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ABSTRACT

The Master Student course was introduced at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to improve student retention; provide individuals with skills to become successful students; and to graduate students with technical, critical thinking, and effective communication skills. The course provides a point of entry into the institution in the areas of academic study skills, career transferable skills, and campus/community resources. The course also addresses critical academic, personal management, and teamwork skills outlined by the Canadian Corporate Council on Education. The philosophy behind the Master Student course is based on three essential elements: no secrets, no victims, and no solos. No secrets suggests there are no tricks to academic success, just common sense approaches applied. No victims encourages self-responsibility by moving students from a victim mode to one of empowerment. No solos refers to the emphasis in the course on building a cooperative and supportive atmosphere. The textbook used in the course comes from College Survival, a company which services more than 1700 colleges in Canada and the United States and includes two student supplements on critical thinking and career planning, as well as a teacher's manual. The course has been offered with the college's Pre-Technology Program since 1986, and some seven other programs or divisions. Although no official studies have been conducted to determine the effect of the Master Student program on retention, student and instructor comments have been positive. Included in the appendix is a list of the components of the Canadian student success network. (KP)

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# Student Success Programs at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (Edmonton, Alberta, June 6-9, 1993)

X 940 571

# Student Success Programs at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology

## Presentation Overview

Student retention at post secondary institutions is a major issue in education. Institutions and the community can no longer afford to have students drop out of programs due to learning strategy difficulties. Adult students register at their institution with many varying skills and abilities. Often, they are overwhelmed by the expectations of them as students. Student success programs are designed to alleviate the drop-out and failure rates during the critical initial period of attendance.

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology has slowly been responding to the challenge of maintaining student attendance while offering support to students that will enable them to be successful. The presentation proposed will outline the history of the institution of the Master Student materials at N.A.I.T. with an outline of the successes and problems encountered.

Student success program like the Master Student program are of great benefit to the student, the institution and the community at large. This presentation will increase awareness of their value and inform colleagues of our experience at N.A.I.T.

**Student Success Programs**  
at the  
**Northern Alberta Institute**  
**of Technology**

**Session 4.4**  
**Wednesday**  
**June 9, 1993**  
**3:00 - 4:15 p.m.**

**Elaine Soetaert**  
**Instructor**  
**Related Subjects**  
**N.A.I.T.**  
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Student Success Programs  
at the  
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology

**Introduction**

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) began its operations in 1963. Presently, NAIT operates four campuses and offers seventy Certificate and Diploma (one and two year) programs. NAIT also offers thirty apprenticeship programs. In the 1991 - 92 academic year, NAIT's enrolment consisted of 6715 full time diploma and certificate students 7338 apprentices and 31 819 continuing education students. In June of 1991, NAIT had as its staff complement 775 instructors, 631 support staff and 53 managers. Its operational budget is in the order of \$100 million.

Now that you know a little about the institutional setting that I am going to speak about, let me outline the objectives for this session.

- 1) Describe the purpose of the Master Student course
- 2) Outline the course philosophy
- 3) Provide a brief history of College Survival
- 4) Recount NAIT's experience
- 5) Describe student perceptions regarding the course
- 6) Discussion and questions from the floor

### The Purpose of the Master Student Course

The Master Student course was first introduced at NAIT to fulfil several objectives. Firstly, retention of students was an issue. The Pre Technology Program was designed to enable underprepared students upgrade their qualifications to gain entrance into their chosen technology. The dropout rate in the first semester of the program could be as high as 50%. Thus, the Master Student course (named Keys to Student Success) was aimed at retaining students. Secondly, NAIT wants to create successful students. With this goal in mind, Master Student was incorporated to help students be successful in whatever program they were enrolled. And thirdly, NAIT recognized the need to graduate people who are not only technically skilled, but also able to think and communicate effectively - able to manage self-development and interpersonal relations effectively.

To give you a flavor of what the Master Student program attempts to do for students, I'd like you to try a small handwriting exercise with me.

