UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN Superior
Academic Service–Learning

Bridging Curriculum with Community

ANNUAL REPORT
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Academic Service–Learning at UW-Superior

Cleaning up a beach is service.

Studying plant habitat on Wisconsin Point is learning.

Working to protect an important Great Lakes resource by identifying and removing invasive plant species on Wisconsin Point while also developing skills in science and public service is Academic Service–Learning at the University of Wisconsin–Superior.

The recent work by UW-Superior biology students on Wisconsin Point is a good example of what Benjamin Franklin meant when he said, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn.” At UW-Superior, Academic Service–Learning does just that.

Academic Service–Learning (AS–L) is an innovative teaching strategy that provides students with opportunities to deepen their knowledge and learn new skills by matching academic goals to the needs of community organizations or small businesses. Students in an AS–L course apply concepts and skills they learn in the classroom and give that knowledge back to the community. In return, they gain practical experience while serving others.

UW-Superior established its Center for Academic Service–Learning in 2008. Since then, we have built relationships with more than 30 community partners and have assisted more than 500 students in contributing their skills and knowledge to meet community needs. While this adds value to our community, it also is a rewarding learning experience for our students.

In this annual report you will read about partnerships such as the one between Daryl Yankee, executive director of Western Lake Superior Habitat for Humanity, and Dr. Bruce Kibler and the students in his Principles of Management course. Three sections of Dr. Kibler’s course have served and learned with Mr. Yankee by generating a feasibility study for a re-use store and creating a marketing plan to increase awareness and raise funds for the organization’s Brush with Kindness Projects. Students also are working to now implement plans for the re-use store.

We want you to become a partner with the Center for Academic Service–Learning

Are you looking for a business plan for your non-profit organization?

Is there a group of children, youths, or young adults who could use assistance with tutoring or mentoring?

Are there stories of elders or other people you would like to record for your class?

Is your small business looking to have someone bring in fresh marketing ideas?

Join us in connecting the curriculum with the community.

Our professors are looking for on-going opportunities to work with the community. Likewise our community has many ways our campus can add value to their organization. Please contact UW-Superior’s Center for Academic Service–Learning at 715–394–8518 or casl@uwsuper.edu. Or visit the center in Old Main, room 312, on the UW-Superior campus.
Greetings!

Academic Service-Learning, where students bring the subject matter of the classroom into the community to achieve real agency-identified objectives, has been embraced by the University of Wisconsin-Superior. This approach to teaching is a key component in forwarding our liberal arts mission. Research has shown that this “high impact practice” is an extremely effective educational tool and equipping students with skills necessary for a 21st century knowledge-based economy.

Over the past year, 14 faculty members from 14 different disciplines have integrated Academic Service-Learning pedagogy into 26 of their courses. Nearly 450 UW-Superior students have enhanced their education by serving and learning at more than 30 local and national community partner sites.

This report provides information about some of those projects. I hope this information will inspire you to become involved in this innovative pedagogical approach that meets both educational and community needs.

I welcome you to join us in this exciting educational venture. The Center for Academic Service-Learning is always welcoming new community partners, placements, and projects. Academic Service-Learning can be successful with any department, organization, discipline, or small business. Contact our center with your ideas at 715-394-8518 or casl@uwsuper.edu.

Please enjoy reading about what has been accomplished so far and then contact the center to begin the process of including your story in next year’s report!

Sincerely,

Christopher L. Markwood
Interim Chancellor
Fun, games and arithmetic

UW-Superior students discover the best way to learn math is to teach it to someone else

UW-Superior students added some fun and brought a little extra arithmetic practice to the afternoon study program at Superior’s Boys and Girls Club as part of the university’s Academic Service-Learning initiative.

Students in Instructor Heather Kahler’s math class spent several weeks organizing games that helped the 7- to 10-year-old children at the club have fun while practicing their skills in arithmetic.

“I’ve learned that I learn best when I teach a subject to someone else,” Kahler said. “So the students in my class will gain confidence in math and understand the material better when they teach. The Boys and Girls Club students will gain math role models, and they’ll also practice their skills in a different way than just doing worksheets.”

