

A LIFE *Transformed* Essay Project



Alan Tope Class of 1966

"As early students at Schoolcraft, we came to realize that the college set high standards, and that we were expected to perform accordingly. My academic success and other recognitions in that rigorous environment

developed a confidence that carried forward throughout my career. I appreciate the intestinal fortitude of Schoolcraft's early and subsequent management teams to establish, and maintain, those high standards and expectations."

Alan's Bio

A member of Schoolcraft College's first graduating class; Alan is also the college's first Valedictorian. Alan ascribes his academic success and other recognitions to Schoolcraft's rigorous academic environment which developed in him a confidence that he carried forward throughout his career. After graduation from Schoolcraft College, he went on to earn an MBA in Finance. In 1980, he founded Aktion Associates, Inc. a computer technology services company, which still thrives more than thirty years later. Retired, Alan now lives in Holly Springs, NC with his wife Nancy.



Read Alan's original essay below.



Alumni and Friends

The Schoolcraft College Alumni Program exists to strengthen and maintain the ties between the college and its alumni. We recognize and celebrate alumni accomplishments and create opportunities for alumni to share in the growth and success of Schoolcraft College.



To learn more about our Alumni Program contact the Alumni Relations Office at 734-462-4501 or vrexius@schoolcraft.edu

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The Second Generation Effect

It was a mistake, and perhaps never should have happened, but what a profound change it made to my life, and that of another young man twenty years later.

The phone call came while I was working my summer job at Ford Motor Company's Research Center. "Someone from Schoolcraft called," my mother said when I got home that day.

I thought that was a bit odd, and a little unsettling, since I had graduated a couple months earlier in May of '66 (yes, the first graduating class). And I didn't recognize the name of the person who called.

In those days, well before our always-available cell phones, it could often be difficult trying to return phone calls; "telephone tag" could go on for days. Fortunately, I connected with him the next day on my first try.

He was a counselor at Schoolcraft and wanted to talk with me about the co-op program I was enrolled in at U-M Dearborn. It quickly became clear to us that he had mistaken me for another student, since I had already enrolled at U-M Ann Arbor, to major in nuclear engineering.

It would have been easy, and natural, for either of us to end the conversation at that point. But something clicked, and I asked to talk more about this co-op program. It was an alternating schedule of working a semester and attending classes a semester, coordinated with a few participating colleges and companies, and available only to business or engineering majors.

I decided to pursue the idea. Several hectic weeks of meetings with the Dean of U-M Dearborn and human resources personnel at Ford resulted in: my transferring from Ann Arbor to Dearborn, changing majors to math; a co-op work agreement with Ford as a computer programmer; and a personalized one-of-a-kind degree program that required co-op for graduation in order to continue my student draft deferment (this was at the height of the Vietnam conflict).

After graduation, I accepted a full time position at Ford's Research Center. Three years later I took a job with Owens-Corning Fiberglas and moved to Toledo, eventually completing an MBA in Finance. In 1980, I founded a computer technology services company, which still thrives more than thirty years later – Aktion Associates, Inc. (www.aktion.com).

How very much different this career was, and how much more suited to me, than had I continued my original plan.

Without the self-confidence I developed at Schoolcraft, I would not have had the initiative or courage to pursue the significant effort that was required to develop the customized degree program – something completely unique at U-M.

As early students at Schoolcraft, we came to realize that the college set high standards, and that we were expected to perform accordingly. The most dramatic example for me was first semester calculus. About forty students began the class, but only four performed well enough to continue to the second semester.

My academic success and other recognitions in that rigorous environment developed a confidence that carried forward throughout my career. I appreciate the intestinal fortitude of Schoolcraft's early and subsequent management teams to establish, and maintain, those high standards and expectations.

Perhaps unexpectedly, or maybe not, this positive influence extends beyond those directly touched by the College. For the rest of the story, we move forward a few years to the mid-1980s.

At the time, my company is a fledgling of about ten people. Our salesman suggests hiring a part-time college intern, who would report to him to assist in sales and marketing. We follow through on the idea, and eventually hire Scott; a senior at University of Toledo whose only work experience was as a deck hand at the boat docks in Maumee Bay.

On Scott's second day, the salesman drops his bombshell – he's quitting to work for another company. That leaves me in a very difficult situation, having no one to manage a rookie with no work experience. The intern plan is heading to an abrupt end.

I called Scott into my office to explain the situation and break the bad news that his job is ending almost before it started. That was my conscious brain at work, and the most logical business decision at the time. But, something clicked. Perhaps my subconscious remembered the call from Schoolcraft College, and the people at Ford and U-M who had helped me years before.

I had hired Scott because I saw ambition and potential. Almost as if someone else was speaking, I heard myself telling him: "I'm not sure what we're going to do with you, but you'll report directly to me, and we'll figure something out."

About ten years later, I moved on from Aktion to pursue other interests. The company has progressed quite well, employing a hundred people and operating in several states. And that inexperienced rookie Scott is now Aktion's president and owner.

Alan K. Tope – Class of 1966, Valedictorian