A Focus on Student Success

USU Jon M. Huntsman School of Business

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A Focus on Student Success

Over the past five years, students in the Huntsman School have won numerous university awards, including USU Man of the Year (three years in a row), Woman of the Year and University Citizenship Award (each twice), Scholar of the Year, and the Bill E. Robins Memorial Award. The USU student body president has come from the Huntsman School three of the past five years. Our students have also received national accolades, including the prestigious Elijah Watt Sells Award to three students over the past two years for top scores on the CPA Exam, and two groups of students have won first place in national MIS competitions.

Huntsman students have gone on to successful careers at Goldman Sachs, Google, GoPro, and graduate programs at Columbia, Yale, and Stanford, and many points in between.

Is there a common denominator of this success? Each student’s journey to success is different, and likely includes some combination of natural ability, outstanding academic performance, engagement in practical experiences, and such individual values and habits of character as initiative and grit in setting and achieving long-term goals. But what can a university do to foster and increase the likelihood that any student can achieve success? Recent research from the Gallup organization and from debates about the role of higher education in preparing students for life after graduation, provide some clues.

This summer, The New Republic published the most read article in that magazine’s history, “Don’t send your kid to the Ivy League,” by William Deresiewicz. In it the author offers a vision of what it takes to move from adolescence to adulthood, and criticizes the U.S. higher education system for creating a culture of box-checking. He argues instead that the role of higher education is to create opportunities for young men and women to build a unique individual self.

The debate around this article was followed by the results of a massive study conducted by the Gallup organization over the course of the last year, examining the linkages between education and long-term success in the workplace and in life.

Gallup asked the question, “What are the things that happen in college that—more than anything else—combine to produce “engaged employees” who thrive in work and in life?” Two things stood out from the responses: “successful students had one or more teachers who were mentors and took a real interest in their aspirations, and they had a practical experience, such as an internship, that was related to what they were learning in school.”

These ideas are driving an increased commitment at the Huntsman School to design pathways of success for each of our students that enable them to create meaningful careers and lives.

A new curriculum

On a recent career exploration trip to New York City, our students listened as a young employee at Bloomingdale’s described her day-to-day responsibilities as the buyer for women’s fragrances for the company. She spoke of hours devoted to market research and business intelligence so that she could understand purchasing trends, of the need to be up-to-date with the latest marketing and promotions techniques to appeal to multi-generational customers, the critical importance of understanding budgets, accounting, and finance, and perhaps most of all, the primacy of collaboration and teamwork. It was clear to our students that there would be few, if any careers that did not require a holistic understanding of business

This reality is informing the effort to restructure our undergraduate core curriculum, the set of courses all Huntsman undergraduates must take in order to graduate. Two of the more significant initiatives of this revision are to infuse the curriculum with critical thinking and communication skills, and to provide a course in Foundations of Business and Leadership that frames the broad field of business and economics in the global economy and sets a culture of rigor.
The Foundations Course is inspired by an effort led by the Aspen Institute’s Business and Society Program. The Huntsman School, along with more than 30 top undergraduate business programs across the country, have joined together to create the Aspen Undergraduate Business Education Consortium, with an aim to answer questions such as: “What kind of new talent do we need in business today? How can we best prepare young citizens to participate in democracy? And how can undergraduate business education best equip students for their roles as both managers and citizens?”

The consortium’s overarching objective is to “explore how business education can do what the liberal arts arguably do best – help students make sense of the world and their place in it, and prepare them to engage responsibly with the life of their times.” In this, our existing Huntsman Scholar Program already provides an outstanding example. In fact, the Aspen Institute lauded the Huntsman Scholar Program at a conference this past summer for creating a model combination of liberal arts and business education.

The curriculum revision is also informed by an effort to create a set of courses that not only provide a means to acquire specific knowledge, to write clearly, and to reason statistically, but to provide a holistic foundation for business education. “Our goal is to set a tone for incoming students right from the start of school that continues throughout all of our required courses and those taken as electives and in fulfillment of the various majors about how we view business education and what we expect of our students in the classroom and outside the classroom,” Dean Douglas Anderson said.