Kahler’s students divided into about 20 small groups. Each group chose games such as “fraction bingo” and “math ball” that are designed to help the youngsters have fun while adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing.

The student groups took turns visiting the Superior Boys and Girls Club during its late afternoon study time for children. The university students led the youngsters through an hour or two of the games, giving them an opportunity to work off some energy, have fun and spend extra time on arithmetic.

“I wasn't quite sure what exactly to expect, but I had a good time and I think the kids did, too, and I'm sure they got something out of it!”
Applying psychology

Students majoring in psychology apply their knowledge to helping local students

Learning about psychology and using that knowledge to help children in an after-school program or to tutor high school students is the goal of Academic Service-Learning through the course “Applied Behavior Analysis.”

Designed primarily for psychology majors, students apply their knowledge of human behavior to make a plan to help encourage better study habits, curb unwanted behavior and modify other unconstructive behaviors.

From learning to tutoring

The UW-Superior students divided their time between their classroom and their chosen site. Each week, Assistant Professor Eleni Pinnnow assigned UW-Superior students to write in an online reflection journal. Through reflection, students consider and identify target behaviors in the middle school students they work with – like amount of time spent studying – and work to change it.

“I have been extremely impressed by the depth and amount of reflection on the material shown by my students,” Pinnnow said.

Pinnnow also graded students on their participation in four reflection days throughout the semester. During reflection days, students had the opportunity to look back on what they’d accomplished.

“My goal is for students to understand the basic principles of conditioning and learning and for them to understand how to apply those principles to modify behavior,” Pinnnow said.

Making a real change

Student Cristin Cline said she was proud of the change she saw in the Superior High School student she tutored. Cline spent a few hours two days a week teaching better study skills to the girl.

“We spent a lot of time on math because that was her hardest subject,” Cline said. “I could tell she was improving, and that really made me feel good.”

Pinnnow believes this type of learning is inspiring. “When students see that they can modify behavior through things like reinforcement, they see their education being put to use.”

Student Amber Bieneck enjoyed her time spent at the after-school program. “I plan on going back once finals are over, because I do enjoy my time there, and the Latchkey teachers have agreed that would be okay.”

Real-life accomplishments

One of the main goals of service-learning is connecting knowledge with everyday life. Pinnnow found this connection was easy to make for students in “Applied Behavior Analysis.” “Honestly, this is the type of learning and application that can't happen in a traditional classroom,” she said.
UW-Superior business students set aside their computers and calculators and picked up hammers and paintbrushes to spend a Saturday making a Superior woman’s home safer and more accessible.

About 15 students and volunteers gathered at the home of Mary Cox on May 1, 2010. The 59-year-old Cox relies on an oxygen tank to assist with her breathing. She suffers from chronic back problems and spends time in a wheelchair. Cox became a candidate for the construction of a ramp through her church, Cathedral of Christ the King. The ramp is the first of 12 construction projects the UW-Superior students planned for completion throughout the summer.

‘Where the rubber meets the road’

This isn’t the first time Dr. Bruce Kibler’s “Principles of Management” course partnered with Habitat for Humanity. During the Fall 2009 semester, students presented efficiency suggestions and a business plan to the Western Lake Superior Habitat for Humanity board of directors as part of the course’s first academic service-learning requirement.

Habitat for Humanity Director Daryl Yankee said he and Kibler wanted to engage students by adding a physical portion for their second venture. “It’s where the rubber meets the road,” Yankee said. “You can have a great idea for anything, non-profit or for profit, but at some point the idea has to go from the head to the hammer in our case.”

A growing partnership

Students were assigned to handle every aspect of the project, from getting funds to gathering names of those who could use assistance. Kibler got in touch with a friend who happened to be a pastor at Superior’s Cathedral of Christ the King. The Rev. Andy Ricci said his church gathered $2,400 in donations the weekend before the project was scheduled to begin.

“It was all raised over one weekend,” Ricci said. “I got up. I mentioned it. I put a basket out back. People gave it to me and we deposited it. It was really fun.” The church ended up raising enough money to help one of its own, Mary Cox.