- \* Place you pen or pencil in your less dominant hand.  
That is, if you normally write right-handed put the pen in your left and vice versa.
- \* Print your name on a piece of paper.
- \* Write your name - use script
- \* To remind you of what efficiency feels like, write your name with your dominant hand the way you normally do.
- \* What did you feel? Frustrated, awkward, uncomfortable?
- \* Why did you persist?  
What if the only legal signature was the one signed with your less dominant hand, would you persist?  
What if everyone else laughed at you if you used your dominant hand, would you persist?

The purpose of this exercise is simple. It illustrates that learning a new skill has an awkward transition phase during which it is very easy to give up and quit. When students make the transition from high school to post secondary institute or from a job or unemployment back into education or training, there is a very awkward time of transition. It is very easy for students to give up during this time. The Master Student course provides the "job orientation" for students' entry into their academic studies at NAIT.

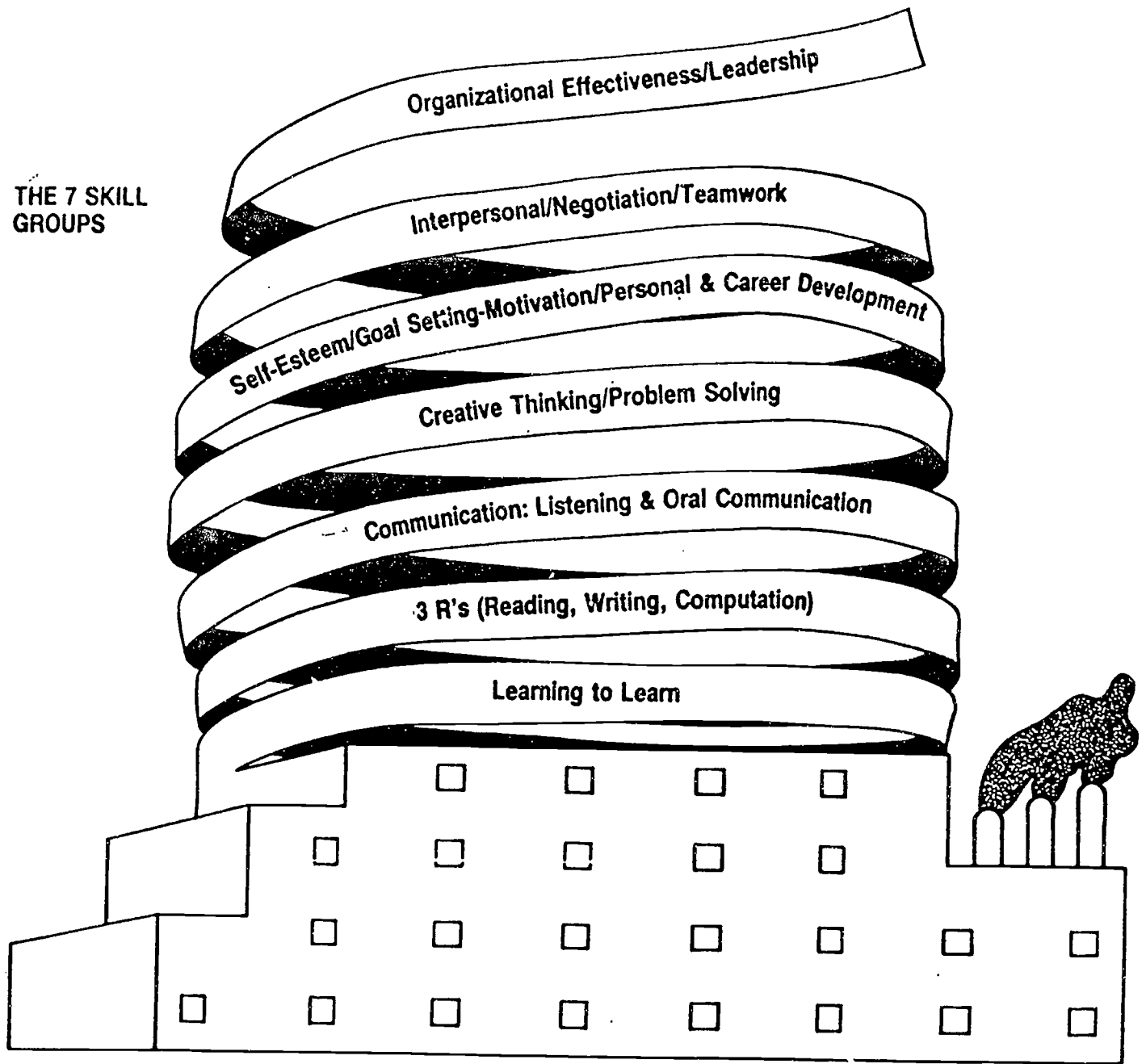
Since Master Student is the "job orientation" portion of a program, it provides a point of entry into the institution in three arenas:

