Internationalization and diversity continue to be increasingly important components of the modern workplace.

Dr. Barbara Denison, chair of the Sociology and Anthropology Department, says that a significant amount of the department’s coursework focuses on stratification so students understand the structure of social inequality and acquire values for diverse work settings.

“Most students come (to Ship) from only having been a few places. They haven’t experienced the world, but they develop an understanding for different social settings that they may not have encountered before,” she said.

Understanding how different social structures function throughout the world is a necessity as many corporations continue to actively develop international relations. This, along with the cross-cultural skills that anthropology studies offer, teaches students how to interact effectively with people of different cultures. “Even if you personally never leave the United States, you’re going to encounter people from around the globe,” Denison said.

According to Denison, the coursework throughout the entire department encourages students to explore new perspectives of the world, exposing them to different cultures and social structures. “Both the sociology major and the anthropology minor get people to think about our society in ways that they haven’t thought about before,” she said.

The structure of the major provides students with a broad knowledge base, making it an ideal degree for those planning to continue on to master’s and doctoral degree programs. Sociology expands students minds and helps them reach their maximum potential upon entering the workforce. “Both fields are great examples of that high-skill building, but at the same time are broad-based liberal arts types of programs,” Denison said.

Rather than being limited to one particular career path, the sociology coursework prepares students for a vast array of career opportunities. Denison suggests the competencies that sociology teaches are necessary components to success in the job market, but also life in general. The two-course research sequence teaches data collection and analysis, along with the basic software skills that employers seek. However, the department knows technical skills are not the only elements taken into consideration during the hiring process.

Students studying sociology gain a deeper understanding for human behavior, which is essential to conducting market research and effectively reaching consumers through marketing and sales.
This issue of our newsletter focuses on several of our programs as examples of ways in which students majoring in the College of Arts and Science can connect with the real world. We also continually seek ways to continue to support students during their educational journey through mechanisms like the Learning Center in the Lehman Library, the Career Center, and the newly established Advising Support Center in the College of Arts and Sciences. Our desire is to provide students with an educational program and the experiences to help them achieve whatever life goals they have set. At the core of what we do is our liberal arts educational approach where students pick a major but are also educated broadly through minor programs, elective coursework, and our general education program.

Our goal is to provide students with a balanced educational experience that will give them the ability to approach life and career goals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and flexibility to thrive in an ever-changing world. Our departments seek to provide a depth and intensity of study within the area of a student’s major. Holistically taken, programs also seek to broaden students, and educate and enlighten them about, for example, the value of civic engagement and living in the world in socially responsible ways. Together, all of our programs also provide pathways for students to gain skills in information literacy, problem solving, critical thinking, discovery, team-work, and design-thinking to help prepare them for career pathways in the real world where there is a diversity of jobs and professional opportunities from which they can choose.

Employers value the education provided by the majors and programs within the College of Arts and Sciences. Studies by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U; www.aacu.org) demonstrate that the liberal arts educational experiences offered by colleges of arts and sciences provide students with real benefits in the workplace, especially with regard to lifetime earnings. In addition, these students graduate with the skills and traits employers desire. Continuing to provide the programs to support these experiences is vital as we work to educate the leaders of tomorrow.

James H. Mike, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
The Celebration of Student Research Conference was held in the Ceddia Union Building on Tuesday, April 22, 2014, a day dedicated to showcasing, celebrating, and sharing Shippensburg University students’ academic excellence from all disciplines. All students from honors freshman to advanced graduate students were welcome to present their research. Students showcased their research through poster and oral presentations, performances, and panel discussions.

The skills acquired during the research process are ones that will serve students well intellectually and professionally as they pursue graduate school or work in their chosen industry or profession. For the faculty, the mentoring process offers a wonderful opportunity to share their passion, impart their wisdom and watch the transition from student to scholar. While this type of hands on learning occurs most often at the graduate level, what sets Shippensburg University apart is that this activity is occurring at the undergraduate level, giving students tremendous advantage over the competition. This is the margin of excellence that brings Shippensburg University students to the forefront of academic and professional achievement and success.

Endowing the Joint Undergraduate Student/Faculty Research program is one of many campaign priorities for Charting the Course, Lighting the Way... the Campaign for Shippensburg University. If you would like to make a gift to the program, please visit the website at www.LightingtheWayforSU.org.

