credit cards and credit, and how to begin saving money.

OSAS and Financial Cents can also tailor presentations to your specific needs. Let us know what topic, or combination of topics, you would like to cover, and we will build a workshop suited specifically to your needs!

To request a workshop, contact the Office of Student Academic Success at (815) 753-5721 or email at osas@niu.edu.
OSAS travels to ILACADA

Staff from the Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS) joined others from NIU and across the state at the first annual Illinois Academic Advising Association (ILACADA) conference at Illinois State University.

Several OSAS staff members had the opportunity to present at the conference:

- Dana Gautcher and Matthew Venaas on the Sophomore Experience
- Dana Gautcher and Missy Lugo on Destination Graduation
- Randi Napientek on using assessment to assist in student retention and success

Congratulations to our staff and others from NIU who presented at the conference!