

distinctive

MODEL OF UNDERGRAD EDUCATION

A closer look at what makes the Defiance College educational model distinctively different

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What is it about a Defiance College experience that sets it apart from other colleges and universities? What is the distinctive Defiance model of undergraduate education?

This edition of the *Defiance College Magazine* begins a multi-issue feature to describe the Defiance model identifying elements already in place or soon to be implemented, that are distinctively DC.

From their first contact with Defiance College, prospective students experience the individual attention that will quickly become second nature during their years at DC. From admissions counselors to coaches to faculty and staff, there is a student-focused common denominator. When visiting campus, most prospective students will meet with a faculty member and/or coach. Nearly all, along with their parents, are met by President Mark C. Gordon in his home where there is casual conversation and often a game of ping-pong. They quickly learn that the “close, personal

develop their own personal strategic plans. As President Gordon explains, “Going to college is a major investment of both time and money. It is very important that students and their parents see the return on their investment that a Defiance College education offers. Individual strategic plans help ensure that the College and each student work together so that each student gets as much as possible out of their four years at DC.” Incoming students this year are meeting with faculty, coaches, administrators, alumni and others to map out the best strategy for each student to achieve his/her goals in college. These plans will outline the progress that each student has selected to focus on during his/her four years in numerous areas – academically, culturally/spiritually/ethically, socially, athletically, and in terms of job preparation. Both the student and the College will assess progress each semester, making modifications as needed.

Throughout its history, Defiance College has offered a strong education in the liberal arts tradition, recognizing the importance of exposing students to knowledge from a wide array of areas. “We believe that students need to be connected to a core of common knowledge that helps define what it is to be an educated person in today’s society,” President Gordon noted in his inaugural speech.

A broad-based, liberal arts education sets the stage for a wide network of connections, those different analytical frameworks learned in classes that cut across many

areas of knowledge. “For instance, a student learns that some of the analytical skills they are learning in chemistry class can also be used to analyze history or writing,” said Gordon.

Those connections can be expanded to athletics as well, Gordon explained. “There is an explicit intellectual component to athletics that we can also make. Students need to realize that the strategic decision-making that they are doing on the athletic field is not unrelated to some of the strategic ways they need to be thinking analytically in other areas.”

Another component of this model, which Gordon hopes to expand, is that of providing hands-on practical training, combining theory and practice. “People sometimes see these as being in conflict with each other ... but one of the best ways to learn theory is to have to apply it through practice,” said the president. Defiance College has been and will continue to be focused on giving students hands-on experience, through a wide range of internships and in-class and extracurricular experiences.

During the current semester, several pilot initiatives have been introduced in which students in business administration and marketing classes are working on specific projects for local businesses. Students in criminal justice, forensic science and digital forensic science majors will have an exciting opportunity to work with the Wayne County (Mich.) Prosecutor’s Office to investigate and potentially reopen the office’s cold cases. Dr. Don Knueve, professor of criminal justice, says that the cold case project has intrigued the students who have been selected to investigate the first case. “The hope is that these students will be able to think outside the box and spot a strategy or fact that was not considered in the original investigation,” he says.

