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ETHICS CENTER



Seita Scholars coaching program becomes national, international model

by Mark Schwerin
February 5, 2016 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—What started as a program to help youths who have aged out of foster care go on to success in college has become a model for coaching youths of all stripes to find academic success, both nationally and internationally.



Two representatives of Western Michigan University, **Kevin Knutson**, director of the College of Arts and Sciences Office of Undergraduate Advising, and **Ronicka Hamilton**, Seita Scholars Program coach, will travel to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, to take the program to the international stage **Feb. 22-25** at the National Academic Advising Association—NACADA—International Conference. They will be the first WMU representatives to present at an international academic advising conference and will report on the "Fostering Success Coaching Model in Academic Advising" as part of the student persistence and retention track at the conference.

At the same time, **Jamie Bennett**, co-developer of the Seita Scholars coaching model, will be in California, training how that state can implement a similar coaching strategy to help young people succeed in higher education.

Wide Application

The coaching strategy is finding wide application outside the foster care realm, says Knutson, who will present to the international audience.

"The coaching model is a WMU homegrown one that **Dr. Keith Hearit**, interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, supported having the college advising staff learn to best serve all of our students," Knutson says. "Though the techniques were developed for foster care students, they translate well for all students. The model really provides advisors a tool to help our student population develop the skills to be successful as students, but also skills that they will need in life."

The model was developed from research by WMU faculty, staff and students and is highly adaptable, Knutson says. It teaches support professionals a skill set that can be used in a variety

of forms of communication. Professionals are trained how to use coaching face-to-face and via email, phone and text messaging, allowing for adaptability across offices, staff and organizational structures.

Practitioners have found that it works best when contact is brief, yet frequent, which is typical in advising relationships. Since it largely relies on communication between advisor and student, various support staff can easily implement coaching strategies in the context of their respective role. In short, this model is easily adaptable to anyone having a conversation with a student.

"It will be great to share this with the global academic advising community," Knutson says.

The NACADA International Conference is hosted by Zayed University. Attendees will share and hear the latest scholarly research that sheds light on best practices, as well as strategies and programs that engage students in advising.

While Knutson and Hamilton are in Dubai, Bennett, training specialist with the WMU Center for Fostering Success, will be training advisors at a California university. California is working to provide this training at many, if not all, of its institutions of higher learning.

About The Program

The Seita Scholars Program, an initiative of the Center for Fostering Success, provides financial and coaching support to students who have experienced and aged out of foster care, a student population that is largely under-represented in higher education.

Its purposes are to create transitions that lead to success in college and career for WMU students from foster care ages 18 to 25 years old; to develop a community of scholars among WMU students who have aged out of foster care and create a safe community to deconstruct and reconstruct identity; and to educate WMU students from foster care and their support network to enhance their professional skill set and to transform WMU students by integrating experiences from students' past to build opportunities for their future.

Professionals trained in the coaching model learn how to work within its framework, yet customize it for each student. Having advisors serve as "coaches" changes the student-staff relationship, promoting academic and professional success through values of partnership, self-determination and skill development. This model lends itself to "fostering" success in all students, regardless of their background, according to those who developed the model.

About Nacada

NACADA, the global community for academic advising, develops and disseminates innovative theory, research and practice of academic advising in higher education, as well as provides opportunities for professional development, networking and leadership.

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

The County Drain Commissioner Is One of our Most Important Elected Officials

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Huh? And, btw, what is a drain commissioner?

Dr. Lynne Heasley, associate professor of history and environmental and sustainability studies, was among a panel of three who helped answer that question at the second Honors College Lyceum titled “Our Blue Marble.”

The drain commissioner (a.k.a. water resources commissioner) creates and maintains the county drains and provides storm water guidance and support to a county.

