

# connecting

TO THEIR

# futures

New program  
engages  
pre-business  
students  
with college,  
community



Gerdin Citizenship Program participants created poster presentations on global business topics and presented them in the Droste Den of the Gerdin Business Building.

**When Brian Gualillo** arrived at Iowa State in fall 2007, he was excited about starting college. But like most freshmen, he was also a bit apprehensive.

“I was thinking,” Gualillo recalls, “I am in this new place, and I don’t have any of my old friends here. What am I going to do to meet people? How am I going to spend my time outside of class?”

Gualillo, who is from Marengo, Illinois, needn’t have worried. Hundreds of clubs and activities vie for students’ interest those first days on campus, and last fall Gualillo and the 700 other pre-business students beginning their university careers had a brand new option to consider: the Gerdin Citizenship Program (GCP).



Brian Gualillo

## An opportunity for engagement

Kay Palan, associate dean for undergraduate programs and associate professor of marketing, came up with the idea for the

GCP the previous spring. “Most of our students don’t enter the professional program until the end of their sophomore or beginning of their junior year,” she explains. “They take very few business courses and hardly step inside the Gerdin Business

Building their first  
two years.”

Palan saw this as a missed opportunity for engaging students in College of Business activities and events. She wanted

to develop a program that would be a mechanism for incoming

students to meet and interact with each other, and with faculty, employers, and upperclassmen. In addition, she wanted to provide a framework for activities that would foster personal and professional growth. With this basic concept in mind, Palan turned to leaders of the college student clubs to brainstorm ideas on what skills and competencies should be incorporated into this new program.



Kay Palan

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>> *Kay Palan, Associate Dean*

“The brainstorming task led us to seven components to include in the program,” Palan says. “They are professionalism, leadership, civic responsibility, global awareness, diversity, ethics, and public discourse. The ideas emanated from the students, but they very much echoed what I thought should be included.”

Further discussions focused on what the requirements for each component should be. “We wanted it to be experiential as much as possible,” Palan points out. “We felt that doing something such as volunteering on a community service project has more impact than attending lectures, so we incorporated hands-on participatory sorts of activities.”

The global awareness module, for example, requires participants to research a topic related to global business and then prepare a poster presentation about the topic. Faculty and employer representatives judge the posters and discuss them with the students. For the leadership component, the students must join and become active members in a College of Business student organization. They must also observe leaders of student-run organizations and record reflections about the leadership style in the GCP booklet. Other activities include giving

four impromptu speeches, which are also judged by employers and faculty, and participating in professional development activities, such as a seminar in writing resumes.”

### ‘The kinds of skills we look for’

Prior to launching the program in the fall, Palan shared the concept with employers who were meeting with college faculty on campus. “I have never seen the employers get so visibly excited about something,” she says. “They told me, ‘These are exactly the kinds of skills we look for when hiring.’”

The employers’ enthusiasm gave Palan some convincing points for marketing the program. “I could tell the students, ‘Employers know about this program, and

they want the kind of students who have completed it. By getting involved, you demonstrate that you have a commitment to developing these skills.’”

More than 125 students participated in the GCP in its inaugural year. Palan was especially pleased by the word-of-mouth advertising that brought students to her door throughout the year to sign up. Seventeen students completed the program in the first year and received certificates recognizing them as Gerdin Citizens at a banquet held in April.

“I decided to give it a try, and I really liked it. It’s helped me get to know the business faculty and the dean on a personal level.”

>> *Katie Vande Berg*



Zeb Bidwell, an operations and supply chain management major, gives an impromptu speech as part of his participation in the program.



The first group of graduates of the Gerdin Citizenship Program.

While the program is designed to take two semesters to complete, Palan emphasizes that there is not a “drop-dead” date for finishing. “I would rather have students do part of it than none of it,” she says. “If it takes two years to complete, that is fine with me.”

Katie Vande Berg, a sophomore from Harlan, Iowa, is one of those students who almost didn’t sign up because of the time commitment.

