Preparing students for tomorrow’s workforce
Preventing students from tomorrow’s workforce

What was your student experience like in college? Did you sit in a classroom listening to lectures, meticulously taking notes and memorizing key facts and figures? Did you get your hands dirty taking soil samples or wielding a hammer at a Habitat for Humanity work site? Or, maybe you put your psychology training to work volunteering on a phone hotline?

Earning a degree today encompasses so many more meaningful experiences than classroom work alone as you will see through the stories in this publication. Students at the eight universities in the University of Louisiana System are conducting research projects, learning the value of civic engagement through service-learning, and preparing for the workforce in business and industry internships.

In fact, a recent national survey revealed 94 percent of UL System students said they are acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills at their universities. That tells us that the hard work of faculty who invest time in their students’ education is paying off, and our students know they are getting a valuable return on their investment.

Access | VALUE | Results
McNeese student named entrepreneur of the year

Southeastern SEAL links science students with industry

ULM student lands top internship

Wallace puts psychology training to work at Northwestern

Louisiana Tech’s Entrepreneurial Enterprise: a safe place for ideas

Springfield’s exceptional internships at Grambling

Nurses from Nicholls: a professional education

UL Lafayette architecture students design Habitat home
“I would have never thought I was capable of starting a business if it had not been for the entrepreneurship program at Tech,” said Erwin, today the CEO and co-founder of Bastrop-based Macon Ridge Foods. “From the beginning, the program introduced you to the entrepreneurial tools you needed to get started and was very helpful with networking. That was probably the biggest benefit; hearing stories and learning from seasoned entrepreneurs was inspirational.”

Erwin’s student story mirrors many others. All have in common a Tech entrepreneurial support system that’s blossomed in the past decade with the start-up of CEnIT, the TOP DAWG business plan competitions, the Enterprise Center and the expanding Enterprise Campus. The result is an extensive and effective innovation enterprise that helps people generate and develop ideas, and start and grow businesses.

“You can think of TOP DAWG, CEnIT and the Enterprise Center as providing the infrastructure and support network that allows students to develop their entrepreneurial ‘personalities’ and skills while in school, then aggres-
sively pursue their drives after graduation,” said Davy Norris, director of Tech’s Enterprise Center.

One of the most refreshing things about the program is it draws students from all disciplines, not just business and not just engineering. “The real common characteristic,” Norris said, “is that they are all entrepreneurial go-getters who want to do their own thing.”

That’s what Erwin did, though he wasn’t sure at the time what his thing would be. So with the blessing of Debbie Inman, the CEnIT’s coordinator of entrepreneurial studies, he started a “business plan competition” to get other students to explore other disciplines and “get some real-world experience outside the classroom,” he said. “Like true entrepreneurs, we decided to just ‘go with it’ in 2002, and we’re happy to see it going strong ever since.”

The birth that year of Bulldog Entrepreneurs gave Tech an on-campus group dedicated to promoting and cultivating an “entrepreneurial culture” on campus. TOP DAWG, now a decade old, was organized by the group that same year. Today the group runs the popular -- and very competitive -- “Idea Pitch” and the New Venture Championship.

This fall’s annual TOP DAWG ‘Idea Pitch’ featured 23 teams and nearly 300 curious students who visited with the teams to find out about their ventures, then voted with “Bulldog Bucks” for their five favorite teams. Teams were judged by business experts.

“We have some awesome projects,” said Inman, whose enthusiasm helps to draw students of all disciplines. “They keep surprising us.”

“Tech is fostering a culture of risk takers and innovators better than any other school in the state or region,” said Josh Raley, who completed his master’s in engineering and technology management in ’08. Raley was on two teams that won TOP DAWG and today works with Erwin developing their Dezzie Dough sweet potato product for their Macon Ridge Foods company.

“A lot of universities and public officials want to attract large companies, big federal programs, the big fish,” Raley said. “The entrepreneurship program at Tech wants to empower people to start and run their own companies.

“Which one,” he said, “sounds better for the community and the region in the long run?”

