

Academic Affairs Update April 15, 2026

LSSU FIRST Robotics Competition

Thank you to everyone across campus who contributed to the success of the FIRST Robotics district competition hosted at the Norris Center on March 27–28. The event brought 41 teams and more than 450 competitors from across Michigan to LSSU and created an exciting, high-energy environment for students, families, mentors, coaches, and visitors.



This was truly a campus-wide effort. Faculty, staff, and students supported the event in a variety of ways, including setup, operations, safety, customer service, and student engagement. Departments across campus played important roles, including Admissions, Athletics, Facilities, Housing, IT, Public Safety, and Dining Services, with a special appearance by Seamore. Several academic programs staffed informational booths and the School of Engineering and Technology offered laboratory tours. Together, these efforts created meaningful opportunities to engage prospective students and strengthen connections with our regional community. A special thank you to alumna Robyn (Jacobson) Hungerford (BA Business, 2003), who served as the event coordinator.



(Left to Right) Admissions Recruiter Amanda Handziak engaging students at the Admissions Booth, Seamore leading the mascot parade, and Event Coordinator Robyn Hungerford

Student organizations also made valuable contributions. The Baja Club operated the machine shop, IEEE provided coffee service, and Team AMORE and Team SLAP supported recruitment efforts throughout the event. Students from the School of Engineering and Technology and the School of

Education served as volunteers. One student, Ben Lockwood (senior in Mechatronics), stepped in and served as a lead coach for a team whose coach was unable to attend for medical reasons.

The program itself reflected the strength of our campus and alumni community. Dr. Andrew Jones from the School of Engineering and Technology served as emcee. Alumnus Bobby Carpenter (BS Manufacturing Engineering Technology, 2022) spoke at Friday's opening ceremony about the importance of the skills developed through FIRST Robotics and how those experiences can lead to continued success in college and careers. President Travis welcomed participants on Saturday and highlighted the strong connection between this competition and LSSU's long history in robotics and automation, while also thanking the families, educators, and community members who support these students.



(Left to Right) Emcee Dr. Andrew Jones, Alumnus Bobby Carpenter from Hyperion Automation, and President Travis

Dr. David Baumann (School of Engineering and Technology), Prof. Bryan Fuller (School of Criminal Justice, Fire Science, and Emergency Responders), Dr. Rob Kipka (School of Computer Science and Mathematics), Dean Mindy McCready (College of Business, Engineering, Computer Science, and Mathematics), Dr. Joe Moening (School of Engineering and Technology), Dr. Russ Searight (School of Kinesiology and Psychology), and Dr. Joe Susi (School of Kinesiology and Psychology) served as judges. Some of our faculty or staff support FIRST Robotics year round. For example, Derek Postma, Mechanical Lab Engineer for the School of Engineering and Technology serves as the coach for local team 1596, The Instigators.



(Left to Right) Dr. Joe Susi and Kevin St. Onge (Environmental Science Secondary Teaching, 1998) serving as judges, the team of judges, and Derek Postma with Team 1596 from Sault Area High School.

A special thank you goes to Justin Fountain and the Norris Center team for their flexibility and support before, during, and after the event.

We are also grateful for the support of our community partners who served as sponsors, including U.P. State Credit Union, Jeta Corporation, The Merch, Smith Beverages LLC, Brady Street Dental, Sault Rotary Club, Goodwill Industries, Families against Narcotics, Sault Rotary Club, the Wicked Sister, and the Lake Superior State University Charter School Office.

Events like this showcase what LSSU is all about. They reflect our shared commitment to supporting youth, fostering innovation, and creating a welcoming campus environment. Thank you again to everyone who helped make this event such a success.

**Photo Credit for all FIRST Robotics photos (above) to Cassy Burk at Cassy Burk photography.*

College of Arts and Sciences

Publications and Creative Works

- As Managing Editor of the *Michigan Sociological Review*, Dr. R. Kirk Mauldin finalized and published Volume 37 (Spring 2026), overseeing all stages of editorial production and submission to key academic indexes (e.g., JSTOR, ProQuest, and EBSCO).

