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CAS News

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WMU gets \$3.2 million to build culture of degree completion, success

by Cheryl Roland - September 30, 2014 | WMU News



Beach

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Western Michigan University will receive more than **\$3.2 million** from the U.S. Department of Education to use the unique opportunities afforded by the existence of the **Kalamazoo Promise** to build an institutional culture focused on increased access and degree completion for underrepresented, underprepared or low-income students.

The new grant is one of a small number of awards, and the only one made in Michigan, announced **Sept. 30** by the DOE and meant to create and validate through ongoing research, student success programs that can tackle the problem of low rates of degree completion. The goal is to create programs that other universities can adopt, knowing there is sound research data behind the strategies embraced and replicated.

"After receiving nearly 500 applications from around the country, we're excited to announce Western Michigan University will receive a First in the World grant, funded for the first time this year," said U.S. Secretary of Education **Arne Duncan**. "Each grantee demonstrated a high-quality, creative and sound approach to expand college access and improve student outcomes. We are confident these projects will have a positive impact on increasing access and completion and help us reach President Obama's 2020 goal, to once again have the highest share of college graduates in the world."

Kalamazoo Promise

For WMU, the four-year project will focus on building a campuswide culture that uses mentoring relationships for first-year students to transform WMU's culture and structures to be more supportive of student persistence. The work will be done with the input of students for whom the problem of affordability has been largely eliminated—Kalamazoo Promise students. The Promise is a nine-year-old initiative that provides up to four years' tuition and fees at any Michigan public university or one of 15 private colleges for students who graduate from Kalamazoo Public Schools.

"Western Michigan University is in a unique position to help find what additional barriers to success exist for students, once the issue of affordability is removed from the mix," says WMU President **John M. Dunn**. "About a third of students attending college through the Kalamazoo Promise choose WMU, and we have both a desire and a responsibility to find and change those things within our culture that still make it difficult for students to earn a degree, reach their full potential and succeed. What we learn will benefit all of our students."

Two strategies

Dr. Andrea Beach, professor of higher education leadership and director of faculty development at WMU, will co-direct the effort with **Dr. Charles Henderson**, a professor with a joint appointment in WMU's Department of Physics and its Mallinson Institute for Science Education. Together, the pair recently launched the Center for Research on Instructional Change in Postsecondary Education.



Henderson

Beach says the project will use one of two strategies with groups of first-year students, and the project team will measure the relative outcomes. The first strategy involves connecting students to professional opportunities in the region by placing them with mentors from the local business community who can provide opportunities for career exploration and course content relevancy as well as a relationship with someone vested in their academic career.

The second approach will be to build mentoring relationships through professional learning communities on campus comprised of the students plus faculty, staff and administrators and focused on identifying and addressing barriers to and supports for student success. Incoming Promise students and others will be invited to be part of the project and will be randomly assigned to one of the two groups. Both approaches will fall within the framework of WMU's First Year Seminar offerings, so that students receive academic credit for their experiences.

The approach for the new work, says Beach, "is a different from 'business as usual' or even 'research as usual' and will take a great deal of institutional work," but both Beach and Henderson point to the campuswide input they received in putting the plan together as evidence of the widespread and interdisciplinary nature of the interest faculty and staff have in the work. The 40 members of the original planning group also showed commitment to rigorous analysis and research as the project moves forward.

"We had to set this up as an experiment that could measure institutional change and evaluate that change as we move ahead," says Henderson. "This is about creating innovation that is grounded in sound research and will also give us the opportunity to advance theory in the area of institutional transformation."

Measuring success

Success at the end of the four-year effort, Beach says, "would mean a move toward transformation of the culture at WMU that is systematic and measurable, and transferable to other universities."

"This is about connecting all the disparate initiatives aimed at student success that every institution has and turning them into one strong and successful effort," Beach says. "The university itself needs to change. Actualizing student success requires integrated institutional transformation involving the whole campus."

