

REFLECTIONS



A Leap of Faith

Siena Heights Celebrates 40 Years of Adult Degree Completion





A Leap of Faith

This year Siena Heights celebrates the 40th anniversary of offering adult degree-completion programs. From its humble beginnings in Southfield at a former elementary school (above), the program now boasts more than 60 percent of all SHU graduates each year. The ultra-successful Bachelor of Applied Science degree graduated its first students (at right) in the late 1970s and has made degree-completion a reality for students from all age groups and backgrounds, furthering the Siena Heights Mission in the process.



Concept of Educating Working Adults Turns into the College for Professional Studies

By Doug Goodnough

As the 1960s were known as a time for social experimentation in America, the 1970s had Siena Heights experiencing its own period of educational “counterculture.”

In 1970, then Siena Heights College had named its first lay president, Dr. Hugh Thompson, and was transitioning from all-female student body to a coeducational one. If that evolution wasn’t difficult enough, Thompson brought more of a business and career-focused educational approach to campus, ruffling feathers of some liberal arts-focused faculty and staff of the time.

Thompson’s vision included starting associate’s degree programs that had a fingerprint more like a two-year technical college, not a private, Catholic, four-year institution. Yet some of these programs not only survived, but grew and evolved. Soon, the unique Bachelor of Applied Science degree was born. That degree became the “seed” that allowed Siena Heights to plant campuses around Michigan. First, in Southfield, then spreading to places like Benton Harbor, Battle Creek and Monroe.

Even a separate college—the College for Professional Studies—was eventually created to manage the growth of these off-campus programs. Currently, more than 60 percent of SHU’s graduates now come from a site other than the Adrian campus.

Ironically, the program that some people initially wanted to reject has become one of Siena’s distinctive educational cornerstones because of its unique way of bringing the Dominican, liberal arts tradition to a once-overlooked segment of students.



As SHU adult degree completion celebrates its 40th anniversary of opening its first off-campus site in Southfield, *Reflections* is taking a look back at how it all got started, and where it is at today.

The Community College of Lenawee County



When Hugh Thompson (left) arrived as president of Siena Heights, he noticed there was not a two-year degree option in the county. He saw that as an opportunity to increase not only the educational programs Siena Heights offered, but to add needed students.

“One of the things that became real clear when I got here, was (Thompson’s) vision of Siena,” said Norm Bukwaz, who arrived on the Adrian campus in 1974 to teach sociology. “There was no community college in Lenawee County, so Siena was still going to be Siena in the way it has always been, but it was also going to be Siena in another way: the community college of Lenawee County.”

New associate degree programs were created in concentrations such as fashion merchandising, hotel and restaurant management, electronic engineering technology and criminal justice.

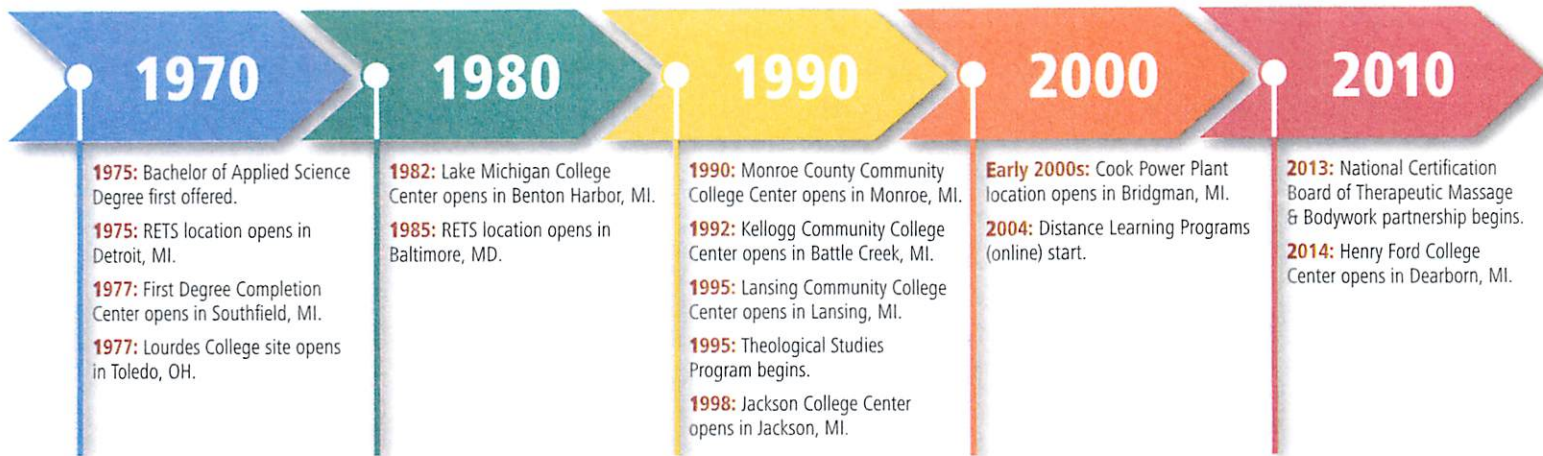
“Most liberal arts schools don’t have these associate’s degrees, but Thompson came out of a career (orientation), instead of a more traditional liberal arts orientation,” Bukwaz said. “Business was going to be big.”

