Where design meets innovation

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Galloping toward winter
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Dylan Towne, a freshman from Shelby, Michigan, studies upstairs in the Richmond Center for Visual Arts. “This is where I do most of my studying,” Towne said. “It’s where I feel most comfortable — because of the art.” Towne is majoring in art therapy and minoring in psychology.
Dear Friends,

It is remarkable how the opportunities offered by higher education can change the course of an individual’s life. Degree earned, graduates can go on to enrich their communities, advance their professions and make their unique contributions to the world. With that kind of impact at stake, it is critical that we ensure the full promise of a Western Michigan University education is attainable for all our students.

To that end, WMU administrators, faculty and staff constantly work to strengthen services, programs and practices that help students conceive and achieve their academic goals and persist to graduation. And as we fine-tune and create new programs, we model what we expect of students in their coursework—continuous improvement and innovation.

One of the major initiatives launched this fall represents a sweeping expansion of our past successes with peer mentoring, taking it to scale so that all incoming freshmen and transfer students benefit.

On pages that follow, you will read about more than 4,000 students who are the first to experience this program, appropriately named Success at WMU. Under development since January, it includes everything from educational support to social activities. Not only is the program designed to help new students feel embraced and supported right away, it also helps them develop essential academic skills. We want students to have the strongest possible start to their academic careers. Not only is the program designed to help new students feel embraced and supported right away, it also helps them develop essential academic skills. We want students to have the strongest possible start to their college career and to stay on that successful path throughout their WMU experience.

From Success at WMU to marking 50 years of the Martin Luther King Jr. Student Scholars Academy to our new product design degree and its recently unveiled home, the Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation, WMU’s commitment to student success is on full display in this edition of the W Magazine.

WMU is fortunate to have so many people—faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and donors—who dedicate themselves to ensuring our students have access to all the opportunities and rewards of higher learning.

Best wishes.

Edward Montgomery
President

WMU’s ‘invisible health service’ garners $1.5M in state support

The University’s Unified Clinics, a multi-specialty group practice that annually serves more than 5,000 patients in southwest Michigan and beyond has received a $1.5 million state appropriation.

The collective of 10 teaching clinics provides an array of services, including autism evaluation, behavioral health services, child-trauma assessment, hearing treatment, low-vision services, occupational therapy, speech therapy and women’s health services. WMU student practitioners and supervising professionals provide the care and treatment.

“WMU’s Unified Clinics provides invaluable health care services to some of southwest Michigan’s most underserved,” says state Sen. Margaret O’Brien, who advocated for needed funding to ensure the University can provide the best possible care for patients.

The appropriation, which is the clinics’ first from the state, covers equipment purchases and uncompensated care, as affordability is a major need for the clinics’ patients.

Through this practice, thousands of Michigan residents receive treatment that may not be covered by insurance, is unaffordable through other providers and, in some cases, is unavailable elsewhere.

“We have been recognized by our patients in the community as a safety net,” says Dr. Carol Sundborg, Unified Clinics director.

Multicultural affairs director recognized for leadership

For his service to multicultural affairs, Dr. Hector Hernandez, director of the Division of Multicultural Affairs, received El Concilio Kalamazoo’s 2018 Quetzalcóatl Award in recognition of how he has been working, contributing, supporting and advocating for the well-being of the Latino community in Kalamazoo.

El Concilio, formerly the Hispanic American Council, is a community-focused organization that works to help Latino residents support their families, contribute to the community and appreciate their cultural significance in the local region.

Hernandez received its accolade during an award ceremony as part of the Nuestra Raices Gala in September. “Nuestra Raices” is translated “our roots” in English.

In announcing the award, El Concilio cited Hernandez for his passionate support of the area’s Latino community as well as advocating for WMU’s Latino students so they can succeed in college. Under her leadership, WMU has secured two federal College Assistance Migrant Program grants totaling $4 million. This grant program supports first-generation undergraduate students who are migrants or seasonal farmworkers.

In addition, Hernandez has been selected as one of the Top 50 Latinos in Michigan by the government-appointed Hispanic/Latino Commission of Michigan. The honor recognizes women who have had a commitment to lifelong learning and expansions of their own personal and professional resources. Nominations came from across the state, and honorees were recognized Oct. 12 during the Statewide Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations.

Advanced manufacturing lab launched in Grand Rapids

WMU, in partnership with Michigan’s Grand Rapids Community College and West Michigan manufacturers, has opened a 10,000-square-foot industrial manufacturing facility in Grand Rapids.

The Advanced Manufacturing Partnership Laboratory occupies the first two floors of WMU’s downtown Grand Rapids location and serves as a program to cultivate the next generation of engineers, designers and other skilled individuals to serve the manufacturing industry.

The $7.2 million AMP Lab development and the equipment housed were partially funded through private investment and support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

“This cutting-edge instructional laboratory has been designed to align with industry demands identified by manufacturing leaders—not only locally, but around the globe—to educate the 21st-century advanced manufacturing workforce,” WMU President Edward Montgomery says.

The AMP Lab combines prototyping, training and small-scale manufacturing with the opportunity for individuals to earn college credits to be used toward a degree or certification. The facility includes 3D printers and scanners, a CAE/CAM lab, a plasma cutter, a laser cutter, a welding station, metrology equipment and prototyping tools.

“The AMP Lab is an excellent example of how communities grow stronger when people come together,” GRCC President Bill Pink says. “We’re partnering with Western Michigan University and local employers to give residents skills they need for great jobs as well as their first steps in higher education and pursuit of lifelong learning.”