- 1) Study Skills - Academics
- 2) Career Transferable Skills - Interpersonal
- 3) Resources - Campus and Community

The provision of an introduction to academic study skills and the resources of the campus and community are somewhat obvious "job orientation" activities. The teaching of career transferable skills is less obvious. The "Workplace Basics" identified by the U.S. Department of Labour Employment and Training Administration and directly and indirectly addressed in Master Student. As well, the Conference Board of Canada Corporate Council on Education has created an Employability Skills Profile that includes a listing of skills identified into three major areas - Academic, Personal Management and Teamwork. These skills too are addressed in Master Student.



**THE 7 SKILL  
GROUPS**



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## CORPORATE COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

### EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROFILE (FINAL DRAFT)

FALL, 1992

<b>EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROFILE: The Critical Skills Required of the Canadian Workforce</b>		
<b>Academic Skills</b>	<b>Personal Management Skills</b>	<b>Teamwork Skills</b>
<p>Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results</p>	<p>The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results</p>	<p>Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results</p>
<p>Canadian employers need a person who can:</p> <p><b>Communicate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and speak the languages in which business is conducted</li> <li>• Listen to understand and learn</li> <li>• Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays</li> <li>• Write effectively in the languages in which business is conducted</li> </ul> <p><b>Think</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions</li> <li>• Understand and solve problems involving mathematics and use the results</li> <li>• Use technology, instruments, tools and information systems effectively</li> <li>• Access and apply specialized knowledge from various fields (e.g., skilled trades, technology, physical sciences, arts and social sciences)</li> </ul> <p><b>Learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to learn for life</li> </ul>	<p>Canadian employers need a person who can demonstrate:</p> <p><b>Positive Attitudes and Behaviours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem and confidence</li> <li>• Honesty, integrity and personal ethics</li> <li>• A positive attitude toward learning, growth and personal health</li> <li>• Initiative, energy and persistence to get the job done</li> </ul> <p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life</li> <li>• The ability to plan and manage time, money and other resources to achieve goals</li> <li>• Accountability for actions taken</li> </ul> <p><b>Adaptability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive attitude toward change</li> <li>• Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences</li> <li>• The ability to identify and suggest new ideas to get the job done—creativity</li> </ul>	<p>Canadian employers need a person who can:</p> <p><b>Work with Others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and contribute to the organization's goals</li> <li>• Understand and work within the culture of the group</li> <li>• Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes</li> <li>• Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group</li> <li>• Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results</li> <li>• Seek a team approach as appropriate</li> <li>• Lead when appropriate, mobilizing the group for high performance</li> </ul> <p>This document was developed by the Corporate Council on Education, a program of the National Business and Education Centre, The Conference Board of Canada, 255 Smyth Rd., Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8M7. Telephone: (613) 526-3280, Fax: (613) 526-4857.</p> <p>This profile outlines foundation skills for employability. For individuals and for schools, preparing for work or employability is one of several goals, all of which are important for society.</p>

### The Master Student Course Philosophy

The Master Student course has as its stated purpose "To provide an opportunity for students to learn and adopt methods to promote their success in school." To fulfil this purpose, the course has a philosophy that illustrates a three legged stool approach. A stool functions quite well with three legs, but if any one leg is removed, the stool no longer functions. Such is the Master Student philosophy. The three legs consist of No Secrets, No Victims and No Solos.