Cox said she had no idea her congregation was coming together for her. “I missed church that day and my friend called me, ‘You better come to church,’ knowing that they were going to do it and I didn’t know.”

‘Nobody loses, everybody wins’

UW-Superior marketing major Jamie Hebb said she’s happy to give back to the community where she attends school.

“I really liked working with Habitat. I’d do it again on a Saturday afternoon, instead of just sitting around the house or cleaning or what not,” she said. “You know you can get out, you can help somebody like Mary. She’s been in and out of the build site and you can just tell that she really appreciates that we’re here, because otherwise, she’d have no way to continue to get in and out.”

Ricci said his church raised enough money to fund another Habitat for Humanity project as well. “People were great. They just stepped up and said, ‘Sure, this is a wonderful idea. I love it.’ It’s going to help university kids with some practical skills. It’s going to help Habitat do part of its mission effectively and well. It allows us to reach out to people. It allows somebody from within our community to continue to have access to her home. You know, nobody loses, everybody wins.”
After planning and organizing the project, students from Dr. Bruce Kibler’s business class go to work on building an accessibility ramp for a Superior woman’s home.

“The most memorable part of my service-learning experience was the actual event of the Habitat for Humanity at Mary’s house. It was a great learning experience and I thought that I got a lot out of it as it directly related to our class content.”

When students enrolled in this class were asked,

Due to my involvement with Academic Service-Learning in this course, I believe:

I increased my ability to work as a team player 58.6 percent responded “yes”; 34.5 percent responded “probably.”

I made an impact in our community or in someone’s life 65.5 percent “yes”; 27.6 percent “probably.”

I increased my understanding of individuals different than myself 55.1 percent “yes”; 24.1 percent “probably.”
Thinking about college

The grant-funded GEARS program pairs UW-Superior students with Superior Middle School students to help the youngsters succeed in school and to see higher education as a possibility.

UW-Superior and the Superior Middle School teamed up to create Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness in Superior or GEARS. The partnership trains UW-Superior students to help Superior middle school students see college as a possibility for their future.

‘Parents like it. Teachers like it.’

GEARS program assistant Julie Schmidt couldn’t be more impressed with the program.

“This is extremely exciting,” she said. “Parents like it. Teachers like it. I even had a parent tell me she cried after seeing her daughter’s improved grades. It’s just gotten really positive feedback from all involved.”

GEARS supports Wisconsin’s KnowHow2Go Network, part of a nationwide program that aims to raise college aspirations in young people and teach them how to get there.

Training mentors and tutors

Under the GEARS program, UW-Superior trains university students to become tutors and mentors. The university students are matched with selected Superior sixth-graders to tutor them on academic subjects, and to connect them and their families to cultural and recreational activities at UW-Superior.

The goal of GEARS is to enable the university student mentors to help the young students succeed in middle school, attend and graduate from high school, and to consider pursuing higher education through a university or technical college.

Thirteen UW-Superior students volunteered to become mentors in fall 2009 to work with sixth-grade students beginning in spring 2010. GEARS mentors enroll in a sociology course that meets twice a week with a tutoring session that follows.

UW-Superior students emphasize good study habits and praise students for improved grades. Mentors aimed to raise the middle school students’ grades by focusing on three main subjects – math, science and language arts.

UW-Superior students earn three sociology credits for their participation in GEARS as well as a $500 stipend for their efforts. Mentor Brian Demar, a legal studies major, said the money is what enticed him at first. “I got so much more out of it though,” he added.

What’s your wing?

For GEARS, 22 middle school students were divided into three “wings” – blue, green, and red. Each wing had at least four mentors.

Demar said the wings made a difference. “The wings made it so everyone got to be a part of a group,” he said. “All the kids became more sociable and that helped me open up.”

“The leadership on the part of UW-Superior was outstanding. The program was run very well.”

Rick Flaherty, Principal, Superior Middle School
Noticeable changes
Schmidt said nearly all the middle school students’ grades improved since they began participating in the GEAR S program. Demar noticed a change in the students as well as himself.
“Theyir grades improved and my leadership skills blossomed,” he said. “It’s been a lot of fun being a part of GEAR S.”

