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New Leaders, New Thoughts

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Quality leadership seems increasingly elusive in our ever-changing global society. We face rapidly evolving communication methods, shifting generational ethos, and polarizing political cataclysms. Organizations constantly face waves of new challenges both internally and externally, and leaders must learn to embrace versatility, collaboration, and innovation in order to compete. Our leaders are no strangers to these challenges. Among us exist educators, athletic trainers, department directors, designers, and victim-service coordinators. We are ready to change, inspire, motivate, educate, innovate, and empower. We are ready to lead in actions minuscule and massive. We are ready to lead by means that reach the farthest and most diverse outlets.

One particular theme emerges again and again in class discussions and writings: communication. Even those who are established need to sharpen communication skills and adapt to the current technology-oriented workplace. Conversations tend to loop back to this core leadership skill perhaps in part because it counteracts some of the most isolating side effects of technology. Communication is also a basic ingredient and antecedent to motivating teams through collaboration. Ultimately, we value communication because we care about people, we care about our work, and we are more than ready to meet growing professional obstacles head on. Though idealistic, we are prepared to do what is necessary in our unique leadership roles to positively impact society in every way we can.

The mission of Winona State University is to enhance the intellectual, social, cultural and economic vitality of the people and communities we serve.

A community of learners improving our world.
MEET THE NEW LEADERS
Change Leadership Class Biographies

Diego Barros Dos Santos
Dos Santos is a Brazilian youth soccer coach for Euro Football Club located in Winona, MN where he coaches young athletes from 3 to 13 years old. He is a former soccer player with more than 20 years of experience within the sport. He holds a B.S. in exercise science from Missouri Valley College where he earned the Gruber Prize in Health Science for his impressive work on the “Viking Healthy” project which entailed a return on investment (ROI) to Missouri Valley when engaging its employees in positive health habits. Dos Santos continues to enhance his knowledge and experience as a coach and student through his graduate studies.

Carrie Bork
Carrie Bork is a graduate student, who is halfway through the Organizational Leadership program. She is a graduate of Winona State University, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Finance and a minor in Economics. She spent six years as a Credit Analyst at Merchants Bank followed by raising two children who are now 6 and 9. Currently, she is a graduate assistant for the College of Education at Winona State University in the Center for Assessment and Accreditation. In the fall of 2017, she helped with the institutional report and onsite visit of the Minnesota Board of Teaching. Carrie has a passion for business finance and personal financial planning. On the side, she sells seed corn to local farmers.

Ben Charles
Ben Charles is from the small town of Westby, WI and currently lives in La Crosse, WI. Recently, Ben graduated from Winona State University with a degree in Exercise Science. Soon afterward, Ben became the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Cotter High School in Winona and an Assistant Strength Coach for Winona State’s Cross Country team. Ben’s goal is to become a Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at a DI, DII, or DIII University after obtaining a Master’s Degree in Leadership Education with an emphasis in Sports Management.

“Amy the time one reaches graduate school, an individual’s professional and personal life has likely become more complex.” - Eva Pitsch

Alyssa Clemment
Alyssa is halfway through the Educational Leadership-Sport Management program here at Winona State. She completed her undergraduate degree in Exercise Sport Science-Sport Management at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Alyssa also participated on the women’s basketball team at UW-L (2012-2017) and is now entering her second year as an assistant coach for the team. Alyssa enjoys spending her free time in the outdoors, hiking and kayaking. She aspires to be a coach for a Women’s Division I collegiate team after the completion of her Masters Degree.
Richie DePaolis-Metz

A complex combination of circumstances and personality traits has placed Richie where he is today. Growing up in Chicago, Illinois and a small town in North Dakota offered distinctly different perspectives on American life. From Mayville State University, Richie earned a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration. A key experience from an undergraduate internship at a large for-profit corporation showed Ritchie he would rather have a career in higher education utilizing his passions for helping others, than be in the corporate world. Richie advanced to the role of Associate Director of Admissions at Minnesota State University-Moorhead as he was fortunate to have the support of stellar mentors from school and work, in addition to his family, a few close friends, and his husband.