Heasley illustrated the drain commissioner’s importance with a case concerning the once-healthy trout-filled Coldwater River (a.k.a. Little Thornapple) in Barry County whose banks were cleared of trees and debris to make the river flow faster and flood less upstream. Instead, the commissioner’s decision summoned the wrath of riparian property owners and fishermen, especially when a thick layer of black and smelly sludge appeared.



“It destroyed a decade of collaborative work to protect habitat in a public-private restoration program,” said Heasley. “And yet, the drain commissioner of Barry County expanded the scope of the project without getting required permits from the state—or informing the two neighboring counties responsible for the inter-county drain.”

Heasley said this case was reminiscent of a newspaper article about a 1970s-era drain commissioner in Shiawassee County who declared that the office is “more powerful than the governor” because it can levy taxes without approval by the county commission or the state legislature.

The debacle of Coldwater River actually goes back to the early nineteenth century and Michigan’s complex environmental history, Heasley said. People moving Westward avoided settlement in Michigan because of its swamps and water-borne disease. Territorial and state laws allowed for swamp drainage in order to make way for agriculture.

The Michigan Drain Code of 1956 authorizes county drain commissioners to assess the costs of drain work to landowners, which makes the office a powerful local and state position, unique in the country. The code is the primary statute that mandates the responsibilities of the county drain commissioner and provides for the creation and maintenance of county drains.

Each drain has a contributing area (similar to a watershed) called a drainage district, which is a public corporation that is legally and financially responsible for maintaining the functioning of the drain.

All costs are paid for by drain assessments, and the drain commissioner acts as a steward for each drainage district. She keeps the historical, financial, and easement records; schedules maintenance; responds to service requests; requires permits for activities affecting the drain; borrows funds to pay for costs; and assesses the costs back to the landowners, transportation authorities, and municipalities, according to their estimated benefit. Apportionments—the fixed proportion owed by an entity for any costs—are adjusted as land use changes.

Dr. Denise Keele, associate professor of political science, said that the concept of federalism also helped make the drain commissioner powerful. Federalism defines the constitutional relationship between the local, state and federal government.

“The 10th Amendment says that states have rights,” said Keele. “It assumes that local officials know more about their resources than those in higher levels of government. Consequently, the people can exercise more control over their lives by voting for their local officials.”

However, federalism and local control have led to a proliferation of elected offices, many of which voters don’t know about or understand.

“Different states assume local control in different ways based on what’s important in a particular state,” said Keele. “One of the more powerful but obscure offices in Michigan is the county drain commissioner who has the authority to tax and the responsibility to control the prevalence of water all around us.”

Michigan has 65 hydrologic unit code level 8 watersheds, thousands of drainage districts and 1,100 inter-county drains covering 6,000 square miles in 83 counties. Kalamazoo County is an intensely water-connected environment, with about 350 drainage districts, more than 360 lakes and ponds, and hundreds of miles of streams, rivers, and drains. Drain commissioners work to control flooding, manage storm water and prevent soil erosion, however, many don’t typically have a background in hydrology, engineering, agriculture, or environmental sustainability.

“The people who run for the office are usually lifelong residents and ‘nice guys’ who pledge to do a good job,” said Keele. “But voters are largely unfamiliar with the office, which is usually found at the bottom of the ballot sheet and often overlooked. Kalamazoo County is lucky to have [Pat Crowley](#) as our drain commissioner.”



Crowley has a Ph.D. from the soil and water division of the Michigan State University Department of Agricultural Engineering and an M.S. degree in water resources management from the University of Wisconsin.

The twice-elected commissioner first came to office in 2008.

“The Coldwater River disaster was wrong for the environment and illegal,” said Crowley. “The property owners of Barry County—as people everywhere—have a love for the land where they live.

On the other hand, Crowley said this disaster created a strong and sympathetic response among drain commissioners who immediately formed a technical subgroup with the State and private professionals to create detailed guidance for working within a stream environment.

“We can tax and there’s power in taxes,” said Crowley. “That’s why people are afraid of us. They don’t expect to be taxed more than the taxes they already pay.”