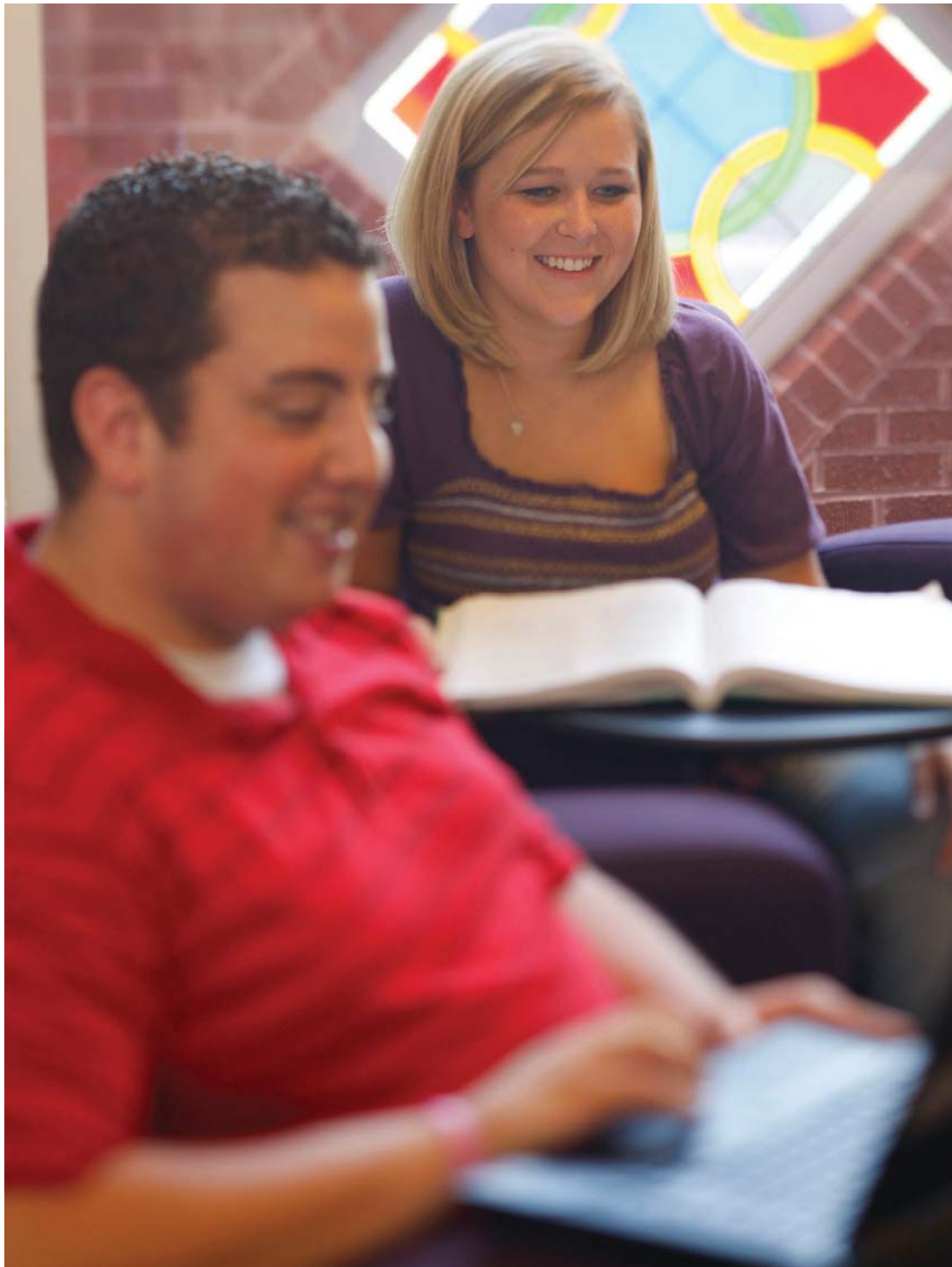
These kinds of experiences not only strengthen students’ understanding of what they are learning in the classroom, they also provide all kinds of contacts and networking opportunities for students as they seek to enter their chosen fields. Defiance College

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-- Mark C. Gordon,
President, Defiance College

attention” touted by many colleges is more than marketing lingo at DC.

But that individual attention is now taking a huge leap forward with the College’s new pilot initiative to work with students to



has always had a wonderful network of faculty and alumni to assist students, and that network is being expanded even further with the addition of national advisory boards for different majors. “These boards,” explained Gordon, “can help us ensure that we are teaching in the classroom the skills that the marketplace is looking to hire. But they also can provide a tremendous networking opportunity for our students at the same time.”

A Defiance College education also incorporates the belief that individuals are part of something bigger, an education that instills

a sense of social responsibility. Toward that end, service plays an important role. With the creation of the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity in 2002, students have unparalleled opportunities to utilize their classroom knowledge with service-based research to improve the human condition.

DC is taking its service focus one step further with the introduction of a new student-run non-profit organization. “This allows DC to expose students to a more sophisticated practice of academic service-learning that has the potential to serve our communities in ways that we haven’t up to

now,” explained McMaster dean Dr. Laurie Worrall, who together with Dr. Buck Buchanan has spearheaded the course creating the student-run non-profit. “With student-run non-profit - which students have named Project 701 for our address at 701 Clinton Street - students will not just be the worker bees, but also the project managers and learning how to run an organization,” said Buchanan. “They will also have to think through business strategies and be in a position of figuring out which projects are worthy of support and which are not,” he added.

Gordon views these latest initiatives as providing a new type of community service and engagement experience in which service is fully integrated into the academic experience, providing both contacts and job experience.

Defiance College has always been and continues to be a school of opportunity, Gordon noted. “We are a school that is more concerned with how prepared students are when they graduate than how prepared they are when they come in. We really focus on nurturing the potential within each individual student. And I think that’s something that is very much the story of many alums who’ve gone on to be so successful.”

A hallmark of a Defiance College experience has always been the mentoring relationships that students develop with faculty, coaches, administrators and staff who share a belief in the possibility of what students can achieve and what they will become. Students are taught the skills they need to get jobs and the ability to think critically and make decisions, while making those ever-important connections to grow into the best persons they can be.

“Through these connections ... we aim to expand for each of our students their own individual opportunities in the context of a life of meaning,” said Gordon. “We are committed not just to opening students’ minds, but also their hearts; and to opening for them doors and opportunities.”

The Defiance model is retooling its strengths for a distinctive 21st century undergraduate education, ultimately preparing students to be successful in the classroom, on the playing field, and in life.

