

The Advisor

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Dr. Micheal Sayler, Dean of the College of Education, 2015-present

Looking Back and Looking Ahead with Dean Sayler

This spring, Dean Micheal Sayler completes his sixth and final year as Dean of the College of Education. In the middle of a year like no other, he took time to talk with us about his time as dean, his research interests, hopes for the future of the COE, advice for students, and his plans for retirement.

Dr. Sayler came to EMU in 2015 after working as a professor and associate dean at University of North Texas. With a background in educational psychology, his research focused largely on identification and education of gifted students, exploring ways to meet their educational needs as well as supporting their emotional needs and well-being. As part of his work supporting gifted learners, he developed “a more racial and gender-free identification instrument for young kids.” His tool, Things My Child Has Done, uses parents’ stories about their children to help recognize traits of gifted learners, and this instrument has been used around the world.

At EMU, Dr. Sayler’s proudest accomplishments have been finding ways to better support faculty and student scholarship and offering dissertation and thesis support. He was also involved in the creation of Pathways for Future Educators, which was launched in 2016 to build partnerships between the COE and urban schools to prepare prospective teachers to return to their communities as educators. This program has expanded to include partnerships with schools in 18-20 communities in Michigan and Ohio, including urban and rural schools.

Looking to the future, Dr. Sayler said he sees the COE as having great potential as the one growing college of education in the state of Michigan, which he explained is a testament to the education at EMU and quality of our faculty. For doctoral students, his advice is to take advantage of every opportunity and talk with people in other fields. He said that every student should, at some time in their doctoral work, teach something at the university level, publish something, and be involved in faculty research. Regarding dissertation topics, he recommends students “find one that’s interesting to you because you are going to spend a lot of time with it.”

When Dean Sayler retires later this year, he and his wife plan to stay in Michigan. After living in North Dakota and Texas, he says he likes the people, likes the place, and likes the seasons here. He looks forward to spending more time in his garden, which includes fruit and nut trees, and seeing his grandkids. While the pandemic has created more distance in families, he has been reading bedtime stories online with his grandchildren.

Dear Dr.

How can doctoral students support their own mental health needs during the pandemic, while juggling life obligations and doctoral studies? What should we keep in mind to also support each other?

Dear Work-Life Juggler,

You're a grad student with articles to read, papers to submit, ideas to ponder. . . a professor who will critique. You're a worker with deadlines to meet, tasks to accomplish, a snoopervisor who may judge your worth. Perhaps, you are a parent with or without a helper who has a child with specific needs and desires, which must be met because you have learned in your classes that to not do so would speed up the decline of western civilization. You may have a romantic partner—this means nightly baths and saving energy for him/her to really listen so the other will know that s/he is genuinely heard.

Is there anything left? Oh, yes, it's Self Care---time for a quiet walk, meditation, self-reflection, beating the snot out of a racquet ball or surpassing your personal best on the border-to-border trail. It's clearly in front of us; as Nike says, "Just do it (swish)."

Sadly, we can't.

The moral, professional, relational and personal issue is the impossibility of adequately responding to all that is asked; in fact, to address all tasks reasonably well is oxymoronic. Just ponder "working from home" and all that this simple phrase implies. When you work/study/write from home AND have other responsibilities, something does not, repeat not, work out as you wanted. We have so much public evidence of this: NPR feeds from the homes of world-class reporters are punctuated by kids' voices, dogs barking and other sounds of life that have previously been omitted from one's professional life.

So, times, they are a-changing. Rather, they have changed.

While we are NOT all in this together, some of you may have found that not having to find a parking space, confront a broken elevator, or be in the company of colleagues who are negative in spirit is really OK. You may even have found this time to be your happy place (to quote one of my dear colleagues). For others who struggle during these times, there are agreed-upon strategies: 1) Go outside, preferably in a more natural place and walk around, being mindful of your steps on the ground; 2) Practice deep breathing; 3) Work to be as present as possible to what is going on—a diaper to change, a meal to prepare; a paper to be submitted; a need to just be alone and 3) above all, be grateful. Could things be worse? Absolutely; you bet your buns—we are not in a war zone, in surgery for cancer, or without the care and resources of caring colleagues and professors. So, ever onward... and sometimes sideways.

- Dr. Sylvia Jones

If you have questions about activism, education, scholarship, or career, please email Jennifer Bennett at jvance@emich.edu for inclusion in a future newsletter.



AESA Conference and Call for Papers

The American Educational Studies Association has put out a call for papers for their 2021 conference, to be held in November in Portland. While the ongoing pandemic presents some challenges for the logistics of a large group meeting in person, the AESA is still calling for papers, with the understanding that plans are subject to change. To apply a Maya Angelou quote, the pandemic leaves us, “hoping for the best, prepared for the worst, and unsurprised by anything in between.”

The theme for this year’s conference is *In Search of Educational Liberation: Revisiting the social foundations of education through the lens of revolutionary democracy, engagement and activism*. The AESA encourages reflection on the following questions:

- What can we learn from critical engagement, community activism, and justice work that lends itself to reimagining hope through educational liberation?
- What stories will we tell about educational revolution in search of hope and an antiracist democratic system?
- What stories will we tell about combating the fragility of democracy in search of educational liberation?

Papers will be accepted from February 15, 2021 to May 1, 2021. [More information can be found here.](#)

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

The Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies prepares educators from a variety of community organizations (P-12 schools, higher education and other community contexts) to engage in effective research and practice about teaching and learning within complex social, political and economic systems. A key underlying emphasis of the program is a focus on poverty and its specific impact on urban, as well as suburban and rural communities.

Community of Scholars

The EDST Community continues to engage in meaningful academic dialogue on Monday nights! On Monday, February 22, we are looking forward to welcoming guest speaker Dr. Susan Linn, author of *The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World*, to discuss commercialization in schools and its effects on young children. Dr. Linn is currently Research Associate at Boston Children’s Hospital and a Lecturer on Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School; from 2000-2015, she was founding director of Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood. In addition to her work with commercialism, she has developed programs for children to help them cope with issues such as mental illness and death and loss and to identify and prevent prejudice.

Also an award-winning ventriloquist, Dr. Linn and her puppet, Audrey Duck, appeared in several episodes of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Susan and Audrey continue to talk with children, including in this [video](#) for children about COVID-19. More information about Dr. Linn and her work can be found [here](#).

As with previous Community of Scholars events, the invite is standing and open; please join us if you are available. We welcome your voice and ideas.

Hats off to You!

Congratulations to those who have recently completed their dissertation defense!

- Dr. Ali Bazzi
- Dr. Tyrone Weeks
- Dr. David Jagusch
- Dr. Agnes Krynski