Dealing effectively with change is a difficult process for most organizations. Change is especially challenging for institutions of higher education because of the presence of longstanding and significant traditions. Yet the internal and external environments do, of course, change for colleges and universities, and these alterations require the development of new coursework, services, and processes in order to better serve students and the campus community.

To help achieve a high level of excellence through our own growth and change in the career area, Stevenson hired a world-renowned design firm, IDEO, late last year.

Based in California with offices worldwide, IDEO focuses on cross-disciplinary approaches to helping diverse organizations design new products and services to better address the needs of clients and customers. Change and innovation go hand-in-hand at IDEO. Although the company has not worked extensively with universities, we were specifically interested in incorporating its creative techniques to assist us with updates to our award-winning Career Architecture process.

As Ventures readers are likely aware, Stevenson seeks to be a national leader in career education, providing a variety of valuable career-focused programs and services to our traditional and non-traditional adult students. Since its 2002 inception, Career Architecture has been structured to help students anticipate their future and ultimately design their career paths.

As reported briefly in Ventures/Spring 2011, Stevenson worked with IDEO for three months on initiating change and in redesigning Career Architecture. We benchmarked Stevenson against other “aspiration” organizations. We also sent our Career Services staff to IDEO’s New York office for brainstorming sessions and conducted a “deep dive”—IDEO’s unique approach to problem solving—on campus to finalize our planning. Through this technique, about 50 faculty and staff members worked to define new, relevant, and exciting approaches.

The result of this innovative process was the development of a Career Architecture model divided into three parts: personal direction, professional know-how, and discipline expertise. Under these divisions, we will now focus on theory, practice, and relationships. It is through the use of this model that we hope to develop a powerful process that will engage our students and help them determine their own strategic future career paths.

Currently, the Career Services staff is diligently working to create and execute a new plan that will soon serve all Stevenson students. One of the most important reorganizing ideas is to redefine the role of our career counselor positions to focus on industry needs. We will utilize highly skilled professionals to direct the placement process for students by focusing on specific schools and industries, such as design and business. There will be a new and dedicated counselor who understands the job search needs of the contemporary non-traditional degree completer and master’s degree students in our School of Graduate and Professional Studies. The Career Architecture process should not only help lead to a job after graduation but also teach our students how to reinvent their careers at a later time. Learning to deal with personal change management may be necessary for our students at some point in their future careers.

Although change can be difficult for higher education institutions, it is important nonetheless. The IDEO illustration for career support is part of a much bigger process that we have initiated at Stevenson. We want to amplify the IDEO innovation approach for other offices on campus that can learn techniques to help improve our overall institution. There are opportunities in every aspect of Stevenson for us to improve programs and services for the entire community: faculty and staff members as well as students. Deep dive teams are now underway in areas as diverse as meeting campus photography needs, improving student communications, and involving parents of current students in some of our programs.

By focusing on innovation and effective change using the techniques we have learned from IDEO, we anticipate continuing to grow and evolve as a leading university overall, and one at the forefront of helping students achieve career success. We expect that Stevenson graduates will not only learn the important values of the Stevenson culture but also be able to design a life and career of significant importance.

Kevin J. Manning, Ph.D.
President