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Get On The Bus: College Talent & Industry Tours

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### Why an Industry Road Trip?

Employers and career services professionals are always looking for ways to efficiently connect students to internships and job opportunities early in their college careers. Streamlining the early identification process for college students and employers has become vital to higher education institutions and companies in Michigan as they strive to retain talent in the state. College and university educators are equally committed to helping students learn the professional networking skills necessary for achieving their career goals.

In order to address both outcomes, career services staff at Western Michigan University (WMU) created a five-day immersion program that allows engineering & applied sciences students to participate in a state-wide industry road trip. Program participants will visit companies, tour facilities, participate in case studies, network with HR staff, and connect with university alumni in industry. The initiative is designed to engage students in the career development process and connect them to hiring employers earlier in their college career.

### Theoretical Models

American educational theorist David A. Kolb believes “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p. 38). His theory presents a cyclical model of learning, consisting of four distinct stages. Kolb’s (1984) model for experiential learning informed the design and implementation of the program. Subsequently, the Michigan Industry Road Trip was designed to be an immersion program whereby students practiced their networking skills and reflected on each day’s experience to improve their networking skills & learn more about potential career pathways in industry.

### Student Learning Outcomes

As a result of their participation in the 2012 Michigan Industry Road Trip:

1. Students will be able to effectively communicate their skills and prospects to employers.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate proper networking etiquette when communicating with professionals and employer representatives.
3. Students will understand various methods for researching companies and/or the skills and competencies needed for their desired industry.
4. Students will become more knowledgeable of potential career pathways connected to their academic major.
5. Students will learn how to successfully identify and pursue internships, co-op, and/or full-time job opportunities.
6. Students will increase their awareness of living and working opportunities in the state of Michigan.

### Assessment of Student Learning

After identifying six distinct student learning outcomes (SLOs), plans for direct and indirect assessment were made. Staff developed journal prompts to assess student learning related to each outcome, and a rubric was created to aid in the evaluation of students’ journal responses. Additionally, student participants completed a brief quantitative survey geared toward the identified SLOs prior to the trip and after the trip to indirectly measure gains in students’ career preparedness after the five-day program.

### The Road Trip

During the 2012 MI Industry Road Trip we stayed at downtown hotels in Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Detroit. We visited five different companies, toured different urban housing developments, engaged in two networking dinners, met with our local State Representative, and participated in the LiveWaysDetroit program to see first-hand the exciting developments in downtown Detroit.

### Student Testimonials

*"After going on this trip, I have a much better understanding of the various industries and technology that is involved in the day to day operations for engineering. Because of this, I believe I have become better at researching companies by being able to look for the qualities and skill sets they look for in candidates.”* - Micah J. Joran, Engr Management Technology

(Left) Students with senior leadership & Bronx engineers at the Chrysler Technical Center in Auburn Hills, MI.

*"The trip has been an amazing experience for me to better understand what Michigan has to offer as a state. Entering WMU I believed that the job I have in the future will be a job outside of Michigan. After this trip I find it hard to imagine leaving Michigan because of all the opportunities and growth I have been exposed to this week.”* - Karen H., Sophomore, Mechanical Engineering

### Future Considerations

- Continued collaboration with economic development groups and regional organizations in target communities
- Create a road trip committee (faculty & staff)
- Faculty/staff nominations within student application process
- Road Trip Ambassador positions for past participants
- Continued focus on first and second-year students
- Workshop series for student participants prior to trip
- New and more measurable Student Learning Outcomes

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References Available Upon Request