What originally brought you to Purdue?

As was the traditional pattern for many married women in the 1960s, I tagged along when my husband was hired for a faculty position at Purdue. I hoped there would be a niche where I could continue my career in student personnel administration, but that was not assured. At that time there was no institutional help finding employment for the accompanying spouse. Because nepotism rules still applied in many institutions across the country, I was not sure Purdue would hire me—my spouse had “first dibs” on the “real” position.

At the time we arrived on campus, the University Placement Service (now the Center for Career Opportunities) assisted male students in their search for jobs but not female students, the majority of whom married soon after graduation. The Office of the Dean of Women offered a modest placement service for women students to help fill this gap, and it was to this office I went for help locating employment. I learned quickly this service was for Purdue students, not for women in general who sought employment. However, while in the office, I learned informally about an opening in the Psychology Department and was subsequently hired as the director of the Testing Center. A couple years later I was offered a position as assistant dean in the Office of the Dean of Women (ODOW) and made a move that lasted the next thirty years.

As many others discover during their lifetime, planning is important, but much is determined by serendipitous events and encounters. Louis Pasteur’s statement, “Chance favors the prepared mind,” was reinforced by Rusty Schweickart, the astronaut and Old Master, who commented during his Purdue visit that “opportunities come every day, but you recognize them only if you are prepared.” It was a chance encounter with a staff member that resulted in my first position on campus and another chance encounter that triggered my move to the ODOW and the career track for which I had prepared. Indeed, “life happens.”

Are you currently pursuing any projects with the University? If so, what do you hope to accomplish?

World and national events are forever influencing life on university campuses around the world, and Purdue University is no exception. For example, the Purdue Memorial Union was built in response to World War I, restricted campus housing for black students reflected the racial discrimination practiced in Indiana and much of the country, the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical Engineering Cadettes program was created to fast-track select women students to replace male engineers who were drafted for World War II, and the student protest movement was a response to the Vietnam War. Life at Purdue University mirrors many of the issues bubbling in the larger community.

Of special concern today is the information literacy of our university students; current national and international events highlight this issue. Where do students go for news? What filters do they impose...
You have been a strong advocate for women’s rights on campus. What do you think the future of equality holds for female Boilermakers?

This is a rare moment for Boilermakers! The announcement was made recently that four college deanships have been filled with women—Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Sciences, and the Graduate School. This is promising. Some will recall a time when the University’s president, all the vice presidents, and all the deans of the colleges were male except for Home Economics. In that same era, Purdue had only a smattering of departments headed by women.

The academy has come a long way from a time when women’s pension plan paid them less than men when all other factors were equal, when women students were discouraged by faculty and advisors for enrolling in traditionally male-dominated academic programs, when it was difficult to find a restroom for women in specific academic buildings, when the support for women’s athletic teams were inadequate by any standard, when women students had to be in their housing unit by a specific time but men did not.

Today, what is the gender mix of students using maker-spaces, enrolling in the cyber security and polytechnic programs? These new programs arrived without a gender-specific tradition; does today’s enrollment reflect that? Purdue is creating a better climate, but there is no reason for complacency. The work has not been completed. Social change occurs as a slow waltz—a step forward, a half step back, a step forward, a step to the side. As in the past, issues related to women on campus will also be influenced by national and international events. #MeToo, Black Like Me, and the next social movements will be part of the changes for Boilermakers. It seems inevitable we will revisit old issues numerous times, but the trend line is moving in the right direction. I am ever hopeful.

As an undergraduate student, did you plan for a career in advocacy?

My life goals have been rather ordinary—find joy, be useful, live with integrity, show respect for others and the environment, use my talents appropriately, share my bounty, and so forth—characteristics that were modeled by my family. None of us execute our goals perfectly, but they are aspirations nonetheless. It would be difficult to hold true to these goals without also becoming an advocate for others and self.
are never static . . . yesterday’s ‘wow’ becomes today’s ‘ordinary.’” The undergraduate students who are “divinely discontent” and who become involved in research projects position themselves to be part of the next wave of “wows” in their discipline. It is those who think like researchers who will be the next Bezos in the academy, commerce, agriculture, medical science, space, the arts.

Being curious is a basic quality of living a rich and interesting life. Without curiosity it is easy to look at our everyday world without seeing anything in detail, without observing the trends, and without discovering the clues that lead to the “aha” moments. It is those simple questions asked by children over and over—“Why?” and “What is that?” and “How come?” and “What does that mean?”—that fuel the imagination and are the foundation for more rigorous research as the young person moves through the educational process and arrives at Purdue.

To entertain ourselves during long waits in airports or medical offices, my spouse and I will check earlobes of those around us—what is the ratio of people with small, attached earlobes to those with long, droopy earlobes. This is a silly game in some ways, but it focuses our attention on something constant in our environment that seldom gets attention. Do “tight earlobe” people have a lineage from specific parts of the world? Can earlobe types forecast specific medical problems? Are there personality differences between “tightlobe” and “longlobe” people? Who has researched some of these questions, and what did they learn? What questions remain for the next researcher? Sometimes the insignificant detail is not insignificant.