No Secrets means that there are no "tricks" to any of the skills offered in the program. Simply, they are common sense applied to academics, personal management and interpersonal relations. We invite students to think critically about every aspect of the program and to use what applies to them. A good example is the advertisement of "Thinner Thighs in Thirty Days." I can purchase that product and have it around the house for thirty days, but if I choose not to use it, I will not have thinner thighs. Thus we provide the encouragement to students to find applications of the skills to their own experience. We even provide experiences of application. An example would be an assignment where students are asked to create a set of study notes for one of their other classes within the structure of one of the note-taking techniques taught in the Master Student class. Once students begin to use the skills and see the value of them to their own academic performance, they will adopt them as their own.

No Secrets

Thinner  
Thighs in  
30 Days

empowerment

Persecutor

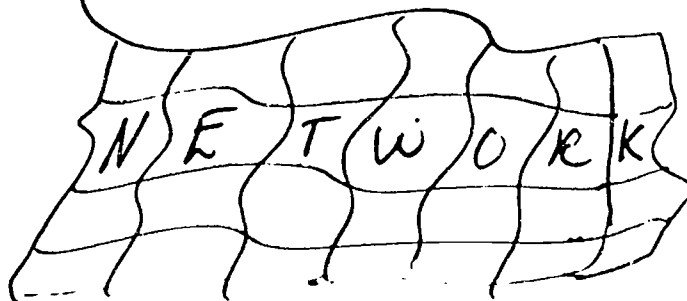
Rescuer

Judgement  
Blame  
Fault

Victim



No Solos



The "No Victims" leg of the stool is a symbol of one of the basic objectives of the course - that of moving students from a victim mode to one of empowerment. Master Student promotes self-responsibility. One of the exercises I have my students do is to describe a time, a situation, when they felt they were a victim. Then I have them adopt the point of view (even if they don't believe it) that they are in complete control of that situation - that they are the creators of it. I ask them to answer the question "What did I do to create that?" Through this and other exercises, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, their own academic career.

The "No Solos" leg of the stool is a focus on the building of a cooperative, supportive atmosphere for learning. The Master Student course provides the opportunity for the loner to find a supportive peer. This course gives students the opportunity to network, experience, participate, experiment; all in a safe atmosphere.

## A Brief History of College Survival

College Survival is the company that markets the Master Student textbook and provide the academic and emotional support to allow the courses to run successfully. It was established in 1980/81 and services more than 1700 colleges in Canada and the United States. Many other colleges use the course model but not the textbook. There are approximately 100 campuses - colleges and universities - using the course in Canada. I am providing a handout that includes names of contact people throughout Canada who are using the Master Student text. (See Appendix). At the present time, College Survival has seven full-time consultants and eight part-time external consultants working with client schools, providing support and guidance, to ensure successful programs.

College Survival provides a student text (\$31.95 Canadian) and two supplements, Critical Thinking, and Career Planning (\$15.00 Canadian). There is a teacher's manual that contains many exercises etc. They provide consultation with their consultants through a 1-800 number (1-800-528-8323). There are a number of supporting videos that can be purchased. They provide, free of charge with the order of the text, 3X5 cards and 2 and 3 part copies for use by the instructor and students.

There are some established alternatives. One can access the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience at the University of South Carolina. Many institutes have created their own student success course; we saw an example here during the

conference of Mohawk College's experience. A 1991 University of South Carolina study quotes that 65.6% of respondents have one or more success courses in place and another 5.5% planned to have courses on line in the fall of 1992.