GRCC began using the space three days a week for its AMP program this fall. In January, WMU will offer courses for a certificate program in integrated design and manufacturing. In addition, manufacturing technology and engineering design and engineering technology and engineering management technology courses will be offered at the facility for students enrolled in WMU’s ABET-accredited four-year engineering technology degree program.

“At full strength, the space will be used for six to eight WMU undergraduate courses a semester with class sizes of 16 to 24,” says Dr. Steven Butt, WMU professor and chair of the industrial and engineering management department. “GRCC will also be offering associate degrees and manufacturing courses. In addition to college courses, workshops, specialized trainings, product design and manufacturing consulting will occur in the space.”

John C. Kennedy, president of Autocam Medical, based in Grand Rapids, has been involved in programs to raise awareness for the education of and need for skilled workers—and for a facility that can lead to new ideas being developed for introduction into the marketplace.

“In addition to developing a skilled workforce, the AMP Lab has the potential to provide other important services to our region, led by engineering faculty and graduate students, can help local inventors prototype projects.”

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A golden day of giving

On WMU's second annual Giving Day, held Oct. 3, participants across campus, the state, the country and the world gave generously to support the Broncos initiatives of their choice.

Battery research project at WMU supports utility’s clean-energy plan

This fall, Michigan utility company Consumers Energy opened a large-scale battery facility on WMU's Parkview Campus. The facility, which is unique to Michigan, stores enough energy from wind and solar sources to power 1,000 homes, and the clean-energy project will offer research opportunities for WMU students.

The Parkview Campus was selected as the site for research opportunities for WMU students. This fall, Michigan utility company Consumers Energy opened a large-scale battery facility on WMU's Parkview Campus. The facility, which is unique to Michigan, stores enough energy from wind and solar sources to power 1,000 homes, and the clean-energy project will offer research opportunities for WMU students.

Gymnastics posts second-highest GPA in the nation

WMU’s gymnastics team achieved the second-highest grade point average in the nation for the 2017-18 academic year, according to the Women’s Collegiate Gymnastics Association. As a team, the Broncos carried a 3.731 GPA, marking the seventh straight year WMU has finished in the top 10 nationally. Individually, 14 Bronco gymnasts earned Scholastic All-America Awards.

"Every year we set the bar high in the classroom, in the gym and in the community," says Penny Jernigan, the team’s head coach.

Additionally, WMU once again had the highest GPA among Mid-American Conference institutions, marking the seventh straight year the team has led the league. The second-place finish ties the 2013 season for the highest mark in program history. That season, the Broncos posted a 3.808 GPA.

Prestigious language scholarships send students abroad

A student awarded a prestigious federal scholarship is spending this academic year studying abroad in Brazil. Caitlin Wiley received a $20,000 David L. Boren Scholarship to spend the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, where she is studying Portuguese.

And, just before fall semester began at WMU, engineering graduate student Joshua White wrapped up an eight-week summer course at the University of Shiga Prefecture in Hikone, Japan.

Joshua White

White was awarded a full scholarship to study in Japan under the U.S. Department of State’s Critical Language Scholarship program. The program is part of a government effort to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages. Critical languages are those that are less commonly taught in U.S. schools, but are essential for America’s engagement with the world, according to the state department.

Who those who receive these scholarships gain critical language and cultural skills that enable them to contribute to U.S. economic competitiveness and national security. White was one of about 550 competitively selected American students at U.S. colleges and universities who received a CLS award in 2018.

He graduated in April with a Bachelor of Arts in Japanese, Bachelor of Science in applied mathematics and Bachelor of Science in Engineering in computer engineering. He plans to graduate with a Master of Science in Engineering in electrical engineering and a Master of Science in applied and computational mathematics in April 2020.

During his undergraduate career, White was named WMU’s 2018 Presidential Scholar in Electrical and Computer Engineering, as well as its 2018 Presidential Scholar in World Languages and Literatures. Being named a Presidential Scholar is the highest honor a senior can receive from the University.

White plans to one day pursue a doctoral degree in electrical and computer engineering, focusing on research in electric neurophysiological interfacing. Eventually, he wants to move to Japan and work on developing advanced prosthetics that interface directly into the human nervous system to help improve the quality of life for amputees.

Caitlin Wiley

Wiley was selected as one of about 550 competitively selected American students at U.S. colleges and universities who received a CLS award in 2018.

She and her fellow Boren Scholars are studying abroad in Brazil to expand the depth and breadth of their Latin America expertise by studying Portuguese. She has an intrinsic motivation for applying for the Boren Scholarship—her long-held public service ethos, which she developed after being introduced to federal public service in high school.

"I realized immediately it was the career path I wanted to pursue," she says. "Since then, I have learned a lot about what it means to be a public servant through interning for a state representative and a U.S. senator."

Wiley’s dream job is to become a foreign service officer. That dream might come true, as Boren Scholarship alumni are fast tracked into federal careers after graduation.

Boren scholarships and fellowships, collectively known as the Boren Awards, are sponsored by the National Security Education Program. They are part of a major federal initiative aimed at increasing the number of U.S. citizens who possess foreign language and international skills. Scholars receive up to $20,000 while fellowships receive up to $30,000, but all Boren Award winners agree to work in the federal government for at least one year.
The nearly $7 million project to renovate Central Kohrman Hall to support the needs of an innovative product design program was made possible by many generous corporate and individual donors, including Jim and Lois Richmond.

The Kalamazoo-area couple, longtime WMU friends and benefactors who have a passion for the arts, contributed $3 million to the project.