Mitch Doerr

Coming from a “student-athlete” family, Mitch could not get enough time on the field or court. His parents always knew how to push him to surpass expectations. Growing up, Mitch was best at football until he sustained a traumatic injury. After the accident, there was nothing Mitch took for granted, firmly believing there is no dream too big to reach. Because of this experience, Mitch’s faith grew stronger when most thought it would be weakened. A mission trip opportunity to various countries in Southern Africa cemented his faith through community development. Always a hands-on communicative leader, Mitch learned from experience as a middle school, high school, and collegiate and professional basketball strength coach. He continues to grow as a leader, communicator, teacher, friend, and person, to all he can reach.

Katie Donlin

Katie is in her 5th year teaching STEM at Byron Middle School in Byron, MN. Being a part of the Byron cohort that completed the Certificate of Innovative Instructional Leadership in 2016 is what encouraged Katie to continue with the graduate program at WSU. She is currently pursuing her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership and is expected to graduate in May 2019. Katie was honored in 2017 as a National STEM Cell Foundation Scholar and presented her grant project at the National Science Teachers Association Conference in Atlanta, GA in March 2018. Outside of teaching and attending graduate school, Katie coaches Junior High Volleyball and Track & Field. She also enjoys spending free time with her dog, Lola.

“Through it all, graduate students speak from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, which enriches discussions and provides different views and opinions.” - Carrie Bork

John Eger

John Eger is the definition of the, “Non-Traditional” student. He spent almost 25 years in sales, marketing and product development before returning to WSU in 2010 to finish the undergrad degree he began in 1982. With a newly earned degree in Business Administration and a minor in Technical Writing, John briefly returned to the private sector before moving into teaching. He is currently a substitute teacher and has also been an adjunct professor of business at Minnesota State College South East. This is John’s first year as a graduate student in the Educational Leadership program. When he’s not teaching, John enjoys books, movies and any time he can get on the mighty Mississippi. When he completes his degree, he would like to work as a middle school or high school principal.
Claire Exley

Claire Exley is originally from the Milwaukee, WI area and has been living in Winona for the past several years. Claire moved to Winona to complete her Bachelor of Arts and Science degrees in Spanish and Criminal Justice; she graduated in 2016. She is currently completing her first semester of the Professional Leadership program. Claire applies the new information and ideas learned directly to her work as the Victim Services Coordinator in the Winona County Attorney’s Office. Claire assists crime victims in navigating and understanding the criminal justice system and ensuring crime victims receive the rights afforded to them by statute. Claire also serves as the leader of the Winona County Sexual Assault Interagency Council, a multidisciplinary team which focuses on improving the community response to sexual assaults.

Anastasia (Asia) Grabinger

Asia Grabinger is studying Organizational Leadership and will complete her graduate degree next year. Asia has worked in training and development for 13 years, and most recently obtained a position as a leader in organization at Prime Therapeutics. There, she leads a team that assists members with their pharmacy needs and concerns. She is driven by developing others, and helping others succeed. Asia has lived in Minnesota her whole life and resides south of the Twin Cities with her family. Outside of school and work, her passions are cooking, going to movies, and spending time outside with her kids.

Tracy Hale

Tracy is currently the Associate Director of Alumni Relations at Winona State University, where she has worked for the past 8 years. She is pursuing a Master of Science degree in Organizational Leadership and is expected to graduate in December 2019. Tracy is very passionate about her work in Alumni Relations and maintains strong relationships with the alumni that she supports. She travels across the nation to engage the alumni of Winona State and to foster positive communication between the university and their alumni population. In her spare time, she enjoys coaching ice skating, outdoor activities and spending time with her family.

Adam Hanson

Adam Hanson is a graduate student in the Leadership Education-Sports Management Program. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in K-12 Physical Education and Developmental Adaptive Physical Education with a minor in coaching from Winona State University in 2006. Adam has just begun his 13th year of teaching and coaching. He currently works at Hoover Elementary School in North Mankato as a K-5 elementary physical education teacher. In the spring and summer, Adam is a varsity assistant baseball coach for Mankato East High School and the head coach for the Mankato American summer Legion baseball team. Originally from Albert Lea, Adam now lives in Mankato with his wife of 12 years, Nicole.

