

Dr. Ray Gerszewski retiring after 32 years at Mayville State

By James R. Johnson—November 28, 2015

MAYVILLE, ND - When Dr. Ray Gerszewski accepted a job at Mayville State in September 1983, he thought he'd be at the school for only a couple of years.

"I don't know that I had aspirations to move to a larger campus, but after a couple of years here you realize that this is a real community," Gerszewski told the Tribune. "I think this university sells itself to a lot of people."

Gerszewski began his 33rd year at Mayville State at the start of the 2015-16 academic year. Most of his tenure has been as vice president for student affairs. At the conclusion of the fall semester in December. Gerszewski is retiring.



Dr. Ray Gerszewski will retire in December after more than 32 years as vice president of student affairs and institutional research at Mayville State University.

"It's just time," he says, "to let some new people come in with different ideas and different approaches. Quite honestly, I've been doing this for thirty-some years, so it's time to try something else."

The Oslo, Minn. native had taught in public schools for six years before he returned to the University of North Dakota in 1981 to pursue his doctorate, which he finished during his early years at Mayville State.

"I started out here in a line position as director of counseling," Gerszewski explains. "After two years, the president here at the time, President (James) Schobel, wanted to do a reorganization. We didn't really have a student affairs division as such. He created the vice president position and consolidated some of the reporting functions to that position. I've expanded a little bit since then."

When it comes to addressing students' needs, a typical day of the job for Gerszewski is atypical. "That's one of the things I've enjoyed about this position is no two days are the same," Gerszewski says. "You're dealing with students and student issues. Those change from day to day. "

He emphasizes, "The one thing that has been consistent is students. Freshmen get homesick, they have adjustment issues, they find this experience is different from what they anticipated. You watch the students grow and develop, and probably one of the most-enjoyable parts is when their seniors and they graduate.

Mayville State President Gary Hagen praises Gerszewski's role as a student advocate.

"He has served as adviser to Student Senate and assisted with their organizational functions. He has promoted leadership development and coordinated 'Who's Who' and Student Senate Recognition Program," Hagen said. "He has served as the primary contact for student issues and complaints and final appeal for disciplinary issues. He has actively provided direct services to students and been an institutional contact for a variety of scholarship programs."

Seeing MSU come full circle

Gerszewski has seen Mayville State endure some lean times through the 1980s and 90s, when the North Dakota Legislature weighed questions of how many campuses were needed in the state and what the role of smaller campuses would be. Those issues were eventually squelched and Mayville State is marking semesters of record enrollments.

"We've gone full-cycle in some respects," he agreed. "Since then, we've shown the role that we do have. With increasing enrollments and expansion of programs, I think we're on pretty firm ground."

He's been part of a team under Hagen and other cabinet and staff members who have made Mayville State "healthy in a lot of ways, not just financially," Gerszewski says. "It's been very nice working with them. They're a very supportive team."

Hagen said Gerszewski's "leadership on the President's Cabinet has been solid and the experience he brought to this group was very much appreciated."

Hagen continued, "As a supervisor, I couldn't imagine having a better employee. His work was always complete, timely, of superior quality, and totally dependable. He was always professional, personal, and he had a great sense of humor."

Hagen said Gerszewski has made his mark writing grants that have brought Mayville State University essential technology, retention capabilities, and a substance abuse and prevention program.

Hagen said, "He managed two-consecutive Title IV Student Support Services Program grants over eight years that resulted in nearly \$1,000,000 to provide integrated retention services to a target group of educationally and economically disadvantaged students."

With those accomplishments, it's no wonder that Hagen says Gerszewski will be difficult to replace.

"I am sure the Mayville State University historians will put him at, or at least very near, the top of all the vice presidents that Mayville State has ever had," Hagen told the Tribune.

Gerszewski says his successor will have to comply with higher education requirements put in place at federal and state levels.

"That's always a challenge and it's a part of the job that isn't necessarily the most enjoyable but still has to be done."

Gerszewski's retirement comes just after the Board of Higher Education's approval of Mayville State's first master of arts teaching degree, the program to start in the fall of 2016.

"That will be an interesting sequence of events," he said. "It would be kind of nice to stick around and see what happens, but I guess I can watch from afar."

Ray and his wife, Alana, will make trips to Texas to see their kids and grandkids, "especially in the midst of the winter," Ray says with a smile. There will be a pair of receptions for Gerszewski, the first from 3 to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8 in the Campus Center Luckasen Room at Mayville State University.

The second will be more of a family and community gathering from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 27 at Faye's Henhouse Quilts.

"I'm just very appreciative of having had the opportunity to spend the bulk of my career here," Gerszewski concluded. "It's been a great place to work, a great community and a great place to raise a family."