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## Global Paths to Enlightenment: A Foundation Scholar Study Abroad to the Dominican Republic

Tacy Allan  
Western Michigan University, tacyallan@gmail.com

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## **Abstract**

There are many different ways for students to gain a multicultural awareness and a global focus, which are important tools for their lives. Study abroad opportunities are seen as one of the widest-reaching and best hands-on learning paths that can be taken to broaden the horizons of students. This proposal combines service learning, a social justice issue (clean water), and global impact; giving students the chance to learn what is here in Kalamazoo and what is in Dominican Republic, how those issues compare and contrast as well as how each location is dealing with these issues. This proposed class will satisfy a general education requirement, for Area 4—Other Cultures and Civilizations. A large part of the class covers case studies from different areas of the world and how they combat the same problem. The Foundation Scholars are the focus group, composed of high achieving, low income students. This course will be listed as an Honors course, and will work to help the Foundation Scholars to fulfill their requirement of taking 6 honors classes. This scholarship group generally contains 10-15 students, an ideal size for such a proposed class. Allowing these students to gain a knowledge of how different social justice issues affect communities will be a valuable asset as these future leaders begin their educational career.

## **Narrative**

The Global Paths to Enlightenment: Dominican Republic course will span a semester at Western Michigan University and a one week period in Dominican Republic, possibly hosted by Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE). There will be academic endeavors in each part of the class, including a research, writing and analysis, reflection and service learning. The focus of the class will be a social justice issue—clean water. This is especially salient in Michigan due to the recent Flint water crisis.

The Foundation Scholarship program is relatively new at Western. Founded in 2014, the Foundation Scholars gained its name to give a financial foundation to the recipients so they can focus on their academic studies. The Foundation Scholarship program complements the Medallion Scholars through providing considerable financial aid to high achieving students. While both groups of scholars are exceptionally talented academically, the Foundation Scholars also demonstrate extreme financial need. As criteria to receive a Foundation Scholarship, students must score at least a 26 for their composite ACT score and have at least a 3.7 GPA on a 4.0 scale at the end of their junior year. According to an article published by WMU News, the 2015 Foundation Scholars had an average grade point average of 3.99 (Baron, 3). In addition to academic endeavors and financial need, Foundation Scholars stand out. For the class of 2015, there was an original pool of 77 students who were automatically entered or were nominated by their high school principal, teacher or advisor. A WMU selection committee narrowed the pool down to 23 semi-finalists, who were then invited to complete a biographical sketch and

provide a two minute video for the finalist selection process. 10 of those finalists received the scholarships.

Many of the Foundation Scholars are the first college students in their families and are more familiar with social justice issues than their peers. The class size envisioned is 10-15 students to help them get to know one another and receive the academic support they need from each other.

High-achieving low-income students have different struggles than the average student while attending college. They are experiencing a different world in college, and as such, have low participation rates in study abroad programs. US News and World Report states that “while there are no statistics breaking down the study abroad population by family income, it’s known that finances often prevent students from making the journey” (Bidwell Jennifer Simon and James W. Ainsworth found that “lower socioeconomic status students are often dependent on financial aid and cannot afford the additional expense of an overseas educational experience” and that “while they [minority and low socioeconomic students] receive verbal encouragement from their families, they are less likely to benefit from material support in comparison with higher socioeconomic status and White peers. (Simon & Ainsworth, 2)” Traditionally, study abroad has been thought to be a luxury which students from the socio-economic class of the Foundation Scholars could ill afford.

## **Study Abroad Programs**

The perception of an international education tends to be that it is for students with means. This study abroad trip would give Foundation Scholars a taste of the opportunities and benefits of studying abroad.

Western is not the first university to provide a study abroad for high-achieving low income students—Purdue University’s main campus has the Horizon program, and such programs are starting to gain popularity for the effect which they have on the students. Another program is located at Kent State University, and a third at Emory University. Purdue began its Horizon program in 2012 with a trip to South Africa (Hastings). In its evaluations of the program, Purdue found that “100 percent of participants increased in confidence in the following areas: navigating through unfamiliar environments, cross-cultural communication, knowledge of their discipline in a global context, ability to perform a job in a global context and ability to make a difference in the world, among others.” (Hastings).