“The Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation on the first and third floors of Central Kohrman Hall features studios, presentation spaces and laboratories dedicated to innovation, fabrication, rapid prototyping, 3D printing, woodworking and metalworking.”

“This fall, WMU unveiled a state-of-the-art facility for the University’s year-old product design degree program. The Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation on the first and third floors of Central Kohrman Hall features studios, presentation spaces and laboratories dedicated to innovation, fabrication, rapid prototyping, 3D printing, woodworking and metalworking.”

“The Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in product design combines coursework in the College of Fine Arts’ Frostic School of Art, the Haworth College of Business, and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences. In addition to their University-based studies, students pursuing the product design B.F.A. are placed within industry settings during summer residencies with the anticipation that those positions will become permanent jobs after graduation.”

“Harnessing the future of product design”

Sylvan Benton, Yan Hernandez and Carl Shields, all freshmen in the product design program, work collaboratively on a form and space project.

“The product design curriculum mirrors contemporary design practice,” says Michael Elwell, director of the institute and associate professor of art.

“The students take courses in design, engineering and business, teaching them to create products that are desirable, feasible and viable. Upon graduation, they will be able to speak the language of the designer, engineer and marketer, positioning them for future leadership roles related to project management.”

Southwest Michigan companies involved include FabriKal, Eaton, Landscape Forms, Styلك, Newell Brands, Whirlpool and Tekna. Bob Brown and the Monroe-Brown Foundation provided key initial funding, and area economic development agency Southwest Michigan First has been an important resource as well. Elwell says the institute has a wide range of corporate partners eager to work with WMU students. And the Richmond Institute will soon offer interdisciplinary courses that bring together students from across the University to work on problems through the lens of design.

“Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to creating innovative design solutions,” Elwell says. “Students who take these courses will learn to appreciate the diverse ways their classmates approach problems, while gaining a new appreciation for their own discipline.”
A new study from an economic development organization and WMU has found that the University annually has a $1.6 billion economic impact on the local region.

"WMU's local economic impact is an excellent return on investment for Michiganders," says WMU President Edward Montgomery. "The University's return of $1.6 billion to its local community is 15 times greater than the state's investment in WMU. In fact, our total impact is greater than Michigan's entire budget line for all state universities."

In fiscal year 2016-17, the year of the study, the state invested $1.4 billion in all state universities, including $104 million for WMU. For every dollar the state invests in WMU, it returns $15.40 in economic vitality for the local region.

The study also determined that WMU supports 16,690 direct, indirect and induced jobs in the local area.

"Imagine the home side of Waldo Stadium with every single seat filled. That's how many jobs we're talking about," says Ron Kitchens, chief executive officer of Southwest Michigan First and a member of the WMU Board of Trustees.

Students have an impact during their time in Kalamazoo. Each WMU student adds $11,500 to the local economy.

"It’s wonderful to see students in local businesses," Kitchens says. "They bring vitality to our community. But they also bring resources. When you see four students having brunch, that’s not just a $46 tab, it’s $46,000 each year in rent, groceries, checking accounts and entertainment. They contribute handsomely to our community as individuals and as citizens."

The study, conducted by Impact DataSource LLC, located in Austin, Texas, covered Kalamazoo County as well as two surrounding counties—Calhoun and Van Buren.

WMU has a local economic impact of $1.6 billion.

This is a sum greater than Michigan’s entire budget line for all state universities—$1.4 billion during the year of the study.

For every dollar the state invests in WMU, the University returns $15.40 in economic vitality to the local region. In fiscal year 2016-17, the year of the study, the state invested $104 million in WMU.

WMU supports 16,690 jobs in the local area, enough to fill every single seat on the home side of Waldo Stadium.

WMU students have a tremendous impact during their time in Kalamazoo, with each one contributing $11,500 to the local economy.

Also, though not from the study, WMU students contribute 235,000 hours of engagement with the community each year.

"I believe that if our region is to thrive in the future, we must grow the portion of our workforce that has earned a bachelor’s degree. We are currently 20 percent below the national average. WMU is an enormous help. It can enable us to attract young professionals here, and we can entice them to stay."

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"We had moved away from everything I knew. I was sad, angry and depressed," Carr says. She moved with her to Chicago to start a new life. A native of Detroit, Carr's parents had divorced when she was in second grade. It seemed bleak.

"I was bad," Carr says. "I had not applied to the program and was accepted. I was enrolled in an educational boot camp as part of the MLK program, and I took three classes and did great. I was over that 3.0 GPA by my second year."

"I was initially accepted for one semester at WMU with the agreement that I would get above a 3.0 GPA. I was enrolled in an educational boot camp as part of the MLK program, and I took three classes and did great. I was over that 3.0 GPA by my second year," Pulliam recalls. "Without the MLK program and the support I received at WMU, I don't know what I would have become," Pulliam muses. "Programs like this are the greatest investment a university can make for kids with potential. We have to invest in all kids, not just those going to Harvard. Encourage them, create opportunities for them—there are many rich ways to expand our workforce."

Results of the MLK program translate into success: 90 percent of student scholars complete and are retained each academic year. The cumulative GPA of participating students is 3.29.

"Some of my brothers didn’t go beyond the sixth grade," Pulliam says. "I was the lead dog when it came to education in my family, although some of my younger brothers did follow my lead to attend WMU. I came here on a football scholarship. I saw how important it was to be connected, to have those advantages of someone to support you and mentor you."

"I was sad, angry and depressed," Carr says. "We had moved away from everything I know. After that, I didn’t do well in school. I would doodle during math class. I wasn’t paying attention, and my grades slipped.”