Alex Howell

Alex is a 2nd year graduate student pursuing his Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership. He is a 2003 graduate from Western Technical College with a degree of Applied Science in Radiography. He is also a registered technologist in Radiography and Computed Tomography. In 2016, Alex graduated from Winona State University with a degree in Healthcare Leadership & Administration. Full time, Alex is the clinical coordinator and instructor for the Radiography program at MN State College Southeast where he has been since 2012. Part time, he works at Winona Health as an X-ray/CT technologist. When not working or in school, Alex likes spending time with his wife and three children.
Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick

As an accomplished landscape designer and educator, nothing inspires Kelly more than to impact positive and sustainable change. She works passionately to intertwine design and ethics, while teaching that well thought-out action can positively affect our wellbeing, altering the legacy we leave behind for future generations. Kelly is the architect of the "Plant a seed" crusade that explores the many facets of our current food system. Her most recent initiative is the creation of a Seed Library at the Rochester Public Library, set to open in the Spring of 2019. Kelly is also a Master Gardener who enjoys teaching about soil biology and nutritional science, and digging in the dirt and cooking what grows in it.

“Whether it is building on an undergraduate degree, or seeking to gain skills for an already established career, the pursuit of learning at the graduate level is extremely rewarding.” - Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick

Emily Lueck

With a passion for English and education, Emily pursued a degree in Communication Arts & Literature Teaching at Winona State. Her coursework at WSU reinforced her enthusiasm as she eagerly endeavored to spread her love for literature to future students. This enthusiasm met with sharp resistance in classrooms comprised of rural, low income, at risk students lacking key foundational knowledge and developmentally appropriate communication skills. Having since taught in three different high schools of ranging demographics, Emily observed a stark disparity in education quality existing for students of various backgrounds, regions and ability levels. Pursuing Educational Leadership will allow Emily to empower future students of all backgrounds by giving them a voice through personalized education.

Andy Pierskalla

Andy Pierskalla is in his 9th year of teaching social studies at Osseo High School. During his tenure of teaching, he has led the middle school trip to Washington DC while being responsible for the logistics and fundraising for the group. He is also a football and baseball coach, while also serving as a varsity assistant for baseball and the recruiting and defensive coordinator for the football team. During his time as recruiting coordinator he has been responsible for placing over ten student athletes into college programs. While teaching, he has served on several committees such as the solutions team that meets to help teachers fix issues with student behavior and create lesson plans for diverse learners. Andy is the father of two children, and his wife is a math teacher and head track coach at Wayzata High School.

Eva Pitsch

Eva is in her second year of the Human Services Professional Master’s Program at Winona State and is expected to graduate Fall 2020. She earned a Bachelors degree in Studio Art from Cornell College in 2013. During the years between undergraduate and graduate school Eva worked various service industry jobs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Feeling stuck, Eva made the leap to travel and teach English in Spain for two years. Working in schools in a foreign country ignited a passion for education, which led to an interest in higher education administration. Currently she is still living with a foot in each country as her partner is from Bilbao, Spain. Eva loves to spend summers in the Basque Country improving her Spanish, hiking, and visiting as many museums and beaches as possible.
THE GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Change Leadership Class Experiences

**Diego Barros Dos Santos** - Engaging in a graduate education program requires the ability to properly manage time spent with family, at work and in school. The mix of having online and in-person classes demands different approaches in terms of perception and strategies in order to absorb and adapt what these different formats of classes have to offer, not only as students, but future leaders as well. These strategies and perceptions are crucial to any student working at this level, including international students. For these individuals, having the opportunity to participate in a graduate program is already gratifying; however, higher expectations are presented. Overcoming different challenges leads students to greater success and an overall enjoyable journey. The most rewarding aspect about a graduate education experience, unlike the undergraduate program where students are spectators is that students are now the co-stars of the show.

