

MEMO

To the Faculty and Staff of Mississippi State University

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Survey: class attendance, behaviors predict grades

A program founded in 1998 continues its support and research efforts to boost the academic success of freshmen enrolled at the university.

Called Pathfinder, the project provides detailed data about qualities that contribute to classroom success, as well as the reasons students select Mississippi State and continue their studies after their freshman year.

In its annual survey of nearly 1,000 MSU students, the program also identifies behaviors—especially academic—that may affect their well-being. Gauging such behaviors as smoking, alcohol consumption and seatbelt use, the survey often detects some surprising trends.

The No. 1 predictor of academic success for freshmen continues to be regular class attendance, said Dr. David McMillen, a research fellow at MSU's nationally recognized Social Science Research Center and founder of the project.

"With the help of faculty members, we identify freshmen who miss two or more classes, and contact them personally," he explained. "We want students to know how significant class attendance is and that instructors are concerned when a student misses class."

Since the program began, the low-key approach has played a role in increasing the academic success of freshmen, their decision

to stay in school and their chances of graduating.

"We have eight-year data to show there is, in general, a full grade-point difference between those who go to class and those who have attendance problems," McMillen said. That translates, as an example, into a 1.7 grade-point average for those with attendance problems versus 2.7 out of a maximum 4.0 for those who regularly attend class.

In the recently completed 2005 Pathfinder survey, research scientists also asked about a range of behaviors. "We're trying to quantify factors affecting retention, grades and, ultimately, graduation," McMillen explained.

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'Coach Carter' to keynote Black History Month program

The basketball coach whose controversial leadership of a California high school basketball team earned national attention will keynote the Black History Month observance at Mississippi State.

Ken Carter speaks Feb. 9 in the Colvard Union ballroom. His story was the inspiration for a 2005 movie starring Samuel L. Jackson.

The 7 p.m. public program is sponsored by the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, Student Association, Black Student Alliance, and Campus Activities Board.

In 1997, Carter took over a Richmond High School team that was in a downward academic spiral. After establishing high standards, he gained national attention by benching his undefeated, playoff-bound players for their poor classroom performances. He also locked the gymnasium and

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University of Tennessee Athletics Director Mike Hamilton shares his expertise on college sports and advises MSU students on how to break into the business during a recent visit to the Starkville campus. He was the third presenter this school year in the College Speaker Series sponsored by the Sports Professional Organization for Research, or SPORTS, a student group within the Kinesiology Department.



Olsens providing space emphasis in engineering

Husband-and-wife professors Greg and Carrie Olsen are using their engineering know-how and NASA work experience to help guide Mississippi State to a deeper focus on space exploration, spacecraft design and mission control.

The Aerospace Engineering Department will revise its curriculum for the 2006 fall semester to provide separate emphasis areas in aeronautics and astronautics—the former pertaining to flight within and the latter to flight beyond the earth’s atmosphere.

“We will be in a position to offer a space-oriented program to those students who are more interested in astronautics than aeronautics,” said Dr. Tony Vizzini, department head.

He said recent additions to the aerospace engineering faculty such as the Olsens—MSU alumni who joined the department in 2004—will allow the offering of astronautics courses in orbital mechanics, spacecraft dynamics and spacecraft design.

“In my opinion, this is an outstanding

improvement in the curriculum and is probably long overdue,” said Ray Echols, a West Point native and 1986 aerospace engineering graduate.

“I believe MSU graduates will be much better prepared to participate in, and contribute to, the future of space exploration with the experience of this specialized coursework,” added Echols, current international space station payload operations director for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala.

Both now assistant professors, the Olsens launched successful careers after earning aerospace engineering degrees together in 1985. While working for many years at National Aeronautics and Space Administration/

Marshall, both also earned doctorates through the University of Texas at Austin.

Carrie, a Mobile, Ala., native, was a payload operations director for the international space station before joining the MSU faculty. Earlier in her 18-year NASA career, she served as an aerospace engineer for the Flight

Mechanics and Guidance, Navigation and Control Group, and the Orbital Mechanics Branch/Mission Analysis Division, all at the sprawling North Alabama research and testing complex.

Greg underwent pilot training in the U.S. Air Force and worked as a space station design engineer for Boeing, performed spacecraft survivability research and testing for NASA at the Marshall center, conducted lethality research and testing for the nation’s ballistic missile defense program, and spent time determining aircraft worthiness of U.S. Army aircraft.



Carrie and Paul Olsen

Research center’s new name reflects focus on clean energy

Mississippi State is changing the name of a major research center to reflect its expanding role as a developer of clean energy systems and catalyst for state economic advancement.

The state College Board earlier this month approved the name change for the university’s Diagnostic Instrumentation and Analysis Laboratory—known for years by its acronym DIAL—which now is designated as the Institute for Clean Energy Technology, or ICET (“ice tea”).