However, drainage is fundamental to our health and welfare. It helps keep us connected, she said. Taxes pay for drainage of the water that runs underground throughout our cities and rural lands. Drainage allows us to get the kids to school and send fire trucks to burning houses.

“When people come to our office, they are distressed about damage caused by water,” said Crowley. “They are also angry and have no other way of venting their anger. My office tries to help people through an organizational structure of collaboration, listening, problem solving and capacity building.”



The political system needs to adapt to our new environmental realities, added Crowley, however, it is difficult to legislate across the state since each county is different geographically and environmentally. The desires of the public differ, too. For example, some plats want their storm water retention ponds to look like golfing greens while others want theirs to have native vegetation.

“We try to honor local values within the greater context of storm water management,” said Crowley. “What’s important to understand is that we all depend completely on drainage systems to carry on our lives.”

Michigan is one of the few states that elects its drain commissioners.

“It’s not about passing another law,” said Keele, “but about people knowing what the drain commissioner does, and how the office espouses their values. Then, they need to vote for qualified individuals.”

UPDATE: Residents on the Coldwater River will now have to pay for the cleanup that resulted when the contractor cleared trees from the banks. For some, [this property tax is more than \\$1,000; it was levied by Barry County Drain Commissioner Russ Yarger.](#)

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College of Arts and Sciences

Western Michigan University

Kalamazoo MI 49008-5308 USA

(269) 387-4350

WMU Cooley Law School is up and running thanks to political science professor

Olga Bonfiglio

College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Meet the man who is making the law school at WMU happen: Dr. Mark Hurwitz, professor of political science.

“I speak law school and think like a lawyer,” said Hurwitz, who serves as special assistant to the provost to navigate the [affiliation process between Western Michigan University and WMU Cooley Law School](#), which became official in 2014, with additional agreements signed earlier this year.

“This affiliation is very significant. As President Dunn indicated, WMU has become one of a select group of universities to have both a law school and a medical school,” said Hurwitz. “The

law school not only gives the entire university prestige but WMU students can obtain an undergraduate and a law degree in an accelerated program that can take less than the usual seven years. This is good for student recruitment and retention, and it enables faculty to collaborate on projects involving policy and legal components. There's no real downside to it."

WMU is a public university and WMU Cooley Law School is a private law school. The two institutions will remain as separate entities under the affiliation agreements.

"Any time two institutions work together, they need agreements to clarify that relationship over time," said Hurwitz. "Each institution needs to know what goals each has and what behaviors to expect from the other.

Accrediting agencies also had to approve the affiliation, which included both the American Bar Association and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Hurwitz, who serves as pre-law advisor for political science students interested in obtaining a law degree, directs them in the practical realities and opportunities that can lead to successful careers.

In law school, students learn how to analyze situations critically and how to see both the big picture and the minute details. While the majority of law school graduates practice law, lawyers can also be found in entrepreneurial and corporate businesses, government, interest groups, policy groups, legal aid groups and law enforcement.

"Legal training helps you know what to look for in business transactions, which occur in all institutions," said Hurwitz.

Hurwitz earned his law degree at Brooklyn Law School and practiced corporate, commercial and criminal law for seven years in New York City, his hometown. Afterward, he decided to pursue a Ph.D. degree in political science at Michigan State University. He currently teaches undergraduate courses in Constitutional law, civil liberties, the judicial process, and critical thinking about politics, as well as graduate courses in American politics and judicial behavior. His research focuses on judicial politics in federal and state courts, judicial behavior, judicial selection, and diversity. He is editor of Justice System Journal, and he keeps an active research agenda, with a forthcoming article in the Journal of Politics entitled "Strategic Retirements of Elected and Appointed Justices: A Hazard Model Approach."

"I don't practice law anymore, but I'm dealing with legal issues all the time through my research and teaching," said Hurwitz, who has been with WMU since 2005.