"I was a minister, and when I told him why I was crying, he had advice for me,” she says. "He told me about the Martin Luther King Jr. program at Western Michigan University and encouraged me to apply." Carr cried her tears and did just that. She was accepted to the program and was accepted.

"The MLK program changed my life,” Carr says. "Getting this second chance gave me an incredible drive to succeed. The structure and support this program provided students was amazing." Carr later returned to WMU as a peer counselor at the MLK program. Now a successful real estate broker and investor in Atlanta, Georgia, she recently traveled to campus for a 50-year reunion of MLK program alumni to share her story. Hers is just one among thousands.

MLK academy marks a milestone

Carr, Pulliam, Rashid and other program alumni were back on campus to celebrate the program’s 50th anniversary. They were joined by Chancellor Kellenbenz, instructor of history and Pulliam’s mentor in college.

"Some of my brothers didn’t go beyond the sixth grade," Pulliam says. "I was the lead dog when it came to education in my family, although some of my younger brothers did follow my lead to attend WMU. I came here on a football scholarship. I saw how important it was to be connected, to have those advantages of someone to support you and mentor you." Pulliam graduated in 1966 with an education major, went on to earn his master’s at WMU and a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan, but he would never forget the influence of WMU on his life. Along with a group of students from the Black Action Movement, who challenged racial discrimination at WMU, Pulliam wanted to create a program to increase racial minority presence among students and faculty. Project 3 began as a six-week program providing academic support and scholarships to 60 incoming students from southwest Michigan. "We started simply by helping new students feel good about themselves, and to broaden their world beyond their own communities," Pulliam says. "We took them on trips to Chicago, New York, so that they could see the broad world beyond academics and athletics. We helped them transition to campus life and put them in the pipeline to graduation.” Pulliam was honored for his contribution to the University at the 50th reunion in October for MLK program alumni. He rarely misses an opportunity to revisit his alma mater or lend a helping hand.

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MLK ACADEMY STUDENTS
Since its inception in 1968, the Martin Luther King Jr. Student Scholars Academy has served some 7,000 students. Fifty first-year WMU students are selected annually to participate in the MLK Student Scholars Academy through the University’s Multicultural Leadership Scholarship competition. Collectively, the four-tiered WMU-MLK Student Scholars Academy annually serves approximately 100-150 students who represent a wide variety of diverse backgrounds.

MLK ACADEMY SERVICES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES
ALL LEVELS
• Academic guidance
• Professional and career coaching and peer leader coaching
• Elassoning course
• Diversity and multicultural exploration

FIRST YEAR
• Academic excellence and adjustment to campus life

SECOND YEAR
• Career planning and professional development

THIRD YEAR
• Leadership development and global learning

FOURTH YEAR
• Research and exploration of graduate school

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
Internships with major corporations in both the public and private sectors
• Study abroad experiences in Europe, Latin America and Asia
• Research opportunities with university faculty
• Leadership involvement in academic and social organizations
• Career development activities and learning

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

90%
OF WMU-MLK STUDENT SCHOLARS successfully complete their academic year.*

100%
OF WMU-MLK STUDENT SCHOLARS are retained each academic year.

The third tier brings study abroad and internship experiences, but also builds the students in their path to graduation and possible graduate school. Career choices begin to take shape. Fourth, or upper, tier centers on graduation and entrance into a profession.

“Second year is when they may lose that spark,” Murray says. “One of our students recently brought his mother in to meet us after graduation. He wanted her to know where I’d gotten the encouragement he needed to achieve success. We care, I hope and pray they all know that.”

Continued from page 13
In 2017, he opened and now runs a successful and busy Chick-fil-A franchise in Portage, Michigan, the first in the greater Kalamazoo area. “I grew up in a blended family of 13,” Rashid says. “In Pontiac, everyone was going into the auto industry. Or they were doing drugs. I remember staring out my bedroom window as a kid and thinking, there has to be more. The MLK program was hard, but there’s no way I would have succeeded without it. There was always an open-door policy—we could get help whenever we needed it, didn’t matter how busy the staff was. People cared about you. It was a family.”

Barry Roberts is also a native of Pontiac. He earned his bachelor’s degree in engineering graphics in 1984 and credits the MLK program for his success.

“I graduated from high school in June, and by the end of the month, I was already at Western Michigan University, part of the MLK program,” Roberts says. “We had six kids in our household. Five went to college, but I was the only one to graduate.”

One of the reasons Roberts felt he was successful in the program was because it connected incoming students with older students. He also points to the willingness of MLK program staff to help whenever and however needed.

“That first summer, I received a C grade in a class when I knew I deserved an A,” he says. “I asked for help in approaching my professor to discuss it. It turned out the professor had accidentally picked up the grade from the next student below me in his records, and I got my A restored.”

“It’s that kind of a helping hand,” Roberts says, that has made him a lifelong supporter of his alma mater and the MLK program. The bonds he developed with others in his years at WMU survive to this day, and he rarely misses an alumni event in the Detroit area.

“People are why I support my school, all the people I’ve met along the way at WMU,” Roberts says.

Larry Donston, too, was the only one of six boys in his family to complete a college education. He earned a bachelor’s at WMU with a double major in political science and communication arts in 1973. He heard about the MLK program from a high school counselor and sports teammates—and what he heard was all good.

“That gave me the head start I needed. It was rigorous and tough. Larry Donston, too, was the only one of six boys in his family to complete a college education. He earned a bachelor’s at WMU with a double major in political science and communication arts in 1973. He heard about the MLK program from a high school counselor and sports teammates—and what he heard was all good.