Fun-to-study ratio
Students don’t spend all the time on school work. GEAR S mentors and students get out into the community twice a month to participate in group activities, such as open gym nights and jazz concerts at UW-Superior and a visit to the public library.

Bright summer and future
The GEAR S summer program is an additional session during which six UW-Superior mentors and 13 middle school students examined many social, physical, spiritual, and academic aspects of life. The smaller cohort of students brought the group together and helped them gain confidence.
Schmidt said she expects 90 percent of the participating university students will return as mentors during the fall 2010 semester. GEAR S will add more mentors to the mix as a brand new set of mentors for the spring and summer in 2011.
Experience pays off

A graduate’s Academic Service-Learning experience results in a job offer

Jeremy Rainville remains grateful for the Academic Service-Learning requirement in Dr. Bruce Kibler’s “Principles of Management” course.

Rainville is a veteran of the Army National Guard who has lived in Springfield, Ill., the past few years working as a financial advisor. He returned to UW-Superior to finish his degree in business administration and finance.

After graduating in December 2009, Rainville applied for the position of lead customer service representative at Illini Bank in Springfield. He decided to include his work with Habitat for Humanity on his resume as well as a business plan he’d created for another course. At his job interview, Rainville was asked several questions about his work, and then was told he wasn’t being considered for the job he originally applied for but instead for two other un-posted positions relating to his work in his UW-Superior course.

“I included what I did for Dr. Kibler’s class because it was unique. I have friends and a brother who have graduated with various business degrees and no other had both types of experiences that I was afforded,” Rainville said. “By incorporating what I did for Dr. Kibler’s classes I hoped I would stand out, and so far every interview I have been on, I have been specifically asked about those two assignments.”

Rainville is thankful for the opportunities he was given while at UW-Superior.

“I would recommend similar projects to all business students,” he said. “It forces you to combine all of the knowledge you have gathered from all your business classes and put it to functional use proving whether you truly understand what you were being taught.”
A special art course

UW-Superior art education students teach a special art course. Three will share their experience at a national education conference

Six UW-Superior students taught special education students from Superior High School how to create artwork using household items in the course “Art for Special Education.” Three students from that spring 2010 course will speak about their experience at the National Art Education Association Conference in March 2011.

Meeting student needs

Art professor Kathy Hubbard split the class into two groups. She assigned three students to work with a group of students with autism. Young people with autism generally have problems in three crucial areas of development — social interaction, language and behavior.

Students Brenda Coffield, Brianna Deterling, and Amanda Walsh worked with a second group of students who cope with physical and mental disabilities.

Coffield, an art education major, said they developed a set of art projects for their group by learning how each student responded to different materials and activities.

“All the students learned differently and we had to adapt to that. It was a big learning experience,” she said. “It was the first time I had worked with special education students.”

Cotton balls, whipped cream and endangered animals

UW-Superior students held weekly art class sessions with the high school students, in which they created watercolor paintings, weather mobiles, paper piggy banks and other art projects. Hubbard said the students with autism enjoyed painting while the students with physical and mental disabilities preferred tactile stimulation projects using household items like cotton balls.

Hubbard recalled a memorable class session when students made print works from whipped cream and food coloring. “A lot of them ate their ink that day,” laughed Hubbard.

Proud students were then able to display their works of art during a showcase in May 2010.

Sharing the experience

Coffield, Deterling and Walsh will join Hubbard in spring 2011 to speak about their experience at the National Art Education Association Conference in Seattle. Both Coffield and Hubbard have attended the conference separately in the past.

Hubbard said she was excited to begin academic service-learning in her course. “I like to teach adventurously,” she said. “In the beginning, all the players had never done this before. I’m pleased with the outcome.”

Coffield said she can’t compare the experience to any other.

“It was a fun group of students to work with. It was exciting to go to class,” she said.

“Teaching is what I want to do and this class taught me how to adjust to a mix of learning levels.”
Empowering students

Distance learning students plan an Academic Service-Learning course for future students to use

In UW-Superior’s first service-learning online course, “Group Communication Processes,” students designed the service-learning projects for other students to complete when they enroll in the course in fall 2010. The course took on a different approach come September as students dived into serving their communities.

