Overview

The Paper Technology Foundation completed our 62nd year of support for our exceptional Paper Engineering students at Western Michigan University. Since its inception in 1958 more than 1200 WMU Paper Engineers have been educated and trained for influential careers in the pulp, paper and affiliate industries. Our foundation continues its tradition of providing excellent support to our students, our faculty, and paper engineering curriculum. In partnership with our member companies, we also facilitate the placement of students in internships, co-ops and post-graduate placement.

Our 62nd Annual Meeting was a resounding success as member companies, and WMU faculty and staff attended our Board of Trustees meeting either in person or virtually. Foundation membership includes 31 companies; 29 voting members and 2 contributing companies.

Special highlights included our first student mentoring roundtable and a reception that was well attended by students, parents, faculty, trustees, and Western Michigan executives including President Edward Montgomery. During the reception, the Foundation recognized outstanding leadership, achievement and service to the following individuals:

- Mike Farrell – Reigning Foundation President – Foundation Fellow Award
- Dr. Tony Lyons – Longstanding Education & Research Committee Chair and Adjunct Instructor – Honor Award
- Andrew McCabe – Outstanding Senior Award

The student mentoring roundtable was very well received as several relevant topics pertaining to student development and career success were addressed by experienced industry executives. This was an extremely valuable session for all of our students and participating parents and we intend to build upon this format for future meetings.

On a sad note, we lost a dear member of our Paper Engineering family. After a long and courageous battle with cancer, Jon Kerr passed away this November. Jon graduated from WMU Paper Engineering in 1982 and always stayed very close to the program throughout his career. Jon had a deep love and passion for helping people and in 2018, he started his own consulting company that provides help to young engineers entering the industry. This same passion and selflessness motivated Jon and his wife to establish a Kerr Family Endowed Scholarship. We will always be grateful for Jon’s friendship and passion for his fellow Bronco’s and young engineers across our industry.
PTF Financials

For fiscal year 2020-21, total revenue for the foundation was $309,866. This consisted of membership gifts totaling $279,810 and investment gains/misc. income of $30,056. Operating expenses were favorably impacted by the effects of the pandemic on recruiting and student events bringing a positive gain in the general fund net assets of $151,346. As of June 30, 2021, the general fund had net assets of $575,324.

Endowment Investment

Our endowment investment performance improved markedly as the economy and equity markets recovered from the initial effects of the pandemic. Total endowment revenue for the 2020-21 fiscal year was $1,573,377 bringing the total endowment fund balance to $6,390,351 as of June 30, 2021 versus $4,990,914 on June 30, 2020.

Membership

At the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year, our voting membership total was 26. During the year we were disappointed to see Nalco and Kadant step down. However, as a lead up to our 62nd Annual Meeting we welcomed three new member companies—Packaging Corporation of America, Nine Dragons US, and Premier Packaging bringing our total at the time of this print to 29 voting members and two contributing companies.

Recruitment and Retention

Our first-year enrollment for the fall of 2021 was 17 students, including three returning freshmen. We also welcomed three transfer students. Overall, this was a disappointing result that was no doubt impacted by limited recruiting activity and the cancelation of several college fairs due to the pandemic. However, total program enrollment is 89 students which includes non-registered students away on co-op. As comparison, last fall had a total enrollment (including non-registered co-ops) of 85 students. Nonetheless out total program enrollment is 89 students (includes non-registered co-ops students) which represents
an increase in enrollment versus last fall despite declining enrollment across other engineering
disciplines and the University as a whole.

In October 2021 we welcomed Cindy Gleaton to our team as our new Recruiting and Outreach
specialist. Cindy brings extensive sales and marketing experience and much enthusiasm to this critical
role. We remain optimistic, that with the proper strategy and Cindy’s experience and professionalism,
we can return to pre-pandemic first year enrollment levels and eventually reach our teaching and lab
capacities.

Our retention rate remains high at 77% for the first-year students, despite the incredibly challenging
virtual learning environment experienced over the last year and a half. This is a lower retention rate than
the program has traditionally experienced but it is still stronger than the other engineering programs
and better than expected considering the pandemic imposed limitations on our normal retention
events. With the return to in-person activities this fall, we anticipate returning to a retention rate in the
mid 80’s for the class of new students. In addition to scholarships, students are mentored in resume
preparation, interviewing skills, academic studies and are provided with upperclassmen mentoring by
the Ts’ai Lun student officers. Students also participate in Ts’ai Lun student chapter events directed to
their personal and professional development, and they participate in the annual TAPPI Student Summit
conference.

**Scholarship Awards**

Scholarship awards continue to be the primary means for effective recruiting and subsequent retention
of students. Awards for the 2020-21 academic year were $300,299 as we continue to see our students
excel in the classroom. A student who earns a 3.5 cumulative GPA or higher during their time in Paper
Engineering may receive $33,000 in PTF scholarships.

Of the 89 students currently enrolled in paper engineering, 63 students are on scholarship. For the
2021-22 academic year we anticipate awarding $407,000 in scholarship funds.

**Paper Night and CEAS Engineering Expo**

For our fall 2021 Paper Night, we welcomed 11 companies whereby more than 200 unique student/
employer connections were facilitated through virtual communication. The overall video capability
was greatly improved over 2020. Additionally, the Engineering Expo attracted 22 industry employers.
Initial placement results are strong and substantially improved over the pandemic impacted fall 2020
recruiting season. Our students are accepting the full-time placement about 6 months to one year in
advance of their graduation.

**Faculty**

We welcomed Matt Stoops back to the department as lab supervisor. He also is providing specialized
instruction and facilitation of our Coating and Advanced Paper Processes courses. We are very grateful
for our guest instructors who bring extensive industry experience and practical subject content to
these courses.

**Graduate Placement**

Our 2021 spring graduates were:

- Julia Burk, joined Green Bay Packaging in Green Bay, WI
- Tyler Fleming, joined International Paper in Rigelwood, NC
- Hunter Ridenour, joined PCA in Filer City, MI

Our 2021 fall graduate will be:

- Andrew McCabe, joined Graphic Packaging International in Kalamazoo on K2
The demand for our graduates remains high and exceeds supply as our industry embraces a myriad of opportunities for more sustainable solutions and operational excellence. This of course makes recruiting and retention of students evermore critical. The entry level compensation packages remain very attractive and well above other engineering disciplines.

**PTF Priorities**

As we head into 2022, we aim to finalize the Dr. Raymond L. Janes Endowed Professorship campaign and design an implementation plan with input and oversight from the PTF Governance Committee. Our intentions are to have this ready for the Board of Trustees approval at our Spring 2022 meeting.

In order to achieve our aggressive recruiting and retention objectives, it is imperative that we increase our scholarship funding. To meet this challenge, we will be collaborating with the WMU advancement office to devise our strategy and leverage their expertise and systems. If you are a Board Trustee and/or a WMU Paper Engineering alum, please consider a generous gift to our scholarship fund to benefit future generations of paper engineers. PTF membership development and relationship management will continue to be paramount. To that end we will continue efforts to onboard additional members while strengthening existing relationships.

In closing, we thank all of our faculty, foundation officers, trustees, staff, and students for their continued commitment in making Western Michigan University—Paper Engineering one of the premier academic and practicum programs in the country. Go Broncos!