

SVSU receives \$3 million federal grant to boost student success and retention

SVSU is poised to accelerate improvement in student retention and graduation rates after receiving a \$3 million, five-year Title III grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Only seven universities in the nation were selected to receive funding.

"We were chosen through a highly competitive process," said President Donald Bachand. "I really appreciate the efforts of this dedicated team that developed our application. It is gratifying to see their hard work rewarded.

"Our students are the real winners here, because the increased services we will be able to provide them will have very real results. We will deliver

improved resources for more students to meet their math requirements. We will increase the number of scholarships we are able to provide. We will implement a summer transition program to help arriving freshmen. All of this will support the academic success of our determined students and help them complete degrees more quickly.

"Having more students graduate in a timely fashion is good for them; it's good for us; it's good for the state, and it's good for the employers that hire our graduates."

SVSU's retention rate has risen for seven consecutive years to 74.4 percent this fall, an increase from 68 percent

in 2011. Higher retention rates generally result in higher graduation rates in future years.

Internal data shows that SVSU students who utilize available resources such as the tutoring services in the Center for Academic Achievement report higher grades and are more likely to remain enrolled. Grant funds will be used to strengthen existing programs and add new initiatives in targeted areas.

The five-year award will provide funding in five key areas:

- Updating courses and offering supplemental instruction and embedded tutoring for students who need support to be successful in

college-level math. This will promote effective teaching and learning designed to increase student retention.

- Developing online educational materials to reduce textbook costs in general education courses. Funding will also support an instructional designer and internal grants to implement innovative curriculum in basic skills and general education.

- Hiring a transition coordinator to serve incoming freshmen and hosting a four-day summer bridge program for cohorts of students to aid their transition to college. Such programs have been shown to improve student success.

- Using technology to create a student analytics and business intelligence framework to improve student services and communication, including individualized targeted student notification to increase student retention and success rates for all students.

- Expanding scholarship opportunities for students. The grant provides \$600,000 that will be matched through private donations to the SVSU Foundation to establish a \$1.2 million endowment to award scholarships to students as a retention tool to help offset their financial burden.

The funds come from the U.S. Department of Education's Strengthening Institutions Program, which provides grants to eligible institutions to help them become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the institution's academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

FIRST Robotics scholarship recipients bring their work ethic and talents to SVSU

Three students have been awarded \$4,000 scholarships after competing on FIRST Robotics teams in high school.

Bryce Stevens, Waliul Matin and Kiley Mowry — now all SVSU freshmen — learned about the scholarship opportunity while competing with 4,800 other students in the FIRST Robotics state championship hosted on SVSU's campus April 12-15.

All three recipients see the scholarship as a chance to advance more easily beyond the challenges — academic, financial or social — that college freshmen sometimes endure.

The FIRST Robotics Competition combines the excitement of a varsity sport with hands-on training in science and technology to help high school students discover how rewarding a career in engineering or technology



Waliul Matin



Kiley Mowry



Bryce Stevens

can be. Remote-controlled robots, piloted by students and cheered on by thousands of screaming fans, go head-to-head in short games on the floor of a sports arena, battling it out to earn points during a two-minute round.

An electrical engineering major, Matin estimates he built about 40 percent of his team's competition robot. At SVSU he continues to pursue his love of robotics, and after graduation hopes to land his dream job with NASA.

A mechanical engineering major, Mowry said that the FIRST Robotics Scholarship offers valuable support for

students, giving them more opportunities to pursue what interests them.

She has joined SVSU's Cardinal Formula Racing team, which twice (2008 and 2014) has built the fastest college race car in the world.

"The scholarship has helped take pressure off me as a student not just financially, but also it helps to know that there are people that believe in me," she said.

As for Stevens, he is using the money he received from the scholarship to pursue his aspirations of becoming a mentor to other students.

Poonam Dharam

Assistant Professor of Computer Science & Information Systems

Preventing the spread of viruses runs in the family for Poonam Dharam, associate professor of computer science & information systems, who does research on online security systems. Her father, the owner of an agricultural company, helps farmers defend against the many diseases that can harm their crops. “There is a common connection there,” Dharam said. “We like to share ideas, from his field to mine and from mine to his.”

Dharam’s particular interest has been spreading across the headlines in recent years after high-profile computer hacking campaigns have companies, organizations, agencies and everyday people fearing for the security of online information.

Dharam specifically is studying the potentially malicious traffic that can penetrate online security systems. She hopes to lead an effort that results in solutions to help fortify the private information stored in digital spaces. Dharam is applying for support grants and laying the groundwork for a research project that she anticipates will involve collaborating with both colleagues and students.