Additional principals on the effort will be **Dr. Martha Warfield**, vice president for diversity and inclusion, who will serve as the project's senior advisor, and **Dr. Stephen Magura**, director of WMU's Evaluation Center, who will serve as director of evaluation and oversee the overall scientific conduct of the effort.

To read the **Department of Education announcement**, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1ByWFYQ>.

For more news, arts and events, visit wmich.edu/news.

Million Dollar NSF Grant Comes to WMU



Western Michigan University assistant professor of chemical education, Dr. Megan Grunert, co-investigators Dr. Sue Stapleton, Dean of the WMU Graduate College, Dr. Jocelyn Steinke, professor in the WMU School of Communication and Reneé Schwartz of Georgia State University have been awarded a \$1,246,037 National Science Foundation grant to conduct a longitudinal, multi-site study with underrepresented doctoral students in STEM fields.

This research project, funded by the NSF through their Alliances for Graduate Education and Professoriate: Broadening Participation Research program, builds on social identity theory to understand the process of identity integration for underrepresented minority (URM) graduate students in STEM programs as they integrate into a community of practice. URM graduate students in STEM fields face multiple challenges with identification and assimilation when progressing through graduate programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIIs). URM students hold multiple identities reflecting race, ethnicity, gender, social roles, family roles, and career (e.g. scientist, engineer). These identities often conflict and, consequently, influence URM students' choices, persistence, and success during the graduate years. Identity integration is essential for lasting success. Little is known, however, about how multiple identities of URM students in STEM conflict, intersect, and integrate as participants become productive members of a STEM community of practice. Using a longitudinal, multi-site, mixed-methods approach, this research traces the experiences of URM graduate students in order to understand their negotiation of multiple, and often conflicting, identities as they progress through their STEM graduate programs. These data will inform the development of a model for URM STEM graduate student identity integration that identifies specific strategies for institutional support needed to promote successful assimilation into a STEM disciplinary community of practice, leading to increased recruitment and retention of URM students in STEM graduate programs.

Two to receive WMU's Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award

by Jeanne Baron

October 7, 2014 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Western Michigan University will present its 2014-15 Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award to **Dr. E. Rozanne Elder** and **Dr. John Jellies**.

The honor is the highest annual award WMU bestows on faculty members. It pays tribute to individuals whose work constitutes a significant body of achievement that is widely recognized within the national and international academic communities.

Elder and Jellies will be recognized during this year's academic convocation at **2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10**, in the Dalton Center Recital Hall. The event also will feature WMU President John M. Dunn's State of the University address and presentation of four other prestigious campuswide honors: the Distinguished Service, Distinguished Teaching, Emerging Scholar and Annual Make a Difference awards.



Elder

Dr. E. Rozanne Elder

Elder is a professor of history and director of what is now the Center for Cistercian and Monastic Studies in WMU's Medieval Institute. She has organized the center's annual Cistercian Studies Conference since 1973 and also served as editorial director of Cistercian Publications until 2008. Since 2008, she has continued to organize the annual Cistercian Studies Conference as a component of the University's world renowned International Congress on Medieval Studies held on campus each May.

Elder's research focuses on the history of medieval intellectual traditions and the history of Christianity with a specialization in monasticism. In addition to editing more than 250 Cistercian Publications volumes, she has written scores of scholarly articles and book chapters as well as presented lectures and workshops at prestigious institutions at home and abroad.

Nominators lauded Elder for ensuring that the Cistercian center is known and respected around the globe and for enhancing WMU's international reputation in the fields of Cistercian and monastic studies, along with related fields such as archaeology, theology, ecclesiastical and intellectual history, and comparative religious studies. Nearly all stressed that she has had a profound impact on four important fronts: editing and publishing, research, collaboration, and mentorship.

One WMU colleague nominating her wrote that just mentioning Kalamazoo brings instant recognition among scholars, in large part because of the annual Cistercian Studies Conference and the vast number of seminal texts, monographs and collected essays that Elder organized, edited and cultivated as the editor of Cistercian Publications.