For More Information Visit: www.latech.edu
If career preparation is the primary mission of higher education, then the Department of Nursing at Nicholls State University might as well receive a perpetual “Mission Accomplished” award.

With a 100-percent employee-placement record, the department is the top provider of nurses working in the Bayou Region, having granted baccalaureate nursing degrees to eight out of 10 nurses working in the four-parish service region - all of whom received hands-on experience as part of their coursework.

The clinical component, for instance, allows students to provide and manage direct patient care. It is the cornerstone of applying nursing knowledge and reinforcing instructional theory.

Senior nursing student and Raceland, La., native Caitlin Bacon, 24, said her clinical experience as part of the Nicholls program has equipped her to pursue her passion - women’s health, especially labor and delivery.

Having conducted her clinicals at a different area healthcare institution each semester, Bacon received a hands-on, professionally supervised education in medical and surgical procedures; medication administration and IV therapy; pediatrics; obstetrics; mental health; community health; and leadership and management.

“We definitely receive a broad range of clinical experiences,” Bacon said. “One advantage is that there are so many varied clinical sites in south Louisiana for clinical experiences - so many wonderful resources. This allows for one-on-one interaction with nurses during clinicals, which I appreciate.”

Bacon, who already has a biology degree from Nicholls, said her goal is to practice nursing in south Louisiana - but thanks to the education she received at Nicholls, she’ll be prepared wherever she goes.

The Department of Nursing maintains contractual agreements with numerous health care agencies where clinicals are conducted, including hospitals, home care agencies, public health units, specialty facilities and out-patient...
facilities. While every attempt is made to conduct these clinicals as close as possible to the Thibodaux campus, venues throughout the university service area are used to provide the most beneficial clinical learning experiences.

Nursing students at Nicholls receive advanced, hands-on experience on campus as well. Betsy Cheramie Ayo Hall, also known as the “nursing building,” mimics a hospital setting featuring five nursing laboratories with 48 hospital beds and associated medical amenities.

The labs also have state-of-the-art manikins, IV arms and chests and computerized patient simulators. Such realistic facilities were put to real-life use during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when the university’s nursing labs and classrooms were used as a fully-functional, patient-care medical facility serving a daily census of 80 to 100 persons.

Additional career-preparation at Nicholls includes such events as the disaster-training exercise facilitated by officials at the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals’ Office of Public Health, Region III. A group of 32 senior nursing students enrolled in the Community Health Nursing course participated in a realistic point-of-dispensing disaster exercise in Shaver Gym, during which the role of nurses in care-dispensing and triage operations was emphasized. The university conducted the training utilizing its own point-of-dispensing (POD) plan, which involved multiple campus departments and personnel working together to engineer the realistic disaster-training scenario.

Under the close supervision of Nicholls nursing faculty, students in the Community Health Nursing course also routinely see patients on campus, in the exam rooms of University Health Services, as part of their clinicals.

The Nicholls Department of Nursing, a component of the College of Nursing and Allied Health, has the approval of the Louisiana State Board of Nursing and is accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.

Greg Stock, chief executive officer of Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, said nearly 200 of the center’s more than 1,000 employees are registered nurses who graduated from Nicholls.

“As Thibodaux Regional continues to attract more patients from outside the local area, the demand for additional, quality healthcare professionals increases,” Stock said. “Nicholls graduates satisfy a substantial chunk of that demand, and we are quite grateful to have them.”
Christopher Dickson, a general business administration major at McNeese State University, has been named the 2010 Entrepreneur of the Year by the McNeese College of Business. He is the owner of Country Club Irrigation, a licensed residential and commercial business in Lake Charles.

This is only the second time this award has been given, according to Dr. Mitchell Adrian, business dean.

“This award is not given every year. It is only given when we see an outstanding and deserving young entrepreneur who is pursuing any discipline in the College of Business,” said Adrian. “Chris is one more example of an aspiring business leader who has effectively channeled his energy to achieve his ambitions.”