For Dharam, the work extends beyond pure academic curiosity. It sometimes can follow her home. Members of her family interact with the very same online security systems she knows are vulnerable to hacking.

“My husband is a big fan of phone apps,” she said. “He installed a bank account app. I try to share articles with him to show him the dangers. He did download a security app, but I’m not totally convinced it’s enough.”

Dharam’s interest in the digital world started innocently enough. In the early 1990s, her father brought home the family’s first desktop computer when she was 7. Once she booted up the hard drive and discovered Microsoft Paint, it wasn’t long before she was using her computer mouse to sketch Mickey Mouse caricatures. “I loved drawing Disney characters,” she said. “That’s how it started.”

Soon Dharam enrolled in computer hardware courses where she learned how to fix her first motherboard.

“Since then, I really have had an interest in understanding how networks work,” she says. “I wanted to get into computer science and learn more about it.”

Once she pursued an education in computer engineering, she became particularly interested in network security and coding. While studying for her Ph.D. at the University of Memphis, a mentor encouraged her to pursue research in the field. Then, as her career in higher education began, she taught courses related to computer information security. Dharam attended conferences relating to online security. Her growing wealth of knowledge on the subject inspired her to pursue it in research.

Another regular source of information: Her father.

“He’s always sharing articles with me and telling me what he’s learned,” she said. “It’s pretty amazing. We both have come a long way since MS Paint.”



Debbie Newton

Audio Visual West Office Coordinator • September Staff Member of the Month

At SVSU, Debbie Newton is well-versed in technology. As the audio visual west office coordinator for Information Technology Services, her work involves organizing the people who problem-solve glitches with high-tech gadgetry on campus.

Away from the office, she prefers the simpler things in life. Although she owns a smart tablet, she spends free time at the local library, surfing for the sort of suspense novels she can browse by leafing through non-digital pages. And, although she carries a cell phone, she has yet to purchase a smartphone with all of the amenities attached to the latest brands. "I'm not a technology geek," she says, "but I do help people with their technology."

Newton began as a temp in Admissions in 1986. She was hired full time as a payroll clerk in the Controller's Office in 1987. Her dedication to the job was put to the test less than one year later when she went into labor while processing the week's payroll checks. "I had to finish so people would get paid," she said. "I was keeping track of my contractions."

When a supervisor became nervous about the receding length of the contractions, Newton was told to leave work. Fortunately for her coworkers, she was able to finish her work before she exited the office. Five hours later, she gave birth to her second child, Paul Newton, who now earns his own paycheck from SVSU as a custodian.

Debbie bounced between several other positions before moving into a much earlier version of her current position in 1993.

Technology changed substantially at SVSU in the ensuing 22 years, meaning her work changed too.

"Back then, the job involved getting 16-millimeter film and increasing the VHS technology," she said. "We had three classrooms with technology, which meant they had a projector with a VCR. Now we have 200 rooms with all sorts of technology, and we're upgrading everything to Blu-Ray."

What has not changed is Newton's role in helping find solutions to tech-related issues. She typically fields phone calls for help from faculty, staff and students on issues relating to computers, WiFi and projectors.

One day, a student in Pine Grove Apartments may have issues connecting a Sony Playstation to the campus WiFi. The next day, a smart projector in Curtiss Hall could be on the fritz. The following day, a more campus-wide problem could present itself, as was the case earlier this month at SVSU when all Windows computers failed to work properly for a time.

"Once I got my computer running, I started to see all of the tickets asking for help," she says. "When people started calling, I thought, 'Oh, there must be something going on here.'"

Occasionally, the solution is simple. "The safest fix, I always say is, 'Shut it off and turn it back on,'" Newton says. "Sometimes that works. Sometimes the problem needs more attention than that."

I enjoy working with the students, faculty and staff, and I enjoy helping people," Newton said. "I enjoy my co-workers. That always makes it easier to come to work every day."



Professional Profile

• **James Bowers**, associate professor of criminal justice, **Joni Boye-Beaman**, professor of sociology, SVSU student Jessica Hacker and Dave Kendzioriski of the Saginaw Police Department presented at the Midwest Criminal Justice Association Conference, Sept. 29 in Chicago. The presentation, titled "Measuring the Needs of Crime Victims," was a collaborative project between the Saginaw Police Department and SVSU, and was funded by an International Association of Chiefs of Police grant (Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims).

• **Monika Dix**, associate professor of modern foreign languages, presented a paper entitled "Japanese + STEM: Innovative Design Thinking for 21st Century Learners" at the annual conference of the Michigan World Language Association, Oct. 13 in Lansing.