ADVISORY BOARD

DAVID ATKINSON ’77 ’84M

While workplaces continue to evolve with the advent of new technologies, certain core principles remain a constant. That’s what David Atkinson ’77 ’84M believes after thirty-five years of working for the Pennsylvania Senate. “No matter how much the world changes, the fundamentals still matter—work ethic, communication skills, problem-solving capabilities, ability to perform under pressure and meet deadlines,” he said.

After earning his bachelor’s degree in government at Shippensburg University, Atkinson returned for his master’s degree in mass communications, giving him the specialized skills he needed to excel in his career. During his time as an undergraduate student, one of his professors helped him land an internship with the Republican State Committee that turned into a lasting career as a legislative staffer.

“The internship was a full immersion experience that taught important lessons and gave useful insights into people and politics,” Atkinson said.

Atkinson spent the bulk of his career doing communications and policy work within state government. Now he has taken a step back, and devotes his time and talents to consulting work. Although the disciplines he studied in college were related directly to his career path, Atkinson also values the well-rounded education his academic programs provided.

“Being knowledgeable and conversant on a wide range of subjects increases the chances of making positive connections. A strong liberal arts education prepares you for the civic, cultural, and community engagement that enriches lives and strengthens our system,” he said.

Atkinson points to several of his professors as contributors to the positive impact Shippensburg had on his career. In return, he now volunteers his time to the College of Arts and Sciences as an advisory board member.

“The advisory board offered a fresh chance to give something back, to get a close look at what the university is doing for students and for the region, and to provide input into programs,” he said.
Establishing strong foundations

In today’s difficult job market, the value of a liberal arts education continues to grow. With stiff competition for jobs and the consistent evolution of new technologies, Dr. Steven Burg, chair of the History and Philosophy Department, advises students that a degree with a foundation in liberal arts studies prepares them for a wider range of opportunities.

“The world has transformed in so many ways. If we train people only for very narrow careers that exist today, we’re really not giving them preparation for what may come in the future and all the careers that they may not have even thought about,” Burg said. He recognizes many students will end up in several different jobs over their lifetimes, making it necessary for them to have diverse skill sets.

Dr. Shari Horner, chair of the English Department, agrees that the development of interdisciplinary skills is essential to each student’s success. “We’re not preparing students for a specific career, so they have to have a really broad way of understanding the world,” she said.

Despite the fact that history and English majors typically are not training for specific professions, career development is still a focus. From open houses all the way through graduation, students are exposed to the many career opportunities available. “It’s a constant, ongoing process. It’s not just directing them toward one particular job, but rather trying to get them to think about how to use the skills they’ve developed along with their passions and talents to find a career that is a good fit for them,” Burg said.

Rather than determining specific occupational goals upon entering college, some students simply focus on the interests that drive them, ultimately influencing them to pursue such degrees as English or history. “Students become English majors because they love English—and then they find jobs where they can use their passion,” Horner said.

While most English majors have a particular talent for constructing perfect sentences and understanding literary symbolism, throughout the course of the major, those mechanics also evolve into abilities that are valued in the business world. According to Horner, English majors are critical thinkers, with strengths in sorting through large amounts of data and problem solving.

“English majors are talented at written and verbal communication, finding solutions to problems through research and analysis, and then being able to present those findings either written or spoken,” she said. “That’s needed in lots of different jobs.”

The skills that English and history majors develop are marketable in a variety of professions. Today’s job applicants must have flexible skills that allow for adaptability. “We shouldn’t necessarily be so determined to link college majors to job training,” Horner said.

Although Burg and Horner agree that certain careers do require specific training, they consider “soft” skills that are transferable among various jobs to be indispensable. Competency in such things as analytical and communication skills often is required of job applicants regardless of the industry or profession they are hoping to enter. English and history majors are prepared with those fundamentals.

“Being able to think in creative ways and having solid core skills in terms of writing, communication, problem solving, critical thinking and research will help prepare students for a lot of potential futures,” Burg said.