Kent State partnered with Upward Bound, a federal program that helps first generation and low-income students prepare for college to launch a pilot program to create more study abroad access for minority or financially disadvantaged students. Emory created the Minority Outreach Initiative to “to break the misperceptions of why students don't study abroad, what the barriers are, and to also spread awareness about scholarship opportunities” (Sand). Each of these three programs works to overcome financial barriers faced by low income students and provide a meaningful study abroad experience to help students gain a global education and focus. Other programs which focus on the high-achieving low income student population in

terms of study abroad include Spelman College, Temple University, North Dakota State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

A section of the WMU's mission statement reads "Western... is committed to enhancing the future of our global citizenry." Western also strives to "transform wisdom into action," Global Paths to Enlightenment will do just that for the Foundation scholars. These institutions help students to overcome financial barriers for these students, and Western does not have any program that is aimed specifically at low income students. Instituting such a program will provide a specific way for Foundation Scholars to grow together and succeed together.

The idea of doing a combined semester class (spring semester combined with spring break) is not an original one—Bryant University, the University of Connecticut, Sacred Heart University and Messiah College each offer at least one course which is taught at the home university and then takes a one to two-week trip during the semester break. Bryant University offers a 'Sophomore International Experience (SIE)'—a 10-12 day trip overseas "learning about other cultures and how businesses operate globally" with a range of different countries visited (Bryant University Student Handbook). In recent years China, Germany, Spain and Italy have each been the recipient of a SIE excursion. SIE is offered as a three-credit course, which began in 2007. As of Fall 2015, almost 2,000 students have taken part. Bryant offers SIE to the academically talented sophomores—those maintaining a 3.2 or higher GPA in good standing. For the winter 2016, Bryant is offering five different SIE courses; with the majority focused on business and communications. For each of these courses, Bryant is offering a class running during the fall semester focusing on "an introduction to cultural norms, historical reading and analysis, language study, and art appreciation" (Bryant University SIE website). Giving future

Foundation Scholars a chance to see the impact they can have on the world is of the utmost importance. According to Bryant's SIE website, at least 44% of the students who studied abroad for a full semester first studied abroad through an early program, including SIE.

Western has many different study abroad programs, and a strong study abroad office which helps students to find a program and funding for going. Currently WMU has over 100 different programs. However, the numbers of students studying abroad is between 12% and 13% of the student body (Force, personal interview). The Study Abroad Office offers a plethora of resources including experienced specialists, scholarship assistance and a myriad of different opportunities for students to take part in. The office also hosts the Study Abroad fair each spring and fall to encourage students to consider studying abroad.

In the study abroad field, there are two main types of programs—faculty led and non-faculty led. Each of these have merits, but for Global Paths, a faculty led program is best. The faculty member who teaches the semester class is able to cement the ideas which were taught, and is also able to lead and guide the students to ensure their experience is enriching as well as ensure that the student can apply the academics to other parts of the course.

Universities which offer similar short term new-student study abroad include the University of Connecticut's ENGL 3193, Sacred Heart's pre-fall freshman program, and Messiah College's January and may term programs. At the University of Connecticut, ENGL 3193, Study in London, is a spring course which includes a trip to London during the winter break. Sacred Heart differs because its program sends the students to Ireland before their first semester of classes, as a way to help acclimate freshman to student life, and Western has instituted a

similar program for incoming freshman. Messiah offers three-week intensive courses focusing on cross-cultural studies. Though different in appearance to the Bryant SIE program, each brings its own merit. Though ENGL 3193 is reverse of SIE and our proposed program, it also gives the inverse—students are able to study about what they have seen and apply their own experiences to their work. The benefit of the course followed immediately by the trip to Dominican Republic would include that the students would hold a better appreciation for not only the problems being addressed, but also for the culture which is to be encountered. This encounter will happen through service learning and academic learning.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning is defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” by Learn and Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse. Fayette State University includes in their definition of service learning that “Students work on real problems that make academic learning relevant while simultaneously enhancing their social skills, analytical ability, civic and ethical responsibility, self-efficacy, and career development.” Through service learning, students apply what they learn in the classroom to benefit members of a community through a specified project.