**Carrie Bork** - Several common themes emerge in exploring the graduate school experience: work life balance, time management, family obligations and creating new networks of support. Learning to prioritize competing responsibilities is a critical skill that must be mastered to achieve any degree of success at this level. Building peer networks and asking questions facilitates the understanding of coursework and related assignments. Working collaboratively with peers from various backgrounds teaches leadership skills such as communication and critical thinking. More importantly, peers are instrumental in building confidence as a contributing member of this learning community. Flexibility is acquired as learners must negotiate multiple instructional delivery platforms: online, hybrid, or in-class and in many instances, multiple locations. Through it all, graduate students speak from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, which enrich discussions and provide different views and opinions. To arrive at the door of graduate education is an honor and a privilege as it takes a lot of strength, balance, and flexibility to complete the program.

**Benjamin Charles** - The student graduate experience in leadership has brought on new challenges and new ways of thinking compared to undergraduate work. During my undergraduate studies, the experience was focused on “recall of information” to pass exams and projects. Essentially, the core of the schoolwork would consist of exams that asked a particular question on a topic followed by the options: A, B, C, or D to figure out which of the possible answers would be correct. The advantage of this type of thinking is that you can utilize the method of the process of elimination to rule out potential answers and solve the question without having a strong background in the material. In graduate school the way of thinking about the material and how to present it is much more complex. Graduate school in leadership consists of discussions of topics based on readings from fables, novels or textbooks. This is followed by writing essay papers or group projects that focus on analyzing and interpreting the information in your own thoughts and feelings and how it applies to the real world. Working with people is essential to succeed in graduate school in a leadership program.

**Alyssa Clement** - Entering graduate school is not easy as many unknowns come with it. Continuously adjusting to the scheduling and prioritizing life by the week is difficult. The most challenging aspect is the academic expectations and how much higher the standards are compared to undergrad. Along with more rigorous courses and assignments, finances can become another obstacle. With constant reminders, it is worth every cent to accomplish a master’s degree and set up a future to reach the dreams and goals set. Difficulties aside, the professors not only share their knowledge but are also very personable, making the transition that much easier. Classes at the graduate level become so much more relatable to the real world and something can be taken from every class and used immediately in the workplace.

**Richie DePaolis-Metz** - The graduate school experience welcomes new learners, yet presents an exciting learning curve. Adherence to a philosophy of lifelong learning enables graduate students to satisfy the insatiable hunger for knowledge that many possess. Often, graduate students do not follow a linear path to graduate education. It is not uncommon for a student to complete an undergraduate degree then wait several years before pursuing graduate education. Financial and logistical obstacles may play a factor in the ability of an individual to pursue graduate education. Self-exploration through career and professional experiences guide individuals to graduate program choices providing well-suited tools for career advancement and professional growth. The Organizational Leadership program at Winona State University represents such a choice as it offers opportunities for individuals to become more flexible, collaborative, self-aware, and introspective.
Mitchell Doerr - From 7th grade until my sophomore year at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, becoming a pediatric orthopedic surgeon has been the goal. As a very driven individual, during this time everything absorbed was applied to situations that would be used in this line of work. This included classes, job shadows and volunteer work in clinics. The thrill of seeing change over a longer period of time, both physically and emotionally does not seem to be available as a surgeon, although helping others through strength and conditioning has delivered a sense of fulfillment. Thankfully, this was brought to light in my sophomore year of college that one could make this their career. From my bachelor’s degree to coaching with the Indiana Pacers and completing my upcoming master’s degree I’ve learned a great deal. Not only strict content, but also the importance of listening, understanding, and communicating effectively. Sadly, I have worked with many leaders who did not understand the importance of these three pillars. Instead, increasing weight room statistics was placed ahead of an athlete’s physical and mental health. If you ask any top tier sports professional, the only thing they care about is injury prevention. What does this mean to my learning over the course of my academic experience? Everything true sports professionals do comes down to caring and putting others’ best interests over their own.

“Self-exploration through career and professional experiences helps guide individuals to graduate program choices that provide well-suited tools for career advancement and professional growth.”