“In response to national, state and local priorities, MSU is beginning to focus more of its research effort in the area of energy systems,” explained Dr. Roger King, associate dean of the Bagley College of Engineering for research and graduate studies.

“This focus will help in not only meeting national needs for energy, but also in enhancing economic development in the state of Mississippi,” he predicted, noting the name change will entail no new costs for the university.

Carter—continued from page 1

stopped team-related activities until his charges learned to “rise as a team.”

The movie “Coach Carter” describes the drama of his decision and the inspiration it proved for a group that included his own son, Damien. When it opened in early 2005, the production registered more than \$24 million in ticket sales, the highest opening weekend of any MTV Films release.

No longer in coaching, Carter is an author and motivational speaker. He also heads the Coach Ken Carter Foundation, which develops educational, training and mentoring programs for minority youth.

Among other honors, Carter has been selected for the Harvard Club’s Distinguished Secondary Educator Award, NAACP Impact Citizen of the Year Award, California State Lottery/Governor Gray Davis’ Heroes in Education Award, San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown’s Leadership Award, and California’s Unsung Heroes Award.

For more information, telephone the Holmes Center at 325-2033.

Mississippi State University complies with all applicable laws regarding affirmative action and equal opportunity in all its activities and programs and does not discriminate against anyone protected by law because of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex, handicap, or status as a veteran or disabled veteran.



Dracula to take bite out of university

The nation's longest running classical touring company will perform an adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic vampire novel Feb. 7 at Mississippi State.

"Dracula," the third performance in the 2005-06 Lyceum Series, begins at 7:30 p.m. in McComas Hall theater. The program is presented with support from the University Honors Program.

Available at the door, tickets are \$10 for adults; \$5 for senior citizens, by request; and \$4 for children 3-12 years old. MSU students are admitted free with valid student identification.

Retold many times, including a 1992 movie starring Winona Ryder, the drama portrays the timeless battle of good versus evil. The early stage production brought the story enduring fame and made a household name of film legend Bela Lugosi.

Produced by the National Players under the direction of veteran Alan Wade, the play is a metaphor for the evil that triumphs by invading the good and letting the "good" do its work.

Wade, a theater professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., includes "The Pelican Brief" and "Homicide" among his film and television credits.

National Players is composed of young professionals from the country's leading college drama programs. The troupe has performed in 35 states and 10 foreign



countries, with the guiding performance philosophy of "tell the story."

In addition to sometimes filling multiple roles during a performance, cast members are involved in every aspect of staging, from set raisings to prop and lighting checks.

For more information on the Lyceum Series, telephone 325-4201 or visit www.msstate.edu/dept/lyceum or www.nationalplayers.org.

Street to close for construction access

Beginning Feb. 6, a section of B.S. Hood Street is scheduled to be restricted to construction traffic only.

Motorists must use Barr Avenue to access the parking lot between Bost Extension Center and Davis Wade Stadium. Only construction traffic will be allowed to enter the parking lot from B.S. Hood.

All motorists must use Bost Extension Drive to travel between Barr and Stone Boulevard. Stone, originally scheduled to close on this date, now will close March 6 for storm drain construction.

The street closure involves construction of the Cullis Wade Depot, the new bookstore/welcome center/Starbucks facility being built adjacent to Bost.

For more information, telephone Facilities Management at 325-5830, or view other announcements and online maps by accessing the Campus Announcements link at www.msstate.edu.

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"The results have implications for both student academics and health."

Initially, Pathfinder surveys found that most demographic variables appear to have little influence on grades. For those MSU freshmen who began their studies in 1998 and graduated in 2005, however, the survey report indicated "wildly significant" differences in grade-point averages, freshman-to-sophomore year retention and graduation rates among those who said they smoked, as well as those who refuse to use seatbelts.

McMillen said that, in terms of freshman GPA:

- Students identifying themselves as smokers had an average 2.33 grade point, compared with 2.79 for nonsmokers;
 - Some 86 percent of freshmen who didn't smoke continued at Mississippi State in their sophomore year, compared to 67 percent who did smoke; and
 - While more than 60 percent of nonsmokers in this group went on to graduate, only 41 percent of smokers received their diplomas.
- Similar results were reported for those who do and do not wear seatbelts.

"A great difference in grades is identified in these behaviors," McMillen said, noting that the data can help guide programs that emphasize social responsibilities and individual behaviors, as well as health.

Those messages are consistent with the Pathfinder goal of encouraging students to be self-directed and personally responsible in their studies, said Ty Abernathy of the University Academic Advising Center. An SSRC research associate, he operates the Pathfinder intervention with the help of residence hall assistants in the Division of Student Affairs and its Office of Housing and Residence Life.

