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ARTS AND SCIENCES

Through a statewide effort called Michigan Gateways to Completion, WMU is aiding students who typically struggle in biology, chemistry, math, physics and psychology.

FACULTY

WMU professor’s new book examines how U.S. women voted in elections following suffrage.

ALUMNI

The Tandem Traveler: Dan Sundberg (Ph.D. ’15, Behavior Analysis) and Lisa Sickman (M.A. ’13, Behavior Analysis) are the brains behind the Tandem Traveler, a California-based tech start up that teaches foreign languages for the purpose of travel.
The Mohammad Hossein Yassaman (B.A. ’77, Economics; M.A. ’78, Operations Research) Endowment for Chemistry, established by Hashem (M. A. ’88, Chemistry) and SuzAnne Akhavan-Tafti, will support a student who is involved in the study or development of renewable energy technologies.

STUDENTS

Sustainable brewing student Dan King awarded scholarship from Kalamazoo Beer Exchange.
WMU part of state effort to boost student success in high-risk courses

by Molly Goaley
December 12, 2016 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Western Michigan University is among the first of eight Michigan colleges and universities to improve student outcomes in high-risk courses through a statewide effort called Michigan Gateways to Completion.

At WMU, the effort was launched in 2015 as an initiative of the WMU College of Arts and Sciences. The effort called on key faculty, staff and student assistants to create and implement evidence-based plans for improving teaching, learning and achievement in courses that have historically low success rates. The goal is to have students who typically struggle in these courses more prepared to complete them and continue on to graduation.

"The Gateways to Completion program—G2C—enables WMU to better serve those students who are at risk of not completing certain foundation-level courses imperative to their success," says Dr. Keith Hearit, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "As we examine and improve on teaching and learning outcomes associated with these courses, we ensure a more engaged and supportive classroom environment for students. This in turn leads to higher retention and graduation rates, helping students to achieve their educational goals."

Initially made possible nationwide with grant support from The Kresge Foundation, G2C was launched through a partnership with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. The project is based on the Gardner Institute's Gateways to Completion process, which is used by more than 40 colleges and universities in the United States to help faculty and staff make meaningful and measurable changes in the way they facilitate teaching and learning.

What are gateways?

Gateway courses are high-risk and high-enrollment courses considered foundational to major subject areas. According to G2C data, failure in these areas is directly tied to lack of degree completion—especially for low-income and first-generation students, and students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. At WMU, students can receive academic support in six challenging foundation-level courses in the areas of biology, chemistry, math, physics and psychology.
Katie Easley, director of Student Success Services, is the G2C liaison at WMU. Easley says each of the six courses is directed by a committee of stakeholders who include WMU faculty and staff members, instructors and graduate assistants, student learning assistants, and others who may be invested in the class.

The G2C process employs Key Performance Indicators to further guide the discussions and analyses that each course-specific committee undertakes. The committee members draw on research associated with best practices in undergraduate education to ensure that the indicators address ideas with the most potential to improve student learning and success in gateway courses. Now into year two of WMU’s four-year G2C initiative, the committees also measure results of the changes implemented, assess their effectiveness and make adjustments where necessary.

"The immediate and most visible impact is on the students," Easley says. "Our main focus is to help students who struggle in these areas to deepen their learning and improve their critical thinking skills, and ultimately, to graduate and apply their knowledge in the workforce."

By working on methods to improve instructional delivery in critical areas, G2C data already points to transformational outcomes including: increases in first-to-second semester retention rates; increases in passing grades; lower course repetition; and high performance in sequential courses.

**Participating Michigan institutions**

In addition to WMU, other participating G2C institutions in the state include Eastern Michigan University, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Lansing Community College, Oakland University, the University of Michigan-Dearborn, Washtenaw Community College and Wayne State University.

"An additional benefit of the G2C partnership is that two-year and four-year institutions work together toward the common goal of helping Michigan's most vulnerable students achieve success," Hearit says. "Our collective focus is to keep Michigan students on track to graduate, and WMU is proud to be part of the G2C initiative."

**For more information** about the G2C initiative at WMU, visit wmich.edu/arts-sciences/academics/student-success/g2c-resources or contact Easley at katie.e.easley@wmich.edu or (269) 387-4257.

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What did the first female voters do with their new right?

by Paula M. Davis
November 3, 2016 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—In a historic year in which America is observing its first female major party presidential nominee, a Western Michigan University researcher's new book delves back into history to offer new details about how U.S. women voted when first enfranchised nearly 100 years ago.

Though the constitutional amendment extending voting rights to women was a titanic and hard-won expansion of the U.S. electorate, little was recorded about how women exercised their new right on a national scale, says Dr. J. Kevin Corder, a WMU professor of political science.