Success has been demonstrated through each of these study abroad programs and that success can help fuel a way for Western Michigan University to begin its own freshman combination study abroad program. Western currently offers a few service learning study abroad classes, primarily through the College of Health and Human Services. In the case of



International Development and Community Service in Peru, led by Dr. Laura Hastings, service learning study abroad to Urubamba, Peru, students help communities to improve daily life through building more efficient burning stoves, constructing cleaner water filters, and seeing first-hand the impact of health care. However, many service learning study abroad classes typically do not have a specific course during an academic term in conjunction. But, these classes are in conjunction with specific majors, so they are still connected to university curriculum and academics.

One of the reasons to offer a semester class would be to have a focus on not only the academic part of a course, but also to allow the students to experience service-learning in the Kalamazoo community as well as during the abroad portion. Through the dual parts of the program, students are better able to learn about the context and breadth of a social justice issue before they work hands-on to help alleviate it.

Service learning, or social justice learning is practiced in various courses at WMU. Western established its Office of Service Learning in 2010. Since then, the office has worked with staff and students to help bring service learning to not only campus but also the community. Many of the projects headed by the Office of Service Learning are a semester long, helping to build partnerships between the students, instructors and the community. To date, there are more than 32,000 students who have benefited from programs put on by the WMU Office of Service Learning. During the past 5 years, the Office of Service Learning has put on more than 675 different project-based partnerships. This has impacted more than 400 community organizations, both for profit and non-profit groups. More recently, in the 2013-2014 academic year, 6,507 students took part in a service-learning course, with a minimum of

15 hours of service per student. The impacts of this program are incredible in the Kalamazoo community (Scott, interview).

I believe that an integral part of the Global Paths to Enlightenment course is to learn through service, and linking the students with the Service Learning Office should solidify that connection. The Office of Service Learning's website does not do the programs available a favor because information is scarce on classes which are designated as service learning. I believe that there are a number of students who participate in service learning courses and do not know it. Western has many outstanding programs, but a number tend to slip under the radar, including service learning.

Though I did not attend a study abroad, I have had the chance to participate in the same type of service learning that is being proposed. In Dr. Suhashni Datta-Sandu's course "Women in Developing Countries" part of the course involved the students volunteering at approved institutions which help to combat domestic violence in some form. We also reflected and analyzed how what we did impacted the community, and compared and contrasted the different efforts on behalf of disadvantaged women in the Kalamazoo area. Through my time at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, I gained an appreciation for how the disadvantaged people in the Kalamazoo area survive. I learned of the countless hours spent attempting to alleviate their suffering, and about what different organizations do to help them. Here in Kalamazoo there are a plethora of institutions to choose from and to learn from. Though the proposed course would deal with many different social justice issues, the volunteering would allow students to learn just as Dr. Datta-Sandu's class did.

## **Course Arrangement**

The ideal arrangement for the class begins in the spring semester, continue during spring break with a trip to Dominican Republic, and finish a few weeks after the break. The class during the spring semester would focus on social justice issues, such as clean water and would have as a component service learning here in the Kalamazoo. Service Learning in Kalamazoo would provide 1-2 days of service in the area, to allow for coordination, development of team work and allows for the students to work together to have a lasting impact on the community.

The focus of the class on clean water stems from the location of Western Michigan University—Michigan has many bodies of water, and water is a salient issue. From the recent water crisis in Flint to the debated draining of the Great Lakes, water unites all. Water is a universal need, is simple, but very important and powerful. Unfortunately, many parts and peoples of the world lack access to clean and safe water.

During the spring semester the course will cover topics related to clean water and international development, as well as a brief study of culture and history of the Dominican Republic. The university offers a minimal number of courses which focus on topics such as poverty, and there are very few aimed at undergraduate students. These classes include PSCI 3460: Women in Developing Countries and ANTH 5220: Poverty, Power and Privilege, which give a taste of how poverty can affect a community.

Western began a program about 10 years ago with the government of Dominican Republic. Initially 50 students were admitted to Western, paid for by the government of the

Dominican Republic. This year Western is home to a total 69 students from the Dominican Republic. Of those 69 pursuing degrees, with 41 working to receive graduate degrees, with a majority pursuing a degree in education (WMU International Admissions Office).