- Richie DePaolis-Metz

Katie Donlin - The graduate experience through Winona State University’s Leadership Education Program is a journey of hard work and self-discovery. Starting the program through the Certificate of Innovative Instructional Leadership was an opportunity like no other. Working as a school district cohort, I experienced many personalized learning moments. It was a gentle way of starting the transition to a professional in the field of education, learning about leadership and its impact. Taking this certificate experience into the leadership classes helped create a sense of connection and relevance between the topics covered and daily occurrences in the world of education. A lot of work and dedication is needed to succeed at the graduate level. Collaboration is critical, and the opportunity to meet with classmates in person or via Acano added to the overall experience. Hearing the different reviews of literature and feedback was a valuable part of classes. Finally, the professors have a significant impact on the graduate experience. Learning from the vast range of skills that each unique professor exemplified from class to class made the graduate experience both memorable and inspiring. Much has been gained from my time as a graduate student at WSU; the skills acquired here will continue to guide the path to lifelong learning.

John Eger - The graduate school experience differs greatly from the undergraduate experience. While the workload and expectations are greater, graduate students are given more respect from professors and classmates. It’s a great feeling being part of that! Students at this level are really making an investment in the future, beyond a four-year degree. Achieving this level of education can open the door to an extremely challenging and rewarding career. The work/life balance makes the pursuit of an advanced degree very difficult. Most people have full time jobs, which typically means 50+ hours a week or more in addition to class time and homework. Family life is bound to suffer, and this must be considered carefully. Students at this level of education are more devoted to studies and assignments than many undergraduate students. The postgraduate challenge isn’t for everyone. However, in many fields it is the best way to advance rapidly and acquire skills which most do not have.

Claire Exley - Education is a treasured asset worthy of working to achieve. Once acquired, education cannot be taken away or diminished. The decision to complete a graduate degree is a major life decision and benchmark. Pursuing higher education is the next logical step for some and allows students to contribute to an educational community while creating new personal and professional opportunities for the future. Graduate students quickly learn there is not any handholding and the path from start to finish is not explicitly mapped out at the beginning of the journey. Rather, the experience allows students to create individual educational paths. Pursuing a graduate degree is an investment, and students should expect to put in the work to achieve desired outcomes. While the undertaking of work is individualized, the journey is not done in isolation; the support and guidance from classmates and professors positively contribute to the overall graduate student experience.

Anastasia (Asia) Grabinger - In the course of the previous fourteen years, four collegiate institutions have each provided a unique experience. Beginning in 2004 at St. Cloud State University, being very young, academics were not of primary importance. This was partially due to the fact that while there, it seemed as though professors, and the institution as a whole, was not invested in the personal future of students. At St. Cloud Technical and Community College, the experience was far improved. The staff was exceptionally personable, and the program availability and organization were well done. The result was an AAS Degree in Healthcare Technology. Winona State University offered a Health Care Leadership and Administration Program. Initially, the experience gained thus far and the ability to successfully finish the program created concern. What was learned is that Winona State does far more for the students than what was initially expected. They are deeply invested in the current and future success of every student. After successfully completing the program, it was decided that the Graduate Program at Winona was the right choice. There is confidence that this will be a successful journey as well, due to some of the same reasons the undergraduate program has been. Though the academic experiences that have led to this point have been varied, other students are also able to feel the difference between them.
**Tracy Hale** - Five Things I Wish I Knew Before Starting the master’s program:

1. Spend time finding the work/life/family/school balance. This can be a difficult task. However, if getting your degree is in your heart, you find the time. Family commitments may take a back seat some of the time, but the determination you show to your kids and spouse is worth all the late-night, weekend research/writing sessions and group projects.

2. Make the time commitment a priority. It takes more time than you ever thought possible to complete your schoolwork some weeks. On average, you should be spending around 20 hours per week per class. This was hard to grasp at first and the amount of assignments was a bit overwhelming. Schedule specific time on a calendar for schoolwork and stick to it.

3. Build relationships with your classmates. This will provide you with the tools to succeed. Being able to ask classmates questions and bounce ideas off them has proven to be a valuable tool. They will become your best resource and ally for the next two years.

4. Spend time with your advisor. Ask specific questions about the program, class schedules, etc. Meet with your advisor frequently to discuss your plan (at least once per semester). Share your professional and personal goals so they can provide you the best advice.