Hurwitz is co-principal investigator for the [WMU Cooley Law School Innocence Project](#), which recently received a grant of \$418,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice. The grant will help defray the costs associated with post-conviction case review, evidence location and DNA testing where the results may show actual innocence of convicted felons in Michigan. The Innocence Project is the only Michigan DNA project of its kind.

“I love the law,” said Hurwitz. “It’s a field that is ever changing and evolving. The law is influenced by politics and it influences politics in return. I find it interesting and stimulating.”

For more information about the WMU Cooley Law School, contact [Dr. Mark Hurwitz](#).

Dr. Angie Moe set to launch research on Syrian refugees

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Yogi Berra once said: “If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else.” For Dr. Angie Moe, who has a long history of scholarship in Middle Eastern music, culture and dance, Yogi’s observation could not be more apropos—or timely.

Last spring, the Haenicke Institute for Global Education invited the sociology professor to participate in a faculty development seminar on social problems in the Middle East. She ended up learning about the Syrian refugees.

“I wanted to study another area around the Mediterranean,” said Moe, who had already done research in Egypt and Istanbul.

The seminar, comprised of eight other American academics, focused for five-and-a-half days each on Amman, Jordan, and Istanbul, Turkey, where Moe met Syrian refugees as well as members of agencies and government organizations who were helping them.

“I was like a sponge in that I got a whole new experience of the Middle East. It was all so new to me,” said Moe. “I’m still figuring out the angle I want to approach for my research, but over the last six months I have been building a basic knowledge of the issue.”

Moe has also joined a working group of people in the Kalamazoo area who are looking into ways they might help support Syrian refugees here. Already she has joined with Pastor Mark Couch of Solid Grounds Student Ministry and Caleb Foerg, a sophomore in political science, who have formed a student organization called Advocates for Refugees in Crisis. ARC is part of WMU Student Activities and Leadership Programs. Its purpose isto promote the cause of aid for global refugees and to provide assistance to those who have been resettled in the southwestern Michigan area.

“This initial group continues to snowball, and I’m not sure what will come of it all or how I will make a contribution,” said Moe.

The first thing it must do, however, is to assess the area’s capacity to host Syrian refugee families. So far, they are partnering with Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, which has been doing refugee resettlement since October of 1998. Bethany was approved to do reception

and placement as a Michigan resettlement affiliate of the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS-IRP) that also works with the U.S. State Department to resettle refugees in the United States.

ARC and Solid Grounds Student Ministry would like to co-host a refugee resettlement program by next summer that would provide such supports as housing, education, health care, transportation, English translation, and language learning.

“It’s quite a commitment,” said Moe. “It even entails meeting the family at the airport when they arrive in Kalamazoo, finding toys for the kids, putting homey touches to their apartment and making them feel like someone cares about them.

Members of the Islamic Center in Kalamazoo have also shown an interest in the resettlement project, especially since Syrian refugees are mostly Muslim.

Spending 11 days in Jordan and Istanbul has definitely had an impact on Moe.

“It’s changed me. It was such an intense education and a dramatic human experience,” said Moe. “I have traveled to other parts of the world and seen many difficult situations, but the magnitude of the suffering I saw is really difficult to put into words. You know intellectually that there is ‘this thing out there’ that is terrible, but when you see people living it, you are affected.”

Moe relates the story of visiting a Bedouin village in Jordan, two kilometers from the Syrian border. There she met a Syrian grandmother who had had a stroke while her family was in flight. The woman was bedridden, frail, and non-verbal.

“I immediately went to her bedside and asked her adult daughters, through our translator, if I could sit near her and hold her hand,” said Moe. “I massaged her hands and cheeks but she just looked through me blankly. When I turned away to pay attention to her son who was relating the family’s story, she suddenly squeezed my hand and tried to pull me back. I turned back around to look at her and she was crying. That’s when I knew there was no turning back.”

