SUPPORTING TEACHER INTERNSHIPS AND HONORING FAMILY

When Velma Cotterill took her student teaching internship with Western State Teachers College (now WMU) over 90 years ago, she found the reduced amount of time for a job made it difficult to pay for school - a problem students still experience today! Velma went on to be a successful elementary school teacher for over 25 years. READ MORE
GENEROUS DONORS MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR STUDENTS TO SEE THE WORLD

Studying abroad can be an eye-opening experience that helps students gain a broader perspective on our country, the world, and their field of study. And it can also be extremely expensive! Fortunately for our Broncos, scholarships funded by generous donors are available to help put these life changing experiences within reach. READ MORE

TOGETHER WE ELEVATE

At WMU, we are always looking for ways we can be the best, ways that we can elevate the student experience, and our beautiful campus. We wanted to take a moment to send you some updates on how WMU and the University community is working together to elevate in the classroom, on the field, and in the community. READ MORE

$1.5 MILLION IN GRANTS STRENGTHEN WMU’S VISION REHAB AND MOBILITY PROGRAMS

The Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies at Western Michigan University has won two Rehabilitation Services Administration grants totaling nearly $1.5 million to strengthen recruiting efforts and increase the number of highly qualified vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation and mobility specialists over the next five years. READ MORE
WMU GRADUATE STUDENTS LEAD CUTTING-EDGE AUTOMATION RESEARCH

Automation and sustainability are driving the future of the auto industry, and two Western Michigan University graduate students are leading the charge. Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist visited WMU's campus to help launch the testing of accessible autonomous shuttles aimed at improving transportation options for people with disabilities. WMU is collaborating with a number of partners on this project, including project lead Pratt & Miller Engineering. READ MORE

SUPPORTING THE INVISIBLE NEED PROJECT

Medical expenses, unexpected costs, and food insecurity are three very unfortunate, but very real problems many students face over the course of their studies at WMU and on campuses across the country. At WMU, the Invisible Need Project works to help those students who, on the surface, may not appear to be suffering. By making a gift to the Invisible Need Project, you can help meet the needs of students. READ MORE

ELEVATE A STUDENT TODAY. MAKE A GIFT. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
When Velma Cotterill took her student teaching internship with Western State Teachers College (now WMU) over 90 years ago, she found the reduced amount of time for a job made it difficult to pay for school - a problem students still experience today! Velma went on to be a successful elementary school teacher for over 25 years. She and her husband provided unwavering encouragement and support to the young people in their extended family to complete a college education and the Velma and Harry Cotterill Memorial Scholarship was founded to honor Mr. and Mrs. Cotterill and continue the spirit of that tradition. The scholarship provides funds in support of student teaching internships to help solve the problem Velma identified so many years ago.

Since its inception in 2004, 40 students have benefited from the Velma and Harry Cotterill Memorial Scholarship. "It's been really great to see this scholarship help WMU students," said Harry Cotterill, Jr., son of Velma and Harry Cotterill. “Being a family memorial, it honors the past. Being an education scholarship it supports the future. Being endowed means it will be around long after we're gone. In the meantime, we always enjoy meeting the recipients, and hearing their enthusiastic plans. It's win-win all-around."

This year’s recipients are Sarah Emma Rose Stiennon and Bridgette Louwers.

Stiennon is a secondary education major with a minor in secondary education history who is expecting to graduate this December. Her dream job is to teach English and drama at a high school or middle school and also assist with an afterschool theatre program. In regards to receiving the scholarship, she shared:

“I am very grateful for the Cotterill scholarship. Student teaching is a five month commitment with no pay; and it is nearly impossible to work a job at the same time. This scholarship allows me to focus my time on teaching, grading, planning, and helping out with after school activities at my internship. Thank you so much for your contribution to my education. I am lucky to be surrounded by friends and family who support my dream of becoming a teacher, but without the help of donors like you, it would be impossible to achieve my teaching certification. With your help, I will be able to finish my student teaching, and pass on your gift to other students in need. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Louwers is a special education majoring expecting to graduate in April 2020. She hopes to teach in an elementary school in a special education classroom with students who have emotional impairments, cognitive impairments, and learning disabilities. In regards to receiving the scholarship she shared:
This scholarship has helped me immensely because I no longer qualify for financial aid, so I would’ve had to pay the full tuition amount if it wasn’t for this scholarship and another grant that I earned! Thank you so much for allowing me to finish my last year of college without financial stress! I am so appreciative of this scholarship!!"