Western Michigan University has a relationship with UNIBE, a major university in the Dominican Republic. UNIBE has prepared courses available for study abroad, and one of them is aimed specifically at service learning. UNIBE's course, Learn While Giving, invites participants to not only be in a community, but to also be immersed in it through learning about local traditions and values, while giving students a chance to meaningfully contribute to the community. The best practice for this course may be to connect it to the UNIBE course on service learning, though there are alternatives to arrange the trip through groups located or connected to the Dominican Republic. Examples of these groups may include Water@Works (an NGO specifically at creating water purification systems around the world); Water For People (an NGO which helps communities implement sustainable measures to have clean water); or Water Charity (a charity designed to bring about clean water in rural settings through wells). Though this is not a comprehensive list, these and many other charities and NGOs work in Third World countries, including the Dominican Republic. Regardless of which type of partnership is involved in the class, there is a need to reflect and assess how this specific course influences students and plays a role in their future lives.

### **Assessing Impact**

Assessing the impact of this class will include a study of measurable factors such as GPA and returning rate. Other scholars have found that study abroad classes increase a student's

global focus, creativity, leadership skills and their overall GPA (Paul). The Foundation Scholars represent a special group at WMU. This course is also designed to bring in social interactions not only between the students, but also with many different members of the University, to help them gain a support team. Students improve their friendships and create their own support groups when given shared experiences.

During my time at Western I had similar experiences. I had the chance to go on a Study in the States trip, Journey through Hallowed Ground. This trip explored significant Civil War battlefields and Washington DC, including the White House, and ranged from Pennsylvania to Virginia. We focused on what different companies from our home towns did, and learned hands-on (and from horseback) about how different battles influenced the war and what areas of science had major advancement during that time. After returning, I stayed in contact with some of the other students, and we developed close friendships and have had numerous study parties. We shared experiences in a small group setting, which led to friendships. Though friendship is not a goal of the class, helping students learn and succeed in life are.

The benefits which I gained from participating in Journey through Hallowed Ground are not only social, but also academic and of personal knowledge. Dr. Andreadis gave us assignments to prepare before departure, daily reflection prompts as well as a final reflection assignment. Through doing so, I was able to note what I had learned before the class, from hands-on experience, and what I believed was important following the trip and experiences. Each person who participated came away with something slightly different, something unique to them, but we all came away changed, with a far greater appreciation for those who fought in the Civil War.

I also had the opportunity to spend 18 months in the Kingdom of Sweden on a mission trip. Though not a formal study abroad, many aspects of study abroad were the same. I saw issues which affected different peoples. I learned how to share my talents to benefit others. I know that it is not easy to leave home to spend time in a far distant land for service, but I grew so much through my time in Sweden.

Overall, the academic benefits for the Foundation Scholars who would complete this study abroad will enrich not only their lives, but also Western Michigan University. Success of this program should be studied in a number of different categories, including the students having a more global focus, becoming better community leaders, and performing better in college. Measureable data will come from the number of these Foundation Scholars who choose to study abroad in following years or those who decide to dedicate time to learning a foreign language for more than the required number of years, as well as GPA. Pre- and Post-study abroad evaluations can also be conducted, both immediately following the course as well as at graduation to begin to see the impact of this course.

Study abroad opportunity will increase confidence, global awareness and community involvement for scholars participating. For becoming better community leaders, my hypothesis lies in where the Foundation Scholars will choose to focus their own senior projects—after becoming more acquainted with the Kalamazoo area and with the globe, I believe that the students will choose to focus on positively impacting either Kalamazoo directly or the peoples of the world at large. However great the outward impact, the personal change will also act as a strong driving force. The students which travel together and have experiences together form a bond and become united. This unity will aid immensely when the Foundation Scholars decide

on a class project in the Kalamazoo community. Continuing on, these experiences help to bond friendships aiding not only in dealing with the stress of college life, but also to help academically through forming study groups, encouraging learning and building rapport between faculty and students. Other benefits include multi-cultural engagement, increased creative ideas and an increased ability to make links between concepts (Leung 169-181).