"She has marshaled her considerable energy, enthusiasm, organizational skills and academic talents to developing new ideas, encouraging the growth of the discipline and elevating the quality of its scholarship," the colleague wrote. "By naming her a Distinguished Faculty Scholar, WMU would acknowledge the leadership and recognition she has already attained around the world."

Elder was praised especially for bringing some 300 texts to publication while at the same time participating fully in teaching and research, contributing to the ongoing development of the Medieval Institute's academic program, building an impressive body of her own scholarly work, and supporting the careers of countless others.

In addition, many nominators described Elder as uniquely responsible for greatly enriching the materials available to researchers, teachers, religious communities and general readers, even as radical changes have taken place in academic publishing. They also praised the unique collaboration and intellectual interchange she has generated between secular scholarly communities and religious communities.

"I want to emphasize that Rozanne Elder can be looked upon as the keystone holding together monastic and especially Cistercian studies not only in North America, but also in the world at large," an emeritus professor from Roskilde University in Denmark wrote. "She has been a central link in establishing at Western what is unique in academic life in North America: an academic milieu which profits from the presence of people living the life that is being studied, the monks and nuns who year after year come to Kalamazoo for the Cistercian Studies Conference, and who make their knowledge and experience available to lay scholars."

Several nominators noted that they first met Elder as graduate students. They wrote that she inspired them to pursue a career in Cistercian or medieval studies and has mentored them ever since. As one former graduate student put it, "She has encouraged hundreds of scholars young and old, lay and monastic, from all continents, contributing directly to the building of their careers."

In summing up Elder's extraordinary four decades at WMU, one history department colleague noted that the University is known the world over as an exemplary locus of research and scholarship on the Middle Ages.

"Erudite scholars on the WMU faculty have contributed to this reputation," he wrote. "While many have come and gone, Roxanne Elder has devoted an entire career to excellent scholarship and to fostering the work of American and international colleagues and students."



Jellies

Dr. John Jellies

Jellies is a professor of biological sciences who has been a WMU faculty member since 1995. He uses experimental approaches with model systems, most recently medicinal leeches, to answer questions related to brain function or more specifically, how the nervous system controls behavior. This career-long work and has generated nearly \$4 million in grant dollars from national funding agencies.

Professionally active on and off campus, Jellies has served in such capacities as president of the WMU Faculty Senate as well as the Michigan Chapter of the Society for Neuroscience. In addition, he has been an invited faculty member or speaker at prestigious institutions such as the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, a grant reviewer for the National Science Foundation, and an editorial board member or manuscript reviewer for several leading journals.

Emphasizing that Jellies is a world renowned researcher, nominators cited him for cutting-edge discoveries made before and after coming to WMU. One praised him for his ability "to bring ideas to practical fruition that directly benefit mankind." Many also noted that dozens of Jellies' peer-reviewed manuscripts have been published in leading journals, with an almost unprecedented seven of them featuring his work on their covers.

In addition, supporters lauded Jellies for his inventiveness in surpassing technical difficulties that have stymied other researchers and for continuing to maintain a superlative level of creativity and scholarship throughout his three-decade career.

"One former colleague at the University of California, Berkeley wrote that Jellies stands alone among present-day physiologists for the skill, dedication and precision with which he carries out his groundbreaking work and called him "a unique treasure as an experimentalist."

Meanwhile, a fellow graduate student from 30 years ago reported that, "Dr. Jellies has built a remarkable career that has produced a number of major discoveries. His dedication, technical expertise, persistence, enthusiasm and talent for experimentation have all contributed to his wide reputation as an accomplished neuroscientist."

Jellies also was cited for being an inspired teacher, instructor and advisor who consistently teaches more classes than required and who has directly mentored scores of students in his research lab.

"Professor Jellies is a superlative teacher. He leveraged his broad range of research accomplishments and life experiences to provide an outstanding learning experience for his students," a former student wrote. "His love of learning and his joy of sharing his knowledge were evident to me and his students during every minute of his class meetings. I can attest firsthand to Dr. Jellies' genuine and unselfish desire to help those around him reach their potential. He went out of his way to share his talents and passion for research with us."