#### **NAIT's Experience with Students Success Courses**

Student success courses at NAIT began with Jacques Plamandon who was a counsellor at the institute. Through networking with other professionals, he gained an awareness of the benefits of student retention programs. He spoke to Bill Isley who was the Program Head of the Pre Technology Program at NAIT. Pre Technology is a program designed to allow students to upgrade their skills to the level required to enter their technology. The student dropout rate from this program was a concern and so, in the fall of 1986, the Pre Technology Program offered a optional two hour a week version of Master Student. The following academic year the program became a required course. The course is scheduled for two hours per week over a sixteen week period.

At about the same time, Jacques Plamandon became involved with Computer Systems Technology and has been involved in an optional course in that technology. Also at the same time, Ed Kuefler, Associate Dean, Academic of the Industrial Division at NAIT became interested in offering some form of coursework in the "soft" skills. Under his guidance, Master Student courses were

considered in many of the certificate programs in the Industrial Division.

Through inservice offerings at NAIT in May and June, Bill Isley, Eric Papsdorf (Assistant Program Head Physics) and Pas Paskaran (Instructor, Physics) began increasing awareness of the benefits of the Master Student program. Also, these inservice offerings began to build a cadre of instructors who were willing to teach the Master Student course.

Most recently Dietary Technology and Photography have instituted portions of the Master Student course. Telecommunications Technology has begun a pilot of a fifty-one hour "Workplace Readiness" course that uses portions of the Master Student course combined with some materials from the Investment in Excellence program that deals with positive thinking and goal setting. Investment in Excellence is a program offered by the Pacific Institute in Seattle, founded by Lou Tyce. Included in this program was a unit on problem solving. The following page summarizes the student success programs offered at NAIT with a summary of the chapters used from the Master Student text.



	Comm.	Optional Required	Hrs.	Changes Proposed	Chapters
Pre-Technology	Fall 1987	Required	30	None	Omit 9,10
Office Administration	Fall 1992	Required	16	Scheduling with Human Relations	1-6, 11
Industrial Heavy Equip. Tech.	Fall 1992	Required	22	No Change	Omitted 8 & 9
Millwright Program	Fall 1992	Required	30	No text Emph. Study Reading, Job Search	1-6, 8, 10
Computer Systems	Fall 1991	Optional	14	Required	1-7
Graphic Sign Arts	Fall 1992	Required	24	24 hrs. over 12 weeks	Omit 9, 10
Millwork & Carpentry	Fall 1992	Required	34	16 hours	Omit 9, 10
Auto Mechanic Certificate	Fall 1992	Required	28	None	Omit 9, 10
Auto Body Certificate	Fall 1993	Required	21	21	Omit 9, 10
Dietary	Fall 1993	Required	8	N/A	1-6 Learning Styles
Photography	Fall 1993	Required	8	N/A	1-6 Mentors
Tele- communications	Jan. 1993	"Workplace Readiness" Required	51	N/A	Master Student Pacific Institute Problem Solving

### Students' Perceptions of the Course

There is resistance to the concept of a student success course from students. Some of the younger students see it as an extension of some of the life skills type courses that they have taken in high school. Some students tend to be defensive. They assume that a course that teaches study skills is based on the assumption that they are deficient in some way and the course is designed to "fix" them. Older students often feel that this is an insult to their age, experience and wisdom. Thus, the course must be introduced with skill and care.

My experience is that students may initially resist, but once they begin to try skills that are being taught, they begin to see the difference in the efficiency and effectiveness of their learning. Once this begins to occur, students often support the course whole-heartedly. Generally, the comments on student evaluations are very positive. The most common suggestion for improving the course is to give it more hours in the program. Perhaps during the open discussion period, some of the students who are in attendance here can speak to their experience and perceptions.

Although no studies have been done to formally determine the "effect" of the Master Student course on retention, grades, etc., students often comment on the positive effect the course has on their academic achievement.

