



# M & M's: The Muhlenberg/Michigan CONNECTION

*By Bill Keller, New Media Specialist*

On the face of it, there doesn't seem to be much connection between Muhlenberg and the University of Michigan. The former is comfortable in its position as one of the country's leading small liberal arts institutions, while Michigan is a behemoth of higher learning, with 44,000 undergrads and grads and a football program that turns Ann Arbor into a major-sized city on autumn Saturdays.

But behind the scenes there is a bond between the two institutions, a bond, in fact, that began as downright chemical.

Bob '62 and Carolyn Meder Buzzard '61 are graduates of Muhlenberg's chemistry program who spent more than 40 years as chemistry faculty at Liberty High School in Bethlehem, Pa. In 1997, they began to explore the steps that would lead to a partnership between Muhlenberg and Michigan that has thus far sent 15 'Berg

students through the university's Research Experience for Undergraduates Program in the Chemical Sciences.

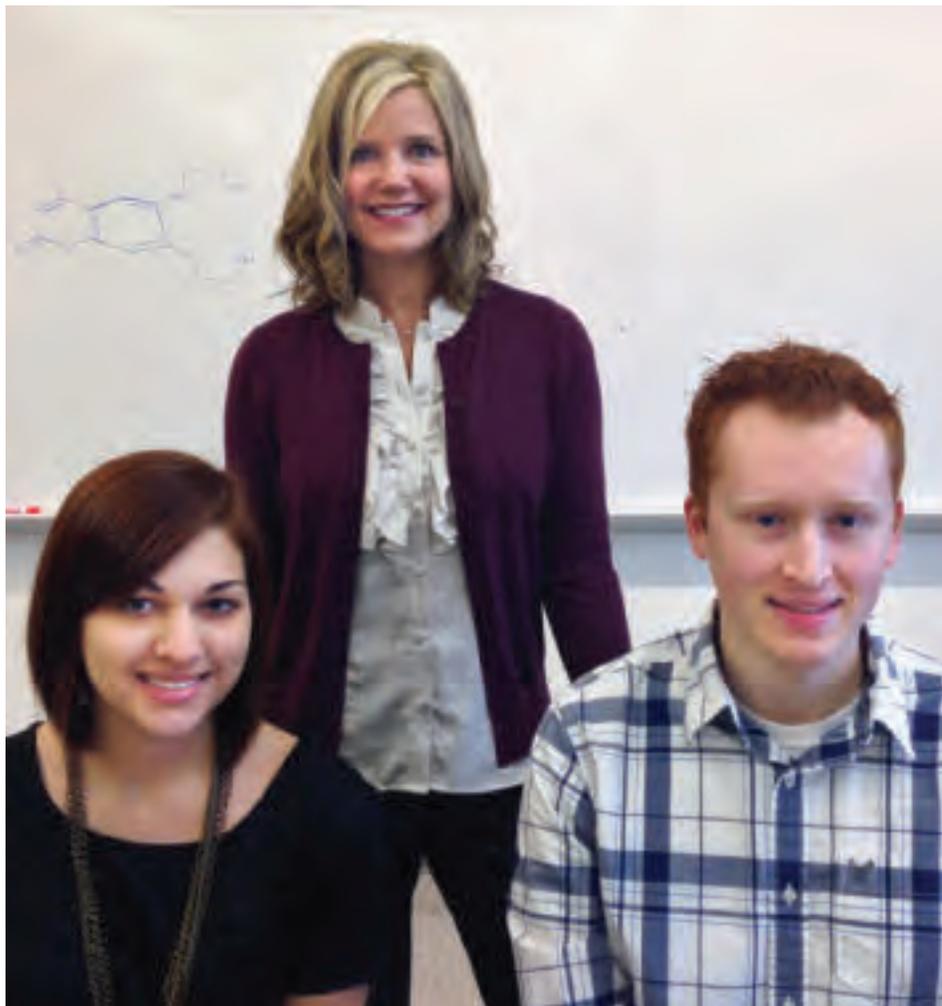
And the M&M connection doesn't stop there. There is also a joint sharing of ideas and programs between Muhlenberg's vaunted Institute of Public Opinion and Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Most recently that brought Prof. Barry Rabe, the J. Ira and Nicki Harris Family Professor of Public Policy and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Environmental Policy at the Ford school at Michigan to campus to speak on the controversial topic of shale drilling, the result of his having met Muhlenberg political science professor Christopher Borick at a number of conferences. Muhlenberg and the Ford School have now jointly completed over ten surveys released under the National Survey of Energy and the

Environment (NSEE).

