

Can you visualize what happiness may look-like if it were to manifest itself as a physical form? Anyone that knows the Associate Vice President for strategic initiatives would tell you “April Welch”.

Now, who is April? Why the hell do you care? Well, like many students here at Illinois Tech, I don’t know much about the members of the administration of the school. Most students in fact, would have a difficult time identifying the president, some may not even know his name.

But as a student of any college or university, would be of great use to you to know more about the very people that are making the decisions on behalf of the student body. April Welch is one of those figures, and thankfully she is one of the friendliest people you can meet.

Her main prerogative is far reaching, in that she has help create many initiatives on campus for the betterment of the students’ experience in college. From the Idea Shop, to the Summer Institute, and even to students thinking about study abroad, April has had a hand in it. “Programs that touch all different areas”, she says, is the best way to summarize what she works in and aims to create.

April has been working at IIT since 2006, and since then she has been working to help students get a chance at bettering their education. Originally started working on a student focused program called Pretrans. She identified students that were interested in Civil Engineering, invited them to Illinois Tech during the summer for different field trips, hands-on projects, and guest speakers from the industry.

When her boss, Michael Gosz, was promoted to Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, the two of them went to work on the policies at the time. Their job included making changes to the policies that were in place, “There were some policies that were, not oppressive to students, but not in the student's favor.”, April recalls. During this time, she also focused on improving retention rates and student experience, leading her to write the grant for Exelon Summer Institute (at the time it was named just “Summer Institute”).

One of her bigger programs, Exelon Summer Institute began in 2008. Her vision for a program run by college students and give incoming freshman a smooth transition from high school to college had started but with difficulties.

“In 2008 it wasn’t funded by Exelon. I begged, borrowed, and stole.”, she jokingly says. Since it was the first time for the program, the initial students would not be taught by the student TA’s. In fact the initial students were not Illinois Tech students at all, they had been chosen by April personally from a stack of denied applicants of the school.

April looked at all the denied applications and chose 20 students that she felt were smart enough to attend the school. She recalls that as she looked through the pile, she looked for students that had experienced a medical emergency taking them away from their studies, or just completely bombed their ACT exam. April wanted to give them a second chance.

“They let me send alternative letters, saying, ‘You are admitted, but you have to successfully complete this four week training program.’”

With the program, she hoped to demonstrate that going through an experience like this Summer Institute could really change a student. After the first summer of the program, funding was secured from Motorola until 2010 when April was able to get Exelon fund the program, doing away with the monetary problems for the foreseeable future.

April's goal for this program now includes in teaching the students to get involved in their school's different aspects.

During the summer of 2015, the Brazilian government allowed 2,000 students to travel to the United States to be partnered with a mentor and work on research projects.

"We were one of only a handful of Universities accepting to take students from Brazil.", says April. Out of the few schools that accepted the students, Illinois Tech was the one with the most Brazilian students, at 800. This program was April's initiative to both have foreign students visit our campus, but also to open up doors for students that would otherwise have a difficult time in Brazil. Since these students were fully paid by the Brazilian government, that allowed for more funding towards scholarships for domestic students.

Due to the government of Brazil changing policies and no longer helping in sending students to the states, April has expanded the summer program for this year to now include various other countries of the world.

One of her more impactful programs on campus was the Idea Shop that is located within the Technology Business Center of Technology Park. In 2010 she

proposed to the owners of the Technology Business Center, Wexford, building that a prototyping lab be built on the lowest floor of the building.

It would benefit the Wexford company by increasing traffic to the building were many startups were being incubated. It would also greatly benefit the school because it was the prototype for the new Ed Kaplan building.

At the time April was in charge of planning the Idea Shop in order to demonstrate how the Ed Kaplan Innovation Building would work on the campus. In the Idea Shop the iPad initiative, which was one of the first generations in the nation to do a one-to-one iPad program.

“We wanted to not only be on the edge of technology, in terms of rapid prototyping and building. We wanted to be on the edge in terms of instructional design.” Apple was brought in to train the faculty how to teach with iPads.

In the Idea Shop there was a bank of iPads with many useful tools installed on them like textbooks, manuals, and paid programs for students to use.

Together with many other colleges of her, they have worked together to achieve the funding for the new Ed Kaplan Building.

Good news for students that wish to study abroad, because starting this Fall semester, there will be more scholarships for students to travel during the semester. April's proposal was to have more domestic students travel for a few weeks out of the semester to Universities in India, South Korea, and China. April has been recently traveling to many of the big cities in these countries, asking Universities if they would

like to partner with Illinois Tech in order to provide a more cost effective way to study abroad.

She hopes that instead of leaving for a whole semester, students can travel abroad and still comeback so as not to interrupt their other studies.

From what it looks like, April is fervently working on improving the experience that students get here at Illinois Tech. She says to be alert because she has lots of other programs and initiatives to help students, the she is working on currently.