

“I would have stayed away from science if it wasn’t for the liberal-arts education at Hope, and now my job deals with science.” That’s how Matt VanderWende views the benefits of a liberal-arts education. **“It’s interesting to see how management education ties the liberal arts together. It helps you to think outside the box.”**

Thinking outside the box is definitely something VanderWende is familiar with: he graduated a semester early in December of 2005, was one of the first to be a freshmen on the London May Term offered through the Department of Economics, Management, and Accounting (DEMA), and had two internships which gave him the hands on experience that complemented the knowledge learned in the classroom. “Hands-on-learning is so different from the classroom, and so valuable.” Yet he doesn’t discount the things he learned in the classroom. “I was taught to think from a systems perspective. You have to do your thinking in the real world. You can’t just regurgitate stuff. [The professors] taught me to dig down deep into a problem and find the root cause. It’s a learning process; [the answer] doesn’t always come to you right away. You are continuously learning as you dig deeper into the problem.”

VanderWende feels that the classroom, by presenting different perspectives, challenged his thinking. “In my management seminar class, we were asked ‘how can you make a difference in the world with your job?’ It’s about how you treat people. Respect and responsibility are important. You are held accountable to make a difference. You are given these gifts and talents to use. Classes at Hope teach you to view your job as a vocation.” VanderWende also gives credit to the Bakers Scholars program—of which he was president for a year—for promoting this idea and fostering that outlook on all facets of his life.

Matt is grateful that he was able to experience the interaction with his professors. He believes that they modeled their ethics in the classroom. “I learned from them how to act and lead. They knew what is going on in the ‘real world,’ and that made their advice and teaching that much more valuable.” He also believes that the professors showed by example “how to work and how to have fun while you are doing it.”

His advice to incoming freshmen is to take advantage of as many different experiences as you can, regardless of your major. For graduating seniors, he has a few other suggestions such as start your job search as early as possible so that you can match your talents with your passions. “Set high expectations and don’t be satisfied with simply getting a job.”