**GENEROUS DONORS MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR STUDENTS TO SEE THE WORLD**

Studying abroad can be an eye-opening experience that helps students gain a broader perspective on our country, the world, and their field of study. And it can also be extremely expensive! Fortunately for our Broncos, scholarships funded by generous donors are available to help put these life changing experiences within reach.

100% of students whom attended last summer’s study abroad trip, “Education in Ireland,” led by Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies professor Dr. Paul Vellom, received scholarship funding to support their trip. The trip allows students to study the education systems in the Republic of Ireland which are typical of European systems. Students visit different cities and engage in service learning activities while studying the three themes of sustainability, social justice, and emigration and migration. Here’s what two students had to say about the impact of the trip and the funding they received.

“I am so grateful for my time spent in Ireland! Traveling and studying with fellow future educators made my journey amazing! On this trip, we met with the Higher Education Authority of Ireland. I loved speaking with those who create Ireland’s standards and support their teachers. Overall, I’m so happy to have had this experience! Thanks!”
-Tucker Albertson

“Thank you so much for the money you have provided. You have given me the opportunity to study in Ireland! Never being out of the Midwest, let alone the country before, I am extremely grateful that I was able to experience studying abroad. Without you, I would not have been able to make this experience work.

Related to education, I learned so much. We got to meet with the Higher Education Authority, and have a meeting with the representatives as one of our class events. It was amazing to hear all about how the field of education works in Ireland. One of the most interesting things I learned was that teachers in Ireland are thought of as having the same level of prestige that doctors and nurses have in the US. Additionally, we met with and got a tour of the Parliament, where we got to see the inner workings of how the government works in Ireland. We also explored the towns (Dublin and Limerick) and did some sightseeing, such as visiting King John's Castle and the Dublin Castle, The Irish Emigration Museum, St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Coleman's Cathedral, Holy Island, The Book of Kells and we met with the Mayor of Limerick. We learned so much about the history of Ireland from both the places we visited, as well as the people around us, our tour guides and our Hosts while in Limerick, Mary Immaculate College.”

-Katie Kukulka

TOGETHER WE ELEVATE

When we come together, we make Western Michigan University the place where all students can thrive while preparing for a bright future. When we give to WMU, we give students what they need to be their best in the classroom, on the field, and in the community.

In the Classroom. At Western Michigan University, students transform into professionals. They arrive on campus to build a foundation for a successful future where they can share their knowledge and thrive in their communities.

On the Field. Bronco student-athletes play two different games; working toward a degree, and working for a win on the field. We want to ensure that they have what they need to make the grade and the goal.

In the Community. Broncos like to use their knowledge to help others, and we like to provide experiences that put knowledge into practice while serving the community.

Together, we can ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach their goals with scholarships, out-of-classroom experiences, premier facilities, and by learning from a knowledgeable and caring faculty. Together, we elevate Western Michigan University.
$1.5 million in grants strengthen WMU's vision rehab and mobility programs

Contact: Joel Krauss
October 30, 2019

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Two major federal grants will bolster the exceptional programs offered by Western Michigan University's renowned Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies. The University's vision rehabilitation therapy and orientation and mobility programs are the longest-running programs of their kind in the United States. Over the past 58 years, in close collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation agencies, WMU has been the nation’s largest preparer of vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation and mobility specialists.