“What was key for me was the six credits I earned in the summer program prior to the fall semester of my freshman year,” he says. “That gave me the head start I needed. It was rigorous and tough. We were about 60 students, and many of us remain friends today. Dr. Pulliam set the tone for us to strive to achieve, and it didn’t matter where we came from—some of us were urban, some suburban, some rural. He made sure we all interacted with each other.”

Now a retired high school teacher, Donston credits the MLK program for teaching him the discipline required to succeed in both his career and personal life.

MLK Academy: 50 Years

Story continues on next page

MLK Academy: 50 Years

The MLK program has changed in some ways over the years while retaining the discipline, the encouragement, the mentoring and the support of its first years.

Joe Murray, assistant director of the program and the Division of Multicultural Affairs, notes that it is now named the Martin Luther King Jr. Academy. In addition, what began as a summer bridge program for incoming students is now a four-tier program that guides students through every year of their education to graduation. Once in the program, students meet regularly with staff and academy peer leaders. The first tier includes an introduction to campus life; academic course review and coaching; diversity and cultural programs; and academic process review.

“Our most common challenge in the first year is handling loneliness,” Murray says. “They’re coming from different places. They’re coming from different backgrounds. The first year, we are already looking at their second year and how we can help them retain the discipline, the encouragement, the mentoring and the support of its first years.”

“Second year is when they may lose that spark,” Murray says. “One of our students recently brought his mother in to meet us after graduation. He wanted her to know where I’d gotten the encouragement he needed to achieve success. We care, I hope and pray they all know that.”

At the reunion of MLK program alumni in October, it was clear—they do.

“I grew up in a blended family of 13,” Rashid says. “In Pontiac, everyone was going into the auto industry. Or they were doing drugs. I remember staring out my bedroom window as a kid and thinking, there has to be more. The MLK program was hard, but there’s no way I would have succeeded without it. There was always an open-door policy—we could get help whenever we needed it, didn’t matter how busy the staff was. People cared about you. It was a family.”

Barry Roberts is also a native of Pontiac. He earned his bachelor’s degree in engineering graphics in 1984 and credits the MLK program for his success.

“I graduated from high school in June, and by the end of the month, I was already at Western Michigan University, part of the MLK program,” Roberts says. “We had six kids in our household. Five went to college, but I was the only one to graduate.”

One of the reasons Roberts felt he was successful in the program was because it connected incoming students with older students. He also points to the willingness of MLK program staff to help whenever and however needed.

“That first summer, I received a C grade in a class when I knew I deserved an A,” he says. “I asked for help in approaching my professor to discuss it. It turned out the professor had accidentally picked up the grade from the next student below me in his records, and I got my A restored.”

“It’s that kind of a helping hand,” Roberts says, that has made him a lifelong supporter of his alma mater and the MLK program. The bonds he developed with others in his years at WMU survive to this day, and he rarely misses an alumni event in the Detroit area.

“People are why I support my school, all the people I’ve met along the way at WMU,” Roberts says.

Larry Donston, too, was the only one of six boys in his family to complete a college education. He earned a bachelor’s at WMU with a double major in political science and communication arts in 1973. He heard about the MLK program from a high school counselor and sports teammates—and what he heard was all good.

“That gave me the head start I needed. It was rigorous and tough. We were about 60 students, and many of us remain friends today. Dr. Pulliam set the tone for us to strive to achieve, and it didn’t matter where we came from—some of us were urban, some suburban, some rural. He made sure we all interacted with each other.”

Now a retired high school teacher, Donston credits the MLK program for teaching him the discipline required to succeed in both his career and personal life.

MLK Academy: 50 Years

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Going ALL in to promote student success

This academic year’s 4,700 incoming freshmen and transfer students have unprecedented opportunities to succeed in college at WMU.

The reason—Success at WMU, a sweeping new peer mentoring program that immediately connects these students to campus and orients them to college life and the University.

Launched at the start of the 2018-19 academic year, it is one of two new programs largely being paid for by awards from the Presidential Transformational Initiative Fund that WMU President Edward Montgomery inaugurated in 2017.

Montgomery challenged faculty and staff to come up with ideas for building a stronger sense of belonging and community among all students. More than 60 proposals were submitted, with Success at WMU and Exports at WMU selected as the first initiatives to be funded.

“Student success is President Montgomery’s top priority, and by supporting students in their transition to Western, we’ll make WMU a campus of choice,” says Monica Liggins-Abrams, who leads Success at WMU along with Dr. Keith M. Hearit, the program’s executive director and a professor of communication.

He also wants us to show a significant gain in the retention of new first-year and transfer students. I believe Success at WMU is an initiative that will allow us to do those things phenomenally well.”

Creating a campus of choice

The initiative is a large-scale commitment that takes advantage of WMU’s past success with student support programs for targeted populations of students and learning communities.

By building on many of those communities and creating new linkages and services, it has dramatically extended overall peer mentoring—from about 1,650 incoming first-year freshmen and transfer students last year to all 4,700 students in this category who started at the University this fall.

The program assigned those undergraduates to communities of up to 25 people that are led by a peer mentor. Under the program design, these cohorts are to meet regularly as a group to discuss a series of preselected topics. Members also participate in such group activities as attending Bronco Bash or gathering for a study night, and they can meet with their peer mentor one-on-one.

“Peer mentors help our new students practice good study habits, explore internship and job opportunities, and engage on a social level so they have an easier time adjusting to college and feel like they belong here,” Liggins-Abrams says.

