

Issue topic: International perspectives on social education

INSPIRATION

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Why it matters to support our students: The vision of Josef A. Mestenhauser

Gayle Woodruff

Who was Josef Mestenhauser, and why should you care? As a young man growing up in Czechoslovakia in the 1940s, “Joe” experienced what many people on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean could not even fathom as real. He saw injustice through his lens as a young law student at Charles University, and fought against that injustice. It led to his imprisonment, and eventual escape from a war-torn country, to a new land, “America”. Coming to the United States in the late 1940s, Joe began his 70 year journey to create the conditions by which students at the University of Minnesota and, eventually all over the world, would begin to broaden their international understanding, and learn to work with each other, not against each other.

Joe Mestenhauser was one of the founders of the field of “international education”, which sought and continues to seek ways for increasing opportunities for students to develop the skills and knowledge to respect each other’s cultures and make the world a better place. Joe’s impact on intercultural learning, and the thousands and thousands of students he literally worked with over the years are the lasting tribute to his legacy. I was one of those students, who gained so much for his mentorship and guidance. Joe was a tough teacher, but it motivated me to be a better “global citizen”. When Joe retired from his University life, and I became a leader at the University of Minnesota in international education, I knew that keeping his legacy alive would be important for future generations. Joe “agreed” that we could start the legacy initiative in his name, only to the degree that the work in his name should not be about him, but about helping students, staff and faculty in higher education to broaden their international understanding.

So we are determined that all students are developing international and intercultural skills, and we have taken Joe’s lead to honor the role that international students have on our campus, who have so much to offer to all students. We seek their positive integration in our classrooms and learning experiences across campus.

And yes, this work is about Joe, sorry Joe. We respect you so much and how hard you worked your entire life, that we wish to honor you too. We do this by helping students become leaders, as they are the future. You knew this back in the 1940s. We thank you for your vision and inspiration.¹

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¹ If you wish to learn more about Josef Mestenhauser, visit this [link](#).



Gayle Woodruff is the founding director of curriculum and campus internationalization for the University of Minnesota system where she established the Mestenhauser Legacy Initiative, the Internationalizing the Curriculum and Campus conference, and co-founded the Internationalizing Teaching and Learning Faculty Cohort Program. She provides leadership for initiatives aimed at faculty development, campus internationalization, and the evaluation and assessment of internationalization. She is principal investigator on The Study of the Educational Impact of International Students in Campus Internationalization. Previously she directed Minnesota's innovative study abroad curriculum integration initiative and was the co-founder of the Multicultural Study Abroad Group. Gayle has published on numerous topics in international education. Her work has appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Education. Gayle is the recipient of NAFSA: Association of International Educators' Marita Houlihan Award for Distinguished Service to International Education and the University of Minnesota's John Tate Award for Excellence in Academic Advising. During her career at Minnesota, she also worked in multicultural affairs and taught in the Minnesota Studies in International Development Program - Ecuador.