The Beginnings of the BAS

With all these students graduating with applied associate’s degrees, there was a growing demand to offer a four-year option. Bukwaz said the educational leaders of the time, led by Director of Community Education Dr. John Miller, developed the Bachelor of Applied Science degree concept.

“They had been thinking about it for a broad range (of programs),” said Bukwaz, who left the sociology classroom after one year and became the co-op coordinator of the new Applied Science Division. “Fundamentally, the argument became, ‘why can’t (the BAS) be a part of the mission of a liberal arts school?’ To take people with technical backgrounds and make them more humane technicians? Broaden their intellectual horizons. The employers I had made connections with said that what technical people need are communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and ethical sensitivities. ... It looked like it had potential.”

College for Professional Studies Historical Timeline



The Board of Trustees agreed, approving the BAS in May 1975. Soon, electronic engineering technology students from the RETS Electronics School traveled from Detroit to Adrian to complete their degrees.

“RETS was the one that really got (the BAS) going,” Bukwaz said.

Breaking the “European Model”

It didn’t take long for RETS officials and students to begin another conversation with Siena Heights officials about bringing the adult degree completion programs to them. At the time, the thought of offering classes at locations other than the traditional brick-and-mortar campus was nearly unprecedented.

“Colleges and universities have always been the European model, of here’s this university or college, and everybody who is going to be educated is going to come to us, and it’s going to be take place within these walls,” said Deborah Carter, dean of the College for Professional Studies. “We were the first private college in Michigan to do this, and Siena Heights College said, ‘Yes, we think this is worth pursuing and we are going to go ahead and do this. And we will do it as a mission-centered endeavor.’ In order to open ourselves up to the possibility that it could be done well in a different format took a leap of faith.”

Bukwaz, who was named the first director of the BAS Program—and still has that title today—said the first classes in the Detroit area were offered at RETS, the Westinghouse Corp. and a machine and tool company in 1975.



In 1977, thanks in part to a \$1 million or so grant authored by Tom Maher for advanced institutional development, Siena Heights opened its first permanent center in Tower 14 (above) of the Northland Shopping Center in Southfield.

“We were either on the 11th or 12th floors,” Bukwaz said.

Program delivery was also much different than the traditional, 15-week model of the Adrian campus. Now, classes were offered in eight-week formats, often at night or on weekends to accommodate working adult students.

One of those students, Steven West ’79 (read his full profile in this issue), said the Southfield program was a “good opportunity.”

“I had actually graduated from tech school and wanted to get my college degree,” said West, an EET major at RETS who received one of the first BAS degrees from the Southfield center. “They literally just got (the program) started. ... It was a really good experience, and I think we were all kind of learning the process at the time.”

Bukwaz said the Southfield program consisted almost exclusively of EET and nursing professionals (RNs and CRNAs).

He said the BAS model worked well from the start, and filled a need very few other institutions could provide.