Building on past successes

More than 100 student employees are serving as peer mentors this year after receiving special training. They, in turn, are being mentored by some 60 faculty and staff who have volunteered to be their champions.

Liggins-Abrams says individual cohorts will remain in place for the 2018-19 academic year, although students are not required to participate. She notes that communities look and behave differently, in part because some cohorts comprised of transfer, regional location or other sets of students may only need to communicate intermittently or through emails and video conferences. Differences also crop up because of the way students are assigned to communities, Liggins-Abrams adds. Placements are first made into existing programs that have shown to be successful, then to course-related cohorts followed by some established residence hall living-learning communities.

The remaining students are assigned based on criteria related to their academic colleges, with international, transfer and other categories of students clustered together when possible.

“We didn’t want to disrupt existing programs. We wanted to leverage the existing peer mentoring expertise on campus, so we relied heavily on the work people all over campus have been doing for years,” Liggins-Abrams explains.

“What makes Success at WMU unique is its scale. We’re being very intentional. Going forward, we want to touch every new student.”

Evaluating its effectiveness

In addition to an $818,500 award from the Presidential Transformational Initiative Fund, Success at WMU is being paid for by a matching award from the Division of Academic Affairs and support from the Division of Student Affairs as well as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

“Student Success is President Montgomery’s top priority, and by supporting students in their transition to Western, we’ll make WMU a campus of choice.” —Monica Liggins-Abrams

Along with Hearit and Liggins-Abrams, an assistant director, an administrative assistant, graduate assistant and interns round out the staff.

“A huge component of Success at WMU’s first two years will be evaluation and research. We want to make sure the program is working well, and we’re documenting the impact we’re having on students, peer mentors and champions,” Liggins-Abrams says.

The program is partnering with the director of assessment and effectiveness in WMU’s student affairs division, and external evaluators to build a comprehensive evaluation plan that will be administered to provide ongoing program improvement and determine whether the program has been effective enough to continue. In addition, the University’s Center for Research on Instructional Change in Postsecondary Education has signed on to do research on the effectiveness of peer and faculty and staff mentors and the impact of mentor initiatives on student learning.
Cailla Rae Moss, a second-year student from Plainwell, Michigan, performs at marching band practice from a skeleton face on Halloween. The skeleton face was an alternative to wearing a full costume. She painted her face that morning, "I had it on all day during Halloween. Everyone I ran into was really impressed," she said.

Scene on campus
In the ring and online

Esports at WMU

The WMU Esports Arena is located on the corner of Oakridge Drive and Oliver Lane in what was previously known as the Little Theatre. The facility now serves as home base for the Esports Club at WMU.

The club grew out of the University’s League of Legends registered student organization and and one of WMU’s formal sports clubs. But instead of putting on uniforms and taking to the court for pickup games, players headsets and sit behind gaming machines, duking it out in the virtual world of online competitive video gaming.

Membership involves about 70 students, including coaches and first-string players and substitutes for his five competition teams: League of Legends, Dota 2, Overwatch, Fortnite and Counter-Strike Global Offensive.

Esports at WMU

During events, players take to the facility’s stage, which is outfitted with 32 competition-level gaming machines. Webcam/camera protect the area’s faces onto screens attached to the front of each machine and are tied into two large screens suspended above the stage. Spectators can follow game play by watching the screens, or, when a contest is being streamed, watching twitch.tv.

Behind the competition machines are 24 practical machines, allowing students to prepare for their contests. Each PC has its own ergonomic gaming chair, high-resolution monitor, headset, and special keyboard and mouse.

WMU has yet to open up the arena to spectators or intramural electronic game teams, but plans to do so soon. It also hopes to host invitational tournaments and tournaments, most likely as ticketed events, and is exploring renting out the arena to high school teams and community groups.

In preparation for those types of activities, there’s a sound-shielding station at the back of the arena so spectators can be treated to a running commentary of all the action. Meanwhile, the background music and reverberating echoes highlight the gaming experience for both players and spectators.

The arena’s state-of-the-art facility now serves as home base for the Esports Club at WMU. The club grew out of the University’s League of Legends registered student organization and is one of WMU’s formal sports clubs. But instead of putting on uniforms and taking to the court for pickup games, players headsets and sit behind gaming machines, duking it out in the virtual world of online competitive video gaming.

Membership involves about 70 students, including coaches and first-string players and substitutes for his five competition teams: League of Legends, Dota 2, Overwatch, Fortnite and Counter-Strike Global Offensive.

The purpose of the project is to extend the University’s community-building efforts to encompass students’ recreational hours,” says Scott Puckett, esports director and a senior director of communication.

The importance of that dedication and skill building is recognized by Andre Ratray, WMU coordinator of club sports and esports.

When you see esports, all you think about is something playing a video game, whether it’s on a computer or console,” says Ratray or turt. These games provide different objectives, and those objectives provide different strategic. So there’s team building in there, there’s problem solving, teamwork, communication. All these things that we’re teaching them in the classroom are the things they can be learning here.”

Cameron McIntos, Esports Club vice president, describes it as advanced thinking. And he believes many people will enjoy watching WMU’s teams play against students from other schools.

"I'd really like to people to just show up and give it a try. Come and fully experience the arena," McKey asks. "We've got revolutionary things that mainstream arenas and professionals have yet to even consider, let alone experience, and we’re behind us."
One of the earliest memories I have of my interaction with music occurred when I was 5 years old sitting in church. I remember the notes of the grand piano echoing off the walls and back into my ears. I watched as a woman behind a podium poured her voice into a microphone, and the congregation sang along with her. The voices of about 200 people resonated together as one voice. The sounds gave me goosebumps—a feeling of pure bliss.