This award should not come as a surprise to those who know Dickson. He comes from a family of successful entrepreneurs in the restaurant business here in Lake Charles. “My grandfather, Charles Dickson, is the owner/founder of Tony's Pizza Inc. He opened for business in August 1968 and his close attention to providing a quality product, superior service and warm hospitality to customers has rubbed off on me and I try to follow those principles.”

His father, Sterling Dickson, has helped manage the operations and logistics at Tony's for over 35 years. “Being able to witness firsthand a successful business operation has helped me out tremendously in my endeavors,” said Dickson.

When Dickson, 21, was a sophomore at Barbe High School, he observed how hard his dad worked in the yard, trying to keep the grass and flowerbeds watered during the hot summers in Southwest Louisiana.

He suggested to his dad that the solution was to get a sprinkler system installed. “Upon getting a few bids and finding that sprinkler sys-
Commercial contractors in the Lake Area with year-round jobs and daily appointments booked for several weeks in advance.

“I started this business while I was in high school before I had any formal business training,” said Dickson. “I decided to major in business at McNeese because I wanted to learn as much as I could to make my current business and any future ventures as efficient as possible and acquire more knowledge of the business markets.”

He said the areas of management, marketing, accounting and finance have all contributed to the development of best practices for Country Club Irrigation.

“My management classes gave me ideas for developing a plan to accomplish future goals and growth for the company and the marketing courses helped me understand how my customers view my business.”

Dickson, who will graduate from McNeese this May, attributes his early success to providing a quality product and service. “It’s important to have a good relationship with the community, and never sacrifice quality just to save a penny.”

Christopher Dickson
The University of Louisiana at Monroe may be anchored in northeast Louisiana, but its students represent the university every year in cities from London to New York to Dallas.

That’s because ULM’s best and brightest land top-notch jobs and summer internships in these cities, many after competing with students from larger universities across the U.S. The internships often bring a little pocket change, but they also broaden the students’ real-world experience and complement their major areas of study.

Guillermo Andrés Valderrama is one such student. A native of Venezuela, today he is living the American dream.

Last summer, the Master’s of Business Administration candidate secured an internship with Fiserv Inc., a Fortune 500 company and worldwide leader in financial services technology solutions. Valderrama seized the opportunity to learn and grow from the experience, nearly doubling the number of projects he was assigned to complete, from 23 to 45.

“The internship with Fiserv was one of the greatest experiences I’ve had,” Valderrama said.

“It set me in an organizational environment where time management, process quality, communication skills, and other tasks helped me acquire a better understanding of my classroom subjects, such as Organizational Behavior, Strategic Management, and Management Information Systems,” he said.

More recently, Valderrama was able to meet with Fiserv’s Business Line President, Albert Ku, an alumnus of ULM.

Ku had returned to his alma mater to visit with students attending the 2011 Spring Career Fair, hosted by the ULM Office of Career Connections and Experiential Education. If Valderrama is able to secure employment with Fiserv following his graduation in May, he will be the second ULM student in two years to land what he calls
“the opportunity of a lifetime.”

Many of these students are supported through a College of Business Internship Support Fund. The fund provides housing stipends to assist students wanting to take advantage of internships in high cost areas, and was created by business alumni with a desire to help students experience the broader business world, according to College of Business Administration Dean Ronald Berry.

Several factors played into Valderrama’s decision to start a new life in the U.S.; chief among them was the deteriorating economic and political situation in his native country. A hard-working person his entire life, Valderrama said he wanted his young son to know the same freedoms he had once known in Venezuela.

In 2009, Valderrama earned a scholarship to attend ULM and since that time has pursued his dream of getting an MBA from an American university with vigor. He left everything behind to make a new life with his family, joining two sisters who had also come to the United States 15 years ago and graduated from ULM.

“It was very difficult in the beginning because of the language barrier, but now, almost two years later, I’m in my last semester and carry a 3.6 grade point average,” said Valderrama. “This makes my family and me very proud.”

“Guillermo impressed me from the very first day I met him,” said ULM’s Director of Academic Interns Ann Smith. “He has immediately taken every piece of advice I’ve given him, from developing business cards to buying a new suit, and he does it even better than I expected. He has shown remarkable intelligence and work ethic.”