The collaborations exist independently but have this in common: They have been mutually beneficial for all concerned, an eye-opening, door-opening exchange.

Through his interaction with Muhlenberg, for example, Rabe got a reminder of what goes on at a smaller campus. "You see faculty who are very accessible to their students and know the importance of student-centered and student-based research, like the Institute of Public Opinion," says Rabe. Plus, it got him back to his Lutheran roots – he's a graduate of Carthage College in Kenosha, WI.

As for the chemistry program, the Muhlenberg students get a lab's-eye view of their future at Michigan since many are interested in pursuing a Ph.D. "Putting them in a university setting for the summer helps in not only the



*Christien Ingersoll, Professor of chemistry, with Alexa Carollo '14 and Hudson Roth '14, both graduates of the University of Michigan's Chemistry Research Experience for undergraduates.*

decision-making process but also in understanding the transition to working at such a big research university,” says Christine Ingersoll, professor of chemistry.

One of the first meetings between Borick and Rabe took place at a conference on climate governance at the University of Virginia. “Initially Chris had begun to put some survey questions on climate into some of the work that he was doing here for Pennsylvania, and I was able to do much the same thing,” said Rabe. “We began to see there was a certain symmetry or chemistry. We worked really well together, we had complementary skills.

I was absolutely intrigued by the idea of a student-run – particularly undergraduate student-run – institute. I thought it made enormous sense in every possible way.”

The collaboration recently expanded survey metrics to include public perceptions of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Thanks to the exploration of the Marcellus shale natural gas trend, the largest source of natural gas in the United States that extends through the Allegheny plateau, Pennsylvania stands at the forefront of many discussions ranging from a local to national level concerning the legislation and public perception attuned to mining natural gas.

The issue is particularly well suited to

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Muhlenberg’s Institute of Public Opinion, since the federal government has largely declared natural gas mining to be a state issue.

“The clean water act doesn’t apply to fracking, as an example,” says Borick. “The issues are state-centered. How are states able to deal or not deal with such problems?”

Controversy and contention abound in the field of public opinion research on energy and climate change, including recent scandals where researchers fail to disclose funding sources or conflicts of interest related to survey work. Corporate and private interests are seen as potential sources for bias in these studies.

“We’re able to manage everything through existing funding that we have in our respective centers,” says Rabe. “It gives the NSEE a certain degree of independence. We include financial disclosure statements in our reports and publications, and the only folks who are getting paid are the students on both sides.”

Students are also the beneficiaries of the chemistry connection that was started by the Buzzards. The program, funded for the past 24 years by the National Science Foundation, allows 10 to 12 students to participate in

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research with University of Michigan faculty. The resource participants are on campus for about two months, and positions include a stipend as well as housing and travel.

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“I believe that the University of Michigan faculty like to know that one or two of the few spots available in the REU program is almost guaranteed to be a great student,” says Ingersoll. The program often receives 250-350 applications per year. “They know for sure that they have at least one excellent student coming in, and they have a possible candidate for graduate school as well.”

Since the partnership began, several Muhlenberg students have been accepted and completed graduate programs at the University of Michigan.

A Muhlenberg faculty member nominates a student for the program each summer. Students are typically juniors at the time, but the department occasionally will suggest an enterprising sophomore. These students will have usually completed a supervised undergraduate research experience with a Muhlenberg faculty mentor.

There’s no reason that both M&M collaborations won’t continue far into the future. But don’t look for a Saturday afternoon football date – that just wouldn’t be fair for the Wolverines.

*Tali Ramo '14, a sociology major, on duty at the Institute of Public Opinion.*