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Professor Stacey Hills Connected With Students

By Nadiah Johari



Executives and professors often talk of having an open-door policy. Stacy Hills' open door policy doesn't have to be stated. Anyone who passes by her office can see it.

Even though it's not a huge office, it is packed with students all the time. Some are working with Stacey, other students have sought her out for guidance, and still others appear to be just there because – well, that's the place to be. It could make one wonder what makes that little piece of real estate so popular.

In December, however, students will no longer have the opportunity to “hang out” in her office since she will be moving to Vermont to continue teaching at Southern Vermont College, a small private liberal arts school. She will be chairing the business division and building a marketing program since there is no marketing major at the school.

She will be missed. Huntsman Scholars Carlie Morrison and Becky Kelley said that Dr. Hills consistently shows that her interest in students goes beyond academics.

Becky, who recently graduated from the Huntsman School of Business after majoring in human resources and international business, used to take classes from Dr. Hills and was a peer mentor for Dr. Hills' Connections class last year.

“While it's great to get to know professors, I didn't think that they cared to get to know students as much,” Becky said. “My experience with Stacey really challenged that assumption.”

Carlie and Dr. Hills went on a trip to Europe with other Huntsman Scholars. Before leaving for Europe, Carlie, who is a senior in marketing and economics, said she was going through a difficult time and yet she didn't share with anyone the nature of her challenges. When she got back, she confided in Dr. Hills.

“After that, I knew I could be comfortable going to Stacey for anything that I needed,” Carlie said, “It's like being able to discuss your problems with a really close friend and know that you are going to be able to trust what she says.”

When she was a freshman, Carlie did not realize just how open an open-door policy could be. Now she is one of the many students who spends a lot of time in Dr. Hills' office. In fact, Carlie, who will be heading to the east coast after graduation, said she was happy that Dr. Hills' door will still be open to her, even though Dr. Hills is moving away.

"The open-door policy that she has here at her office has extended halfway across the country," Carlie said.

Dr. Hills earned her bachelor's degree in economics and international studies from Russell Sage College in 1995. She then pursued her MBA in new product development at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute before receiving her doctorate in marketing from the same institution.

Prior to coming to USU in 2002, Dr. Hills worked as a statistician in several organizations including the New York State Department of Labor and General Electric. While in graduate school, her interest in marketing was sparked when she learned that her experience in economic modeling and decision-making could be applied to business problems.

In February 2001 Dr. Hills attended a conference to present a paper. There, she met Lisa Troy who was, at the time, an assistant professor in marketing at USU. A few months after the conference, Dr. Troy suggested Dr. Hills apply for her job at USU since Dr. Troy was leaving Utah to go work in Texas. Dr. Hills, who said she was ready for a career move at that time, applied for the job and was hired. She moved her family from upstate New York to Utah.

She said the biggest adjustment that she had to make when she started living in Utah was getting used to people being nice.

"You walk into the store and people would ask you how you were, they smile at you, and make eye contact," she said. "I wasn't used to that. When someone looks at you in New York, you start being suspicious."

When she graduated and received her doctorate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 2004, she was unable to go back for her commencement ceremony because she was already working at the Huntsman School of Business and was expected to attend USU's ceremonies at the same time. Her colleagues in the Department of Management didn't want her to miss out so they threw her a graduation party, she said.

"I am not sure that in 10 years I have seen her without a smile or otherwise happy disposition," said Vijay Kannan, professor of operations management and executive director of international programs. "She is one of the few faculty members who will never say no – not sure if this is a good or bad thing!"

Dr. Kannan said Dr. Hills has demonstrated a sincere and total commitment to her students and brings a genuine enthusiasm and energy to her job. In addition, he said Dr. Hills is always willing to go the extra mile, whether it be in terms of teaching assignments, providing informal help when asked, or otherwise being a team player.

"Stacey will definitely be missed and is, in a lot of ways, given what she has been asked to do over the last several years, irreplaceable," he said.

Dr. Hills said there is a strong sense of community at the Huntsman School of Business and hopes that as the school progresses, that continues to remain as one of its strengths. She said she hopes to take the good things she's learned here and bring them to her work at Southern Vermont College.

Dr. Hills lives with her husband and their eight-year-old daughter. Besides traveling and spending time with her family, the self-proclaimed "nerd" said she loves watching Doctor Who.