Published by Cambridge University Press, "Counting Women's Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal," offers answers to questions that have long stymied political scientists and historians.

"We knew that turnout went down overall, and we knew that Republicans won in a landslide. But to what extent women were responsible for both of those things, we just weren’t sure," Corder says.

"I was interested in the challenge of tackling a problem that was out there and open."

To this end, Corder and his co-author, Dr. Christina Wolbrecht of the University of Notre Dame, used a novel statistical method to reveal whether, how and to what result women voted in the elections that followed suffrage. In addition to resulting in a book, the authors' research design won Iowa State University's Carrie Chapman Catt Prize for Research on Women and Politics.

"This is the first effort to say, in more than one place and in more than a handful of elections, here's how women voted in the 1920s. … So, the next time somebody writes an American government textbook, they can say, 'This is what happened when the electorate expanded," Corder says.
A page from the 1912 Brown and Gold yearbook displays members of the Western State Normal Suffrage Association. (Photo courtesy of WMU Archives and Regional History Collections)

**J. Kevin Corder**

Corder has served on WMU's political science faculty for 21 years. His research interests include voter behavior, elections and public policy as it relates to banking.

**Related**

Additional details on Corder's new book are featured in the fall 2016 issue of WMU Magazine. The issue, available for download at [wmich.edu/magazine](http://wmich.edu/magazine), also features pre-retirement sentiments from President John M. Dunn and articles highlighting WMU research to reduce pediatric drug dosing errors, an alumna's "green" fashion business, healing gardens designed by occupational therapy students and more.

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Dan Sundberg (Ph.D. ’15, Behavior Analysis) and Lisa Sickman (M.A. ’13, Behavior Analysis) are the brains behind The Tandem Traveler, a California-based tech startup that teaches foreign languages for the purpose of travel, rather than overall language fluency.

“We were frustrated spending countless hours on verb conjugation, when we just wanted to know how to order dinner,” says Sundberg. The app can quickly teach travelers the words and phrases they need to know for international trips.

Sundberg and Sickman are co-founders of the company, which went through months of designing and content testing. The Tandem Traveler has partnered with a mobile development company to bring the app to life, and just this week a Kickstarter campaign was launched to help fund the mobile learning app. They are hoping the app will be ready for the Summer 2017 travel season.

Sundberg’s ‘day job’ is with ABA technologies, a company that offers online education and business consultation. Sickman currently runs The Tandem Traveler full time, but continues to teach behavior analysis on the side. Together, they combine their experience and knowledge in clinical language learning and corporate instructional design to foreign language learning.

“My education at WMU has informed so much about this program,” Sundberg commented. "At WMU I learned the science behind teaching language, and the art behind making a business."

The Kickstarter app will end November 17. To learn more about the app and crowdfunding campaign, visit thetandemtraveler.com.
New scholarship honors WMU graduate's life-changing mentor

by Molly Goaley
December 13, 2016 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—If not for a special person in his life, Dr. Hashem Akhavan-Tafti would have never ended up at Western Michigan University, a move that he says "saved his life."

Now, Akhavan-Tafti and his wife, SuzAnne, have established an endowed scholarship in that special person's name.

The Mohammad Hossein Yassaman Endowment for Chemistry at WMU will support a full-time graduate or undergraduate student who is involved in the study or development of renewable energy technologies. The scholarship, begun with a $10,000 endowment, was officially announced during a Nov. 17 reception in WMU’s Chemistry Building, with Yassaman and Akhavan-Tafti in attendance.
WMU connection

The two men, both natives of Iran, made remarks during the event. Akhavan-Tafti told the story of being a teenager and wanting to pursue a college education in the U.S.—something his family friend Yassaman had done years previously.

After learning English, obtaining a visa and finally making the journey to the States, Akhavan-Tafti ended up at a school in Indiana, where he struggled to acclimate to his new surroundings. He contacted Yassaman, one of few people he knew in the U.S. at that time, and Yassaman convinced him to apply to WMU.

"This man rescued me from absolute doom," Akhavan-Tafti said of his friend, noting that the WMU Department of Chemistry faculty played a significant role in his life and career, as well.

Having supported several endowed scholarships in recognition of past WMU professors and mentors, Akhavan-Tafti added, "it is a fantastic feeling" to be able to honor the people and places that have so positively influenced him, while offering current and future students access to the same level of instruction he experienced.

Yassaman said during the reception that he is very honored to have made an impact on Akhavan-Tafti's life.

"I'm really proud to know this man," he said, "and to see all he's done for humanity."

