

The few, the happy few

This April has provided Utahns with some of the best conditions for spring skiing in recent memory. As I was riding Snowbasin's John Paul lift on a recent Saturday my mind wandered to the week ahead, and I thought about Weber State University's upcoming graduation ceremony. I considered that some of WSU's graduates might celebrate the event with a post-graduation ski or snowboard trip to Snowbird which will be open through May.

The image of graduates and skiers started to occupy my mind. As I was getting off the lift, I thought that the evolution of competitive skiing might contain a useful lesson for the class of 2010.

This year, the 2010 Winter Olympics were held in Vancouver.

Didier Defago of Switzerland was the winner of the men's downhill. Didier finished with a time of 1 minute 54 seconds. Bode Miller of the United States came in third with a time of 1 minute 54 seconds. The 10th place finisher also finished with a time of 1 minute 54 seconds. The 15th place finisher also finished with a time of 1 minute 54 seconds. At the 2010 Olympics there was less than one second difference between first place and 15th place.

The first winter men's downhill race was held during the 1948 Winter Olympic games. In 1948, four seconds separated the first-place downhill skier from the second; more than 13 seconds separated first place from 15th place. The 1948 downhill competition could have been timed on any cheap wrist watch with a second hand.

If the timers at 2010 Winter Olympics had to rely upon 1948 timing technology, the many Olympic events could not have been held because the competition among today's athletes is so fierce that the difference between first and second is almost imperceptible. Today, you need a timer accurate to 1,000ths of a second to time events.

This year, almost 3 million undergraduate and graduate degrees will be conferred in the United States. Even more degrees will be awarded by international colleges and universities. Because the economy has not fully

recovered from the 2008 recession, the graduates of 2010 are facing a tough job market. Those planning to seek additional education will compete with talented students from across the United States and around the world. In this environment, the margin between success and failure is becoming smaller and smaller.

How can one college student set himself or herself apart from the other 18 million college students? Believe it or not, it isn't that hard. Graduates can set themselves apart by doing some simple things.

Each year, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered across hundreds of college campuses. The survey assesses many aspects of student behavior. The NSSE

results provide some insight into what college students can do to distinguish themselves and gain a competitive advantage.

The most recent NSSE survey found that 21 percent of college seniors have never read a single book they were not required to read for a class. Across the country, 23 percent have never attended a concert, play or dance performance. Among current college seniors, 47 percent have never joined a club or organization.

Research shows that students who engage in the activities mentioned above are more likely to be successful in college. These students earn better grades and are more likely to graduate. More importantly, engaging in these activities in college is also likely to establish habits which may persist for a lifetime.

Olympic athletes know that almost everything they do is important — the hours they sleep, the things they eat, the exact time of day they practice. Being conscious of all of the details is critical to their success.

The graduating class of 2010 would be well served by focusing on the important elements of their daily lives, including things like reading a book, appreciating the arts, and participating in the civic fabric of the community. Many graduates won't find the time to do these things. For that reason, those that do will distinguish themselves.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

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Commentary

Michael Vaughan is Weber State University's provost. He accepts e-mail from readers at MVAUGHAN@Weber.edu