There is currently a critical nationwide shortage of vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation and mobility specialists. Western Michigan University has received two Rehabilitation Services Administration grants totaling nearly $1.5 million to strengthen recruiting efforts and increase the number of highly qualified vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation and mobility specialists in the workforce.

These five-year grants, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education in October, will provide funding for tuition support for eligible individuals enrolled in the VRT and O&M programs at WMU.

"The goal of this project is to increase the number of highly qualified vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation and mobility specialists in the workforce," says Dr. Dae Shik Kim, professor in the Department of Blindness & Low Vision Studies. “Most applicants inquire about
scholarships at several universities. The amount of financial support they’ll receive will certainly be an important factor in selecting WMU.”

EXPANDING RECRUITMENT

The tuition support will help the University recruit from a larger geographic region and also recruit individuals reflective of the diverse population of the U.S. That should, in turn, ensure a steady stream of applicants and more graduates to face the national shortage.

"More WMU students should really know about our programs," says Dr. Jim Leja, chair of the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies. "We are national leaders in this particular field, and our graduates find great jobs all over the country. These graduate programs could present amazing career opportunities for undergrads from many different programs on campus."

In fact, the programs do attract students from various undergraduate disciplines, including healthcare services and sciences, exercises science, education and psychology. "Students who are good communicators, who thrive in interacting with others, and who enjoy teaching one-on-one may find great reward as a vision rehabilitation therapist or orientation and mobility specialist," says Leja.

The vast majority of program applicants do not have significant backgrounds in blindness and low vision, but ultimately find the programs rewarding.

"Nearly all of our graduates secure jobs within a year of program completion,” says Dr. Helen Lee, associate professor in the Department of Blindness & Low Vision Studies. “They work in veteran administration hospitals, for vocational rehabilitation agencies and for non-profit organizations across the country."
The total award for the vision rehabilitation therapist grant is $746,272, while the orientation and mobility grant totals $749,050. Together, the two programs aim to graduate 115 students in the next five years and place 95% of them in the workforce within 2 years of graduation.

Orientation and mobility training

**ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SPECIALISTS**

Orientation and mobility is an exciting discipline in low vision and blind rehabilitation that teaches people to travel safely, efficiently and independently in their environment. Orientation is the process of mentally organizing the environment and determining one's location within that environment. Mobility is the act of moving through the environment in a safe and graceful manner.

**VISION AND REHABILITATION THERAPISTS**

Vision rehabilitation therapists often work in teams that include eye care, health care, rehabilitation and education professionals working with adults who are blind or visually impaired and their families. VRTs offer information and resources these individuals need to lead successful, productive and independent lives. They often do this with non-visual techniques, visual enhancement devices and strategies, universal design and problem-based learning.

More information about orientation and mobility specialists and vision rehabilitation therapists is available on [the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies website](http://www.departmentofblindness.com).
KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Automation and sustainability are driving the future of the auto industry, and two Western Michigan University graduate students are leading the charge.

Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist visited WMU's campus Monday, Oct. 21, to help launch the testing of accessible autonomous shuttles aimed at improving transportation options for people with disabilities. WMU is collaborating with a number of partners on this project, including project lead Pratt & Miller Engineering.

"Right now, Michigan is in a race with companies in Silicon Valley, and in countries around the world, to revolutionize the future of mobility through autonomous technology," says Gilchrist. "The research that WMU and Pratt and Miller are doing will give us a competitive advantage and help solidify our position as the car capital of the world for generations to come."

Nick Goberville, a mechanical engineering doctoral student, and Johan Rojas, a mechanical engineering master's student, are helping coordinate and carry out this multimillion-dollar project.

"We're working on the modeling simulation of the autonomous vehicles," says Rojas. "We helped with the mapping, the cost value analysis and with everything needed to make the pilot possible here at Western."
Goberville and Rojas are conducting the research under the guidance of Dr. Zach Asher, assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering and director of WMU’s Modeling, Control and Optimization Laboratory.