Valderrama said the quality of education he has received so far, along with the internship and potential career paths that have developed, has made his decision to come to America – his new home – worth it.

“I would just like to encourage other students to look forward to a better future,” he said. “There are several people at ULM available to help you. Don’t miss the ULM Career Fair every semester, and don’t stop applying for jobs or internships. There are a lot of opportunities out there, and ULM provides us with the tools.”

But, said Valderrama. “How far you go depends on you!”
Sparkle Springfield ‘s exceptional internships at Grambling

By Debra Johnson

Students at Grambling State University have many opportunities to apply classroom training in high-level internships.

Sparkle Springfield, a graduating senior, has taken advantage of Grambling’s internship program four times during her academic career. She is looking forward to attending graduate school and plans to complete a doctorate in Biomedical Sciences. Since Springfield enrolled at Grambling State University she has had a full schedule. Sparkle carries a double major in chemistry and biology and a minor in computer science while maintaining a 3.10 grade point average. Some students wish to have one opportunity to take part in an intern program but Sparkle has had the opportunity to participate in four internships since entering GSU in Fall 2006. “Each intern program has prepared me to reach higher levels in my career focus,” says Sparkle.

Sparkle is determined to use the skills gained while participating in her undergraduate research opportunities to shape her next endeavor along the academic journey to the Ph.D. She has a long-term goal to work as an independent researcher in the biomedical science field. In establishing a career path she decided to use the summer months of each academic year to earn experience in research. Sparkle participated in the following summer research opportunities:

1) Summer 2007 - she worked with a group of scientists on a project that investigated the use of high performance computing (Supercomputing) to address health issues in the Medical Field. The project was sponsored by the Joint Equal Opportunity for Minorities Program (JEOM) of the Department of Defense and was held in Maui, Hawaii;

2) Summer 2008 - she worked closely with scientists at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. The project involved use of high performance computing techniques to study physical properties of Carbon nanotubes;

3) Summer 2009 - she focused on the study of a Mechanistic Investigation of Efficient C-H insertions at the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg; and
4) Summer 2010 - she worked in Chicago at the University of Illinois with prominent scientists on the perceived benefits of “Qigong” as it relates the promotion of good health.

After completing each summer experience Sparkle returned to school recharged and ready to work in class.

As Springfield continues her education before entering the workforce she will have the confidence to excel because of her preparation and support from family, professors and colleagues. “Grambling has helped me build a strong foundation academically and socially in which I have developed skills that will support me in my research career and for that I am grateful,” says Springfield. Sparkle is on track to do great things.

Grambling State University offered approximately 700 undergraduate internships/practicums for 2009/2010. Internships allow students to get hands-on experience that assist in the understanding of concepts that are taught in the classroom. Students who participate in internships have several advantages over students who do not. They are more competitive when pursuing graduate school or employment opportunities. They have individuals other than faculty from their home institution who can write recommendations for opportunities they will pursue. Many of the students maintain relationships with their internship mentor(s) for many years after the internship ends and in some cases for entire careers. This relationship can be beneficial in opening up career possibilities for years to come.

“We encourage each of our undergraduate students to participate in internship experiences. The university tries to make sure that support is provided that will assist students in identifying internships. Usually each department has an individual that works specifically with students in the identification of internships,” says Connie Walton, Grambling State University Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

About Grambling State University

Grambling State University, located in Grambling, Louisiana, is a Historically Black College and University founded in 1901. The University has been accredited by 18 accrediting associations, and holds accreditations in all programs required by the Louisiana Board of Regents. The 384-acre campus offers 46 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, including the nation’s only doctorate program in development education. Grambling State University is a member of the University of Louisiana System.
Robert Wallace has found it is easier to solve a problem once your mind has been opened and you realize there is often more than one right answer.

Wallace, a graduating senior in psychology at Northwestern State University, is from Kentwood. He is an active duty staff sergeant in the U.S. Army whose assignment is to complete his degree at Northwestern under the Green to Gold program. He has been in the Army for seven years, three years in Southeast Asia, three at Fort Polk and the last 18 months at NSU. In 2005, he won the Army’s Soldier of the Year Competition.