“That’s the problem four-year schools have always had in designing four-year programs,” he said. “(The BAS) is a program for practicing professionals with Associate of Applied Science degree backgrounds. ... (AAS students) live in a credentialistic world. They represent the ‘other’ transfer student. The idea is that a whole category of AAS grads out there needed a program so they could build a baccalaureate degree.”



The Community College Partner Model

Bukwaz was the dean of Admissions and Off-Campus Programs when he received a letter from the president of Lake Michigan College in 1982. LMC was looking for a new partner to provide bachelor’s degrees in business on its Benton Harbor campus (above). The program also needed to be very transfer-friendly. After some conversations, Siena accepted the offer to partner with LMC. More than 33 years later, Bukwaz said it has become the “model” for the CPS/ community college partnerships.

Carter, whom Bukwaz hired to staff the LMC location—and eventually replaced Bukwaz as dean of CPS in 2000—agreed. She said there were some built-in advantages of being onsite at another institution.

“Being on a community college campus, we have been able to hire the cream of the crop faculty who are full-time, many who are PhD held in those various locations,” Carter said. “It’s the ideal setting for faculty recruitment in the setting of the community college. They have a real understanding of the student from the community college.”

Siena Heights expanded this model to several other community college locations in the state. Currently, SHU also has centers in Battle Creek, Dearborn, Jackson, Lansing, Monroe as well as an award-winning online program.



Above: Former President Rick Artman (left) poses with current faculty member Sister Pat McDonald during the celebration of Siena Heights becoming a university in 1998. The map they are holding shows SHU’s locations around the state of Michigan at the time.

Back to the BAS

Although CPS offers a number of degree programs such as business, accounting, professional communication and multidisciplinary studies, the BAS is still the most prevalent.

“I think that the Bachelor of Applied Science degree is successful at Siena Heights because of some basic institutional assumptions,” Carter said. “It’s so successful because we have been able to, with Norm’s enormous help, examine all of the current health, trade and occupational associate degree programs that have fit into the model of an inverted major. An inverted major means that the major coursework has already been accomplished before coming to us.”

“If you think about it, if we didn’t have the BAS, we probably wouldn’t have the off-campus programs,” Bukwaz said. “That’s been the opportunity. If there is one program that has been distinctive about Siena Heights (it’s the BAS).”

And West agrees with the idea that bringing a liberal arts education to a non-traditional student population is a good thing.

“One of the classes I took (at Siena Heights) was the philosophy of art,” said West, who has spent more than 30 years as an executive in the telecommunications industry. “It really got me interested in impressionist art. I did my paper on impressionism, and since then I’ve really been a big fan of (impressionist art.) That was something I specifically took out of that.”

Carter said the flexibility of the BAS is also one of its strongest features.

“What has constantly been the advantage of the Bachelor of Applied Science degree, is it has never been tied absolutely to one program,” Carter said. “We have been able to meet people where they are and what they’ve done before. That’s huge.”

Providing credit for past work experience was another important facet of the adult degree completion program. Bukwaz credits an unlikely source—the late teacher education faculty member Sister Eileen Rice, OP—for the development of that concept.

“One of her special areas ... was in vocational education for state certification for vocational teachers,” he said. “She was a leader in the state (to award credit for work experience).”

6,300 and Counting

Since the BAS started, Siena Heights has graduated approximately 6,300 students from the program. That’s roughly 27 percent of all of SHU’s baccalaureate degrees since opening its doors in 1919.

Currently, BAS graduates comprise about 60 percent of all CPS graduates. And those numbers are expected to rise.

Carter credits the overall achievements of CPS to her faculty and staff, especially the academic advisors who serve the needs of the adult degree completion student on a daily basis.

“The absolute key to the success of CPS is our professional advising staff,” she said. “To have an army of people who are really shepherding students, that’s big. That resonates with people. That whole customer service model is very Dominican.”

“I think it’s worked out pretty good,” Bukwaz said of the CPS model. “And we have some tremendous stories now. ... (Adult) students need to be educated. We’ve made some differences.” ♦

One on One With . . .