"Master Student taught me how to organize my notes so that they were helpful to my studies."

"This course (Master Student) helped me to get over my test anxiety."

"When I enroled, I thought I'll try this for a while. Then I got scared. The one thing that kept me from dropping out was the Master Student course. It gave me the confidence to keep trying." (Anonymous student comments from course evaluation forms, 1993.)

### Conclusion

Besides the benefits a student success course is designed to deliver to students, there are some interesting results of which you should be aware, that result from such a course. It is an extremely rewarding course to teach. Students are often very warm and open to the instructor because they see the instructor as supportive of their efforts. Students are often very effusive with their praise of the instructor and the course. Instructors become revitalized. They begin to get in touch with the reasons why they became teachers. They bring this vitality to their other classes. Instructors who do not teach the Master Student course, but teach the students other subjects find the students much more organized and ready to learn. The students tend to be more responsible for their own learning and the entire program, staff and students reap the rewards of a positive flow of energy.

In the context of Total Quality Management or Continuous Quality Improvement, the Master Student course is a vital tool to improve the quality of the instructor's teaching and the

students' learning. As post secondary institutes begin to compete ever more aggressively for students, those institutes that can demonstrate a student focus through the offering of student success programs will have a distinct advantage in the marketplace. Parents will see a student success course as a form of insurance that their child will succeed. Students feel more welcome, honored and valued by their school through their involvement in a student success course. When they graduate, they become alumni with positive feelings towards the school and this could result in more generous donations by alumni back to the school. Student success programs bring many benefits to a school.

I have available to you, a reference list, a sample course outline, a networking list and various odds and ends that you might find useful (see appendix). For further reading and information, please feel free to contact the people at College Survival and/or the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience at the University of South Carolina.

I would like to close today's session by reading you a fable called "Succeeding" by Charles Templeton.

Long ago, in a small village, there lived a very wise man. There was a boy in the town who didn't like the wise man and decided to trick him. He caught a small bird, and cupping it in his hands so that only its tail feathers could be seen, took it to the wise man.

"Is this bird alive or is it dead?" he asked.

If the wise man said it was alive the boy planned to give it a quick squeeze and open his hands to show the bird was dead. If the wise man said the bird was dead, he would open his hands and let it fly away. So no matter what the wise man said, he would have him.

"Is it alive or is it dead?" the boy asked.

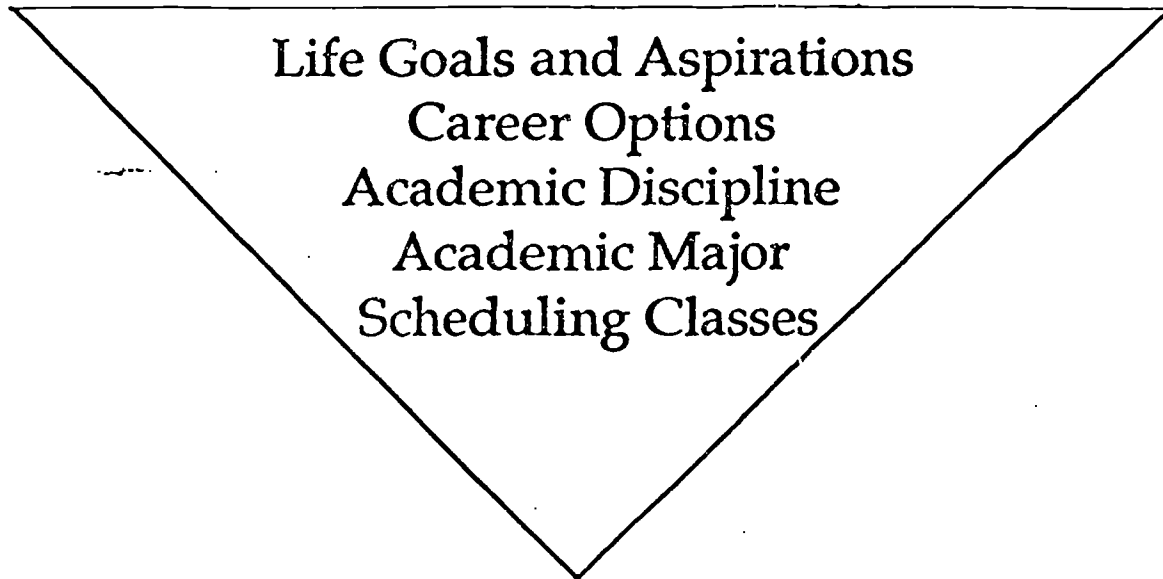
The wise man looked, not at the boy's hands but into his eyes and said, "It's whatever you want it to be."