Below: Images from the opening of the FJ Management Center for Student Success on September 11, 2014. This new center is both a physical space and an administrative function designed to advise, mentor, and engage students to build pathways for success. We are deeply appreciative of the partnership with Crystal and Chuck Maggelet for the creation of this center.
PREPARING FOR LIFE BEYOND GRADUATION

The effort to revise our curriculum is one part of our effort to create a framework for student success. The other part is to provide a set of career development experiences and opportunities that complement excellence in the classroom.

Crystal Maggelet, CEO of FJ Management and one of our most distinguished alumnae, joins us in this effort. Preparing the young men and women of our community for meaningful careers is very important to her. "I had such a great time at Utah State, and feel strongly about preparing students for life beyond college. When an opportunity arose where we could help students from our community, we were glad to be able to help," she noted.

With her inspiration and financial support, we have created the FJ Management Center for Student Success, which is both a physical space and a team of advisers and mentors. The concept (and now the reality) for the FJM Center is to bring together in one space and under one organizational structure undergraduate advising, including a pilot peer-to-peer mentor program; career development, with six new employer interview rooms; student engagement through clubs and organizations; and scholarship opportunities—all to provide a seamless means for students to access the great resources of the Huntsman School.
Brandon Busteed, the executive director of Gallup’s education division who conducted the survey examining linkages between education and long term success, noted that “We think it’s a big deal” where we go to college. “But we found no difference in terms of type of institution you went to — public, private, selective or not — in long-term outcomes. How you got your college education mattered most.”

The Gallup findings were substantiated by a study conducted by the federal government to review education-to-work programs. According to Byron Auguste, a White House deputy national economic adviser, “In successful programs, students got as much applied, hands-on experience as possible, whether in a classroom or on a job site. And students or working learners got a lot of coaching and guidance to understand how to trace a direct path between their training today and careers tomorrow.”

In addition to the undergraduate staff advising currently offered to all Huntsman majors, programs such as the existing faculty mentoring in the School of Accountancy and a pilot student-mentoring program may be expanded across the Huntsman School. These and a planned alumni mentoring program could have a significant impact on how prepared Huntsman students will be for life beyond graduation.

Over time, the FJM Center will provide the infrastructure to bring together the entire Huntsman Community of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends to inform, to educate, to mentor students and create a mechanism to help students navigate their academic careers at Utah State while also helping them develop pathways to career success. “Students will find caring mentors and informed advisers who can link them with the opportunities that together with their own raw talent, hard work, ambition, and integrity will produce extraordinary results,” noted Dean Anderson.

The purpose of the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business is to be a career accelerator for our students and an engine of growth for our community, our state, the nation, and the world. The effort at curricular reform and career development is part and parcel of meeting that purpose, but larger questions of the role of business education and how we go about preparing students to lead lives of meaning are always the key drivers to understanding what student success really means.

The writer David Brooks said recently that there are three distinct purposes for a university: a commercial purpose (starting a career), a cognitive purpose (acquiring information and learning how to think) and a moral purpose (building an integrated self).

Our aspiration to create a world-class undergraduate program—to “produce students who can compete with the best and the brightest anywhere in the world”—in the words of Jon M. Huntsman, must combine all three purposes of a university, providing our students the means to begin careers, to learn how to think, and to build a whole self. That defines student success, and that is our focus.

Dave Patel serves as Associate Dean for Student & External Affairs at the Huntsman School.

Student Success Stories
As a freshman I never imagined that my choice to come to the Huntsman School would provide me with unparalleled opportunities to learn about business while traveling the world as an undergraduate. After only one year, I traveled to Vietnam, China, and Korea with the Go Global Program, where I experienced incredible business visits to places like the Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange and Nike, as well as cultural visits to places like the Terra Cotta Warriors and the Great Wall of China. As a candidate in the Huntsman Scholar Program, I developed confidence and critical thinking skills that assisted me as I led three expeditions of college students to rural villages in India to teach English to children, while also developing a partnership with an Indian organization to open a school for underprivileged girls. While in Europe with the Huntsman Scholar Program, I not only visited organizations like the WTO, the UN, and the EU, but I also developed deep relationships with my 25 classmates—incredible people with great careers ahead of them. While completing a microfinance internship in Ghana with the SEED Program, I discovered my love for accounting, which generated my pursuit of an accounting degree. Throughout all of these experiences, Dr. Shannon Peterson has provided a constant stream of encouragement with daily pep talks and support to pursue my interests, no matter how far out of reach they seem. In addition, Professor Bonnie Villarreal has taken me under her wing to prepare me well to enter the accounting world. The exposure I have gained as a student provides me with a competitive edge in seeking a career with companies for whom I never would have dreamed of working before coming to the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business.

