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EXCEL @ SMC!



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VISIT US ON THE WEB:
http://www.swmich.edu/excel

YouTube, its not; but it certainly can keep you up to date on what new and exciting events are happening with EXCEL achievers.

If you are looking for a list of EXCEL activities or are longing to participate in a service project to polish your resume - you will find the dates, times, and locations of opportunities planned with college students in mind.

Scholarship applications and links to valuable websites complement the resources available. Workshops presented by EXCEL Counselors are advantageous and at your fingertips.

This is one networking opportunity you may not want to miss!

To become a member: Log onto your SMC Wired, click on the GROUPS icon (right hand corner), then Groups Index; then Departments, then EXCEL, and join Group.



Congratulations Mark Howkins!

Mark's insightful essay entitled, "The Long Road Ahead" has won the Grand Prize in the EXCEL Career Plan Challenge!

~ Great Job, Mark! ~

~ If you would like to read Mark's essay, please visit the EXCEL Groups Page ~

Student Accountability Key to Laptop Loan Success

If you are a frequent flyer in the laptop loan program; you may have noticed that demand for laptops has increased. The waitlist is usually nearly a week out - and students continue to count on one another to turn laptops in on time and in good condition.

The EXCEL program is fortunate to have 12 laptops available for loan; each one has the Hawkes Learning software installed, this program has been piloted in some sections of Math 101. In addition, six laptops have received memory upgrades and two new laptops were purchased this fall to help meet the increased demand.

However, as usage increases; so, too, has wear and tear on our laptops. Repairs may be costly and leave students on the waitlist for a longer period of time. Remember to take extra care when you have a laptop on loan - the success of the program depends on it!

~ Graduation Applications ~

Don't forget! Graduation applications for Winter 2007 are due by February 15th. Make an appointment with your EXCEL advisor anytime to do your degree audit.

Congratulations on a job well done!



EXCEL NEWSLETTER

- Southwestern Michigan College -



~ December 2007 ~

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A Home for the Holidays!



EXCEL Students Reflect on the Gift of Giving!

Once again, EXCEL achievers donated time to a local Habitat for Humanity project. Two EXCEL students who are also Peer Mentors share their insights on what took place on this cold and rainy day in October.

The Habitat for Humanity project was a beautiful success. It was fun working with the EXCEL Staff as well as fellow EXCEL members and other volunteers on site. I really enjoyed getting to meet new people; the teamwork that was demonstrated exceeded my expectations and it was nice to see how volunteer work like this brought us together.

-Triciaa Rodgers

It was a cold Saturday morning and getting out of bed was as tedious as doing volunteer work, but when the bell rings you have to go because somebody needs help. We never know when we might need someone else's help. We all met at the Niles Area Campus of Southwestern Michigan College where we caravanned to the Habitat grounds in Buchanan.

-Solomon Danso



The Challenge of the Non-Traditional Student "Finishing"!

~ By Mark Howkins - EXCEL Peer Mentor ~

Have you been labeled a "non-traditional" student? If so, do you know what it means? For the most part, we define a "non-traditional" student as someone who is usually older than 23, has returned to school after some time away, and usually requires non-traditional class scheduling in order to accommodate the many responsibilities in their lives. Is this all or part of who you are? When I first returned to school at the age of 42, I was quickly labeled a "non-traditional" student.

Returning to school was something that I always wanted to do, but, as many of you can probably relate to, I kept putting it off year after year. I was fat, happy, and in a routine consisting of family responsibilities and chasing the all mighty dollar. Just before I made the decision to return to SMC, I was earning a pretty good living doing work that I somewhat enjoyed. Then one day, just a week before Christmas, I lost my job. At first, my only thought was to get another job, as I was stressing about what I was going to do when my last pay check ran out. I was all set to hit the job application trail when it suddenly occurred to me that I could not handle one more useless, dead-end job, that I either regretted or just partially enjoyed.

So here I was, 42, broke and unemployed. This is when I made the decision to return to school. After approximately 15 years away from my first college experience, this was a very difficult decision. There were many challenges that I had to face and questions I had to answer. The first hurdle to clear was how to survive financially? After a couple of days of stressful thought, I decided that even if we had to move into a cardboard box, I was going back to finish college.

My first semester back was tough. Being the only forty something, fat guy in the room of 18-21 year olds was no picnic. I remember one of my instructors calling on the class to partner up and all of the young, just out of high school, girls refusing to make eye contact with me as they all huddled together. The thoughts of "what am I doing here" kept creeping into my head and believe you me, I wanted to quit many times in the first month. After a while I settled into my classes and eventually started to meet other adults my age. I became a tutor and a peer mentor and life really started to improve.