“As a freshman, I wanted to get my feet wet slowly,” she explains. “But then I decided to give it a try, and I really liked it. I learned a lot about the college, and it’s helped me get to know the business faculty and the dean

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>> *Patrick Kincade*

on a personal level, rather than just as professor and student.”

Meanwhile, Gualillo, who was worried about how he might meet new people, completed the program while also working for Iowa State’s Information Technology Services, doing a marketing internship with Apple, Inc., and serving as one of the six Cy mascots who perform at athletic and other special events. For him, the program’s greatest benefit is the relationship building that occurs.

“Furthering my knowledge in areas like ethics and diversity are right up there, but I think the relationships you make with other students, employers, and faculty are the most important,” Gualillo says. “The other things you can learn along the way and the GCP give you a good basis and help you expand on what you learned growing up, but it is the relationships you have that are going to shape who you become in the future.”

## **Beyond volunteering**

Patrick Kincade, a freshman from Apple Valley, Minnesota, expresses surprise at the program’s effect upon everything he does. The diversity component, for example, has made him think about how to approach and adapt to individual situations—for example, when, as a host at a restaurant this past summer, Kincade had to interact with a wide range of customers.

“I had a group of five blind people come in,” Kincade recalls. “Instead of just taking them to their table and saying, ‘Your server will be here in a minute,’ I took it upon myself to help them—and that meant reading the menu to them.

“It’s not necessarily the big things,” he reflects, “but rather the little things that you apply to the rest of your life that are the main benefits of the GCP.”

Even Palan has been surprised by the GCP’s impact on students. “One young woman told me she wasn’t sure she wanted to be in the business college, but this program helped her see that this is the right place for her,” Palan says. “Another student told me that his participation gave him the confidence to get involved in



Kelsie Harvey

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other campus activities. It is clear the program has already made some dramatic differences in the students’ lives.”

Two students—Kelsie Harvey, a sophomore from Akron, Iowa, and Jeremy Weiss, a junior from Barnum, Iowa—decided they wanted to do more than volunteer when it came to community service. They planned, marketed, and carried out a successful College of Business blood drive, which they expect to become an annual GCP event.

“We exceeded our drive goal, getting around 65 donors,” says Weiss. “But through my eyes, the success goes beyond that. We helped students gain a greater sense of community service while helping to save lives.”

### **‘An amazing experience’**

Employers play an important role in the GCP. For example, Josh Ingalls, a campus relations consultant for Principal, spoke to the group on several occasions and also served as a judge for the speeches and posters. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the program.

“I think this program influences students to think of personal success in terms of

having more opportunities to help society and their community to be successful,” Ingalls explains. “The Principal has a very civic-minded culture and puts a high priority on a positive work environment. So students who come out of school with a core value of integrity and a worldview fit in well with our culture. GCP helps them achieve that view.”

Ingalls, Scott Goodew, a regional underwriting manager with Federated Insurance, and Andrea Dana, college relations coordinator for Pella Corporation, note that, beyond the Business Career Fair and speaking to classes, the program provides opportunities for employers and students to get to know each other.

“When I give presentations, I tell people I’m not in the insurance business, I am in the people business,” Goodew said. “I am out working with people, trying to find those who fit with our culture. As I interact more with students and also with faculty, they get to know our company and what we look for in employees.”

The employers also agree that the program is a great way for students to distinguish themselves from the crowd. “These are the kind of students we want

to hire because they are taking the initiative to do something extra,” Dana points out.

For 2008-2009, Palan will have substantial assistance running the program and moving it forward.

Four students who completed the program last year—Gualillo, Harvey, Vande Berg, and Weiss—will serve as GCP Student Fellowship Leaders.

“GCP has turned out to be a win-win situation for everybody,” Palan says. “The employers are getting what they are looking for in employees, the students develop their skills and a support network, and I have gotten the engagement I wanted.

“It’s been an amazing experience,” she adds, “that will just keep getting better.” ■

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>> *Josh Ingalls*