



15 YEARS OF ADULT EDUCATION

By Dr. Ronald Bolender, Professor of Organizational Leadership/Coordinator of Online Instruction

The Executive Center for Lifelong Learning—referred to as EXCELL—was launched fall 1993 with one cohort in the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program on the main campus in Mount Vernon, Ohio. That was the start of a major thrust in nontraditional education for MVNU that today enrolls nearly 1,200 students.

EXCELL—later to be renamed Adult and Graduate Studies (AGS)—met a growing need in higher education to service older, working students. Students transferred in the first two years of college to complete a business major at MVNU. The BBA program offered one course at a time in the same classroom on the same night of the week with the same cohort of students.

The focus was to create a premier degree-completion program that would serve as a model for other degree-completion programs and eventually lead a reengineering of traditional/residential programs. MVNU's motto, "To seek to learn is to seek to serve" was the foundation of how AGS built and delivered academic programs.

In 1994, I was assigned to lead the effort, through adding state-of-the-art technology, first-class customer service, an identifiable market niche and the design and launch of MVNU's first off-site campus—Polaris located in Columbus, Ohio. Every aspect was created and implemented by using the following values to guide decisions.

Based on MVNU's motto, the following values listed in the form of questions

connected adult students to MVNU's mission, including staff interactions with students, facilitators' interactions with students, curriculum and service to the students. Service included recruiting, advising, registration, billing, financial aid, book delivery, technical support, leadership, management and custodial services. This was a holistic approach. Every event was treated with professionalism including preparing the teaching area for each night of class.

VALUES TO BUILD ON:

Professionalism: Is the program designed to create professionals who are able to serve in the business world? Is the curriculum relevant? Is it a blend of academic and real-world applications? Will organizations find graduates to be of quality to carry out their roles as professionals?

Faith and Learning: Does the program integrate faith and learning? If MVNU's motto is "To seek to learn is to seek to serve," the program needs to have intentional components that teach the Christian worldview related to business living, decisions, and actions. Does the program provide opportunities for students to reflect upon how they can approach business from a Christian perspective?

Living Faith: Do the students experience Christian love? Do they see Christian love in action between the staff, facilitating instructors and other students? Do they experience a unique blend of professional high expectations with

interactions that are Christ-like? Do they see the message of salvation through interaction with others? Do they hear the message of salvation through devotions, prayer and testimonies? Do they read about the message of salvation through the curriculum? Are they confronted with the need for Christ, as a personal savior, in their own lives?

Market and Financial Resources: Are the operations of AGS bringing marketing and financial value to MVNU? Are programs delivered with integrity in terms of providing top quality and service to students while positively contributing to the general needs of MVNU from market awareness and financial perspectives?

Today, AGS uses these values to grow the nontraditional arm of MVNU. New programs (social work) and additional sites have been added (Polaris, Newark, Lima, Gahanna, Cincinnati, Marion, Mansfield and Grove City) since the fall of 1993. During the fall of 2007, online programs were added (BBA—organizational leadership, and the Master of Science in Management).

The future of AGS will look different due to the changing needs of the workplace and new technology. However, the values that will drive future decisions will be based upon the four values that drove decisions in the beginning days of EXCELL. In this way, MVNU's motto, "To seek to learn is to seek to serve," will be preserved and its influence expanded further into the professional world.



"MVNU's motto, 'To seek to learn is to seek to serve' was the foundation of how AGS built and delivered academic programs."

The AGS program has made returning to school easier for me. I experienced a wonderful support system as an undergraduate 25 years ago, and it has only improved since then. Due to life circumstances, I've had to change to an online cohort. I thought I would have to drop out of the MSM program, but everyone worked to keep me enrolled so that I could finish. It definitely is a learning experience, and one I am glad I started and continue to look forward to.

— **Donna De Julius ('82)**
Current MSM student

During the pursuit of my associate degree, I was going to class 3-4 nights a week and on the weekends. Balancing homework and a full-time job was difficult. MVNU's BBA offered me the chance to breathe! The one-night-a-week program was wonderful. I found my professors to be well educated, yet approachable. The biggest surprise was the connectedness I found among my classmates—we became a family! When I made the decision to go back for a master's degree, I returned to MVNU. I have once again found the coursework to be challenging but very rewarding!

— **Jon Worthington ('05 BBA)**
Current MSM student

As both a faculty member and graduate student, I have had a unique opportunity to witness firsthand how the AGS program is truly "life-changing." One of my favorite memories is watching a student graduate who had struggled to complete the program. Although this student encountered many obstacles, he was confident that he was where God wanted him and that He would be faithful to help him complete the program. It is also amazing to see students develop spiritually and how the groups rejoice together and bear one another's burdens.

— **Melanie Spangler ('92)**
AGS Instructor

The landscape in higher education is changing rapidly. We will have to become more flexible and efficient with our programs and with technology. As a member of the School of Business, I would like to see MVNU establish a doctoral program in business administration delivered in the AGS format. I envision this as the first doctoral offering by MVNU and a flagship program, not just for the School of Business or for AGS, but for the University as a whole.

— **Dr. Kevin Hughes ('87)**
Chair of the Graduate Business Department



1993-2004



ADULT AND GRADUATE STUDIES

2004-present