Your institute can be whatever you want it to be. Your students can be whatever they want to be. A student success course is designed to give what Elaine Cannon describes as the best gift in today's world - the love of the very act of learning.

APPENDIX

# Ask students:

"What does success mean to you?"



- Planning not only for your first job, but also planning for how you want to spend the next 50 years of your life.
- Determining your life goals will assist in clarifying your immediate goals.
- Will this choice direct you closer to your goals or detract from them?
- Students can use this technique to create meaning in each class meeting.
  - How might I use this?
  - What can I do differently?
  - How will this assist me over the next 50 years of my life?

## COLLEGE SURVIVAL

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# SUCCESS

I say to you: "One must have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star." Friedrich Nietzsche

To laugh often and love much, to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Campbell, Eileen, *A Dancing Star Inspirations to guide and heal* Aquarian Press, An Imprint of Harper Collin Publishers, London 1991, ISBN 1-85538-101-X.

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(05/05/93)

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**Student Success Programs**  
at the  
**Northern Alberta Institute**  
**of Technology**

**Session 4.4**  
**Wednesday**  
**June 9, 1993**  
**3:00 - 4:15 p.m.**

**Elaine Soetaert**  
**Instructor**  
**Related Subjects**  
**N.A.I.T.**  
**11762 - 106 Strteet**  
**Edmonton, Alberta**  
**T5G 2R1**  
**(403) 471-7465**



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# RELATED SUBJECTS

## COURSE OUTLINE

### GRAPHIC SIGN ARTS

#### MASTER STUDENT

#### COMMUNICATIONS

#### GSA-140

2 Hours/Week

Over 12 Weeks

24 Hours Total

Prepared By:

E. Soetaert  
Instructor  
Related Subjects

Business Knowledge  
Approval By:

P.G. MacKay  
Ass't Program Head  
Related Subjects

Date: 93-04-22

## DELIVERY METHOD

This course will be delivered by lecture, group work and audio video presentations. Students will be involved in exercises, introspection and reflection. Students will be expected to be highly and actively involved in the learning process.

## STUDENT EVALUATION

The progress and success of students will be assessed through a combination of many assessment tools.

• Assignments	30%
• Test One	30%
• Test Two	30%
• Attendance	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

## TEXTS

Ellis, D.; Becoming a Master Student, Sixth Edition

## STUDENT SUPPLIES

Pens, pencils and highlighter

8. Communication (2 Hours)

Students will learn how to construct an effective "I" message. They will learn how to rephrase complaints into a more useful form. Assertive communication will be emphasized.

9. Conflict Resolution (1 Hour)

Assertive ways of communication will be explored with respect to affecting a win-win resolution to conflict.

10. Dealing with Criticism (1 Hour)

Tips on giving criticism effectively will be discussed. Students will explore strategies for receiving criticism non-defensively.

11. Goal Setting and Affirmations (2 Hours)

Students will have the opportunity to be involved in a goal setting exercise. Affirmations will be dealt with as a tool to achieve goals.

12. Attitude, Self-Talk and Positive Thinking (2 Hours)

The cyclical relationship between self-talk, attitude and positive thinking will be explored. Students will be exposed to tools to gain and maintain a positive attitude.