“There is something about the human experience here that so easily turns hearts and minds,” Moe continued. “I hope, that even in that brief time, I gave her some comfort.”

In this same village, Moe experienced quite a different scenario that is telling in terms of the life Syrian refugees have become accustomed. She heard gunfire while meeting with the village’s tribal sheik. He had taken in several hundred Syrian refugee families in order to set an example for others of the humanitarian effort that he thought should occur.

“No one ran for cover from the gunfire and instead just carried on business as usual. So I did nothing,” said Moe. “It turns out that the arid climate and direction of the wind makes sound travel differently and in a way that I couldn’t tell where the gunfire was coming from. Hearing it was definitely new to me and very unsettling. However, the people there hear it all the time.”

Moe finds the civil war in Syria to have morphed into a complicated mess with many actors and scenarios. For example, it is looking more and more like a proxy war between the United States and Russia. There is also controversy over the oil fields in Syria that Daesh (a.k.a. Islamic State) currently controls. Religious animosity between the major sects of Islam (Sunni and Shia) are also at play. Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad seems relentless in the war, while Daesh is using the conflict as an opportunity to exploit the country and its citizens.

The opposition powers are more complex than they were originally and have been infiltrated by radicals, said Moe. Moreover, the Kurds continue the struggle toward autonomy as they fight Daesh over northeastern Syria. The United States, as is often the case, is quite in the middle. During and since her travels, Moe has heard from various sources (many with Syrian background or connection) that it is largely believed the U.S. could end the war. At the same time, people in this region of the world are ambivalent about outside interests getting involved.

Some Syrians have said that if they would not have participated in the Arab Spring had they foreseen the upset it would cause, according to Moe. They do not like Assad, but recognize that he provided some stability in the country prior to the war. Overall, the people find the strains of war not worth the attempt to overthrow Assad. And, they fear that if he were deposed, Daesh—or some other radicalized terrorist group—will likely jump in to replace him.

“The country needs some stability,” said Moe. “What happens after that is unclear.”

Moe recently spoke on "Invisible Victims: Violence Against Women and Children and The Syrian Refugee Crisis" at the Lyceum Lecture series sponsored by Lee Honors College.

The Fall 2015 Lyceum Lecture series is a companion to the continuing [Raise Your Voice](#) series. WMU faculty and community experts address gendered violence in college life, at work, in the family, on the street and in other institutions, and how we can achieve a world without gender-based violence.

Bob Hercules '79 sees Maya Angelou film selected for 2016 Sundance Film Festival

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Bob Hercules' new film, [Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise](#), was selected for this year's [Sundance Film Festival](#), which premiered there on January 26.

“It is an incredible honor to have been chosen and I am humbled by it,” said Hercules.

The film is co-directed by Bob Hercules and Rita Coburn Whack. It will also air on the PBS series, American Masters, in fall 2016.

Dr. Angelou has become a global symbol of peace, humility, and freedom—but parts of her story are not well known, says the website on the film. The Maya Angelou documentary will reflect on how the events of history, culture, and the arts shaped Angelou’s life and how she, in turn, helped shape Americans’ worldview through her autobiographical literature and activism. The filmmaking team hopes to shed light on the untold aspects of her life and to educate audiences about her story.

“It is every filmmaker’s dream to have their film accepted into the Sundance Film Festival so, for me, it’s a dream come true,” said Hercules. “After four years of work on the film it’s incredibly gratifying that it will premiere in such a prestigious festival. And, of course, it was a tremendous honor to have made the very first film about the incomparable Maya Angelou. I cherish the time I spent with her, and I hope the film will inspire people to overcome their own obstacles just as Dr. Angelou did with such grace.”

