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Voices Defining The Cals Student Experience

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he student experience in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences connects what happens inside and outside the classroom. The two are mutually supportive and synergistic.

Students’ out-of-classroom activities are as instilled in the college’s culture as the land-grant philosophy. Even Iowa State’s motto, “Science with Practice,” reflects how our students take what they’ve learned in class and make the coursework more relevant to them.

Some parts of our student experience, like student clubs, student council and Alpha Zeta, have been fixtures for a century or more. My wife’s grandfather, a 1912 animal husbandry grad, has fascinated me with the story of his Alpha Zeta induction. Traveling abroad goes back more than 50 years. Today, students study on every continent.

In the past 15 years, learning communities have become an important way for new students to become part of the ISU community quickly and easily. About 90 percent of the college’s freshmen are members of a learning community. Learning communities set the stage for what students can accomplish in their time at ISU. Plus, the students enjoy their experiences. One student commented on a learning community evaluation, “This is the greatest thing mom ever signed me up for!”

We particularly encourage and assist our students in finding internships. In my experience, students returning to campus after completing internships have greater direction and motivation. They bring what they’ve learned back into the classroom so that other students and often instructors can benefit.

As a faculty member, it’s exciting to watch students change their focus from a purely academic one to a professional one. Instead of thinking only about grades, they begin to grasp that what they’re learning will impact how they advise future clients, benefit their communities and solve problems locally and globally. Internships aid them in making this transition. Coincidentally, guess what happens to students’ grades as they progress from an academic focus to a professional one?

With such a breadth of opportunities, another of our college’s strengths comes into play—academic advising. I like to think of our advisers as symphony conductors. They help students blend activities both inside and outside the classroom, where each student’s final college experience is greater than the sum of its parts.

Our student experiences have never been one size fits all or cookie cutter. We strive to provide all students with rich, meaningful, individual and personal experiences that enable them to accomplish more than they believed possible when they entered ISU. That’s our legacy, that’s our future.

We have plenty of evidence of success. For me, the most convincing evidence occurs every year on the second Tuesday in October. That’s the day the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences hosts the largest agricultural career day in the nation. Our great graduates are in great demand!