Attending a Purdue commencement is a grand experience with much to look at and see. The viewers who are most curious are likely to ask, “Why are the all the candidates who earned degrees as Doctor of Audiology and Doctor of Nursing Practice female?” What does that mean? Why are most of the candidates for a Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering male, and why are there more international students in this discipline than in audiology or nursing? How would that information enlighten us about our current and future world? What research projects are represented here that

Before I began elementary school, my father “hired” me to pick dandelion blossoms so our lawn would be the standard for the neighborhood. The contract was $.01 per blossom. I was poorly informed about economics, but I loved the challenge. I cleared our lawn and the neighbors’ lawns and earned $10.00 for my tenacity! Not bad for a five year old. My father honored his agreement but wanted to change the next contract to ten blossoms for $.01. I was young and naive but not that naive, and I declined that puny offer. I did not realize for many years the value of that early experience of rejecting a poor offer. Advocacy.

Sometime after my college graduation, I received my sorority’s glossy magazine filled with articles and pictures of “sisters”—collegiates and alumnae. The feature article in that issue was about the numerous alumnae who were wives of political leaders and what they were doing to advance their husbands’ careers. I was dumbfounded that my sorority’s national leaders were promoting women in a subservient role rather than focusing on models who were stepping forward to lead. I wrote immediately to the National Office expressing my dismay and disappointment. I did not receive a direct response; however, the next issue of the magazine had a photocopy of my letter on the inside cover, and the former editor had disappeared. Advocacy.

Some of us had the experience of being told by loan officers that our salaries could not count in the calculation of a loan for housing, that we could not have a credit card unless it was in the name of our spouse, and that our medical bills must be sent to our spouse (“the responsible person”) even though each of us had medical insurance in our own name. Those experiences “set the sail” in determining we must advocate for ourselves and for other women who are marching down the road with us and behind us. Advocacy happens because we are faced with injustices that require a response.

**What do you believe is the importance of undergraduate research at Purdue?**

Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, wrote in the 2017 annual report, “One thing I love about customers are never static . . . yesterday’s ‘wow’ becomes today’s ‘ordinary.’” The undergraduate students who are “divinely discontent” and who become involved in research projects position themselves to be part of the next wave of “wows” in their discipline. It is those who think like researchers who will be the next Bezos in the academy, commerce, agriculture, medical science, space, the arts.

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are waiting for the attention of a disciplined undergraduate researcher?

It can be the opportunity of a lifetime for a student to become involved in undergraduate research—to find a topic that matches an area of curiosity, participate as a team member in a project, learn the correct protocol for an investigation within a specific discipline, experience the disappointment and the value of negative results, and build a mentor relationship with a faculty investigator. Be “divinely discontent!”

What advice do you have for the undergraduate population seeking meaningful research projects?

The possibilities in each academic discipline are so vast it is almost immobilizing for the prospective researcher. However, here are some basic suggestions:

- Take a walk and make a list of the possibilities for scientific investigation, asking: What is the relationship of green space to wellness? Do young professionals choose to live in your hometown? If not, why? What do family planners need to learn from you and your peers? What is the impact on mental and physical health of living in intergenerational homes?
- What topics excite you? You may be working on some aspect of this research for a long time, and it may evolve into a lifelong specialty.
- What personal characteristics are assets in doing research? What is your ability to stay focused, your degree of tenacity when the process isn’t easy, your ability to work solo when you need to follow an unpopular route?
- Are you willing to initiate contact with an assortment of faculty members to learn what research projects they are working on and how you might fit in their team? Ask yourself not only is the topic of interest, but also, is the team of interest?
- What companies might have research and development departments with projects of interest to you? A contact might produce a research opportunity or provide a networking link that would take you elsewhere.
- What research projects are your peers in different departments working on that sound interesting?
- Drop in some campus and community maker-spaces and ask what is going on.

Oh, the Places You’ll Go! achieved Amazon’s #1 ranking for all books sold—ahead of the recipe books, the self-help books, the mysteries, and the political commentaries. Why is that? Regardless of age, Dr. Seuss has an optimistic message for all who have “brains in their head” and “feet in their shoes”—those who are curious and energized: “You can steer yourself any direction you choose. . . . Your mountain is waiting. So get on your way.”

Interviewer

Eliza Van is a sophomore in Purdue’s Honors College pursuing a dual degree in English from the College of Liberal Arts and human development and family studies from the College of Health and Human Sciences. She is also studying two minors: sociology and women’s studies. Van served as the coordinator for this volume of the Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research. She also is involved as a writing tutor in Purdue’s Writing Lab and as an ambassador for both the College of Liberal Arts and the Honors College.