5. Write down your goals. When do you want to be done? Are you scheduling your classes when your work or family life is less busy? Do you plan to “go for it” and be done in two years or are you more casual about the timeframe? Know that you are in charge of your own fate with your program. Keep the end in sight, set high expectations and plan to spend a significant amount of time working hard to achieve your goals.

“**The leadership program at Winona State, in particular, engages these passionate individuals in critical conversations and research that enriches experience and understanding.**” - Emily Lueck

**Adam Hanson** - The graduate student experience affects each person in a different way. Before starting the program, graduate students need to be aware of scheduling and academic demands of graduate level work. Being able to balance academic work, a career, and a personal life is challenging. Also, finding the right time to take classes that fit into a daily schedule adds to this. These factors alone could deter someone from going back to school for a master’s degree. Graduate students need to think about experiences that are gained when in the program and ones that will be beneficial in future endeavors. Being a graduate student is an opportunity that not everyone gets, and because of that, there needs to be a 100% commitment to the program. The challenges of being in a graduate program are minimal compared to the many rewards gained. Because of this, many are grateful and will not take the opportunity for granted. When finished, a graduate student will have obtained knowledge and skills that will hopefully lead to personal success.

**Alex Howell** - Winona State University’s Organizational Leadership in Education Master’s program offers wonderful learning experience for graduate students. Flexibility of evening classes and learning with technology leaves time for graduate students to balance professional careers and family life with learning. Classes challenge graduate students in a way that prepares new leaders to think about future opportunities. Knowledgeable faculty provides students with real-life situations that add value to the learning. One thing to keep in mind is the amount of time needed to be successful in the graduate level program. This level of instruction is not meant to be easy, but by planning and working together with people around you, future leaders will be well prepared for leadership challenges.

**Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick** - Graduate studies allow students to explore more deeply subject matter that is truly inspiring. Whether it is building on an undergraduate degree, or seeking to gain skills for an already established career, the pursuit of learning at a graduate level is extremely rewarding. From a query that stimulates research, skills are achieved to write from an academic perspective, communication is enhanced, leadership traits are developed, and simultaneously, a heightened sense of self-esteem and humility can be gained. Seeking a graduate degree through Winona State University has been one of the best goals I have ever pursued.

“**Once acquired, education cannot be taken away or diminished.**” - Claire Exley
Emily Lueck - Graduate studies are entirely different than those at the undergraduate level. Students are among other working professionals with an extreme passion and drive towards specialized success and professional development. Collaboration among like-minded individuals with diverse experiences allows for unique learning opportunities. The leadership program at Winona State in particular engages these passionate individuals in critical conversations and research that enriches experience and understanding. While the coursework is rigorous and wide ranging, it is also flexible and applicable in developing skills and dispositions necessary to be an effective and socially responsible leader in an ever-changing global community. These leaders are eager and motivated to create positive changes in education, athletics, business, and other far-reaching organizations.

Andrew Pierskalla - “Getting in the Groove” is a phrase that accurately captures the graduate student experience. Throughout shared discussions within graduate classes, learning grooves form and develop. Students hail from differing backgrounds and situations. Some graduate students are recent undergraduate degree earners and are focused on setting a new bar of excellence within graduate-level work. Other graduate students frequent the class offerings from a wide variety of locations nightly. Graduate students worry about the technology that is relied on each evening and experience familiar and unfamiliar surroundings. Further, there are graduate students who journey nightly, to sit in front of a room of strangers that will soon become colleagues, to better advance career ambitions and gain valuable networking opportunities. Getting in the groove is different for each graduate student, namely classroom expectations, conquering technology, and fitting in time for homework into an already packed life with work and family obligations. As the weeks seem to fly by, graduate students start to find the groove with the external factors that face a graduate student. The groove itself will look different to each student, yet the groove is what will allow students to find the success so desired as the journey of graduate school commences.