Doing the legwork

During the summer 2010 semester, Instructor Beth Austin divided her 18 students into groups of three to five. Austin first assigned students to come up with their own group rules.

“In the rules that they established, it was fascinating to see their dedication to the larger project, their detailed expectations for each other and their rationale for each rule,” she said.

Groups contacted agencies and conducted research to create beneficial partnerships between distance learning students and agencies like local non-profit organizations.

‘Only online students truly understand’

Austin said students had to take into consideration their other responsibilities when planning projects for the fall semester.

“Only online students truly understand what it is like to be an online student,” she said. “Distance learning students typically have a lot going on. Some students work days and others nights. Many are juggling jobs, businesses, kids and family while taking full course loads.”

Thank you, technology

Students often used the Internet webcam program Skype to talk face-to-face without actually travelling, in some cases, hundreds of miles.

UW-Superior’s Learn@UW-Superior online learning website also was an asset. Message boards made it possible for students to plan and coordinate their efforts. Groups also communicated by telephone and by e-mail.

Learning and doing

By coordinating the project, students are learning how to plan events, communicate with businesses, and work with a group in a different setting.

“These students are very responsible. They are treading unfamiliar waters and hitting road blocks as they go,” Austin said. “But they keep moving forward. I’m excited to see the final outcome.”

Austin said students know they’re not doing busy work. “It’s invigorating for them. They are actually helping with the projects. Their input is needed.”

Excitement meets disappointment

While planning the projects, some students were disappointed they couldn’t participate in the project with students in the fall. “Many summer students have already volunteered to serve as liaisons and consultants when the fall students take the helm,” Austin said.
Students enrolled in “Selected News Writing” were given the opportunity to visit elderly people on the Senior Connections meal program or spend time with a resident at St. Francis Nursing home in Superior.

A story to tell
Joel Anderson, senior lecturer in communicating arts, believes everyone has a story to tell. Anderson works primarily with journalism students, teaching them to report and write stories that appeal to the public.

The goal of Academic Service-Learning in Anderson’s “Selected News Writing” course is to uncover the stories elderly people had to share and create an article for possible print in the Superior Telegram. Anderson worked with students throughout the semester to “find” each person’s story. Students reported back each week and shared their conversations.

Getting over the fear
Many students were surprised to learn they were going to visit the homes of people while working with Senior Connections.

“It was definitely awkward at first,” said senior Bradley Kostiuk. “But most of them let me in with a smile,” he added.

Students who chose to work with Senior Connections took on a list of six or seven names. They had the task of setting up an appointment with each person to complete a nutrition assessment. Students were told to use their skills as reporters to strike up conversation and create a comfortable relationship between student and senior citizen.

You never know what you could learn
Student Brittany Berrens was unsure of what to write about a woman she spent time with at St. Francis Nursing Home.

“She’s had a lot of life experiences,” Berrens said. “I don’t want to write a biography. I just have to find what angle to take.”

Berrens began her academic service-learning in October and spent two hours each week chatting with the woman.

“I talk the whole time with her. I’ve been able to find out so much,” said Berrens, who was surprised by the amount of information the woman shared. “We had some good laughs. I’m going to miss her.”

Putting skills to use
Berrens has had a wealth of experience in the journalism field but nothing like this.

“I usually know what my angle is going in. I never have to think much about it,” said the journalism major. Yet, she was thankful for her previous experience. “I know what questions to ask to learn more about her,” she said.

“This is a real opportunity for students to get off the campus and practice what they’re learning while assisting the community,” she said. “I can’t think of a better educational opportunity than that.”

Dual benefits
Senior Connections Director Rhoda Nagurski is thankful for the Academic Service-Learning program. Her employees delivering meals don’t have much time to talk to the people receiving them, and she believes that the students all made meaningful connections with at least one person.

“I think this program benefits both the agency and the student,” she said. “A lot of homebound individuals don’t get to talk to many people during the day. These students might be the only people that these individuals get to see on any given day.”

