

NEWS

Behrend professor selected as ASME fellow

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The campus community of Penn State Erie – The Behrend College is celebrating the achievements of one of its own. William Lasher, Ph.D., the chair of the Mechanical Engineering program at Behrend, has been selected as a Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). ASME is a program that focuses on technical, educational and research matters in the field of engineering, and many engineering students and faculty at Behrend are involved in it. Lasher received this honor for his achievements and contributions to the field of engineering, which include his accomplishments in assisting the start of, and continually improving, the engineering department here at Behrend.

An Erie native, Lasher graduated from McDowell High School then began his career by earning both a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in naval architecture and marine engineering from the University of Michigan. He then returned to Erie and started a boat design business. After deciding not to do that for a living, he made his way into the field of education, teaching at Gannon University for four years. Lasher then worked for a local company for two years, but then decided to get back into teaching. He went on to the State University of New York at Buffalo where he earned a Doctorate in Mechanical Engineering.

Lasher said transitioning from naval architecture and marine engineering to mechanical engineering was not as difficult as it may sound. "It turns out that there really isn't a significant difference at the Ph.D. level because what you are doing is solving equations. The same equations that I would solve as a naval architect use the same techniques, and it is just a question of what the problem is that you are solving. Mechanical is a little bit broader than naval architecture also; I thought that that would open more doors than a PhD in naval architecture."

Lasher has made quite an impact on Behrend's engineering department since he joined the teaching staff in 1984. He was very involved in the development of the Mechanical Engineering program at Behrend, and has helped the program achieve the status that it is at today. Lasher, who has been a member of the faculty

since the beginning of the engineering program, said that he is amazed at how much the program has grown. "We started off with two interdisciplinary programs in environmental science in engineering and energy science in engineering. They were really a cross between engineering and a science program, so I started teaching the engineering classes in that. After a few years, they evolved into a general engineering program with options in mechanical and electrical engineering, because that's where the demand was." Lasher was involved in making that transition, and eventually they were split into two separate programs, the mechanical engineering program and the electrical engineering program.

He assisted in designing the courses and putting the programs together.

Lasher's involvement in the engineering department did not stop there. "At the program level, there a number of courses that I have designed and continually modified," he said. He typically teaches the equivalent of two courses per semester, and also supervises senior design projects.

Lasher's involvement in ASME has included presenting papers at their conferences, and most recently, chairing regional meetings involving program chairs from different schools. At these meetings, they would discuss issues like accreditation and program development. "That's been really good in terms of getting ideas for how to address some of the problems we've had

here," he said. Behrend students are also involved in ASME. Members attend the annual regional student conferences where there are competitions and presentations of senior design projects and research projects.

Lasher not only devotes his time to the engineering department, but also our entire campus. He has chaired the United Way campaign in the past, and was also a university senator for four years. While serving in the university senate, he was on the undergraduate education committee. "We looked at different things, like improving the academic culture at Penn State in

general," he said. More recently, he was the chair of the faculty council.

Watching our campus become what it is today has been quite an experience for Lasher. "When I started here, the computer center consisted of a couple of key punch machines over in Turnbull. This building [Nick] wasn't here, the Hammermill-Zurn buildings weren't there, the library wasn't there and so watching all that happen and being a part of, at least at a program level, making all that grow has been pretty neat," he said. He also mentioned that when he began at Behrend, there were five students in the engineering program, and today there are 65 in the junior class alone.

Lasher's dedication to Penn State Erie and the field of engineering has made him an asset to our school. He has accomplished and contributed a great deal to the field, and has helped to develop Behrend's engineering program into what it is today.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

New Minor offered to students

By Earl Gordon
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When you hear the phrase "give back to your community," what comes to mind? Most people think of some form of community service, such as volunteering at a soup kitchen or helping to clear neighborhoods of litter. Faculty and administration have devised a way for universities, such as Penn State, to give back to their states and possibly even the rest of the world.

A new minor has been approved for college students to take for which they will receive credits for helping their communities. Civic and Community Engagement is beginning its freshman year at the Penn State Erie campus. The new minor was created by a group of faculty members and was designed to help students become active participants in the community. It was developed as a way to address the growing number of students who expressed a desire to become active and engaged members of the global community.

Communications professor Dr. Rodney Troester is one of several faculty members who will teach courses in the new minor. Dr. Troester says civic engagement is a key component of all disciplines. "It is a minor for which students of almost every major can use," he said.

This minor only requires the students enrolled to take a class called YFE 211. This

course will help students to learn about the basic concepts of Penn State, which is a land-grant university (a university that has been given federally controlled land). "Because of Penn State being a land-grant university, it is a way to give back to the community," Professor Troester said. YFE 211 will also be used as one of the building blocks students can use as a way to become familiar with the primary goal of the course. It will eventually help them to fully understand their own majors and help to decide what they want to do upon graduation.

This new course will also be unique in the way in which it will be taught. The new program will incorporate a variety of teaching methods such as projects, cases, films, hands-on experiences and guest speakers. The students enrolled in this minor will be responsible for creating an analysis of the different topics covered, writing an editorial on topics they like and participating in a lab. Also, students will only have to take one test throughout the entire course. In order to be eligible for this minor, students must apply to the Civic and Community Engagement committee. They must also have an overall grade point average of 2.0 and submit a description of their plans for this minor along with a brief academic summary of their college career.

The new Civic and Community Engagement minor will help students grow academically, as well as become more polished individuals throughout their college careers and life.

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