Editor's Note: This is a regular Reflections article series, and this issue features longtime Siena Heights faculty member and Dean of the College for Professional Studies Deb Carter, who is retiring in September 2015 after more than 33 years at SHU. *Reflections* recently sat down with Deb to reflect on her time at Siena Heights.

How did you get your start at Siena Heights?

"Well, it's an interesting story. I was a teacher of hearing-impaired children in Berrien County, and I had young children (at home). I was working part-time because of my little kids, and administratively they decided to only go with full-time people. I had enough seniority that I could bump somebody, and I just didn't feel that I could that. So I resigned from my position not knowing where I was going to go or what was going to happen next. This was May of 1982. In the summertime, a friend of mine called me and said she saw a very small ad in our local newspaper . . . and it was advertising Siena Heights College needs a part-time person to oversee a new degree program for adult students. I hate to admit this because I've spent 33 years of my life here now, but I had never heard of Siena Heights College. I had no college experience. No higher ed experience. All my experience was K through 12 teaching hearing impaired kids. . . . My friend talked me into calling the number, and I got David James, who was the director of Admissions at the time, and I said I was interested in looking at this. (He said) 'Can you send your resume?' . . . So I mailed it. And then a couple of weeks went by, and I got a call, and David said, 'Our dean is coming out to your area, and he is going to be interviewing candidates.' . . . So I met Norm Bukwaz, who was the dean of Admissions and off-campus programs, and we had a conversation. And my curiosity was, 'what on earth could you see in my background?' I don't know that I would have looked at me, because I didn't have higher ed experience. . . . (But) I was called and offered the job, and it fit my criteria because I had little kids and (I) worked part-time. And I was hired at, believe it or not, 10 hours a week, roughly two evenings a week. . . . To this day, I'm grateful for that strange little happenstance . . . that was I was able to connect with a place that I love dearly."



Above: Retiring CPS Dean Deb Carter (far left) during her days as an advisor on the Lake Michigan College campus. She is pictured with the first graduates of the LMC program, Larry Larsen and George Kanyuh. Also pictured was former dean and current director of the BAS program Norm Bukwaz (far right). The photo was taken in 1984, two years after the LMC program started with only eight students.

What are some of your early memories of the Benton Harbor campus, as well as the adult degree completion programs?

"I started work July 1st (1982), and we offered our first three classes in the fall of 1982. Norm (Bukwaz) taught one of them. We hired Tom Muldary, who was on the faculty here in psychology, and maybe Tom Radecki. . . . The earliest memory was of a feeling as though I was thrown into a deep end of a pool because I felt that there was just so much about the whole world of higher ed and degree completion that I didn't know. I used the 800 number constantly. I was constantly calling and talking to Norm. He was very responsive and it was wonderful. I remember the early students who came into the program, and just how exciting it was to realize that we could be in a position to help them meet a goal. I have to say that excitement has stayed with me all these years because there's just something wonderful about meeting somebody with previous college credits, looking at it and analyzing it, doing a degree plan and helping them meet their goals. It was just a very exciting thing. And I have to say that it was our very first community college program. We did not have any programs on community college sites until then. I learned a lot in that first several years about the importance of relationships, the importance of presence, the importance of curiosity. People really do like to tell their story. . . . I love to hear peoples' stories. It was a really great experience to realize that I was, in many ways, establishing a blueprint for this."

How has higher education in general changed during your time at Siena Heights?

"It's going to make me sound like a dinosaur, but when I first started there were no computers. One of the things that we have embraced in the College for Professional Studies is that while we are at a distance, we know the importance of getting together to meet and to plan and be creative together. The change between 1982 and now has been monumental in terms of the connectedness of a large group of people—45 staff and faculty—who make up the College for Professional Studies."

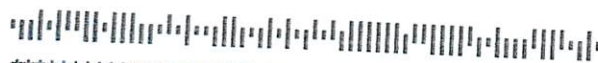
What was your first reaction when you learned Siena Heights was beginning online education?