Reflection
This is the first year Anderson has used academic service-learning but he says it won’t be his last. He hopes to incorporate it in a basic reporting class.
The business of helping

Students present business plan, efficiency suggestions to Habitat for Humanity board

In December 2009, students from Dr. Bruce Kibler’s “Principles of Management” course presented their ideas to Western Lake Superior Habitat for Humanity’s Board of Directors. Students in two sections of the course took on different projects for the non-profit organization. The first group worked to create the most efficient use of the organization’s resources, ranging from project materials to available people. The second studied the possibility of a “re-store,” – a business that takes recycled material from work sites and resells it at a lower price for profit.

‘Oh my gosh, how am I going to do this?’

UW-Superior junior Alysse Tunell admits the idea of service-learning scared her at first.

“I thought ‘Oh my gosh, how am I going to do this?’ It was daunting at first,” she said.

The students broke up their projects into different aspects of business, from marketing and sales to information technology. Tunell, an accounting major, said she felt overwhelmed after learning she was a member of the finance group. “I hadn’t had any finance classes until that semester,” she said.

The importance of ambiguity

But Kibler said he assigned students to the groups with goals in mind.

“It’s introduced them in many ways to the ambiguity that is so indicative of real life and the fact that you can’t just read a text book and take a test,” he said. “Life is all about decisions without information.”

That ambiguity, Kibler said, is what the students had the most difficulty handling. “They were put into a project as if they were consultants and they needed to define the project with the customer. They weren’t given a specific project in class. That was an extremely new experience for them,” he said.

Teamwork

Although she went into the project afraid, Tunell emerged as the finance group’s leader.

Some students, like senior Patti Stalvig, found their assignment quite fitting. Stalvig, who majored in transportation and logistics management, served as leader of the supply and logistics group while examining Habitat for Humanity’s mode of doing business.

She said working on a team wasn’t always easy.

“Unfortunately, the four of us in the group had very conflicting schedules, which was probably the biggest hurdle. The only time we had to meet was between 8 and 8:30 a.m. before class. We did have a couple of opportunities when Dr. Kibler was gone that we met during class time, and that helped.”

“Being able to access real company data to be put into use was very helpful. The group dynamics were interesting and really challenged my management skills.”
First-time partnership

Working with college students isn’t a new experience for Daryl Yankee, director of Western Lake Superior Habitat for Humanity. Throughout his years of service he has worked with students from the University of Minnesota, the University of California in Santa Barbara and Pepperdine University in Malibu. UW-Superior, however, is the first local university to practice service-learning with Yankee and Habitat for Humanity.

Yankee said the students have done a great job. “I can already see the benefits that have come about through it,” he said.

Yankee credits the success of the project to both the students and the Habitat directors. “We’ve been very open to learning as we go, and both sides have been adaptable along the way. The students weren’t afraid to ask questions and learn how our organization works,” he said.

Always room for improvement

Kibler said he sees room for improvement in future projects.

“I’d still like to be able to get more information to the students a little earlier on how the project works,” he said. “I’m probably going to also work on repeating myself more often; trying to drive the point home of what this is really doing for the students.”

Kibler also hopes to better emphasize the academic side of the course as well as allot more time for the service-learning portion.

A look into the future

Yankee also mentioned that he would open to future possibilities.

“There are definitely opportunities we’ve talked about; perhaps in the social services side of things. I know we’ve got a lot of family support that we do,” he said. “We’ve got 32 existing partner families that we’ve built with over the years. There’s definitely an opportunity there, as well as straight-up business applications.”

Stalvig, a spring 2010 graduate, said she would encourage others to participate in this course and any other service-learning opportunities. “So many people learn by doing, myself included,” she said. “The hands-on experience is something that every student who makes an effort will gain something by participating.”

"I was able to learn how difficult setting up a business actually was. I learned all the different aspects one must look at. It was very informative."
Learning government at the grassroots level

Students in a public relations class learn about teamwork, organizing events and lobbying as they take part in Superior Days in Madison

Each spring semester Communicating Arts Senior Lecturer Mary Tripp accompanied about 15 UW-Superior and WITC students to Superior Days, a two-day regional effort in which people from Superior, Douglas County, and northwestern Wisconsin lobby about local issues with their representatives in Madison. For the past seven years, the UW-Superior course “Public Relations Cases and Problems” has given these students the opportunity to gain first-hand experience with their state government.