Most nominators also praised Jellies as someone who has provided exemplary service to WMU, his discipline and academia. "Good research alone does not make a great faculty member. John has also been recognized for great work in both service and teaching," one WMU Faculty Senate colleague wrote. "More precisely, [greatness] is in John's ability to work with people; his networking with individuals, industry and educational institutions; and his dedication to those he serves."

In summing up Jellies, one of his former teachers at Texas A&M University called him one of the finest scientists he has ever met and wrote that, "What characterizes John Jellies' work is a remarkable ingenuity in finding tractable but interesting problems, an amazing ability to use simple but elegant approaches, a set of hands that would make him the world's most gifted microsurgeon, an artistry that manages to picture the true elegance and beauty of nature, and an intelligence to make sense of it all."

Two will be honored at convocation with Distinguished Teaching Awards

by Cheryl Roland
September 23, 2014 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.--Western Michigan University will honor two faculty members in the **School of Communication** next month for being exceptional educators and mentors and demonstrating outstanding dedication in their work.

Sue Ellen Christian and **Dr. Autumn Edwards**, both associate professors of communication, will be recognized as the recipients of this year's Distinguished Teaching Awards during WMU's Academic Convocation at **2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10**, in the Dalton Center Recital Hall. The annual event includes WMU President **John M. Dunn**'s State of the University address along with the presentation of other campus-wide awards honoring this year's Emerging Scholars, Distinguished Faculty Scholar and the recipients of the Distinguished Service and Make a Difference awards.

Initiated in 2006, the Distinguished Teaching Award is the highest honor given by the University to recognize faculty members for their work with students. Christian and Edwards join 19 other faculty members who have been honored since the start of the award program. A similar program, the WMU Alumni Association Teaching Excellence Award, was conducted between 1966 and 2001 and honored 131 faculty members.



Christian

Sue Ellen Christian

Christian, a former Chicago Tribune reporter who teaches journalism at WMU, was praised by her nominators for bringing real-world experience to

the classroom and helping her students build the skills they will need to succeed in today's news world. A faculty member since 2001, Christian has had a profound and lasting impact on her students.

"Professor Christian's greatest qualities as a teacher are believing in her students and giving them the tools to be great journalists," said one alumna who is now a professional journalist and remains in touch with her mentor. "I chose WMU for its journalism program because I knew I was going to be a journalist. Professor Christian knew it, too, and did whatever she could to help me succeed."

Her ability to build a positive teaching environment, her commitment to her students and her ability to connect with them and to stay connected over time also were noted as among her teaching strengths.

"In the early stages of my college career, Professor Christian introduced me to the world of journalism," wrote a current student. "Throughout my time at Western, Professor Christian has served as a resource, a mentor and a friend."

In addition, Christian was singled out for successful work in building bridges between college journalists and budding high school writers by developing a collaborative project in which they focused on diversity and producing a series of publications that focused on the topic of teaching tolerance.

An alumna and area teacher worked with Christian on a five-year, grant-funded project to link the two groups of students in an effort known as Communicating Common Ground. She praised Christian for her dedication to bringing a new generation into the industry and giving them a thorough grounding in some of the important issues of today and the future.

"Working with Sue Ellen on these projects was so inspiring," the teaching colleague wrote. "She was taking journalism to a new arena...using storytelling to explore topics in diversity and using passion to inspire not only her own students at WMU, but also high school students in Kalamazoo Public Schools."

Christian earned a bachelor's degree from Hope College and a master's degree from the University of Michigan. She was a staff writer at the Chicago Tribune for 10 years before accepting a faculty appointment at WMU.



Edwards

Dr. Autumn Edwards

Edwards, whose focus is on interpersonal communication and communication theory, was lauded by those nominating her for the passion and ability she demonstrates to help students understand cutting-edge theoretical concepts and their use in the research lab as well as their value when applied in an organizational setting.

"Having had Autumn as an instructor for two graduate-level courses in communication where we deal with high-level discussions of quantitative methodology and theoretical concepts," wrote one graduate student, "it amazes me how easily she can transform confusing textbook language into clear and concise conceptualizations of the material."

