



INCREASED INVOLVEMENT TRANSFORMS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

By Kathleen Tuck





Brandie VanOrder and Chase Johnson helped start new Greek societies on campus, in addition to their already full slates of academic and social commitments.

CARRIE QUINNEY

WE ALL HAVE 24 HOURS IN A DAY; SOME OF US JUST CRAM MORE INTO THOSE HOURS THAN OTHERS.

Take Chase Johnson, for example. The senior, who plans to graduate in history this May, figures he averaged 1.2 all-nighters per week last semester. Even then, he couldn't fit in everything he'd like to do.

A member of the Honors College, Johnson is president of the newly founded Delta Upsilon fraternity colony and secretary of academic affairs for ASBSU student government. He also teaches English classes at the International Rescue Committee, and he and his fraternity brothers are partnering with the Boise Bicycle Project on an event to help refugees get around town.

Following graduation, he'll

deploy with the Peace Corps to the Republic of Georgia, where he can use the Russian language skills he has polished through programs at Johns Hopkins and Arizona State universities.

Johnson is a shining example of the new breed of college students who understand that engaging in campus life outside of the classroom leads to greater success both inside the classroom and in other areas of life.

"The words university and universal are very similar," he says. "An education should encompass academic, social and professional goals."

In addition to helping students achieve balance, a growing body of research shows that engage-

ment also keeps them in school and on track toward graduation. Students who live in residential communities or are involved in fraternities or sororities, social or cultural clubs, academic advising or similar activities also are more likely to perform better academically and be leaders following graduation.

"Engagement is important to student success because when people engage, they connect," says Caile Spear, a kinesiology professor who spent two years living on campus as faculty in residence. "Connections mean knowing someone, being



accountable to someone and, more importantly, mattering to someone.”

Sometimes the connection is student to student, and other times it’s in the form of a mentor or advisor.



For junior Brandie VanOrder, the opportunity to associate with mentors on academic, personal and organizational levels is a huge benefit of student involvement.

The political science major spends about 15 hours a day on campus between her classes, her work as co-founder and new member coordinator for Alpha Gamma Delta sorority, her involvement with ASBSU’s student academic advisory board and her job as a special

project coordinator for New Student and Family Programs (NSFP). Sometimes, sorting out priorities

and possibilities is easier with the help of someone who already has been there.

“Brian MacDonald [director of NSFP] has changed my life. He taught me that if I think something is important, I need to follow through,” VanOrder says. “He trusts me and empowers me as a young adult, and it

gives me a lot of confidence.”

So much confidence, in fact, that she is running for ASBSU president this spring so that she can assist fellow students in making the connections that will help them to thrive.

“I care more about Boise State as a result of my involvement,” she says. “I accidentally became passionate about this place, and it has led me to care more about the community and other people.”

VanOrder’s story is not uncommon. “Involvement makes students feel invested in campus,” says Jeremiah Shinn, director of the Student Involvement and Leadership Center. “If they are invested in their education, they put more into it.”

Shinn’s office works full time getting students connected, from attracting more sorority and fraternity chapters to campus to supporting activities sponsored by nearly 200 student organizations, organizing leadership seminars and promoting community service opportunities.

“We know they are getting a great education, but employers are looking for skills most associated with being a member of a student

organization, being involved in the community or holding leadership positions,” he says.

Being involved and working with a variety of people also teaches essential life skills, such as how to balance different perspectives and how to set and achieve goals. Helping faculty work with students to develop these skills has become a priority at the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), where several projects focus on student/faculty engagement.

“Students who are actively engaged know that they matter,” says Andy Goodman, associate director of the CTL. Once they’re convinced their input is valued, real learning can take place at an exponential rate.

Goodman points to examples of engagement across campus, including faculty who use small groups to form interactive problem solving teams; the use of technology to record role playing exercises so faculty can offer personal feedback to students; faculty who attempt to learn every student’s name and ensure students get to know one another; and the use of BlackBoard and other technology to engage students

in discussions outside of the classroom.

These examples only scratch the surface of engagement at Boise State.

Sharon McGuire, vice provost of undergraduate studies, says the university is taking great care to provide more opportunities for student/faculty



Jeremiah Shinn works to provide opportunities for students to be involved in campus life beyond the classroom.

“AN EDUCATION SHOULD ENCOMPASS ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS.”



interaction, based on research that shows that students who interact with faculty, especially within the first few weeks of class, do better.

“We looked at how we could remove mundane tasks so that faculty have more time to spend with students,” she says.

That led to more online resources for academic

advising, so advisors can spend more time talking to students about their goals and needs and less time tracking down academic reports. The university also has provided a number of workshops emphasizing the importance of rapport building and increased the number of students working beside faculty as teaching and research assistants and presenting their findings at research conferences, as both Johnson and VanOrder have done.

Perhaps most telling is the Founda-

tions Program, a new core program that includes an expectation that students will be engaged outside of the classroom.

“Service and other community involvement will be used as a jumping off point for course discussions and to connect classwork with outside experience,” McGuire says.

Other examples include the Campus Read program, which encourages conversations among students, faculty and staff; learning communities and course clusters that encourage students who live on campus together to interact outside their dorm rooms; the Interactive Learning Center, which provides open space where students and faculty can meet and mingle; and more.

“We need to get everyone engaged – students, faculty, staff and alumni,” Shinn says. “Boise State is like a powder keg – there is so much waiting to explode, and we want to ignite it.”

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JOHN KELLY

Sororities and fraternities are just two pieces of the student-involvement puzzle aimed at helping students feel more connected to campus.