Recruitment and Outreach

- March 2–4, Dr. Martha Hutchens visited Charlton Heston Academy, Concord Academy-Boyne, and Alpena Community College. Activities included a guest lecture in microbiology and sheep heart dissections to over 50 students.
- On March 5, Dr. Derek Wright and Dr. Mark Zierden hosted twenty-three 8th grade students from Sault Area Middle School enrolled in Trevor Paulus's STEAM Class for hands-on activities in the Micro Analysis and Spectroscopic Characterization (MASC) Lab. Students examined a variety of specimens including soils, electronics, and microbes using electron microscopy, learned about x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, toured the science facilities in Crawford Hall, and learned more about science careers with Nicholas Gordon from the Sault Tribe Environmental Department.
- On March 6, Dr. Steven Johnson hosted 29 students from Sault Area Secondary School. The students performed three chemistry laboratories during their visit.

Other Activities

- *GEOL468 Tectonic Systems* students studied the tectonic processes that created the Appalachian Mountains on a geology field excursion lead by Dr. Paul Kelso over LSSU's spring break. Students collected data and samples of igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rocks and associated deformation. Students are now using the data they collected during spring break to create a geologic field guide to the southern Appalachian Mountains. The *GEOL 468* students' study of tectonic processes of the Appalachian Mountains includes oral presentations, laboratory and



Dr. Martha Hutchens assists a student from Charlton Heston Academy with a dissection.



Students from Sault Area Middle School work on the scanning electron microscope in the MASC Lab

field data collection and observation, and writing a substantial, integrative report interpreting their geologic data and geologic processes which formed the Appalachian Mountains.



GEOL 468 students at Linville Falls along the Blue Ridge Parkway near Linville Falls, North Carolina. (Left to Right) Pat Hildebrand, Jack Boase, Addison Zabik, Addy Chwalek, Grace Corbin, Jared Kaylor, Logan McQueen

College of Business, Engineering, Computer Science, and Mathematics

Student Accomplishments and Activities

- A team of three LSSU students competed in Northern Michigan University's Programming Contest on March 28. LSSU's Soo Superior Semaphores placed 3rd overall out of 14 teams from four universities. Additionally, LSSU placed 2nd in the university standings.



(Left to Right) Dr. Christopher Smith (School of Computer Science and Mathematics), Dylan Ballone, Christopher Burie, and Rusty Trim

- Eight Lukenda School of Business students attended the Quinnipiac University GAME forum in New York City on March 19 – 20.



Publications and Creative Works

- Dr. Edoardo Sarda co-authored a research article with a recent LSSU graduate and a colleague from Florida Atlantic University that was published in the journal *Ocean Engineering*.

Vicent, X., Dhanak, M.R., & Sarda, E., 2026. PID auto-tuning for USVs: A multi-evolutionary optimization AI approach. *Ocean Engineering* 355, 124987.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oceaneng.2026.124987>

Recruitment and Outreach

- School of Engineering and Technology faculty and staff attended various FIRST Robotics competitions across the state as part of ongoing student recruitment efforts. The School of Engineering and Technology representatives will attend the FIRST in Michigan State Championship and the FIRST Championship international event in April.



Dr. Paul Weber and two students recruiting at the FIRST Robotics competition. (Shown on the right.)

FIRST Robotics teams left their team pins on the map when they visited our robotics laboratory. (Shown on the left.)



- Dr. Joe Moening attended the Rudyard High School Career Fair on March 12. His companion, Fitz the Robodog, was quite popular.
- School of Engineering and Technology Ambassadors called and/or texted 187 prospective students to congratulate them and offer assistance with any questions as they make decisions about which university to attend. While the vast majority of calls resulted in simply leaving positive voicemail messages, there were a number of good conversations that were had with students and/or their parents.
- The School of Computer Science and Mathematics hosted a Pi Day event on March 12. Approximately 180 high school and middle school students came to campus to solve mathematics problems, eat pie, have lunch in the Quarterdeck, and meet with faculty in a friendly, competition-based environment.
- The School of Computer Science and Mathematics hosted a Talk Math 2 Me Minisymposium on March 31. This event consisted of a series of five 20-minute talks, organized like a minisymposium at a Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics conference. Four students gave talks on pure mathematics, the mathematics of AI, the mathematics of neuroscience, and a jellybean experiment. There was a good turnout of both faculty and students.
- On March 18, Dr. Rob Kipka talked with students in a Sault Area High School Career Readiness classroom about what you can do with a bachelors/masters/PhD in mathematics, what *is* mathematics, and how great Lake State is. He showed them how to use Python to estimate parameters describing Michigan's wolf population. He also showed students a TIE

fighter simulation and some results from a transformer model that a LSSU student coded this spring.