Another student noted Edwards' classroom style and teaching methods and commended them as inspirational. The student first encountered Edwards in a large lecture class and went on to see her teacher become a mentor.

"In a lecture class of over 100 students," the student wrote, "Dr. Edwards managed to create an engaging learning environment that fostered both critical thinking and creativity...Dr. Edwards has fueled my desire to continue my education in graduate school and has allowed me to realize my potential as a student and communication scholar."

Edwards also was praised by a colleague for helping create a course that is now a required course for all majors and minors and for co-creating a research lab used by graduate students to conduct experiments and surveys. The second function of the lab is to teach interested undergraduates the basics of research. The colleague nominating Edwards asserted that lab function was its "most important."

And as the faculty member who teaches the introductory course to the school's master's program, Edwards also is known for helping graduate students develop a strong research foundation and also for generating interest in research among undergraduate students.

"Dr. Edwards creates an open intellectual environment that really sets the tone for the entire program," one of her students affirmed. "Dr. Edwards does not discriminate against those she may disagree with: in fact, Dr. Edwards often takes interest in them as a way of expanding her own intellect."

Edwards earned a bachelor's degree at Texas Tech University, a master's degree from the University of Kansas and a doctoral degree from Ohio University. She held graduate teaching and research positions at both Kansas and Ohio before coming to WMU in 2005.

Five Biologists to Provide Leadership, Expertise for ASM-NSF Biology Scholars Program Research Residency

Washington, D.C. (September 2, 2014). The American Society for Microbiology (ASM) is pleased to announce the selection of five biologists — Loretta Brancaccio-Taras, Ph.D., of Kingsborough Community College, John Geiser, Ph.D., of Western Michigan University, Cynthia Miller, Ph.D., of the University of Louisville, Stephen Nold, Ph.D., of the University of Wisconsin-Stout, and Miriam Segura-Totten, Ph.D., of the University of North Georgia — to lead and facilitate the 2014-2015 ASMNSF Biology Scholars Program Research Residency. As a national leadership initiative to improve undergraduate biology education based on evidence of student learning, the Biology Scholars Program has gathered more than 260 Scholars to create and disseminate examples of scholarship in teaching in biology. These examples have been made possible through the program's three residency programs — the Assessment, Research, and Transitions Residencies.

During their residencies, Research Scholars design research projects that investigate student learning; develop methods for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about student learning; and identify appropriate venues for publishing their results. The residency culminates with a capstone experience, after which Scholars are encouraged to continue their efforts in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

"Seeing the variety of faculty — from community colleges to schools with large graduate programs — working collaboratively on different aspects of student learning is truly exciting," says residency leader Loretta Brancaccio-Taras, chair of the Department of Biological Sciences at Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, N.Y. Brancaccio-Taras is an alumnus of the 2005-2006 ASM Scholars-in-Residence Program, the precursor to the Biology Scholars Program.

Brancaccio-Taras and facilitators Geiser, Miller, Nold, and Segura-Totten guide Research Scholars through every aspect of the residency, including the intensive Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Institute held each July in Washington, D.C. As former Scholars themselves and deeply committed to improving and investigating how students learn, the team is ideally positioned to help Scholars navigate the intricacies of SoTL.

The Biology Scholars Program was developed with the support of the National Science Foundation under grant number DUE-1022542. The program is sponsored by ASM with support from the NSF, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and American Association for the Advancement of Science BioSciEdNet Collaborative. In addition, several life science professional societies partner with and

contribute to the program; these include the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Biological Sciences, American Physiological Society, American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, American Society for Cell Biology, American Society for Plant Biology, American Society of Human Genetics, Ecological Society of America, Genetics Society of America, Human Anatomy and Physiology Society, and Society of Toxicology.

Applications for the 2015-2016 Research Residency will be accepted through February 1, 2015. Learn more at www.biologyscholars.org. The ASM is the world's largest scientific society of individuals interested in the microbiological sciences. Its mission is to advance the microbiological sciences as a vehicle for understanding life processes and to apply and communicate this knowledge for the improvement of health and environmental and economic well-being worldwide.