This semester, Wallace has been part of a group of psychology students at Northwestern who have developed a comprehensive survey for use by the Natchitoches Parish Teen Summit. The survey asked general questions about the school and community, then asked more specific questions about topics including drugs, violence and sex. The Teen Summit is a program sponsored by the Natchitoches Parish School Board, Natchitoches Parish Sheriff’s Office and Northwestern. More than 300 parish junior high and high school students met on the Northwestern campus recently to discuss community/school related issues and generate solutions to those problems.

Wallace will be part of a group of Northwestern students who will present findings from this project at the ULS service learning conference on March 17.

“I have been working as a volunteer for the past 10 years, so I was able to look at the survey and add real world experience to the question development process that would help them get better responses,” said Wallace. “In putting together the survey, everyone had their own ideas. I found there is more than one right answer to a situation due to varying life experiences. People have different perspectives about the way a question is
Robert Wallace

Wallace has maintained his standards of high achievement at Northwestern, maintaining a 3.6 grade point average while taking 22 hours a semester. He is taking 26 hours in his final semester. That kind of discipline served him well when he competed for the honor of Soldier of the Year.

“It started at the company level and I kept advancing through nine levels,” said Wallace. “They test your physical fitness, psychological fitness, weapons qualifications, common Army and civilian knowledge. When you reach the final stage of the competition, panels of senior military officials test your poise and composure with a rapid fire barrage of questions. It is very intense.”

Wallace has received the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Accommodations Medals, and eight Army Achievement Medals. He also received the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal in 2005 for his volunteer services with the local community substance abuse clinics.

“I feel like I have been blessed and I want to give back,” said Wallace. “I try to take life as it comes, one day at a time and live life on life’s terms, take on issues as they come. My life’s mantra is ‘To thine own Self Be True’ for you cannot be true to anyone else if you’re not true to yourself.”

Wallace hopes to remain in the Army while attending graduate school with the objective of becoming a psychologist and helping fellow soldiers. He says it would be hard for him to imagine doing work that didn’t involve helping others. Wallace volunteers each week at a local mental health clinic. He has also spoken at local prisons, Army institutions and to campus Greek organizations as part of an alcohol awareness program.

“The education I have received at Northwestern has been invaluable,” said Wallace. “In psychology classes, I have learned the correct names to the disorders I have worked with in my volunteer services and have gotten the kind of experience that has made me a better person.”

worded that could be valuable. The final product we came up with encompassed the group's combined input.”
In a chemistry lab at Southeastern Louisiana University, science students are not only impressing their professors with their work but also are catching the attention of Louisiana chemical companies through a program that links students with industrial research.

The students are part of SEAL, a student-run organization working on projects proposed to them by area industries. SEAL - which stands for Student Entrepreneurs as Active Leaders - was organized at Southeastern with a post-Katrina grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents. It was created to encourage economic development activity by linking students with area businesses and industries.

This linkage between academia and the workplace is a focus of strategic initiatives at Southeastern as the university prepares students for success in a knowledge-based economy.

“Students work under the guidance of Southeastern faculty members to solve research questions and problems for Louisiana industries,” said David Norwood, the physics professor who sought the original grant and now serves as one of the group’s faculty advisors. “These industries frequently have questions that come up that they may not have the time, equipment or personnel to investigate. They can now turn to our SEAL group and - for a nominal fee - initiate the research they need.”

Norwood said students seeking a SEAL position submit an application and then are interviewed by student managers who assess their qualifications.

“SEAL allows us to see the kind of work that major corporations are involved in, and we are paid for our work,” said student manager Amber Bordelon of Robert, a senior chemistry major. “The extra money we bring in goes back into the SEAL fund for future work, to purchase supplies and sometimes for travel to make presentations at conferences.”

“This work allows us to do things beyond our regular academic lab studies,” Bordelon says. “It’s a great exposure to the industrial world.”