Reaching for success continued from page 1

A study by the American Sociological Association that focused on graduating seniors found eight areas of skills generally developed by sociology majors:

1. Identify ethical issues in research
2. Develop evidence-based arguments
3. Evaluate for research methods
4. Write a research report understandable by non-sociologists
5. Use effective communication to explain what data mean to the general public
6. Form a casual hypothesis
7. Use computer resources to develop a reference list for investigative research
8. Interpret the results of data gathering

Denison notes that sociology and anthropology courses focus on all eight skill areas, along with an additional emphasis on the verbal presentation of information. Students practice professional verbal communication through presenting both individually and in groups. “No one goes out into the workplace without having to work with a team,” she said.

Although a sociology degree adequately prepares students for the job market, the focus is not only on job preparation. Denison suggests that there is more quality to college than just working toward a job. Students learn how to think critically, gather and analyze information, and make good decisions based on that information. “Education is about skills for life,” Denison said.
ANNA SEILS ’14

Reading can be a hobby, something to pass the time or a source of inspiration. For Anna Seils ’14 reading was the inspiration that fueled her career goals. “I decided to be an English major because I absolutely love to read,” she said.

Hoping to maximize her writing potential, Seils also minors in communication/journalism. Having learned to manage her time between classwork and extracurricular activities, she has taken the first steps to reach her goal of becoming an editor for a New York publishing company.

As editor-in-chief of Shippensburg University’s chapter of Her Campus, a digital magazine for female college students, and as editor for the Ship Life section of SU’s student newspaper, The Slate, Seils is gaining more than writing and editing skills. These leadership positions have helped her develop skills that cannot be taught from a textbook. Her campus involvement has taught her the importance of organization, time management, and adherence to multiple deadlines.

Seils also has gained valuable experience from various internships. She put her passion into action during an internship at Celebrate Gettysburg Magazine. She also had a unique experience as a lifeguard for the Disney College program where she had the opportunity to take several business classes at Disney University. “The program influenced me through business and marketing practices, and I gained extremely valuable insights for what I want to do in my career,” she said.

She has pursued opportunities outside the country as well. While working as a tutor in Italy, she gained a global perspective, ultimately learning how to interact with people from different countries. With her recent acceptance of an internship with a publishing company in London, Seils will continue to gain a deeper understanding of international businesses as she enhances her writing and editing skills. While these real-world experiences have prepared her for professional success, reading continues to be an important component of her career goals. “Reading so many different things gives me fresh ideas and keeps me motivated to seek interesting projects.”

ANTHONY BROWN ’14

Turning a hobby or passion into a promising career might be easier said than done. However, Anthony Brown ’14 is doing just that. A dual art and history major, Brown combined two of his interests and began a journey down a career path with unique and rewarding opportunities.

“My skills have enabled me to feel assured that the work I am producing is of the best quality.”

Brown put both his knowledge and talent to work last summer during an internship at Seminary Ridge Museum in Gettysburg. He contributed to the design and layout of the museum’s first temporary exhibit, which provided invaluable professional experience. The contrast between his two majors has helped him develop unique skills that have become the backbone to his success.

“I have been able to express myself more efficiently, structure clearer ideas and plans, and produce work that is more polished.”

He is dedicated to his schoolwork and participated in the Celebration of Student Research last year. Satisfying his passion for art history, Brown presented his research findings about the life and artwork of 16th- and 17th-century painter El Greco. He also is a member of Ship’s chapter of the national history honor society, Phi Alpha Theta.

Learning from those he believes to be some of the best in the business, Brown is confident that he will be a valuable asset when he enters the job market. “My skills have enabled me to feel assured that the work I am producing is of the best quality,” he said. After graduating in December, he hopes to continue working in historical exhibit design and development.
While hands-on learning is beneficial in any major, psychology is a discipline that requires students to learn through experience. Applying classroom knowledge is necessary to prepare for job opportunities after graduation.

Dr. Kenneth France, associate professor of psychology, emphasizes two courses in the major—person-to-person interaction and abnormal psychology—that are essential to his students’ success. Both courses allow students to take advantage of new experiences that they cannot gain from the classroom. “You can’t get this quality learning at the same intensity in the classroom,” he said.

Students in abnormal psychology are involved in problem-based service learning. For their projects, they partner with community members to help people who are suffering from mental illnesses. This takes their educational experience further than simply discussing the topics in the classroom. The person-to-person interaction course teaches active listening and reflection as a communication tool, a useful job skill that also qualifies job candidates for positions outside the field of psychology.