I tried to sing along, my eyes glued to the hymn book, even though I didn't know how to read yet! In awe, I thought, “I want to sing like that and make people feel how happy I feel right now someday.” Throughout my childhood, the “magical” effect of music became even more meaningful to me.

As an adolescent, I began a battle with anxiety and depression. I marched to the beat of my own drum and often felt like an outsider. I eventually felt myself numb and bored with the mundanity of everyday life. However, I found an escape from reality in music. When listening to music, I traveled to new places, heard new stories and experienced intense feelings I didn't feel on a daily basis. In melodies and harmony, I found a world that was endless and intricate. The songs I loved resonated with feelings that lived deep in my gut.

Eventually, I realized how powerful it was to create music with my own voice. While I felt it difficult to express myself through words, singing translated my thoughts into something the world could understand. Music, particularly in the form of singing, gave me a sense of clarity and identity in a world that was often confusing. I chose to major in music as an undergraduate at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign because it fascinated me more than any other subject. I was interested in working with the diverse populations such as individuals who are incarcerated, veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, those in psychiatric units or mental health centers, hospice or medical settings, and older adults with dementia. I also found studying psychology and the brain intriguing.

While I had heard positive feedback from friends pursuing music therapy, my current college did not offer that major. I adapted and created a music degree that combined my two main interests: music, specifically vocal jazz, and psychology. My education included courses in areas that challenged me and inspired me. Before graduating, I began applying to graduate schools where I could pursue a master’s degree in music therapy.

I was drawn to Western Michigan University because of the Brain Research and Interdisciplinary Neurosciences Lab—the BRAIN Lab—founded by Ed Roth, professor of music therapy. I also wanted to attend WMU to learn from Professor Roth’s expertise in working with clinical populations with experiences of trauma and/or mental illnesses. It only made sense to study music therapy in a program that emphasized musical interventions backed by scientific research.

Two years later, as the lab’s graduate research assistant, I have the opportunity to dive into research pertaining to the lab’s current interest in the social and neurological implications of improvisation. In addition, the lab nurtures research related to the physiological outcomes of musical experiences.

During my time in the program, I’ve become increasingly interested in the interpersonal dynamics of musical improvisation and how musical improvisation interventions can be used by music therapists to treat individuals with symptoms of social isolation or loneliness. With more insight into the neurological processes initiated by music, I am also interested in how musical experiences may be used to treat individuals struggling with drug addiction.

Music therapy is a field that not only nurtures my interests, but allows me to provide services that benefit others who seek help. My experience has given me the opportunity to provide music therapy services to individuals with aphasia, dementia, Parkinson’s disease, intellectual and physical disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder and mood disorders.

Today, as an intern at the Seasons Hospice and Palliative Care in the Chicago area, I am learning how to effectively improve quality of life through music therapy for patients at the end of life.

As I move closer to receiving my master’s degree, I am thankful for my professors and peers at WMU. They have helped develop my passion for pursuing the neuroscience of music and contributing to research that will better help music therapists effectively treat populations in need.
A University Built On Purpose

Think Big is WMU’s call for all students, faculty, staff, donors, alumni and community members to rethink and reimagine Western Michigan University.

The higher education landscape is changing. Students face new pressures and challenges that affect the way they choose a university and engage with their campus communities. While financial resources are often limited, options for how they learn, play and connect with others are virtually infinite.

Meanwhile, existing industries are evolving and new fields of expertise are emerging quickly, fundamentally changing the nature of work.

Those who generously give to universities want to support causes that have a clear impact. And increasingly scarce research funding requires demonstrated value and expertise in order to attract investment.

WMU is a wonderful university today because of the forethought of those who came before us. Now is our opportunity to take advantage of a changing world and create the extraordinary WMU of tomorrow.

wmich.edu/thinkbig

So, what’s your big idea?
Visit us online and get involved.
A new master’s degree program in medical engineering at WMed equips students to advance health care through technology.

During a successful career that has spanned some two decades, Dr. Tycho K. Fredericks says his success as an educator and engineer can be traced back to a question he is never afraid to ask: Why do you do it that way?

“That’s the way I was trained,” says Fredericks, a professor in the Department of Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering and Engineering Management at the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences. “There are always other ways to do things, and sometimes having outside eyes looking at something will help you do that.”

That philosophy is the engine behind the new Master of Science degree in medical engineering at the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. The interdisciplinary, graduate-level program at WMed is for engineers and quantitative scientists with an end goal in mind—creating new medical devices and processes to improve health care.

The inaugural class began the new degree program in September.

For Fredericks, who serves as program chief and professor in medical engineering at WMed, the start of classes and the launch of the new curriculum are the culmination of what has been a seven-year process to implement a program that immerses students into the world of health care with a focus on the interface between medicine and engineering.

“Our mission is to train professionals and create technologies to improve health care,” he says.

During the master’s program, students will complete five courses at the medical school and three courses at WMU. In the first year, students will get the chance to choose a specialty track that fits best with their career goals.

That list includes biomechanics and biomaterials, biological signal processing, sensors, and instrumentation, or health care systems engineering. As part of their education, students interact with diverse groups of professionals, from engineers and clinicians to surgeons and residents, as well as nurses, medical technologists and business and regulatory experts.