"Towards the end of the 90s, (then SHU President) Rick Artman came to me and said, 'We have a Higher Learning Commission comprehensive visit coming up, and I want you to write a change request to do a completely online degree program.' I said, 'No, no. You need to pick somebody else, because that's not how I teach. I teach in the classroom and I get a lot satisfaction from face-to-face and seeing people nod as your talking. . . . So I don't think I can do that.' He essentially said, 'You will do this.' So I said, 'OK.' That change in delivery was huge. That was huge for the University and it was huge for (CPS). But we also realized from the very beginning . . . that we were going to be talking about doing online in the Dominican tradition, which meant a real emphasis on community-building. If we couldn't do it that way, we probably shouldn't do it."

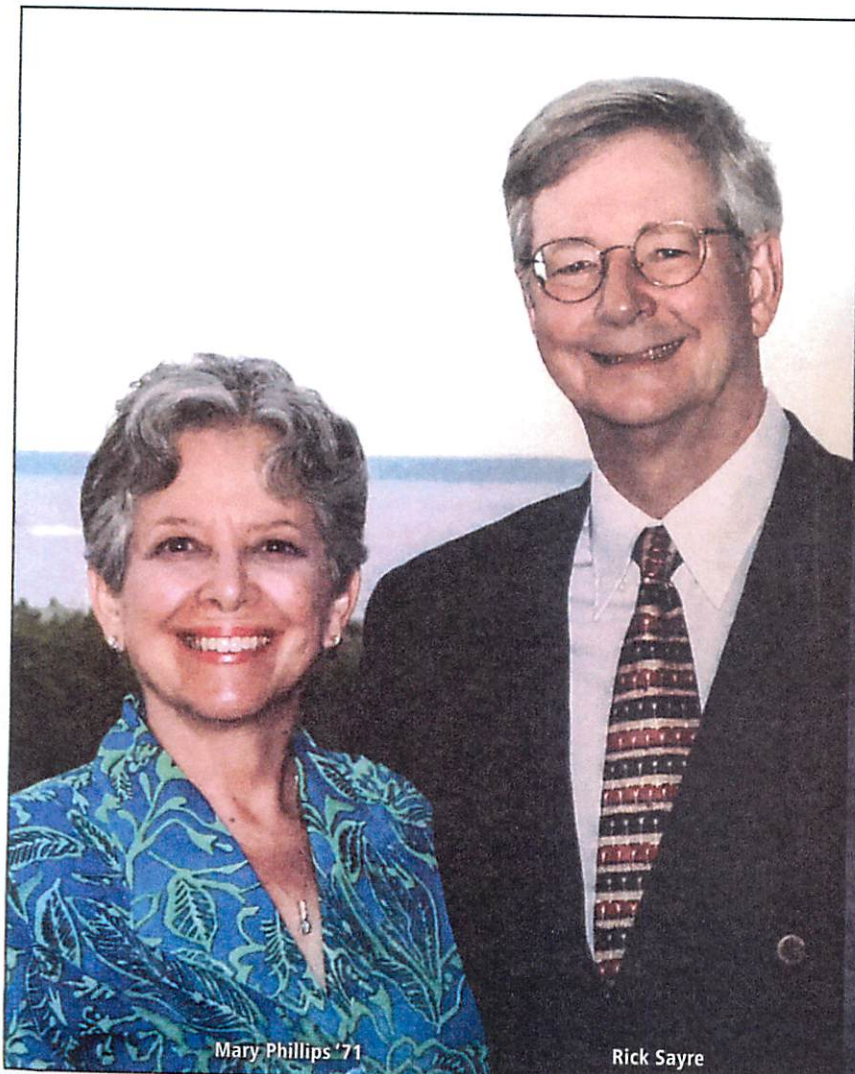


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Mary Phillips '71

Rick Sayre

Make a difference, leave a *legacy*.

It is our hope that our contribution will in some way allow the legacy of Studio Angelico and its distinguished faculty and appreciative alumni to continue and flourish. As Siena has been such a treasured part of my life, my husband (Rick) and I wanted to do what we can to continue the Siena legacy. I would encourage others who have benefitted from Siena Heights to consider leaving a legacy gift. Future students will also be able to benefit from all that Siena has to offer!

— Mary Phillips '71

To learn how you can leave a lasting legacy that will impact the lives of others, call (800) 693-0506 or email jbroocket@sienaheights.edu.