Bob Hercules is an independent filmmaker whose recent films include [Joffrey: Mavericks of American Dance](#) and [Bill T. Jones: A Good Man](#). The Joffrey film, narrated by Mandy Patinkin, tells the full story of the groundbreaking ballet company and their many rises and falls. It premiered in January 2012 at the Dance on Camera Film Festival at Lincoln Center and aired on PBS’ American Masters December, 2012. A Good Man aired on American Masters in 2011 and played at many film festivals including IDFA, Silverdocs, Full Frame, DOXA and the Southern Circuit. Hercules’ acclaimed [Forgiving Dr. Mengele](#) (2005) won the Special Jury Prize at the Slamdance Film Festival and has been seen in film festivals around the world.

Hercules’ hometown is Gaylord, MI. At WMU he majored in telecommunications and minored in fiction writing.

Kevin Wordelman MPA ’13 joins Kalamazoo Nature Center

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Kevin Wordelman MPA ’13 has joined the [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#), assuming the newly created position of director of people and culture. In that post, he serves as the champion for resources related to staffing and organizational culture at the nature center, including oversight of the volunteer program and management of all aspects of human resources within the organization. Wordelman was previously administrator and organizer for two large locals of the West Michigan Federation of College Educators. He has a master's degree in public administration from Western Michigan University. He is also a member of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners.

"Climate Challenged Society" (ENVS 1000) excites students across disciplines

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

As students come into the room, they immediately move desks around to form a discussion circle. Dr. David Benac, history, will conclude his week as guest lecturer about the development of climate change perceptions, historical context and policy as students share their research on American news and science coverage of climate change during the 1970s and 80s.

Benac is one of 10 professors providing expert guest lectures from key disciplines for "Climate Challenged Society" or ENVS 1000, the introductory course for the new climate change studies minor instituted last fall. At times, Benac defers to Dr. Steve Kohler, Environmental & Sustainability Studies Program, or Dr. Denise Keele, political science, the lead instructors and facilitators for the course, for scientific and political details. At other times he invites students to recap or reflect on the different policy developments he's just described.

The students of the class seem satisfied, enlightened and engaged with today's discussion, but before they leave, Benac gives them a list of courses he will teach that relate to the environment and may be applied to the climate change studies minor.

Last fall, the minor was added to the undergraduate curriculum to apply to any major as preparation for a variety of 21st century professional fields.

It was created by an interdisciplinary working group of WMU faculty members, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Group for the Study of Climate Change, sponsored by the WMU Center for Humanities.

Sensing that climate change is the most important issue facing humankind, one of the major goals of this group was to infuse climate change into the liberal arts education.

"It was time for us to move beyond the science and let students understand the world they live in," said Keele, who serves as chair of the advisory board for the climate change studies minor. "There are challenges coming and our real hope is to teach students something that will be useful to their lives and the future."

Students seem to get it as 27 of them filled this initial course offering. Three students talked about their motivations for taking the class, the minor and their insights about climate change and sustainability.

David Bere is a senior from Kalamazoo who is majoring in political science. He has a passion for bicycles: building them, traveling on them and promoting them as alternative transportation.

Although he is not sure of his direction after graduation, he is intensely interested in sustainability.

“I got into bikes through my volunteer work with the Office of Sustainability two and a half years ago,” said Bere. “After six months of volunteering, I was hired for a student assistant job.”

Bere took ENV5 1000 because he had Dr. Keele for environmental law and liked her. He also needed a minor and decided on the climate change studies minor.

“Environmental issues are critically important,” he said. “Every day of my life I face choices that affect the environment. In fact, this issue is on everyone's mind in my generation—more than it was in the past, I think. I feel like I serve as an ambassador between generations.”

Bere said that making small choices every day about how to live is not that hard. Instead, it becomes part of one's consciousness. Perhaps that's what got him started working with bicycles and teaching other students how to fix them.

“I have a new appreciation for the energy it takes for the things I use, so I'm always looking for energy alternatives. My focal point is finding ways to make everything sustainable. I may end up an entrepreneur doing something with energy alternatives.”

Alex Farr, a senior political science major from New Baltimore, took ENV5 1000 because he also liked Dr. Keele's environmental law course and wanted more background on climate change.