Eva Pitsch - One of the most marked characteristics of the graduate school experience is choice. At the Bachelor’s level, there are a wide variety of classes and college is nearly all consuming. In the liberal arts model, students have to select a major, but most of the focus is on gaining a well-rounded education. By the time one reaches graduate school, an individual’s professional and personal life has likely become more complex. Graduate students also have a wealth of experiences, gleaned through study, travel, and life in general, that have nudged them towards this important decision to return to school. Although many parents and teachers encourage students to pursue an undergraduate degree, graduate school can be a deeply personal choice. Each student comes to graduate school by taking a unique path to arrive at that decision, making it a rich educational environment.

“The skills acquired here will continue to guide the path to lifelong learning.” - Katie Donlin

“Knowledgeable faculty provides students with real-life situations that add value to the learning.” – Alex Howell
LEADERS IN ACTION

Alumni Spotlights – Leadership Education

Valarie Peterson (Bere) ’17

MS Organizational Leadership
Employer: Minnesota State College-Southeast, Radiography Program Director

What tools did the program provide to make you a more effective leader? Communication; most importantly in the area of communication, I learned to be a better listener and pay attention to the verbal and non-verbal communication as I interact with others.

Group Work: we did a lot of group work in the program and I learned to be patient with others when working in a group. We each have different ways of approaching our work and I found it important to respect that in the individuals I worked with on projects.

Systems Thinking: This has helped me not only in leading, but in everything I do. It is important to look at an entire system when making decisions rather than one small piece of the big puzzle. When negotiating in any situation I now understand you need to give a little in some areas to get what you want in other areas.

What did you most enjoy about your experience in the program? My favorite part about the program was when I was able to participate in the New Zealand Travel study. I took so much from that experience. It was a great way to understand systems thinking and apply it. Not just in the Marine Strategy we studied, but in many of the experiences we encountered. This shows that an interactive learning experience can be far more valuable than sitting in a classroom or in front of a computer.

What are your career goals and how has your graduate experience aided you in achieving those goals? My career goals are to be a better instructor and to manage the accreditation of the Radiography Program. The graduate experience at Winona State University helps me in reaching those career goals by the examples given to me by the professors in the program and learning the ability to be organized. In addition, I have learned that prioritizing tasks leads to success. There is great value in continuous self-growth.

Christopher J. Hahn ’17

MS Professional Leadership Studies
Employer: CreateMe Marketing, Owner / Engagement & Business Development

What tools did the program provide to make you a more effective leader? The LDRS program core courses were valuable. Communications, Systems Thinking, Change Leadership, and Scholarship are all tools that I utilize on a daily basis in different areas of my consulting work. They enable me to continuously update and apply information that I gather from clients, co-workers, volunteer activities and networking. These core courses have also given me a larger skill-set that I can utilize to better evaluate issues from multiple perspectives to gain a better understanding of the “big picture”

What did you most enjoy about your experience in the program? The multiple opportunities to engage not only with classmates, but other professionals in my area of study on both a national and international basis. Conferences, in-class presentations, and scholarship all contribute to my ongoing personal development on a daily basis. It has also given me a diverse and rich network of people and resources that I can leverage in both my career and personal development.

What are your career goals and how has your graduate experience aided you in achieving those goals? I want to be part of an organization where I can use my business and relationship building background to better the organization, and give back to the community as a whole. I want to continue my education, and my experience as a graduate student has allowed me to identify several areas of study that I am passionate about, and that would be meaningful to explore as part of my doctoral degree program.

“Conferences, in-class presentations, and scholarship all contribute to my ongoing personal development on a daily basis.” – Christopher J. Hahn
**Danica Johnson ’18**

MS Sports Management

Employer: Winona State University, Athletic Academic Advisor

**What tools did the program provide to make you a more effective leader?** The program taught me a lot about myself as a leader. It taught me how to best interact with others that have a different leadership style and that leadership is a continual learning process. Additionally, I learned how to handle myself in a crisis situation if one arises, and that communication is a key factor in organizational success and retention. Lastly, I was taught to critically analyze a problem for all possible solutions. Sometimes the most obvious/simple solution isn’t the right solution for the organization.

