



CenturyCollege

News Release

February 9, 2009

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Century College Honored for GPS LifePlan

Century College student Kary Bowser, 49, a U.S. Air Force veteran and vice president of the Minnesota State College Student Association, was out of school for 28 years before he decided to return to college.

When he enrolled at Century College in 2007 he thought he wanted to become a radiologist. But after working with Century's GPS LifePlan, and doing some serious soul searching, Bowser decided that a career that focuses on his communication skills would be closer to his heart.

"Change is hard, and planning is difficult," said Bowser. "But the GPS LifePlan helps you be brutally honest with yourself. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror and facing facts about who you are and where you want to go."

Century's GPS LifePlan, a campus-wide program that includes an online planning tool for helping students connect their education with their career goals, received a national honor recently by being named one of 10 finalists for the Bellwether Award, which is given out in January at the Community College Futures Assembly in Orlando, Fla. Previously, Century was honored as a Bellwether finalist for its Student Success Day and Teaching Circles programs.

Bowser said during his first semester at Century he was so gung-ho about the GPS LifePlan, he attended nine workshops that dealt with various aspects of the planning tool. “I’d been out of school for awhile, and this was a good way for me to get back in the game,” said Bowser. “I especially liked the workshops about how the brain works and also time management.”

Students who want to use the GPS LifePlan simply go to www.gpslifeplan.org/century and click on one of the five components: EducationPlan, CareerPlan, FinancePlan, LeadershipPlan or PersonalPlan. After they answer questions and fill out various surveys such as the interest inventory survey, for example, the results can be stored in an electronic portfolio (eFolio) that can stay with them beyond their time at Century.

The LeadershipPlan portion of the GPS LifePlan inspired Bowser to become active in student government. Over the past two years, he has served on a number of state student association committees, visited many campuses and also testified at the Legislature on topics related to higher education. Next year, he plans to run for president of the Minnesota State College Student Association.

As a veteran, Bowser said he is pleased that the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system plans to create a version of the GPS LifePlan for veterans. “Student veterans are struggling to adjust to civilian life,” said Bowser. “This will help.”

Bowser said the interest assessment tests associated with the GPS LifePlan helped him sign up for courses in which he would succeed. As a result, the interpersonal communication classes he has taken have shaped his future. “The GPS LifePlan has really been a good foundation for me,” he said. “It was a springboard to my college career.”

Since it was first introduced, involvement in the GPS LifePlan has spread across the Century campus, and it is embedded in the curriculum of many Century courses. Over 65 faculty members use it in their courses. The college also has assigned student experience directors to help students connect with the GPS LifePlan at orientation, campus events such as Student Success Day and through a mentoring program.

Prof. Pakou Vang said the GPS LifePlan changed how she teaches her public speaking class at Century. Instead of having students choose random speech topics, for example, she asked them to focus on the LeadershipPlan portion of the GPS LifePlan. She required students to compose speeches that persuaded the rest of the class that they could lead a particular organization or movement.

“The GPS LifePlan helps my students see the relevance of my course in their lives,” said Vang. “The students begin to see how my class helps them achieve their goals. And students, who never thought of themselves as leaders, begin to see themselves in a new role.”

Vang said the GPS LifePlan also helped make her conversations with students more focused on the student’s life goals. She often refers students to the GPS LifePlan so that they can gain better insight into why they are in college and what they want to do with their education.

“This is a transformative program for our students,” Vang said. “It is so valuable in every way.”



Photo: Century College student Kary Bowser