“The environment plays a huge role in my life, particularly on the policy side, so I'm exploring environmental law programs, he said. “Policy is the most effective way to change things, and I can't think of anything more important than the environment. Without a healthy environment, nothing else matters.”

As an opinion columnist for the **Western Herald**, Farr already sees the impact he can make through the written word. He received “tons of feedback” on his [recent column advocating bicycles for WMU parking services](#).

Farr's sensitivity for the environment comes primarily from his family, especially his “hippy grandmother.” He grew up in a neighborhood near a landfill that occasionally emitted a bad smell. He also learned about sustainability in elementary school where students found ways to “reduce, reuse and recycle.”

“The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 really fired me up,” he said, “as well as the company's delayed response.”

Farr sees Americans coming around to more sustainable futures, but feels it is taking far too long because the issue is framed as a business vs. the environment conflict—with business deemed more important.

“I want to have kids someday,” he said, “but I don't want to bring them into a world that is environmentally unstable.”

Farr would have added the climate change studies minor to his program had it been offered earlier in his college career. He sees Keele as the perfect person to lead ENVS 1000 because she is both motivated by the subject and “incredibly knowledgeable.”

“She's also involved in community environmental projects, so she has a great deal of credibility.”

Farr participated in one of Keele's community projects as a canvasser for a proposed superfund site at the Allied Paper Mill in Kalamazoo.

He recognizes that some people feel hopeless about climate change, but he believes that through politics he can make a difference in reversing the catastrophes it forebodes.

“We can't just throw up our hands and not do anything,” he said. “By not acting on the problem, you become part of the problem. I'm young and ready to fight for the environment. And the more people who fight for it, the better off we'll all be. There are no second chances.

Ali Coutts, a senior Honors College student from Grosse Pointe, decided to major in environmental studies because she wants to educate citizens about climate change and the importance of community and local advocacy.

“I think climate change is extremely important. It's happening now and nothing will change it unless we learn what to do about it.”

For example, on a small scale people can buy local products or ride bicycles, she said. On a larger scale people need to know what government is doing and then vote for environmentally-oriented candidates.

During her college years Coutts has interned with Greening of Detroit, a collaborative group of organizations whose aim is to inspire “sustainable growth of a healthy urban community through trees, green spaces, food, education, training and job opportunities.”

However, what she's discovering in the ENVS 1000 class is that even though students and faculty come from different disciplines, they are concerned about climate change and what they can do about it.

“It's extremely enlightening to find out that climate change touches so many different disciplines,” said Coutts who hasn't taken courses in physics, advanced English literature, or history. “But they're all a part of ENVS 1000, and now I'm exposed to these perspectives on climate change, which ultimately broaden my perspective.

Coutts reported that other members of the class—art students, business students, anthropology students and English students—are all worried about climate change.

“I thought it was just us environmental studies majors who cared. I’m glad to be sadly mistaken.”

In fact, she believes saving the environment is definitely an issue for her generation and that most students have already been exposed to the facts about climate change.

“That alone gives us a greater sensitivity to the issue as well as a greater advantage to doing something about it,” said Coutts.

Keele is very pleased with student and faculty response to the climate change studies minor and the ENVS 1000 course. The minor was created by a working group of over 20 faculty from the Interdisciplinary Humanities Group for the Study of Climate Change, and is administered by a seven-member interdisciplinary faculty advisory board.

“They are the most dedicated, hard-working people I know on this issue. They spent all of summer 2014 to put together the program,” said Keele. “These people care, and they want to make sure our students are prepared. They also want to make sure WMU makes a good start in this area—and I think they succeeded.”

ENVS 1000 provides students with the necessary science-based background and a broad understanding of the human relationship to climate change, including the social and environmental causes, challenges and opportunities for mitigation and adaptation. The goal of the program is to develop informed and engaged citizens who can use information from multiple disciplines to draw appropriate conclusions and constructively contribute to societal adaptation to global environmental change.

