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Updates in Academic Affairs - 11/03/15

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Updates in Academic Affairs: November 3, 2015

Inside Updates: Michigan now a LEAP state, WMU students busy with dozens of service-learning projects, reporting of midterm grades up significantly this fall.

MICHIGAN JOINS NATIONAL INITIATIVE PROMOTING LIBERAL EDUCATION

In conjunction with the American Association of Colleges and Universities, we are pleased to announce that Michigan is the most recent addition to the Liberal Education and America's Promise States Initiative.

The purpose of this initiative, known as LEAP, is to promote the importance of a liberal education in developing engaged and informed citizens to sustain and enhance our democratic society throughout the 21st century.

AAC&U defines the attributes of a liberal education as "...an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world...as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest."

The LEAP States designation is granted when a consortium of higher education institutions collaboratively develop common goals to achieve the ideals of the LEAP States Initiative. Information regarding the initiative is available from the AAC&U website linked here.

In 2012, administrators from Michigan's 15 public universities began discussions regarding the LEAP States Initiative. In 2014, the WMU Faculty Senate passed a resolution in support of WMU and the state of Michigan being established as a LEAP state.

Being designated a LEAP state is an honor to the 15 public universities in the Michigan consortium. At WMU, this designation will focus the University in its revision of general education and enhance liberal education for all of our students.

The Michigan consortium begins its work with three primary goals:

- Institutions in the consortium will work together to develop and share effective processes that assess the learning in general education program.

- Institutions in the consortium will work together to educate the general public and legislators at both the state and national level regarding the importance of a liberally educated populace to maintain and enhance our democratic society.

- Institutions in the consortium will work to develop an environment of inclusive excellence that ensures all citizens of the state have an equal chance at a quality liberal education.
In addition to Michigan, other states earning the LEAP designation are: California, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Faculty, staff and administrators at Michigan's 15 public universities are encouraged to actively participate in advancing LEAP goals for liberal education. For more information about the initiative, contact Dr. Dave Reinhold, associate provost for assessment and undergraduate studies, at (269) 387-4564 or david.reinhold@wmich.edu.

WMU STUDENTS, COMMUNITY MEANINGFULLY CONNECT IN SERVICE LEARNING

This semester, more than 700 students will participate in 36 unique service-learning projects managed through the Office of Service-Learning.

In the spirit of collaboration, students, community partners and faculty members, together create and manage service projects that meet community needs and course objectives. Students gain invaluable hands-on experience in the process, while addressing challenges identified by our community partners.

Though often used interchangeably with volunteering, service learning involves more in-depth projects—along with critically reflecting on the service experience—and a deep connection with the community. By taking part in projects, students apply theory and academic training to practice, explore professional work environments, and expand their professional network.

Projects range from therapeutic horseback riding to helping create remediation plans intended to make the city safer for children who walk and bike to school. Service learning requires a minimum of 15 hours of service work over the course of a semester to help establish a depth of experience for all involved.

The Building Bikes, Building Communities project is an example of a community-student collaboration managed through the Office of Service-Learning. Co-hosted by WMU's Office of Sustainability, the project partners WMU students with students from Lakeside Academy to assemble bikes that are given to exemplary, income-eligible students in local elementary schools.

WMU students form special bonds with the Lakeside students, sharing everything from personal experiences to their favorite movies. Leadership, team building and critical thinking through action and reflection are all essential skills being honed by WMU and Lakeside students during this project.

Spring Staycation is another example of a service-learning project available to students. The week-long alternative spring break program provides opportunities for a small group of WMU
students to learn about social justice issues, such as those involving mental illness and teen violence, while participating in service projects.

Through Staycation, students gain a deeper understanding of the community and themselves. Each day focuses on a social justice topic with morning sessions featuring speakers, panelists and interactive simulations. Afternoon sessions expand morning topics into related service projects involving WMU students and community members.

For more information about the Office of Service-Learning or Spring Staycation, email csl-info@wmich.edu or contact John Scott at (269) 387-4455.

**STATISTICS SHOW A SHARP RISE IN REPORTING OF MIDTERM GRADES THIS FALL**

Midterm grade reporting for the fall semester is at its highest rate in the last seven years. Periodic evaluation and feedback is a major factor contributing to a student's academic success.

It is important for students to clearly understand how the grades they earn are tied to their academic performance, as evaluated and graded by their instructors.

Midterm grades also can be accessed by academic advisors, which provides them with a more comprehensive picture of a student's academic performance.

Provost Tim Greene extends his appreciation to instructors of record for submitting midterm grades for students enrolled in fall courses. A total of 33,515 midterm grades were reported this semester, an increase of 4,989 recorded midterm grades over the fall 2014 semester. In addition, midterm grades were reported for 1,149 course sections, an increase of 155 sections over fall 2014.

Thank you for your work and continued support of our students.