WMU philosopher-ethicist to be honored as an emerging scholar

by Mark Schwerin

October 8, 2014 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.--A Western Michigan University philosopher and ethicist whose research has broken new ground in the areas of cyberwarfare, torture and nanotechnology will be honored by Western Michigan University as an emerging scholar during an Oct. 10 campuswide awards ceremony.



Allhoff

Dr. Fritz Allhoff, who in 2013 received a \$500,000 National Science Foundation grant to study the ethics of cyberwarfare and had a book on the ethics of torture published, will be presented the **2014-15 Emerging Scholar Award** during WMU's **academic convocation** ceremonies at 2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10, in the Dalton Center Recital Hall. The event will feature WMU President **John M. Dunn's** State of the University address as well as the presentation of several other campuswide awards honoring Distinguished Faculty Scholars, Distinguished Teaching Award recipients and those being honored with Distinguished Service Awards.

Emerging Scholar Award

The Emerging Scholar Award program was launched late in 2006 to acknowledge the accomplishments of WMU faculty members who are among the rising stars in U.S. higher education. It is designed to celebrate the contributions of faculty who are in the first decade of their careers at WMU and who, by virtue of their contributions to scholarship or creative activity, have achieved national recognition and demonstrated outstanding promise to achieve renown in their continuing work. The award goes to scholars nominated for consideration through a campuswide selection process and carries a \$2,000 cash prize.

Dr. Fritz Allhoff

Allhoff's book, "Terrorism, Ticking Time Bombs and Torture," was published by the University of Chicago Press. He also coauthored a scholarly book, "What is Nanotechnology and Why Does it Matter?: From Science to Ethics," which was published in 2012. Allhoff also has edited nine scholarly volumes, nine teaching-oriented volumes and three trade publications and has published 17 peer-reviewed articles in top-ranked journals and 15 invited journal articles, seven as the single author.

Allhoff also has 10 book chapters to his credit and has given presentations at over 60 national and international conferences. He has acted as conference or session organizer at over 20 national and international events and as a reviewer for both journal and book publications for multiple journals and presses. He is managing editor for 13 different publication series on topics ranging from nanotechnology to the extremely popular "Philosophy for Everyone" series.

Quantity and quality

"Dr. Allhoff's research and productivity is nothing short of incredible," wrote one nominator. "There is simply no manner or research productivity in which he has not extensively engaged."

Allhoff was cited for not only the sheer quantity of his research output, but also its quality, breadth and reach.

Allhoff joined the WMU faculty in 2005 and has served as director of graduate studies since 2008. He also has been director of the Medical Humanities Workgroup since 2010, director of the History and Philosophy of Science Workgroup from 2006-10, and adjunct assistant professor for the Mallinson Institute for Science Education from 2007-10. He earned his bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in 1998 and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 2001 and 2005, respectively.

In addition to his duties at WMU, Allhoff has served as a research fellow at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics in Canberra, Australia, and a visiting associate professor in the University of Michigan Department of Philosophy. Earlier this year, Allhoff received his juris doctor degree from the University of Michigan School of Law. He is now serving a judicial clerk for the Honorable Craig F. Stowers, an Alaska Supreme Court justice, and completed an internship with the Honorable Helene N. White, a U.S. Court of Appeals judge with the Sixth Circuit Court in Detroit.

"There is not a more energetic, professional or productive scholar than Fritz," wrote another nominator and longtime colleague. "Even as a graduate student at U.C. Santa Barbara in 2003, Fritz had the foresight to be concerned with ethical issues arising from emerging technologies and, given his background in both science and philosophy, has proven to be well equipped in addressing such daunting issues."