"By making individual contact with students who have attendance problems, we give our university a human face," Abernathy said. "While we talk to students about attendance problems, we encourage them to talk about any other issues affecting their schoolwork.

"They're left with the knowledge that at Mississippi State, people care about them as an individual."

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Calendar of Events

Send your calendar items to

Kay Fike Jones, 102 George Hall; Mail Stop 9512; FAX 325-7455; e-mail jonesk@ur.msstate.edu at least **TWO WEEKS** in advance. For updates, check www.msstate.edu and click on "Calendar of Events."

To list calendar events online, access www.ur.msstate.edu/news/today.asp and follow the instructions.

Ongoing Events

WMSV radio's free Live and Stripped Down Acoustic Series is held every Thursday, 6:30-8 p.m., on the new patio of the State Fountain Bakery. Local acoustic musicians are featured in a relaxed atmosphere. In case of inclement weather, the series moves inside the bakery. 325-8481.

34th MSU Art and Design Competitive Exhibition, Feb. 6-March 2; opening reception Feb. 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Department of Art Gallery, McComas Hall. 325-2970.

Each Sunday the Presbyterian Collegiate Connection is sponsoring "The Bridge: A Worship Experience Connecting Past and Future," Chapel of Memories, 5-5:40 p.m. 312-6833; www.msstate.edu/org/pcp.

February

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Bits & Bytes Workshop: "Acrobat," Giles Classroom, Mitchell Memorial Library, 9-11 a.m. 325-7676.

Correction

A story in the Jan. 23 issue of Memo on honorary degree nominations omitted the names of two past honorees.

The most recent recipients of honorary degrees are James Worth Bagley, chairman and chief executive officer of the Lam Research Corp., and Will D. Carpenter, retired vice president and general manager of the New Products Division of Monsanto Co.



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Lyceum Series: "Dracula," National Player's 57th annual tour, McComas Hall theater, 7:30 p.m. 325-4201. (see story page 3)

50-Minute Madness Workshop: "Flash: Tweening," Giles Classroom, Mitchell Memorial Library, 1-1:50 p.m. 325-7676.

Workshop: "Developing a Literature Review (Survival Skills for Graduate Students)," ELI Classroom, Mitchell Memorial Library, 2-3 p.m. 325-0810.

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ITS workshop: ADMIN BANNER: Navigation and Financial Query, McArthur Training Lab B, 8:30 a.m.-noon. 325-0631.

Workshop: "Finishing Touches: Formatting Your Thesis or Dissertation (Survival Skills for Graduate Students)," ELI Classroom, Mitchell Memorial Library, 3-4 p.m. 325-0778.

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MSU vs. Florida, women's basketball, Humphrey Coliseum, 7 p.m.

"Coach" Ken Carter lecture, Colvard Union ballroom, 7 p.m. 325-2033. (see story page 1)

Bits & Bytes Workshop: "Dreamweaver," Giles Classroom, Mitchell Memorial Library, 1-3 p.m. 325-7676.

Lambda Professionals is hosting a brown-bag lunch conversation, Floral Design Studio adjacent to the University Florist, 12:30-1:30 p.m. 325-1965.

Faculty Social and Seminar: A social precedes a seminar presented by Dr. Noel Polk, "Taming the Whirlwind: Editing William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren," Parker Ballroom, Hunter Henry Center, 5-7 p.m. 325-3742.

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MSU vs. Alabama, women's basketball, Humphrey Coliseum, 2 p.m.

14 and 15

ITS workshop: ADMIN BANNER: Requisitions, McArthur Training Lab B, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. 325-0631.

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ITS workshop: Intro to PhotoShop CS, McArthur Training Lab A, 8:30 a.m.-noon. 325-0631.

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ITS workshop: Intro to Dreamweaver, McArthur Training Lab A, 8:30 a.m.-noon. 325-0631.

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MSU vs. Mississippi, men's basketball, Humphrey Coliseum, 2 p.m.

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MSU vs. Kentucky, women's basketball, Humphrey Coliseum, 2 p.m.

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Vienna Choir Boys, Temple Theatre, Riley Center, Meridian, 7 p.m. 601-696-2203.

Rush receives MBJ honor

John P. Rush, director of major gifts for the MSU Foundation, is recipient of a statewide honor from the Jackson-based Mississippi Business Journal.

Rush was named to this year's Top 40 Under 40 program recognizing young leaders for achievement in both the business world and their communities. The program now is in its 13th year.

As major gifts director, Rush leads efforts to obtain non-public funds, including constituency-based major fund raising, planned giving, and corporate and foundation support. He assumed the position in January 2005.

A 1994 MSU political science graduate, Rush also completed a master's in public policy and administration at his alma mater.