

Dean Peter Straub, Stockton University, Class of 1980

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When it came to participating in college selection activities, one might say that high school student Peter Straub, the second of seven children, was like a fish out of water. He had very little idea what he wanted to do in life or where he should go to college. He knew the following: he liked the water, liked fish, and he liked his brothers. After a couple of years at schools that just did not work for him, he decided to go to Stockton, which was near the ocean that had fish and where his older brother was already enrolled.

For someone who excelled at science, Peter employed a most unscientific college selection process. “My parents and grandparents never went to college – my brother and I were first generation college-degree seekers. I did not understand how to pick a college. Stockton had a marine science major – which did intrigue me,” said Peter, now Dr. Peter Straub, Stockton University’s Dean of the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (NAMS).

“Actually I found it pretty amazing,” for a school – located in a state characterized by its New Jersey Turnpike/concrete and blacktop jokes – to have a specialty in marine science,” said the native of Ringwood, New Jersey in Passaic County, far from the Jersey Shore.

No one would ever say that Peter Straub’s decision-making nowadays is unscientific. He still likes water, likes fish and likes his accountant brother, but the recently appointed NAMS dean makes scientific and strategic decisions about the future of his program and its students every day.



By the time he graduated from Stockton with a B.S. in Marine Science in 1980, he became focused and decisive about his future in academia as a teacher and researcher and ultimately, administrator. He went on to get his M.S. and PhD in Marine Studies from the University of Delaware. Then he completed post-doctoral work in molecular biology at Washington University in St. Louis. He has over 20 years of teaching experience in higher education, having attained the rank of tenured professor of Biology. In addition, he served as the coordinator of Stockton’s Biology

program, participated in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation process, and was the grants administrator for a large number of projects funded by local and federal agencies, including the Barnegat Bay Partnership/EPA, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). And he “happily” serves as the diving safety officer for Stockton.



Dean Straub said that his skills and passions for his various professional roles are rooted to his undergraduate experiences at Stockton – particularly those that represented “learning without borders.” His favorite type of classroom had no walls, was outdoors and hands on.

“My marine science professors such as – Rich Hager and Rudy Arndt, dragged us through the mud, out into the environment. As students, we just did not sit in a classroom, there was a huge outdoor component to the classes. We slogged through the marshes, maneuvered boats through the waterways. In classes that I have taught, I love keeping up that tradition of teaching in the environment,” he said.

“What makes Dean Straub such an inspiring and intriguing member of the Stockton community,” said Stockton President Dr. Harvey Kesselman, “is that Straub’s passion for the outdoors, and skills as a teacher and researcher are equal to his passion for Stockton University’s spectacular facilities/infrastructure and his skills as an administrator and manager of people and capital projects.”

As both a faculty member, and now a dean, Dr. Straub has made a strong commitment to procure and maintain excellent facilities for undergraduate research at Stockton. This project will strengthen that mission at Stockton, a primarily undergraduate institution.

NAMS awards about 22 percent of all the science and mathematics undergraduate degrees at New Jersey’s senior public colleges and universities. The Unified Science Center 2, a \$28.62 million expansion of the world-class facilities of the Unified Science Center, is scheduled to open in the spring of 2018. The USC2 will house teaching and research labs for various disciplines in the sciences, a vivarium, a large greenhouse, a multi-purpose room and faculty offices.



“This is an exciting time for Stockton,” Dean Straub said. “We are taking our research and scholarly activities to a new level. We are building upon past successes and establishing a better infrastructure. This creates a heightened and more practical educational experience for our

students. This gives them the opportunity to be better prepared for life after Stockton, whether that involves graduate school or entry into the workforce.”

Dean Straub’s indoor and outdoor worlds have connected with appropriate synergy in the area of sustainability. The Stockton Campus is an “island of preservation – a natural learning lab in the Pinelands,” said Dean Straub. As aggressive as Stockton has been with preservation of the campus’ natural spaces, it has been equally aggressive with creating interior spaces that respect and value and sustain the natural environment. Stockton has implemented major alternative energy projects – solar, geothermal (the Campus Center and the core of the campus are geothermal), and an ATE aquifer transfer system that pumps cold water into the ground, where it is stored to cool the air for air conditioning in the warm weather.

Dean Straub also is working with lead investigator Nathaniel Hartman, assistant professor of Biology, on federally funded research into neural stem cells, the building blocks of the brain.

Stockton recently received a grant from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, part of the National Institutes of Health, to investigate the stem cell mechanisms that can lead to neurological pathologies. The three-year project, with total funding of \$380,133, will also involve student researchers working with faculty mentors.

Dean Straub’s intensely hectic schedule remains sustainable because he knows how to recharge by getting away with his wife and now two grown children to Florida, Nassau or Curacao for a vacation without walls – scuba diving and snorkeling.

“Yes, I love those trips, but I am profoundly lucky that I love all aspects of my work,” said the dean.

And the entire Stockton community is profoundly lucky that the ‘likes’ of Peter Straub’s youth have become the loves of his life.