JILL AOKI
Accounting, Economics, & Finance, ’12, MAcc, ’13  
2012 Valedictorian

When I applied to USU, I never would have thought that I would travel the globe and meet with leaders from Microsoft and the WTO; share meals with a CEO of a leading professional services firm, a TIME magazine person of the year, and a billionaire philanthropist; develop a giant Plinko board, film a candy factory, and create t-shirts for recruiting efforts; generate business plans for marshmallow treats and mobile apps; build a network of peers who are becoming CEOs, economic leaders, and PhDs; and have numerous other unforgettable experiences all made possible from the Huntsman School. The school offered me so many opportunities through its programs, but I also had support and encouragement. On any given day, I could talk to any one of my professors or the staff at the school about anything, whether it was about coursework, career plans, or even vacations! They were obviously interested in my success. For instance, I remember conversations with Dr. Larry Walther where he would state, “When you get the Sells Award…” It was never a matter of if—always when. He constantly encouraged me. I saw my professors give up evenings and weekends to teach extra study sessions, cook breakfast burritos for teams of volunteers, and introduce students to alumni—all so students could dare mighty things and pursue their dreams. I learned more than textbook knowledge in my time at the Huntsman School; I learned networking, leadership, creativity, work ethic, and interpersonal skills that will continue to benefit me for years to come. I am proud to be a Huntsman alum.

Editors note: Jill Aoki was recognized as one of the top accounting students in the nation when she was awarded the 2012 Elijah Watt Sells Award. She and fellow Huntsman student Anthony Lemon were two of 39 award recipients, out of 92,000 who took the CPA Exam that year.

WENDY BOSSHARDT

Psychology and Marketing, ’15  
Huntsman Scholar Co-President

My experience as a Huntsman student has been pivotal in allowing me to find potential I didn’t know I had. I took my first business class with no intention of having a business degree; I just needed a class to round out my semester credit load. Taking that class was the best decision I could have made. Because of that class, I added another major and have completely changed my career goals. Faculty members became invested in me and I was able to take ownership of my education. After completing the Huntsman Scholar semester, I came to understand in a real sense how much I didn’t know and how many opportunities and resources there are designed to help students. Four months later, I applied and was accepted to the Insight Dubai 2014 conference held in the United Arab Emirates. Due to my experience at the conference, I chose to collaborate with Dr. Shannon Peterson on my honors thesis, which looked into cross-cultural leadership among women. Using the network I had gained through Huntsman Scholars, Dubai, and career exploration trips helped place me in a competitive position to be selected for the Small Education and Enterprise Development (SEED) internship in Ghana. The Huntsman School invests in its students, not only through classroom discussions, but
also by giving us real world experiences. I may have initially taken a business class to fill my schedule, but in actuality, I have found a place I can call home. I am proud to call myself a Huntsman student!

DOUG FIEFIA

Marketing, '15
Student Body President 2013-14, 2014-15

Although I originally came to USU to play football, I fell in love with the academics and student involvement opportunities at USU. I have been involved with the Business Council, Student Alumni Association, Multicultural Recruitment Council, A-Team, USU Rugby Club, and joined Psi Sigma Phi fraternity. In 2013 and 2014 I was elected Student Body President of the Utah State University Student Association (USUSA) and have loved serving our student body.

As well as being involved in these amazing opportunities, I have truly come to appreciate all I have learned inside the classroom. It was the Huntsman School of Business that helped me believe in myself. My professors and mentors there have pushed me to work harder, smarter, and better. Their faith in me has helped me to see my potential and truly believe that I can accomplish anything I put my mind to.