### **Findings**

Scholars and researchers not associated with Western have found that studying abroad also invites students to gain a tolerance for ambiguity and open-endedness, and teaches them how to handle a lack of closure and firm answers as well as prioritize important information while learning (Paul, ref. Bialystok). Students who learn a second language are also moved into a more deliberative mode of thinking, writes Boaz Keysar, a University of Chicago psychologist. Keysar also states that “The results suggest that thinking in a foreign language could be greatly beneficial in making decisions in a business setting or in personal finance.”

Though exhaustive scientific research is available, students also believe that studying abroad is incredibly valuable to them in future places. Korey Force, of the Study Abroad Office, helped to elucidate how study abroad at Western impacts students. Of the 12-13% who study abroad annually, many of the students come back stronger academically and learn valuable life lessons for the future. Force stated that the general consensus of students who participated in study abroad found it to be an enlightening and challenging process which helped the students to gain leadership skills. The same sentiments are also found in a survey by IES (International Education of Students) and the University of California Merced. This survey noted that 84% of

students who had studied abroad “felt that studying abroad helped them build valuable job skills such as foreign language skills, cultural training, tolerance for ambiguity, adaptability, communication, and more.” The same studies found that study abroad alumni, on average, also had 25% higher starting salaries and 90% of graduates who studied abroad were employed full time within 6 months of graduation (“What Statistics Show about Study Abroad Students”). With such great benefits from studying abroad, the Foundation Scholars will learn to change the world.

These students would come in contact with the world and be in a better place to have an influence following their trip to Dominican Republic. Eyes will be more open, ears more hearing to the pleas for social justice around the world. Each group of students will be a class that communicates and works together throughout their time at Western; and when it comes time to pick their class project, one would hope that this specific course would stay in the forefront of their minds about the influence for good that they can be both in Kalamazoo and in the world.



## Cost

The estimated cost of Global Paths to Enlightenment varies based on a program fee. If Western partners with UNIBE, the cost is estimated at \$4185.00. This accounts for academic fees, lodging, airfare, meals, customs regulations and travel in Dominican Republic. Academic fees currently account for \$2,900 (UNIBE: Service Learning while in the Dominican Republic). However, this is not a guaranteed cost. UNIBE's service learning program is set at 2 weeks, and Jane Blyth, Executive Director of the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education has been working with UNIBE to help create a program which accommodates Global Paths' ideals. (Table included below)

To help defray the costs of the program for students there are scholarships available through the Haenicke Institute, for both merit based and need based awards, with the average award being \$1,500. The College of Arts and Sciences, where this program will reside if initiated, also gives out need and merit based scholarships, typically ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 per recipient. Additional scholarships can be found through the Lee Honors College, including the Nicholas A and Barbara A. Andreadis scholarship and the Susan M. Dick Scholarship. These scholarships from the Lee Honors College also range from \$500 to \$1,000. Others yet available from Western also include departmental scholarships, Global Engagement Scholarship, as well as the President's grant for study abroad (\$10, 000/year). Michigan Education Trust (MET) is another avenue for funding, as are the Fulbright, Boren or Gilman

national scholarships. For Foundation Scholars from the Kalamazoo Area, the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship is another source of funding.

External sources of funding are also available, and more can be looked into with corporations which do business in Dominican Republic. Such funding can come from Rotary Club districts (which offer district grants for study); or from companies which work internationally, as well as other organizations such as Diversity Abroad.

		UNIBE**	
UNIBE Program Fee	3credits	2,900	
	Billable Subtotal	2,900	
Room		0	
Meals		20	
Other Fees		0	
Books		0	
Airfare		800*	
Local Travel		0	
Passport		135	
Insurance		0	
Immunizations		100	
Miscellaneous		250	
Visa		0	
	Non-Billable Subtotal	1,285	
Total		4,185	

**\*Price reflects round trip airfare from Chicago O’Hare to Santo Domingo airports (starting at \$707/round trip per person)**

**\*\*UNIBE course fee for Service Learning (2 weeks) is \$2900. This covers housing (single occupancy), cultural excursions and most food.**