Scholarship

- Dr. Ralf Wilhelms attended the *AI Forum: Using AI for ACBSP Accreditation and Beyond* at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego March 5–7. Conference attendees explored how artificial intelligence can transform accreditation processes, enhance institutional effectiveness, and drive innovation in higher education.
- Dr. Ralf Wilhelms attended an ACBSP Evaluator Training workshop in Tampa, FL on March 26–27. This training prepares professionals to serve as site evaluators for schools going through initial accreditation and reaffirmation processes.
- Dr. Jennifer Gorman helped write the problem presented to more than 3,400 high school students from the US and UK as part of the Mathworks Math Modeling Challenge. During Challenge Weekend (February 27 – March 2), students comprising 770 teams were tasked with creating a model related to the growth and impact of online sports gambling.



Dr. Ralf Wilhelms at the ACBSP Peer Review Evaluator training.

College of Great Lakes Ecology and Education

Student Accomplishments and Activities

- Five Teacher Education students attended the MACUL (Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning) Conference with Dr. Stith in Grand Rapids. Two students, Brianna Petersen and Delaney Stec, co-presented in a session titled “Future Teachers, Future Tools: How Preservice Teachers are Using AI to Reimagine Teaching and Learning”. Their presentation focused on how preservice teachers are using educational technology to prepare for their future careers.



- Students from the Recreation (Rec) Club, Conservation Biology Club, and Fisheries and Wildlife Club, worked closely with Dr. Mackey, Dr. Moerke, and Justin Fountain (Norris Center) to roll out the return of the Regional Outdoor Center. The students secured funding from Student Government to purchase a desk, sign, and new rental equipment. Equipment has been ordered and a soft rollout of the ROC is underway thanks to the hard work of many.

- The Conservation Biology Club participated in the LSSU student Renaissance Faire, hosting snowshoe hikes and an information table about foraging opportunities.
- The Rec Club hosted a Learn to Rock Climb event this month.
- Ten members of the Fisheries and Wildlife Club traveled with Dr. Brewer on a birding trip and saw species including Snowy Owls and Sharp-tailed Grouse.
- Students in *TEAC 423 Partnerships and Classroom Management* are conducting a research project focusing on how local schools approach classroom management.
- Student teachers in *TEAC 480 Directed Teaching Seminar* are completing action research projects focusing on the use of brain breaks, informal assessment, the use of visuals in instruction, and student persistence.
- Ryan Quackenbush (Fisheries and Wildlife Management) was invited to present an overview of the CFRE Fish Hatchery to 30 members of the Great Lakes Bay Region Steelheaders.
- Natural Resources Career Technical Education (CTE) students met with Dr. Kevin Kapuscinski to explore the care and health requirements of our lake sturgeon housed in the Great Lakes Discovery Center (GLDC) for their project focused on fish & aquarium enrichment (photo at right).



- CTE students toured the Sault Ste. Marie Water Treatment Facility (photo at right) on March 25, learning about what all goes into producing water for the city and exploring another potential natural resource career pathway.



Grants

- Dr. Doubek and Dr. Kapuscinski were awarded \$146,127 in funding for a study on *Age-0 lake whitefish and zooplankton relations in Lakes Huron and Michigan*. The project is funded by US Geological Survey Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit and will support student projects including a graduate student researcher.
- Dr. Jill Witt is a co-PI on a project titled *Assessing impacts of white-tailed deer on forest diversity and dynamics at the Huron Mountain Club*. The funding (\$2,174) is from the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation.

Publications

- Brewer, D. E., Webb, E. B., McCallie, J., Novobilsky J., Fournier, AMV, Roberts, C. P., Mini, A.E., McKnight, S.K. In Press. Locations and management strategies for prioritizing King Rail conservation efforts in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*.

Academic Program Successes

- The School of Education revised its curriculum, approved by the University Curriculum Committee on March 19, to reflect opportunities for students to complete multiple grade bands/certifications. Students will be able to select more than one grade band or certification when they register at LSSU. These changes were based on feedback from the EUPISD Superintendents and Principals and supported by the School of Education Advisory Board.
- The School of Education has identified 30 student teachers for Fall 2026—this is one of the highest numbers on record for LSSU.