Among the dozen or so firms with

Southeastern SEAL project links science students with industry

By Rene Abadie
which the SEAL group has partnered over the past several years are Gaylord Chemical of Slidell, United States Composite Pipe South in Zachary, V-Labs, Inc. of Covington and Bercen, Inc. of Denham Springs.

“Like most chemical companies, we are always trying to develop new products and conduct research,” said Artie McKim, technical director of Gaylord Chemical’s Research and Technology Center in Bogalusa. “The problem is we don’t have the time or resources to research what we want. The SEAL students have done an excellent job of solving some of our burning questions.”

Bercen, one of the largest producers of papermaking chemicals in the world, has also placed several projects with SEAL.

“SEAL helped to characterize some substances that they could possibly use in their coatings,” said Bordelon. “We analyzed the structure and size of the molecules to determine why some worked and some didn’t. We also did some organic synthesis for them, creating new compounds that they could possibly use.”

Bercen chemist Joseph Harrell said the company was definitely pleased with the quality of work performed by the students.

“One of the reasons Bercen moved its headquarters here was to be close to universities like Southeastern that we could partner with,” said Harrell, a 2006 Southeastern graduate. “This is such good training for students, giving them the chance to work on real-world problems. I wish something like this had been available when I was a student.”

In addition to Norwood, chemists Debra Dolliver and Jean Fotie work with the students as faculty supervisors.

“They primarily review our work,” Bordelon explained. “If it’s a new project, they’ll hold our hands and walk us through the steps we are proposing. The faculty advises us, but in the end the students design and execute the project. They are all very patient with us and always accessible and willing to help.”
Some graduate students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette are using lessons learned in their architecture courses to help a Lafayette woman rebuild her home, which was destroyed by fire in 2008.

Their class project for Fall 2010 was to design a small, affordable house with some unique spatial qualities and energy-saving features. This spring, they are involved in the home’s construction.

They’re working with Lafayette Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry, to replace Louida Fuselier’s house on Carver Street, near Dorsey Park, off of Martin Luther King Drive. This historic African-American neighborhood is one of Lafayette’s oldest.

Melinda Taylor, executive director of Lafayette Habitat for Humanity, said the organization usually relies on stock house plans that meet residents’ basic needs. “We don’t normally say to our homeowners, ‘What do you want in your house?’” she said.

But the opportunity to collaborate with architects-in-training was appealing.

The UL Lafayette students began by talking at length with Fuselier. “In their conversations, some interesting things came out, things that are beneficial for us, as an affiliate, to consider more carefully,” Taylor said. The creative use of natural lighting is an example.

Matt Heidel, another architecture student, said Fuselier’s house was his first opportunity to be engaged in a real-life project: “real budget constraints, real needs for the homeowner and for the community.”
It is anticipated that the Realtor Association of Acadiana and the congregation of Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church will provide funding for Fuselier’s home. Church volunteers and UL Lafayette students are providing the labor.

Architecture student Josh LaBorde explained that the class was able to vary ceiling heights, “allowing light to come in from above. This helped create natural lighting in the house and it created a feel for a bigger space.”

The students learned that Fuselier is a member of Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church. She manages the sacristy, a room where vests used by priests during services and sacred vessels are kept. So they designed a special prayer space for her new home.

“We plan to use some of the siding from her old house on the walls within the prayer space,” LaBorde said. “This will give the walls some texture and it will also be a reminder to her of her home she lived in before.”

The students are also planning to use the front door from Fuselier’s former home.

Taylor said the architecture students considered outside space as well. “They looked at something we really haven’t paid much attention to: the side of the house. They created a focal area where the homeowner can pull up his car and park.”

An outdoor living space adjacent to the home’s kitchen and living room can be used for entertaining.

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Three-dimensional renderings of a Habitat for Humanity home designed by UL Lafayette architecture students.

Geoff Gjertson is an associate professor of architecture at UL Lafayette and director of the university’s Building Institute. The institute gives architecture students a chance to get start-to-finish building experience, as their designs are transformed into tangible structures.

“The project offers an intense and immersive educational experience for our architecture students while giving back to the community,” Gjertson said.

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