Cal State Fullerton professor receives top NGWA awards for contributions to groundwater industry

<http://www.ngwa.org/Media-Center/press/2014/Pages/2014-09-11-awards-oliver-anderson.aspx>

An Extraordinary Life

Posted on Tuesday, August 12, 2014

The influence left behind by Western Michigan University alumna Merze Tate ('25, *Certificate of Teaching; BA '27, History*) is one of remarkable significance. She has received international recognition for her accomplishments and now, 18 years after her death, she is going to be honored once more by her hometown.



Upon completion of renovations in September, the Rolland Township Library in Blanchard, Mich. will be rededicated as the Tate Memorial Library. Dan Shaw, a school teacher at Blanchard High School, has been a promoter for the preservation of Tate's memory. Shaw has been involved with providing a headstone at her burial site, as well as her nomination into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

For many years, Tate was one of Kalamazoo's best kept secrets. Her extraordinary life was uncovered by Kalamazoo Gazette reporter, Sonya Bernard-Hollins when she found her unique name on a list of alumni provided by the University. Bernard-Hollins was doing a story on WMU's African American Firsts, and when she came across Tate she realized that she had found a true gem.

Tate has held many titles over the years; inventor, world traveler, journalist, and author being just the tip of the iceberg. Tate was the first African American to graduate from Oxford University in London, as well as the first African American woman to receive a Ph. D. from Harvard University and Radcliffe College. Tate was also named as WMU's first African American Distinguished Alumna. When she graduated from the University in 1927, Tate held the school's highest academic record at that time with all A's and only three B's.

As an educator, Tate strived to give her students the best experience possible. As someone who loved to travel, having circled the globe not once, but twice, she created a school Travel Club which took dozens of her students across the country. Upon her

death in 1996, she left millions of dollars to various universities across the country for continued support of higher education.

“The best that we as educators can give to our students and graduates is capacity for continued growth. Having a purpose gives meaning to what human beings do.”

To learn more about Tate, please visit www.merzetate.com.

To read more about her library dedication, please [click here](#).

Tate (center) pictured with President John Bernhard (left) and Loy Norrix (right) after receiving her honorary doctorate degree from Western Michigan University.

Posted by Stan Sulewski

Communication and Social Robotics Lab



For most students, college education is only thought to come in the form of conventional lectures and textbooks, but two students working in the Communication and Social Robotics Lab (CSRL) are afforded a break from the classroom several times a week. CSRL is a collaborative effort between Dr. Autumn Edwards and Dr. Chad Edwards in the School of Communication at WMU and Dr. Patric Spence at the University of Kentucky. Under the supervision of Drs. Edwards, students conduct and analyze robot-human interaction, as well as continue their studies in overall communication.

Emily Spranger, a junior majoring in public relations, takes care of the social media aspect of the lab. She develops the Twitter and Facebook feeds and is helping to build the website.

"Working in the lab has been a great experience for me. I've learned so many real life skills that I would not be able to learn in a traditional classroom

setting," Emily said. She continues, "For example, working on the website has given me so many relevant public relations experience. Working in the lab is very hands on and very rewarding. It's great to have an actual physical outcome of your work instead of just getting a letter grade." Emily's favorite part is working with the robots. She finds it interesting to witness how students and teachers interact with them. According to Emily, "working in the lab has been a very rewarding and knowledgeable experience."

Adam Reid, a senior who studies public relations and management, worked in SERL last spring and is working there this fall also. For his fall lab work, Adam will primarily focus on



his thesis through the Lee Honors College. The thesis will involve a study that aims to help shed light on human-robot interaction in an education setting. Adam "will use two telepresence robots: Herman, which is bulky and slow, and Olivia, which is small and fluid. I believe differences in subject perception and attitude toward each robot will vary, depending on the subject and the corresponding robot's features and tendencies." Pending data and results, Adam's thesis will be sent for possible inclusion at the Human-Robot Interaction conference in Portland, Oregon. After it has been defended, the thesis will be revised and submitted to a research journal for publication.

Emily and Adam agree that working in CSRL is both educationally and socially rewarding. Textbooks and other structured learning styles offer limited creativity, but work in the lab is seemingly without boundaries. They consider themselves fortunate to not only be presented with problems, but to also be given the opportunity to discover the answers themselves.