Recruitment and Outreach

- February 27 – March 25, 18 prospective students toured the Barch building and the Hatchery. This included 8 members of the Mount Clemens Metro Jets Hockey team (none of whom had visited a college campus before) travelling with 2 coaches and 5 parents.
- Dr. Stith and five School of Education students toured two LSSU-authorized charter schools (photos below): Innocademy and iCademy in Zeeland, MI. During their tour, the School of Education students gave a recruitment pitch to high-school students at iCademy in an online classroom. Also, the School of Education students developed and facilitated their own math activities in a 4th grade classroom at Innocademy.



- To celebrate March is Reading Month, a new educational program, *Discover Michigan: Your place in the Great Lake State*, was developed by the CFRE Education and Outreach team using a 20'x16' floor map from Michigan Geographic Alliance. The program was introduced to over 1,650 students this month already including:
 - [Lake Superior Academy 4th/5th grade](#) (25 students)
 - [Vicksburg Community Schools, Vicksburg, MI](#) (3 elementary schools, K-5) (1140 students)
 - Brimley Area Schools (K-6) (210 students)

- Pickford Public Schools (K-5) (200 students)
- JKL Bahweting (1st, 3rd, 4th) (90 students)
- CFRE Education and Outreach staff Beth Christiansen and Michelle Visser and Fisheries and Wildlife students, Blake Patterson and Taylor Allen, visited Sault Elementary 5th grade STEM classes over the course of March 10–12 to facilitate activities focused on local environmental issues including invasive species and road salt pollution for 100 students. This kicked off the students' joint STEM-Art class project to make Earth Day posters, 25 of which will be selected to showcase in the GLDC for the April 18 Earth Day celebration.
- As part of an ongoing data science collaboration with the EUP MiSTEM Network, CFRE research technician Drew Heckman provided guest lectures and data science workshop activities to approximately 100 middle/high school students across Rudyard and Engadine schools. Similar activities are expected to reach 5 additional classes at Sault Area Schools before the end of the month.

Community Engagement

- February 25, a MomCo group visited CFRE's Great Lakes Discovery Center—Five moms brought 8 preschoolers in to explore the exhibits, read a story, and do a craft (photo below).



- Nine undergraduate students from the School of Education and CFRE engaged over 100 students at the EUP Reads event held at LSSU Cisler Center on March 9 (photo below).



- The CFRE Great Lakes Discovery Center was open to the public for two Saturdays on March 7 and 21. Forty-five guests attended the story and craft event on March 7, reading a story focused on water use and treatment, then creating thank you cards which were mailed to the Sault Ste. Marie Water and Wastewater treatment plants. Our World Water Day celebration saw 61 guests come for activities focused on wetlands, water filtration, and the microscopic life in water.

Operations and Infrastructure Projects

- CFRE engaged an outside consultant to draft a monthly newsletter to support continued donor engagement and increase visibility. The first newsletter was sent out this month, and monthly newsletters will follow for the year. The newsletter is paid for by donor funds.

- CFRE is in the process of hiring up to 16 summer students to support ongoing research, hatchery work, and educational programs at the Great Lakes Discovery Center.
- CFRE will be hosting two events this next month, including Doctor's Day for MyMichigan Medical Center and an Advancement Ceremony for the US Coast Guard.

Appointments to Boards and Professional Organizations

- Dr. Kevin Kapuscinski participated in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' semi-annual Esocid Committee Meeting, where statewide issues related to management of Muskellunge and Northern Pike were discussed.
- Dr. Ashley Moerke serves as an advisor on the Lake Superior Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission; she participated in the annual meeting in Ypsilanti this month.
- Dr. Ashley Moerke is an advisor to the Natural Resources Canada Multi-Partner Research Initiative; she participated in their annual meeting this month.

Scholarship Activity

- Dr. Kevin Kapuscinski and Alana Schofield (Master of Science candidate) hosted colleagues from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada at CFRE for a workshop focused on age estimation of Lake Sturgeon.
- Dr. Ashley Moerke participated in invitation-only workshop at the University of Michigan—Great Lakes Marine Science and Technology Users Group, which was sponsored by the Cooperative Institute of Great Lakes Research.

College of Health & Emergency Responders

Student Accomplishments and Activities

- Fire Science students, as well as student members of the Emergency Response Team (ERT), were on-site for the extinguishing of the burning snowman during LSSU's annual Snowman Burning event on March 20.