## Timeline

January - April 2016	Students apply for Foundation Scholarship Foundation Scholars are selected and notified
June 2016	Foundation Scholars notified of Global Enlightenment: DR
July 2016	Students apply for Passport and Visa
October 2016	Spring Registration for Freshman—Deadline for enrollment in Dominican Republic Study Abroad, Apply for Financial aid, Book Airfare, Receive Passports, Visas
January 2017	Spring Semester Begins—Students begin semester class
February 2017	Midterms
February 2017	Receive needed Immunizations
March 2017	Spring Break: Trip to Dominican Republic
March 2017	Debrief, Projects due,

## **Sample Syllabus: Focus on Clean Water and Water Filtration**

### **Purpose**

To help students gain an appreciation for service learning and social justice issues. This class will enhance the knowledge and skills of the students in many different realms including their academic, social and employment circles. This course will broaden the vision of students to help them to be positive influences for good across the entire world. Students will come away with increased skills, confidence, engagement, complex thinking, as well as creativity and open communication.

### **Class Schedule:**

10 meetings, one (1) time per week for fifty (50) minutes. The course will be primarily led by one instructor, with many guest lecturers on specific fields of study to help the students see a more vibrant image of the world around them.

#### **Week 1**

Intro/purpose, Social action, service learning, development

#### **Week 2**

International development: Guest Lecturer (ie Dr. Paul Clemens)

Case study: India

#### **Week 3**

Intro to environmental factors: Guest Lecturer (ie Steve Kohler)

Case study: FLINT, MI

#### **Week 4**

Intro: NGOs and Service Learning: Guest Lecturer (ie Shawn Tenney/Jan Maatman)

Case study: Africa

#### **Week 5**

Biology and water: Guest Lecturer (ie Dean Koretesky)

Case study: Central America

#### **Week 6**

Sustainable Solutions: Guest Lecturer (ie Tim Palmer)

Case Study: Tonga and Samoa

Week 7

Gendered Explanations and Outcomes

Case Study: Philippines

Week 8

Intro to the DR: Guest Lecturer (ie George Guarionex Liuberes)

Case Study: DR

Spring Break

UNIBE / DR Trip

Week 9

Application of the trip, apply learning and doing, analyze impact of Tourism on water decisions

Week 10

Final Debriefing, projects, reflections

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Bryant University: SIE Experiences

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<http://china.bryant.edu/academics/sophomore-experience.htm>

Carnegie Foundation: Private Colleges and Universities

[http://www.carnegiecomm.com/media/uploads/file/Gold\\_2013.pdf](http://www.carnegiecomm.com/media/uploads/file/Gold_2013.pdf)

Eastern Kentucky University: Cooperative Center for Study Abroad (CCSA)

<http://catalogs.eku.edu/sites/catalogs.eku.edu/files/files/2006-2007%20Undergraduate%20Catalog.pdf>

[www.ccsa.cc](http://www.ccsa.cc)

Howard University: Luard Junior Year Abroad

<https://www.howard.edu/students/hbook/H-Book.pdf>

Lehigh University: Catalog

<http://catalog.lehigh.edu/pdf/2014-15.pdf>

Messiah College: Cross Cultural Courses

[http://www.messiah.edu/info/20962/short-term\\_programs/1364/cross-cultural\\_courses](http://www.messiah.edu/info/20962/short-term_programs/1364/cross-cultural_courses)

<https://intercultural.messiah.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.FeaturedPrograms>

Northern Kentucky University: CCSA

<http://catalog.nku.edu/content/dam/Catalog/docs/catalog20112012.pdf>

Rotary Club: Scholarships

[file:///C:/Users/TacyAllan/Downloads/facts\\_about\\_Rotary\\_scholarships\\_en%20.pdf](file:///C:/Users/TacyAllan/Downloads/facts_about_Rotary_scholarships_en%20.pdf)

Sacred Heart University: Freshman Fall

<http://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/studyabroad/freshmanfall/>

<http://www.sacredheart.edu/prospectivestudents/academicstudyabroad/>

University of Connecticut: Course Catalog (n.d.)

[http://catalog.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/752/2014/07/09\\_10\\_catalog.pdf](http://catalog.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/752/2014/07/09_10_catalog.pdf)

Western Michigan University: Office of Service Learning

<https://wmich.edu/servicelearning>