Alumni Invest $1.67 Million to Establish Zeigler Institute for Professional Development

The experiences of an alumni business owner since his graduation in 1976 have inspired the largest philanthropic gift in the history of the Bloomsburg University Foundation — $1.67 million. Terry Zeigler, president and CEO of Datacap Systems Inc., Chalfont, Pa., and his wife, JoAnn Schultz Zeigler ’77, are financing the Zeigler Institute for Professional Development (ZIPD) within Bloomsburg University’s College of Business.

“The core mission of ZIPD is to provide a comprehensive educational experience that builds the personal and professional capacities necessary for career success,” says Michael Tidwell, dean of BU’s College of Business. “Starting with the freshman Introduction to Business course, the institute will give students a detailed understanding of the interconnectedness of the major elements of the business enterprise.”

The idea behind ZIPD grew from the Zeiglers’ belief that business education should be delivered from a “top-down perspective” and include exposure to various careers within the business field. “(We need to) give students an idea early on about opportunities and expectations so they can choose an education and career path suitable to their skills and interests,” Terry Zeigler says. “The primary objective of the institute is to present students with a broad view of job opportunities in various business disciplines, educate them for real-world career applications and teach them how to look for jobs that fulfill their individual requirements.”

“The Introduction to Business course is constructed around four basic modules: business environment overview, marketing, managing resources, and financial management,” Tidwell says. Each module has an embedded professional development component that links the course content to its corresponding profession via executive speakers and career exploration assignments. For example, the financial management module links to careers in accounting and financial services.

“An integrated, three and a half-year professional development curriculum will follow the first semester experience,” he adds. Through co-curricular activities, students will attend professional speaking events, etiquette training, and intensive resume development and interviewing seminars; network with executives; and develop portfolios. The end result will be graduates who are well prepared to enter a business career.

Zeigler, a native of Pottstown, Pa., recalls entering college with no idea of what career opportunities were available within a general business setting. During summers, he worked on a construction crew building houses, and operated machinery at a die-casting plant. “In those task-oriented jobs, you knew exactly what’s expected and the specific pay rate for what you produce,” he says of those jobs. “But, what does a career look like within the other business segments that develop, administrate, market and support that actual process of building houses or molding parts? What are those supporting jobs, what do you actually do each day and what is the earning potential? It can be hard to grasp. With a shift from a production economy to an intellectual asset economy, creating that visibility will be critical to a student’s future success.”

Zeigler was in his 20s when he and two partners started Datacap Systems. Blending individual expertise in operations, business and engineering, the firm has become the leading supplier in its market niche, enjoying 28 years of continued growth and financial success. Datacap Systems develops and markets electronic payment interfaces that enable cash register and business system providers to add electronic payments to their systems. In addition to JoAnn, the Zeiglers’ sons, Justin ’06 and Jared, work for Datacap Systems. Daughter Jenelle Zeigler Ross is a biologist with Merck and Co. working on drug safety protocol.

“Thanks to the Zeiglers’ visionary generosity, students will graduate as business professionals who understand the interconnectedness of the major functions of business and how their unique interests and skill sets add value to the business enterprise,” Tidwell says. “ZIPD will positively impact the career trajectory of all business students.”

Zeigler says leading a small company provides a different perspective from big business. “In my world, people have to be able to execute a wide variety of tasks and be willing to work across department lines. Students with a good, well-rounded understanding of how business units interact dramatically increase their value proposition to a company like Datacap. Increasing students’ personal value proposition to a future employer must be the university’s primary goal.”

Terry and JoAnn’s investment in ZIPD is a “natural sequence” to their endowed scholarship awarded annually to talented business students with financial need.

“This is all about improving the educational process,” Zeigler says of ZIPD. “JoAnn and I don’t see our involvement as merely a donation, but as an investment in helping students to prepare for life in an intellectual asset economy. We want to be able to look back in the coming years and see that the program has merit and justifies the investment.”

ZIPD launches Aug. 29, 2011.