Publications and Creative Works

- Students in *PSYC 459 Behavioral Neuroscience* and their instructor, Dr. Kris Olson-Pupek organized a Neuropalooza event, part of Brain Awareness Week from March 16–20 Kenneth J. Shouldice Library. On March 19, students presented their projects to an audience that included students, faculty, staff, and other library visitors. The projects explored diverse topics such as dance, music, nightmares, and trauma, as well as other areas related to the brain and neuroscience research. Thanks to the generosity of the library staff, the student projects remained on display through the weekend, allowing more patrons to engage with the creative and educational exhibits, showcasing the importance of brain research and its role in understanding the human experience.



- Fire Science student worked with Professor James Garlitz to create a Pre-fire Plan for two local businesses: Guido's Pizza and Circle K Gas. These local businesses welcomed our Fire Science students to assess their building and occupancy type, fire tactics and strategy, fire codes, and presence of hazardous materials. Fire Departments use pre-plans to prepare for emergencies that may occur at the location in the future. This exercise is designed to introduce students to activities associated with fire inspection divisions within fire departments, while providing a valuable service to our local businesses.

Conference Presentations

- Professor Herb Henderson presented at the *2026 AI Connect Conference* at the Sault Area Secondary School on March 20. He spoke on Cybersecurity and Password Protections. Learners were provided specific examples of current cybersecurity issues and ways to protect themselves from cybercriminals. In addition, he discussed multiple password protection concepts and showed how easily passwords can be compromised. The AI Connect Conference is a cross-sector event designed to position Career and Technical Education (CTE) as the lead engine for AI digital literacy and skills across Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula. Built around the themes of *Engage. Protect. and Connect.* — the conference showcased how artificial intelligence literacy and skills can enhance communication, safeguard communities, and link the region to the global digital economy. The *AI Connect Conference* is a collaborative effort between the Sault Area High School & Career Center and the EUPConnect Collaborative to bring practical, accessible AI education to the Eastern Upper Peninsula, focusing on engagement, protection, and connection. The initiative seeks to address both enthusiasm and apprehension about AI, planning for broad community participation, and real-world impact.
- At the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants (AALNC) conference in Orlando Florida March 11–13, Prof. Jaimee Gerrie presented on the topic of Trial Terminology and the role of the Legal Nurse in Mediation. In alignment with provision 3 of the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses, this presentation highlighted the importance of the nurse's understanding of the litigation process and one of the many roles nurses serve in. This presentation pre-empted a full

day mock trial demonstrating the process of litigation and how nurses and providers are both impacted by and can assist with trial.

- Three groups of Kinesiology majors presented their research at the Michigan American College of Sports Medicine (MIACSM) Conference on March 19–20.
 - Descriptions of On-Ice Fitness Parameters Through On-Ice Skills Assessment in Club-Level Collegiate Hockey Players, Brooke Rivers, Joe Kasprzak, & Vanessa Swerdon, Advisor Eric Statt.
 - Effects of Ballroom Dance Intervention on PTSD and Chronic Pain Symptoms in Service Members and Veterans, Skylar Miklusicak-Whitney & Caleb Henderson, Advisor Jody Susi.
 - Analysis of Sprint Velocity Trends in NCAA Division II Middle-Distance Runners, Grace Kreps, Advisor Eric Statt.

Upcoming Events

- Thursday, April 16 — College of Health and Emergency Responders Interprofessional Simulation
- Thursday, April 16 — Soo's Got Talent, Arts Center, 7:00 pm
- Saturday, April 18 — CFRE's Dr. Constance Baker Great Lakes Discovery Center will be hosting an Earth Day celebration. The event will be open to the public and feature 25 posters created as part of a science-art project at Sault Area Elementary School
- Sunday, April 19 — LSSU Music Department Spring Concert, Arts Center, 2:00 pm
- Tuesday, April 21 (Weather Backup date: Thursday, April 23) — Fire Science students will be engaging in live fire activities on location at LSSU's fire building. Students who will be in the fire academy the following year work with current students to prep the burn cells for live burns. This empowers the students and provides ownership of their place in the Fire Science program. This experience also builds teamwork among the students similar to the fire service. Instructors have the opportunity to learn about our students and teach hands-on skills along with interior wall covering building construction lessons.
- Friday, April 24 — Spring Senior Research Symposium, SAC, 2:00 pm
- Friday, May 1 — Nursing Pinning, Arts Center, 1:00 pm
- Friday, May 1 — Distinguished Teacher Reception, 4:30 pm
- Saturday, May 2 — Commencement, 10:00 am
- Thursday, June 4 — 40th annual stocking of Atlantic Salmon, CFRE