I know that all of you face similar, if not the same, challenges; but I urge you to keep going! It's worth it. It's been a year since I made my decision to return and I still struggle with home, family and especially money issues all the time, but not a day goes by that I regret leaving that job and coming back to school. The thought of walking across that stage in my cap and gown and accepting that diploma keeps me coming back.

In closing, to all of my "non-traditional" brothers and sisters, don't let anything or anyone get in your way of "FINISHING" this chapter and realizing your dreams. You will go through many highs and lows over the span of your college career, but that one goal, "FINISHING", has always guided and motivated me to keep going. The commitment to return to college and staying focused on "FINISHING", is the best thing that you can do. Now go out there and get that diploma and start doing what you were meant to do!



The EXCEL staff wishes each of you a very Merry Christmas and Wonderful New Year!

Have you Applied for the Winter Scholarship Yet?

Last winter we awarded over \$36,000.00 in scholarships to EXCEL Students!

~ Don't forget, the winter scholarship application is due by February 29, 2008. ~

Applications are available at the EXCEL offices on both the Dowagiac and Niles campuses or you can print a copy from the EXCEL Groups Page.



Tentative Schedule of EXCEL Activities

Please note that this schedule is subject to change, but here are some of the things we have planned for this academic year. Watch our newsletters, bulletin boards and groups page for details on the events and activities that are being offered to EXCEL students! Also, please remember to RSVP with Missy before the deadline at 782-1274 for each event that you are interested in attending.

~ January 2008 ~



Notre Dame Theatre ~ Wednesday, January 23rd. William Shakespeare's, *The Taming of the Shrew*, will be performed by Actor's from The London Stage. Showtime is at 7:30 p.m. We will have a van for transporting interested EXCEL students to Notre Dame. **Tickets must be ordered ahead of time so please RSVP by January 16th.**

Scholarship Workshop ~ Tuesday, January 29th, Dowagiac Campus, 12:00 p.m.—1:30 p.m. Room # TBA. **Please RSVP by Monday, January 28th.**

~ February 2008 ~



SMC Musical - "City of Angels" ~ Friday, February 22nd or Saturday, February 23rd at 7:30 p.m. or Sunday, February 24th at 2:00 p.m. **Firm deadline of Friday, February 15th. No RSVP's will be accepted after that date.**

Campus Visit to IUSB ~ Wednesday, February 27th. Featured Major: Business/Technology; but all are welcome to attend and see what IUSB may have to offer you! We will leave Dowagiac Campus at 8:15 am. Lunch will be provided at IUSB. **Please RSVP by Tuesday, February 19th.**

Financial Aid Workshop ~ Need help completing your FAFSA Online? Have questions about your Financial Aid Package? We are here to help! Dowagiac Campus, Tuesday, February 5th, 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. & NAC on Thursday, February 21st, 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m. **Please RSVP for Dowagiac by Monday, February 4th and for NAC by Wednesday, February 20th.**

TRiO Day Celebration ~ EXCEL and ETS students will get together in celebration of the government program that funds the support of these programs for you, the student. **TBA - Watch for our flyers and announcements!**

~ March 2008 ~



Transfer Workshop ~ Monday, March 17, NAC, 10:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m. Room # TBA. Take action now to learn how to create your transfer plans! **Please RSVP by Friday, March 14th.**

EXCEL Winter Scholarship Awards ~ Monday, March 24th, 3:00 p.m. Walk the red carpet and receive your award. *Participation in this event will not be counted toward the scholarship requirement. Simply come and have some fun!*

~ April 2008 ~



National Heddon Museum ~ Tuesday, April 22nd. Did you know the first artificial lure was crafted in Dowagiac? Join us as we learn the local history that helped to revolutionize the sport of fishing. We will leave the Dowagiac Campus at 6:00 p.m. **Children ages 8 and older are invited to attend. Please RSVP by April 21st.**

~ May 2008 ~



EXCEL Graduate Breakfast ~ Saturday, May 3rd, 9:00 a.m., CSBG, TLC.

Silver Hawks/Coveleski Stadium ~ TBA.

Relay for Life ~ Friday, May 16th or Saturday, May 17th. Cass County Fairgrounds. Sign up to walk, collect donations, or do both. We know you will find this is a fun and rewarding experience! **Please RSVP by Wednesday, May 14th.**

~ June 2008 ~

These events are *free* to EXCEL students and count toward part of your eligibility requirement for our scholarship awards!



EXCEL Focus Group ~ Wednesday, June 4th.

EXCEL Graduates Train Trip into Chicago ~ TBA.

EXCEL Spring Scholarship Awards & Ice Cream Social ~ NAC, TBA.