**What did you most enjoy about your experience in the program?** I really enjoyed getting to know my classmates. I feel I grew a lot as a leader through the conversations I had with my fellow leaders. They would challenge my reasoning and push me to think outside the box. I also learned to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

**What are your career goals and how has your graduate experience aided you in achieving those goals?** My career goals are pretty simple. I want to go to work every day and enjoy my job. Furthermore, I want to work in college athletics, and most positions at that level require a Master’s degree. Having a Master’s degree in Leadership Education will continue to help me advance in college athletics, not only professionally, but as a leader too.

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**Jenna Long ’17**

MS Organizational Leadership

Employer: Minnesota State University-Moorhead, Academic Advisor/Student Relations Coordinator

**What tools did the program provide to make you a more effective leader?** The program really deepened my ability to understand and lead through organizational changes. In the end, everything boils down to proper communication and finding all sides of a story to make informed decisions.

**What did you most enjoy about your experience in the program?** I most enjoyed getting to know my classmates in the program. It was a lot of fun to be in classes with folks from higher education, K-12, athletics, health care, non-profit, and for-profit sectors. In most programs, it seems like there’s a lot less diversity in student professional experiences, so I appreciated that a lot.

**What are your career goals and how has your graduate experience aided you in achieving those goals?** My current career goals are focused on creating a fulfilling career in student affairs and enrollment management. I’ve recently moved from undergraduate admissions to academic advising and retention work, which has been a wonderful shift. My program encouraged me to form deeper connections with influencers on campus and to ask better questions. Overall, the program has given me more confidence to be an involved professional in the workplace.
Tracy Hale currently serves as the Associate Director of Alumni Relations at Winona State University (WSU). She began taking classes in the Organizational Leadership program in May of 2017. Studying how to move groups or organizations through change has been one of the most beneficial skills she has used from her classes so far. In addition, working on stronger communication skills and how to work with other people’s strengths after using the Strengths Finder tool is something that she applies to her everyday life. The skills and traits that are taught in the Organizational Leadership program at WSU allow her to apply her learning immediately into her personal and professional life. This has developed her into a more effective and well-rounded leader. Her opportunity to work with alumni all over the United States is one way that she utilizes her communication skills in order to share the mission and vision of WSU. Developing relationships with the alumni and sharing their love for WSU is her favorite part of her job.

Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick is often found in front of groups or making an impression through her teaching and design. Being in a leadership role however, has not always felt comfortable to Kelly. She explains, “Without adequate education, I was unsure of myself and unable to step forward to take on challenges I felt most passionate about.” Now, having spent time with non-profits, leading neighborhood projects and partnering with the Rochester Public Library to prepare for a Seed Library opening in February 2019, Kelly rarely feels insecure about her endeavors. “Knowledge is a wonderful thing. It can elevate one from a place of insecurity to a place of strength.” Graduate research on the effects of leadership on local food security and the ecological impacts of applied design mechanisms have increased Kelly’s knowledge in relation to real-life experiences. By integrating her academic studies into her work, she is now a tour-de-force creating lasting change to help many in her community.

Andy Pierskalla is a high school football coach at Osseo Senior High School in Osseo, Minnesota. As a high school football coach, he wears many hats. He is part counselor, coach, dad, and teacher at the same time. To balance the dynamic juggling act, he must build relationships with his athletes. He spends countless hours listening to them and ensuring that they have a safe place to sound off their steam. He also listens carefully for problems at home, school, or in their relationships. His success as a leader of young men can be attributed partially to the tool of listening. Building relationships is more than just listening. Often he is the only disciplinarian in their lives, so it is his role to transform into that of parent as well. This task of holding athletes to high standards and expectations goes beyond the field. It also includes school, home, and life after high school. For Andy, it’s a difficult task to be a parent and a school official, but like many of the current coaching leaders today, he’s not doing this for the money. He does his duties because he truly grows to love the athletes and wants them to succeed. In his role it is not always sunshine and rainbows; difficult conversations must be had to ensure that growth is obtained by the athlete in their personal lives. In addition to all these responsibilities he devotes countless hours of time to film study. He is always attempting to call the perfect play and manages the position coaches that are under his direct report.