

College students are finding new options

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By Margaret Snider, Telegraph Correspondent

Beginning in the fall of 2013, Drexel University Sacramento is adding an undergraduate transfer program to their operations. Drexel opened its graduate school in Sacramento in 2009, and has had a presence in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, since 1891.

“Our aim is to work with all of the different community colleges in the area,” said Olivia Stelte, Drexel’s Assistant Director of Admissions. “We’re really looking for students to complete the first part of their degree at the community college level, and then transfer into our Bachelor of Science in Business Administration program.”

The program is defined by its cooperative on-the-job education in which undergraduate students participate in paid work experience for six months of their two year degree program.

“Right now there are around 1,200 co-ops available on our co-op website,” Stelte said. “We will be adding to that here in the Sacramento area with our new director of career services who will be networking with the Sacramento community.”

Students can apply for more than one on-the-job experience which could result in their being able to choose among several opportunities, which can be local, national, or international.

“I pretty much understand higher education in California,” said Dr. Sandra Kirschenmann, Associate Vice Provost and Executive Director at Drexel. “What I didn’t understand was this sort of a special – I always refer to it as lightning in a bottle – of Drexel University. I guess for the longest time I really couldn’t even define it myself; I’ve fallen in love with this concept of experiential education.”

Kirschenmann came to Drexel after more than 30 years with the Los Rios Community College District where she ended as Vice Chancellor of Resource Development.

Often colleges create wonderful degree pathways for bright young people, Kirschenmann said, then as graduates they have trouble finding a job.

“They struggle to get a job because they don’t have experience,” she said.

Stelte explained that three quarters of the first year are academic, the fourth quarter co-op. The first quarter of the second year is co-op so the two on-the-job quarters are back to back to make a continuous six-month paid work experience.

Another trademark of the Drexel system is that students go through the program in what is called a “cohort.”

“It’s kind of common in privately funded schools for a group of students to come in together and stay together, and it’s very powerful,” said Kirschenmann.

She herself participated in a modified cohort approach when she got her doctoral degree in education at the University of the Pacific. She said it took her seven years to finish that degree because she was primary caregiver for her very ill husband.

“There were times when my life just melted down,” she said.

One day when a paper was due for her dissertation she concluded she just was not going to be able to get it done. A member of her cohort told her “You don’t need to sleep tonight. Just go home, sit down at the computer, and write something. It doesn’t have to be perfect. Don’t miss this opportunity and drag it out any longer, just go do it now.”

She realized the friend from the cohort was right; she didn’t have to sleep that night.

“So I did exactly that,” Kirschenmann said. “I went home and I wrote the thing. I got something in on time and it wasn’t great, but it kept me from losing another semester, and it’s probably why I finished that degree.”

Drexel is looking at other majors in the business arena, and outside of business as well, according to Kirschenmann.

“We’ve made no decisions yet, but we are most certainly actively pursuing expansion ideas,” she said.

Gary Hartley, Dean of Instruction and Technology at Folsom Lake College, said that Folsom Lake, as well as other area community colleges, are always looking for more options for students.

“Drexel is another opportunity for students to take what they have done here in their educational pursuits and continue to move forward with extending their education into the Bachelor’s degree,” Hartley said. “. . . That’s the business of education in a nutshell, is really taking the passion that students have and want to pursue as part of their education and making it happen in some tangible way.”