• **Rachel Florence-Spaetzel**, director of orientation programs, will deliver an invited presentation titled "The Best of Both Worlds: Hybrid Orientation for Transfer Students" at NODA: Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education Annual Conference, Nov. 5-8 in Louisville, Kentucky.

• **Julie Foss**, associate professor of modern foreign languages, presented the sessions "Creating Cultural Competence Through #GlobalTakeover" with SVSU student Sandra Lamarche, "Building Career-Readiness Through Language" with Irma Torres of Oakland Schools and Emily Spinelli of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, and "MIWLA Language Policy and Advocacy Update" at the 53rd annual conference of the Michigan World Language Association, Oct. 12-13 in Lansing. Foss serves on the MIWLA Executive Board as public affairs liaison.

• **Eric Gardner**, professor of English, was one of four invited speakers at the Re-Envisioning Reconstruction Symposium, Oct. 6 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His lecture was titled "African American Literary Reconstructions and the 'Propaganda of History.'"

• **Chris Giroux**, associate professor of English, and **Helen Raica-Klotz**, director of the Writing Center/director of the Saginaw Bay Writing Project, presented "Locally Grown, Locally Produced: A Farmer's Market Model of a Community Writing Center" at the Conference on Community Writing, Oct. 21 in Boulder, Colorado.

• **Bradley Herzog**, associate professor of rhetoric & professional writing; **Blake Johnson**, professor of art; **John Lowry**, associate professor of kinesiology; and **Izabela Szymanska**, assistant professor of management, presented "Cardinal Solutions: Powerful Learning, Community Engagement, and Economic Development" at the Lily Conference, Oct. 18-20 in Traverse City.

• **Susan L. Hillman**, professor of teacher education, collaborated with Signe Kastberg (Purdue University) and Alyson Lischka (Middle Tennessee State University) to present "Factors that impact MTE's written feedback practice: Improving practice through inquiry" at the annual meeting of the Association for Mathematics Teacher Educators, Feb. 8-10 in Houston.

• As a Fulbright Scholar in Niger during the 2016-2017 academic year, **Sara Beth Keough**, professor of geography, facilitated contributions from her students to the U.S.-based Climate Stories Project. Five students' stories were the first from the African continent to be accepted and published on the Project's website. The stories can be viewed at climatestoriesproject.org/africaclimatestories.html.

• **David Nichols**, associate professor of philosophy, conducted sabbatical research this semester at the Jaspers Haus-Gesellschaft in Oldenburg, Germany. He gave two presentations while in residence: "Van Gogh in Tragic Portraiture: Jaspers, Bataille, Heidegger," and "The Last Portrait: The Death Mask as Cipher." Also, Lexington Books published Nichols' book, *Van Gogh among the Philosophers: Thinking, Painting, Being*, for which he is editor and contributor.

• **Aricka Schweitzer**, assistant professor of occupational therapy, presented "Active Student Engagement Group Presentations" at the Lily Conference, Oct. 18-20 in Traverse City.

• **Jay Scott**, associate professor of biology, co-authored "Endothelial CaMKII as a regulator of eNOS activity and NO-mediated vasoreactivity," which recently was published in *PLOS One*.

• **Gail E. Sype**, associate professor of management, had a case titled "Is Death a Dying Business? Evaluating the Impact of Social and Economic Changes on the Funeral Home Industry" included in Sage Business Publishing's updated cases that will be published in January 2018.

• **Stephen Taber**, professor of biology, has a manuscript titled "A New Nearctic Species of the Fungus Gnat Genus *Palaeodocasia* Meunier" accepted for publication in *Southwestern Entomologist*.

New Cardinals

• **Kim Lacey**, associate professor of English, welcomed a new baby boy, Fletcher Jeffrey Lacey Cahill (6 lbs., 15 oz., 19.5 in.), Sept. 29.

Condolences

• To **Ashley Blinstrub**, research & assessment librarian, whose father-in-law, Joseph Blinstrub, passed away Sunday, Oct. 1.

• To the family of **Chad Dewey**, lecturer of computer science & information systems, who passed away Sept. 29.

• To **Ruth Sawyers**, assistant professor of English, whose mother-in-law, Marjorie Sawyers, passed away Sept. 13.

Briefly Speaking

• Faculty and staff may present the diploma jacket to graduating members of their immediate family during the Commencement ceremonies at 7:30 p.m., Friday, Dec. 15, and/or at 11 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 16. Please call Jim Dwyer at ext. 4209 to make arrangements.

The Interior is published on the last Tuesday of each month for faculty and staff at SVSU. University departments sponsoring activities or events listed in the Interior will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities when contacted at least three days in advance.

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