Distinguished careers

Yassaman earned a master's degree in operations research from WMU in 1978. Akhavan-Tafti completed his master's degree in organic chemistry at WMU in 1988 and went on to earn a doctoral degree from Wayne State University.

The two embarked on separate, equally successful careers. Yassaman worked in the aerospace industry as an engineer, serving 27 years at the Boeing Co. before retiring in 2013. Akhavan-Tafti recently retired as vice president for research from Lumigen Inc., an immunoassay and molecular diagnostics business group based in Southfield.

The first recipient of the Yassaman Endowment for Chemistry will be announced in spring 2017.

For more information about the WMU Department of Chemistry and its scholarships, visit wmich.edu/chemistry.

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Kalamazoo Beer Exchange awards WMU-KVCC brewing scholarship

by Molly Goaley
January 4, 2017 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—With the nation’s first higher education program in sustainable brewing in its second year at Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, area businesses are doing their part to ensure that future brewers have ample opportunity to hone their craft.

At the forefront of that effort is the Kalamazoo Beer Exchange, which awarded its annual Beer Week scholarship for the first time to a Western Michigan University student. The KBE, a bar and restaurant that features local and international beers, presented the scholarship to Dan King, a junior from Bloomingdale pursuing a bachelor's degree through the joint WMU-KVCC sustainable brewing program.

During a presentation event Nov. 17, King was invited to ring the KBE opening bell amidst a crowd of friends, WMU faculty and alumni, and KBE staff and patrons.

"I wasn't expecting a big celebration, but this is really impressive," he said. "It's pretty exciting."

Jim Flora, KBE owner-operator, was equally enthused about supporting a local brewer's education.

"It's awesome," he said. "When we found out Western and KVCC were starting a brewing program right here in Kalamazoo, we immediately said, 'that's where we want this scholarship to go.'"

Flora said his company established the scholarship fund as part of opening festivities for Kalamazoo Beer Week. Ten percent of KBE's sales from the first night of that week go to the scholarship. Some $1,500 was raised last year, with $1,000 being awarded to King. The company plans to hold the same type of fundraiser during this year's Kalamazoo Beer Week, set for Saturday through Saturday, Jan. 14-21.

"It's the perfect way to kick off Beer Week—celebrating the breweries that really got craft beer going and then giving back to the brewing industry in Michigan," Flora said. "If the scholarship can help a student with books or pay part of their tuition, that's great."
Hands-on learning

Hands-on experience and internships, as well as an opportunity to understand every aspect of the industry, are major components of the WMU-KVCC sustainable brewing program. Those components have been important to King, who has been employed since March at the Paw Paw Brewing Co., which is co-owned by WMU alumni Ben Fleckenstein and Ryan Sylvester and located just 15 miles from WMU.

As the company's cellarman, he is responsible for taking care of the beer during its fermentation process and assists the brewhouse team with various cellaring, brewing and packaging activities. King said his sustainable brewing education is something he has been able to apply on the job immediately.

"Paw Paw is a very interesting brewing company in that a lot of its equipment is repurposed," he explained. "It's a little bit more sustainable than buying everything brand new, and it makes brewing more interesting because you have to adjust your processes. If something doesn't work, you build new parts."

King, who will finish his bachelor's degree in 2018, added that although he eventually plans to own and operate his own brewery, he hopes to continue his career with Paw Paw Brewing after graduation.

"I really like the people there, and I'm learning a lot," he said.

Forging a national reputation

The WMU and KVCC brewing program was developed by the two schools working in close coordination with the industry. The resulting "two-plus-two" program in sustainable craft brewing offers students the opportunity to earn a certificate or associate degree at KVCC, then move on to a Bachelor of Science degree that marries industry art and science with WMU's national reputation in sustainability.

The rigorous science curriculum addresses some of the industry's most pressing issues. It was developed with input from an external advisory board comprised of a dozen of Michigan's top craft brewers, many of them in West Michigan, which has one of the country's highest per-capita densities of craft brewers.

Nationally, craft beer accounts for nearly 8 percent of beer sales, and the industry is becoming a significant generator of jobs and revenues. Craft brewing contributed $1 billion to the state's economy in 2015, putting Michigan 10th on the list of states in which the industry has the greatest economic impact. Entries into the industry continue, with West Michigan developing a strong reputation for the craft. In 2013, Grand Rapids was named Beer City USA, and Kalamazoo came in second in the international voting.
For more information about the WMU-KVCC sustainable brewing degree program, visit wmich.edu/brewing. For more about the 2017 Kalamazoo Beer Week, visit kalamazoobeerweek.com.

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