Four courses in the minor are offered in Spring 2016 and the goal is to have at least 20 students minoring in Climate Change Studies by next year, said Keele.

One of two options to enter the minor, Climate Challenged Society (ENVS 1000), is led and facilitated by Keele and Kohler with week-long guest lectures taught by Allen Webb, English; David Benac, history; David Karowe, biological sciences; Lei Meng, geography; Duane Hampton, geosciences; Steve Bertman, chemistry; John Miller, chemistry; Paul Pancella, physics; Carson Reeling, economics.

“Climate change can be a depressing issue, but our students are faced with questions about how to be in a world experiencing climate change and how they can support each other in it,” said Keele. “Now, that’s an accomplishment!”

Climate change studies advisory board members:

Steve Bertman, Chemistry

James Cousins, CAS Dean’s Office

Lisa DeChano-Cook (Program Adviser), Geography

Duane Hampton, Geosciences

Dave Karowe, Biological Sciences

Denise Keele (Chair), Political Science, Environmental and Sustainability Studies

Allen Webb, English

Pathways of Change: Natives, Newcomers, and the Waterways of Northeastern North America

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

Water and friendly interactions between the French with native peoples shaped the development of northeastern North America from the Great Lakes to eastern Canada on the St. Lawrence River and north to the “Upper Country” (pays d’en haut) around the Great Lakes, said Dr. José António Brandão, professor of history. He spoke at the first Honors College Lyceum titled “Our Blue Marble.”

The search for the Northwest Passage to Asia attracted the French to North America. They followed the St. Lawrence River inland and later founded forts in Quebec (1608), Montreal (1642), Michilimackinac (1671), Fort St. Joseph (1691) and Detroit (1701). This quest eventually drew them all the way to the Pacific Ocean in 1793. Meanwhile, they focused on more immediate riches: furs, fish, land and faith conversion of the native peoples.

In spring as soon as the ice broke up, French traders went to the Upper Country (pays d’en haut). They used canoes, a technology they learned from the native peoples, to collect furs and make reports on the waterways and lands. These reports allowed cartographers back in France to map out the region despite never having visited it. In 1697, Antoine Louvigny, who commanded at Michilimackinac, produced a most accurate manuscript map outlining Michigan, the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The European thirst for territory in the new world fed their expansionist spirit in different ways. The French, for example, built 106 forts and settlements on waterways that served as trading and military posts in order to defend their fur trade from encroaching English settlers. However, Louis XIV closed the fur trade in 1696 because it was undermining colonial development and the glut of furs and a weak demand for beaver pelts made it no longer profitable. Trading was eventually reestablished because it became important for non-economic reasons.



The native peoples were critical to the French traders' survival and France's success as an empire, however, due to their lack of immunity to European diseases (influenza and measles), they were severely depopulated. As a result, the native peoples were challenged to replicate their societies and to maintain their cultural practices and beliefs, which proved especially ineffective in coping with the changes introduced by the French presence. No doubt, the French used their immunity to these diseases as an example of their superiority and the consequence of the natives' "pagan worship." This aided the Jesuit missionaries who came to the region (1634-1750) to convert the native peoples to Christianity.

Although the French posts were sited to control New France militarily, defending territory without the help of the native populations would have been difficult. The French supplied the native peoples with knives, axes and kettles to make their lives easier—and firearms to fight their common enemies. The French also provided men to assist some native groups fight against their particular enemies.

The French were remarkably adept at this interdependent relationship because they respected the native peoples' practices and tried to fit in with them to achieve their own ends. Likewise, the 135 Jesuit missionaries were able to convert some native peoples by learning their languages, adapting some of their beliefs to Catholicism, and regarding them as intelligent enough to learn Christian truths.

The French explorers and settlers changed the region as a result of their interaction with the native peoples. However, what linked everyone together politically and militarily were the waterways and the fur trade.