"This research is important because individuals with disabilities encounter many challenges when it comes to transportation," says Asher. "Autonomous vehicles, which require no human-machine interaction, have the potential to enable new independence for them."

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Engineers from Pratt & Miller stand outside the shuttle alongside Goberville, second from right, and Rojas, right.

Graduate school is challenging in itself. Adding in a state-funded project involving multiple partners across Michigan keeps both students busy.

"You just have to focus on one thing at a time and try not to get overwhelmed with everything going on," Rojas says.

Of course, focusing on work isn't hard when it's what you love to do.

"It's my passion now, being able to do this kind of stuff," Goberville says. "This has changed the course of what I thought my career would be. It's really exciting to be in a new field and you're able to have an impact on the future of it."

In fact, this is just one of several ongoing projects underway in Asher's lab, which puts students on the cutting edge of autonomous technology research and development.

"It is so important for companies and universities to create a space for young adults to be involved at all levels in the process,” says Gilchrist. “These experiences can not only help to
shape and define a student’s career, but it can also shape and define the research by involving a younger generation that was born with technology at their fingertips."

**SPRINGBOARD TO SUCCESS**

Rojas rides in the shuttle.

Rojas always had a fascination with the automotive industry, but he didn't discover his interest in automation until coming to WMU. A native of the Dominican Republic, he studied mechanical engineering and worked at a power plant for four years before deciding to pursue a master's degree in the United States.

"Western has a lot of research in the automotive field," says Rojas, whose research related to this project is now being published in the Transportation Research Board's national journal. "When I got here, I saw this opportunity to work with autonomous vehicles. It's great for my future."

Goberville arrived at WMU as an undergrad from suburban Chicago. While he knew his strengths were in science and math, he didn't solidify his path in engineering until he took a physics course involving electronics.

"Being able to do stuff like that is what really got me interested in what I was doing," says Goberville who found his passion in robotics before getting involved with Dr. Asher's lab. "I wouldn't be able to have the experience I am now if I went to a bigger school. There's no way I'd be involved this closely with this project or even other research we're doing in our lab, trying to integrate an autonomous system into a Kia."
The team has been drawing on the expertise of WMU students with disabilities for their accessibility research. Travis Waker advised them on better accommodating different types of wheelchairs in the shuttles.

"I think people with disabilities need as much access to things as anyone, and this would be a huge step," says Waker, a Howell native in WMU's counseling psychology graduate program. "I think self-driving/autonomous vehicles are just the beginning of an easier future for people with disabilities and people in general. I really admire the work the engineers are doing at Western, and I'm really glad I can contribute."

Student Taylor Arndt, a sophomore planning to major in computer science, also got involved in the project. Overcoming her own vision challenges to excel on campus, she worked with the team to develop a system so that students with visual impairments could be fully independent in finding shuttle stops.

"This is one of the things that she helped us find that we didn't have planned in the project plan," says Chris Andrews, director of mobility and innovation at Pratt & Miller. "But, as we met her and as we started working with the community here, it's amazing how you've got this synergy that can happen for solutions."
"I think it's really awesome that I could help change the project. I wanted to make it fully accessible for everybody, including those with blindness," says Arndt, who works as an accessibility specialist at WMU's computing center. "Organizations that I've been a part of have taught me the value of what autonomous vehicles can do and how I can help with the technology."

Waker says research like this could be a game-changer for people who require accommodation for disabilities.

"Technology like autonomous vehicles will help tremendously with even the smallest things like getting to a future job or being with friends. In the past I've had to rely on others and public transportation," Waker says. "With self-driving cars, none of those obstacles are in place anymore and the places I can go are unlimited."

The accessible autonomous shuttle pilot will run for two weeks, operating Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Students who have pre-registered through WMU's Disability Services for Students organization will have access to the shuttles, which run on a roughly half-mile path on main campus between Sangren Hall and Sprau Tower.

For more WMU news, arts and events, visit WMU News online.