For students interested in doing direct service work, France makes the equation for success simple. Completing these two courses and an internship provides students with the knowledge and real-world application to be successful in direct service jobs after earning their degrees. “I’ve never had a student who didn’t get a job upon graduating.”

However, psychology students are not limited to doing direct service work. With further education in a specific area of study, psychology majors can expand their careers. France recognizes the value of teaching students more than the content-specific material they learn in the classroom. “Most people don’t continue in the field that they start in, so you need to learn some skills that are going to help you generically,” he said.

Not only are students learning the skills needed for psychology-related careers, but they are developing highly valued skills that are easily transferable in today’s job market. “There’s no such thing as a content-free discipline, but the skills that I’m teaching are applicable in other contexts,” France said.

Many students further advance their education by doing research with professors. The project management skills they develop are transferable to any job. They also are required to complete several statistic courses and an experimental design course. This helps students develop quantitative skills needed in their field that are applicable across a wide range of occupations.

The person-to-person interaction course allows students to gain experience with direct service work and teaches active listening as a useful communication tool in any job setting. The problem-based service learning component of abnormal psychology forces students to deal with uncomfortable situations, which is something they could face in any profession.

Recalling his students’ nervousness about working with clients at partnered institutions, France explained that these courses are designed to take students out of their comfort zone. “Part of problem-based service learning is to put you in a situation that you’ve never been in before.”

While high-paying careers often attract job seekers, money is not the motivation for Megan Breckinridge ’14. Instead, Breckinridge seeks satisfaction from helping those who face daily struggles caused by mental illness. “It gives me a sense of accomplishment when I can help someone in need,” she said.

Breckinridge, a psychology major and sociology minor, does not aspire to change the world, but rather the lives of those who can benefit from what she has to offer. Applying what she has learned from her coursework, she interns with a day program at New Visions in Chambersburg for people who struggle with mental illness.

Despite the wavering job market, she has high hopes for her future. “You wouldn’t believe the number of areas you can specialize in and the number of jobs that use psychology,” Breckinridge said. After graduating, she plans to further her education by pursuing a master’s degree with a specific focus on clinical mental health counseling. Although she hopes to someday work in this specialized area of psychology, Breckinridge recognizes the importance of learning about all areas of psychology and sociology to give her a broad background.

Through her studies, Breckinridge has learned to appreciate the academically diverse environment at Ship. Her liberal arts experience has enhanced her professional development. “[English] pushes us to read and gather information and to become well-rounded individuals who can make a difference, hold intelligent conversations, and work toward a goal,” she said.
History professor earns Fulbright Award for research

Dr. Steven Burg, professor and chair of the History and Philosophy Department, studied abroad in Sweden as an undergraduate student decades ago. He was given the opportunity to return last fall after earning a Fulbright Award. He spent the fall semester as a visiting researcher in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Gothenburg.

While Burg acknowledged that his study abroad experience in Sweden may have contributed to his interest in teaching and doing research there, something else intrigued him: Sweden’s public policy. “Sweden has made sustainability a central part of all its public policy in terms of housing land use and energy,” he said.

As a teacher of historic preservation, Burg naturally has an interest in the two. Exploring beyond the city of Gothenburg, Burg traveled to Stockholm to learn about sustainability from members of the government who work in historic preservation.

Burg also made valuable observations outside of his research. He learned about the differences between the American and Swedish approaches to higher education. Prior to college, Swedish students attend a gymnasium school that has a rigorous focus on general education. The gymnasium school prepares students for higher education by first focusing on liberal arts studies. Once in college, students concentrate on a specific career with little flexibility between disciplines.

Returning to his classroom at Shippensburg after teaching in Sweden, Burg began the spring semester with a deeper appreciation for the education system in the United States. “It was an incredible experience in terms of thinking about our education system, the value of liberal arts, and studying abroad. “Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses, but I think that incorporating liberal arts and general education courses allows for a broader background and more interdisciplinary thinking, flexibility and creativity.”

Burg hopes to work toward establishing an exchange agreement with the University of Gothenburg.
The College of Arts and Sciences Advisory Board is composed of alumni, friends of Shippensburg University, and faculty emeriti of the college. Its purpose is to share professional and personal perspective on matters relating to academic philosophy and practice, internships and cooperative learning opportunities, and professional development for faculty; to provide financial assistance; and to become involved in the curricular and extracurricular programs of the college. With thanks, we recognize the current members of the board:

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