Preparation

In the prerequisite course, public relations students spend a few weeks coordinating or advertising an event with a local non-profit organization. Tripp helps students create a business plan, which serves as a guide to ensure a successful project. “Public Relations Cases and Problems” includes the same type of plan, but students execute a project based on Superior Days.

From planning to implementation

Projects vary from planning one of three receptions to photographing proceedings for local news media outlets. Some students work together while others take on solo ventures. Each student must accomplish varying amounts of work throughout the course.

UW-Superior junior Zach Olson chose to create the “Parade of Products,” an annual poster display that features photos of influential Superior Days participants and a slideshow of various presentations. Olson said he underestimated the amount of work he should have done before Superior Days.

“I struggled through the last few hours before my display went up,” he said. “I could have planned things better with the photographer. And I should have printed things out beforehand.” Olson worked on his project alone but the display’s photos were supplied by another student who worked on the event’s digital media plan.

‘We were in sheer panic’

UW-Superior senior Dolly Thygeson teamed up with classmate Elissa Crowley to prepare the Youth Reception. The pair brought together decorations, refreshments, prizes and a guest speaker for the high school students in attendance.

Thygeson said the reception didn’t go as smoothly as she predicted. “We got down to the room early to decorate and we saw that another group was already meeting in there,” she said. “We were in sheer panic when everyone cleared out because we didn’t have enough time to do everything before students showed up.” Then, “another classmate showed up and asked if we needed help. If he hadn’t, it would have all gone awry.”

Adding to their dismay, their guest speaker, Attorney General J.B. Hollen, showed up early. Yet, Thygeson said she was satisfied with how they handled the situation. “Things all seemed to go wrong but they all worked out. I was so glad Mary had us plan for the worst.”
Many possibilities

One of the most unusual experiences Superior Days offers is the chance for participants to lobby up to six state representatives. Teams of six attendees spent the final day of the event hoping to harvest support for six legislative issues affecting northwestern Wisconsin. Issues this year featured the possibility of creating the Superior Research Institute and reinstatement of the Wisconsin-Minnesota Tax Reciprocity Agreement.

Thygeson, a speech communication major, said Wisconsin Rep. Mary Hubler appreciated the student’s interest. “Mary Hubler and I really hit it off when my lobby team visited her. We got off topic once I told her my major. She said it was the best major to have because it was so versatile. We also realized we have a shared love for the ‘Wizard of Oz,’” laughed Thygeson.

Inspiration through example

Guest speakers also are an instrumental part of the Superior Days experience. This year, students met with a public relations professional from Wal-Mart, a lobbyist for the city of Superior, two Douglas County board members, Superior Mayor Dave Ross, and the president of the German toy company Haba.

“It was great to be able to ask them questions about their professions,” said Olson. He said he respected what Haba president Lea Culliton had to say about leaving a past job. “She shared that she left a company because she didn’t support its ethics. She emphasized that we will likely switch jobs often as we mature in the workaday world.”

Thygeson, a spring 2010 graduate, said she’s more optimistic about her future outside of college. “The people I met had a variety of backgrounds. I learned there are so many options out there for students once they graduate.”

Reflecting on a job well done

“Public Relations Cases and Problems” and its prerequisites may change during the 2010-2011 school year as the course moves from UW-Superior’s Communicating Arts Department to the Business and Economics Department.

“Change happens,” said Tripp, who is still unsure whether she will teach the course next spring. She has made the trip to Madison with WITC students for the past eight years and UW-Superior students for seven.

“I thought it was a good relationship builder between the two schools where the technical college students could interact with the UW-Superior students, and vice versa, and I’ve had several students transfer from WITC to UW-Superior,” she said. “There’s a certain energy and enthusiasm that the students create as part of this course that is unlike any other course I teach. There are certainly some challenges associated with it, but the results at the end are usually students who come back very engaged in the process. They’re proud of their accomplishments and to me, that’s very exciting to be around.”
Academic Service-Learning

Old Main 312
Belknap and Catlin, PO Box 2000
Superior WI 54880-4500
715-394-8518

uwsuper.edu/casl