Fredericks says a key component of the new master’s program is the first 15 weeks of instruction, which immerses students in health care and gives them an up-close look at the inner workings of clinical settings. That step, he says, is vitally important so that students gain a deeper understanding of the discipline of medicine and, in turn, can begin assessing and identifying where they can use their skills to improve processes and instruments.

Luke Swoboda and other students have been ensconced as observers in a variety of medical settings this semester, including during surgical procedures.

“I can’t tell you how to do the surgery,” says Swoboda, an alumnus of WMU’s industrial engineering program. “But I can look for areas for improvement as far as timing, efficiency, even instrumentation. I can look at how tools are currently used and how they can possibly be used in ways that are better for the surgeon and the patient.”

At the conclusion of the master’s program at WMed, students will take part in a final capstone, completing either a thesis or a medical engineering design project. The work by students, Fredericks says, will focus on “a real problem that’s scalable” and could focus on such things as improving the design of an existing product, or on processes that could reduce patient wait times, among other things.

Fredericks describes the curriculum for the new master’s program as “quasi-fluid” and says that it will be built around the students’ capstone projects.

“It’s customization for education, in a sense,” Fredericks explains. “For us, it’s about the student. You don’t dictate your agenda on the students; it’s more about helping them become the best version of whatever they’re going to be down the road. We’re going to help them learn the structure of health care.”

In launching the new program, Fredericks is supported by faculty at both WMed and WMU. Each faculty member brings to the table the experiences that will serve students well.
Jim and Lois Richmond: Advocates for Innovation and the Arts

In 1967, the year Jim Richmond began his career at Stryker Corp., the company was grossing about $3 million annually. Last year, the company’s revenues topped $12.44 billion.

“The reason? Innovation,” he says. “Stryker was looking for all along. I wanted to do something that culture of cooperation can drive innovation and efficiency.”

In 1988, Jim Richmond retired from the company as senior vice president of global marketing and development.

He and his wife, Lois, both alumni and some of the most generous of the University’s benefactors, hope to replicate that theme of inclusivity with their most recent gift to WMU, a $3 million contribution for the Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation.

Jim, who himself holds 14 patents for medical device products he invented, knows the importance of a culture of cooperation in any company. Issues are dealt with efficiently and products that meet end-user needs are created more quickly.

“It’s an example of the ripple effect of an innovation and efficiency.”

The institute is going to serve as a model for how that culture of cooperation can drive innovation and efficiency.

Launched in fall 2017 with its first class of students, the program was created to meet current and future design and manufacturing needs in southwest Michigan and beyond.

“Historically, there were islands in a corporation—engineering over here, marketing over there, manufacturing somewhere else,” he says. “There is a move now toward greater cooperation across corporate departments.

“There is a move now toward greater cooperation the Richmonds believe is so integral to success. They told me, ‘This program is what I couldn’t believe there was a program tailored perfectly for them.’”

Jim Richmond.

“Western has, in our view, become the best place for us to donate to,” Jim says. “The University is transparent and inclusive with its benefactors. They have an open-door policy. They create a cooperative relationship with those who give.”

Several southwest Michigan companies have supported the institute, including Whirlpool, Tokina, Newell Brands, Stryker, Fabrikal, Landscape Forms and Eaton. Bob Brown and the Monroe-Brown Foundation provided funding, and local economic development agency Southwest Michigan First assisted in the construction of the Richmond Center for Visual Art, home to the Gwen Frostic School of Art, which opened in 2007.

The institute also fills a role in encouraging more women to enter science and technology fields, Lois adds.

“I am so impressed with the number of women in the program,” she says. “The institute is going to be one of the doors that we hope many women will walk through in and into careers in STEM-related industries.”

She remembers sitting with a group of design program freshmen students at a luncheon after the institute was unveiled.

“They told me, ‘This program is what I was looking for all along. I wanted to do engineering, but I have a passion for art. They couldn’t believe there was a program tailored perfectly for them.’”

The institute is going to be an asset to southwest Michigan and beyond.

“We want our gift to help the local community,” Jim says. “We think the institute is going to provide for years to come.”

Jim Richmond.

“We want our gift to help the local community,” Jim says. “We think the institute is going to provide for years to come.”

Those who give.

The Richmonds—known for their passion for those who give.
In Memoriam
The Kalamazoo River

The sociologist uses life-history interviews and ethnographic observations to illustrate how immigration creates gendered work and family contexts for middle-class Taiwanese American women, who, in turn, negotiate and resist the social and psychological effects of the processes of immigration and settlement.

Most of the women she interviewed migrated as dependents when their U.S.-educated husbands found professional jobs in the city. Contested by their husbands’ vocational ideas, these women could not work outside of the home during the initial phase of their settlement. The significant contract of their lives before and after immigration—changing from successful professionals to housewives—generated feelings of boredom, loneliness and depression.

Mourning their lost careers and lacking full participation in homemaking, these highly educated immigrant women were forced to redefine the meaning of work and housework, which in time shaped their perceptions of themselves and others in the family, work and in the larger community.

As a professor of sociology, she is also the author of "Mind-Health among Taiwanese American: Gender, Immigration and Transnational Strategies."
Broncos are Prepared.


Our graduates earn degrees that prepare them to immediately succeed. In just three months—half the standard of most colleges—Broncos are employed in jobs they like that are in their field. We go further, focusing not just on 2022 but 2042, and a lifetime of opportunities that will come from a changing world of work. Our students learn deeply in their major, and also learn to adapt by pairing their passions with critical thinking, reasoning, writing and communication.

It’s a great day to be a Bronco.

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