The Spirit of Engagement

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Greetings,

Western Kentucky University values highly its duty as a leader in university-community engagement. This Spirit of Engagement magazine is intended to share useful information and practical stories regarding our involvement in various initiatives throughout our city, region, and world. As a public university, we understand that we have a responsibility to provide both a high quality education that will prepare students for their careers, as well as opportunities for students to develop into socially responsible citizens who understand the value of contributing to society on a regional, national, and international level.

These articles demonstrate our engagement philosophy. They provide useful information for those interested in pursuing community engagement and for our community partners who wish to collaborate on a variety of exciting initiatives. The central point here is that we recognize the voice of our communities and are committed to addressing important issues in a collaborative fashion.

We also want to highlight some of our faculty and staff who have embraced a personal and professional commitment to community engagement and engaged student learning. I am proud of the excellent faculty and staff of this university and applaud their efforts and innovative means of challenging students to become academically prepared, socially responsible, and civically engaged.

I am delighted to share this edition of the WKU Spirit of Engagement with you. I hope that you find it both informative and inspirational.

Sincerely,

Gary Ransdell
President

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 Engagement for What?
4 ICSR
6 A Kenyan Pre-Med Connection
8 Listening to the Future
10 Partnership for Healthier Eating
You might have noticed that “engagement” has become somewhat of a buzzword around higher education over the past few years. Student engagement, community engagement, civic engagement, scholarship of engagement – what does it all mean? Oftentimes, the unfortunate result of this ambiguous rhetoric is a loss of focus and intentionality lying at the heart of engagement. The “why” and “for what” are consumed by logistical concerns that ultimately do not serve to build the civic agency of our students.

To be clear, the type of engagement that we so desperately need is one that develops skills and capacities in our students allowing them to impact the civic life of our communities. Few would argue that we need such an engaged citizenship; however, all too often we overlook the role of higher education in shaping these citizens. American educational philosopher, John Dewey, is noted for emphasizing the fact that the establishment of democracy is not a once and for all event; rather, it is to be learned and enacted anew in every generation. Furthermore, it is through education that we learn the values and skills that enable “we the people” to sustain a democratic society.

Our institutions of higher education provide students with the knowledge and opportunities to secure successful careers, raise healthy families, and participate in meaningful work in all aspects of our society. In addition to this important goal, colleges and universities also serve as a formative space and communal laboratory for the modeling and imparting of skills necessary for a healthy democracy. In this way, scholarship and teaching are understood as public crafts that focus on collaborative processes and intentional experiences for our students. Craft traditions place primary emphasis on shaping the character and attitude.
of the apprentice over the delivery of technical knowledge. In essence, the public craft deals with how to apply knowledge, not simply the acquisition of the knowledge in the first place.

It is also important to understand that the type of engagement we seek is not about providing services to a needy and passive public, nor is it advocating for our own preconceived goals. In either of these instances, citizens are reduced to consumers whose only notion of democracy is voting or simply observing a system over which they have no power. What is required are viable campus-community partnerships that educate and empower a generation to strengthen our local communities and beyond.

Accomplishing this level of engagement requires a strong civic imagination to shape an institution that not only assures students excellent disciplinary training, but demonstrates how that knowledge can be applied for positive change. We are asking faculty, staff, students, and members of our communities to continue to build a university where this form of deep engagement is a core commitment to what it means to be educators. Imagine a student body who not only achieve excellent disciplinary training, but come to understand how that knowledge can be applied for the common good of society. Such a realization can only be reached through the practices of mutual respect and collaboration – qualities that rise to the surface as we ask the important question, “engagement for what?”

“From the time of Thomas Jefferson to the present day, leaders in America have pointed to education as the key to a healthy democracy. And for good reason. Civic responsibility must be learned, for it is neither natural nor effortless....Education is the obvious means to foster the civic commitment and intellectual competence that citizens need to participate effectively in public life. That must be what John Dewey had in mind when he declared, ‘Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.’”

– Derek Bok (President Emeritus, Harvard University)
What exactly is the role of higher education as we prepare our students to step out into the world? To most institutions, the answer to that question is very clear cut – we are here to teach. However, at WKU, there is an undeniable Spirit of Engagement weaved throughout our student body, faculty and staff that goes beyond the traditional roles of universities and rears itself in a multitude of ways on our campus and in our community.

Take into consideration our students securing first place in the ONE Campaign's National Campus Challenge, the GreenTopper Students for Campus Sustainability, the Political Engagement Project, the Class Legacy Project, and so many more.

So how is it that we harness all of this positive energy for social change and direct it in a way that creates a deeply embedded culture of civic-minded individuals at WKU? Drs. Saundra Ardrey, Eric Bain-Selbo, and Paul Markham would point you towards the newly-forming Institute of Citizenship and Social Responsibility.

The Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (ICSR) is an organization of students, faculty, staff, and administrators committed to promoting careful reflection on civic values; engaging in critical analysis of contemporary social, economic, and political problems; and developing the capacities and skills of community organizing, citizenship, and civic engagement as ways of achieving social change and the common good.

The ICSR will bring together a number of existing WKU initiatives in the American Democracy Project (such as the Political Engagement Project, Constitution Week, Democracy in Other Lands, and Partcipatory Citizenship), Campus Compact, the ALIVE Center, and others—fostering the creation of a broader network of administrators, faculty, and staff committed to curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities about citizenship and social responsibility.

Dr. Ardrey started down the path of citizenship and social responsibility as a young girl, protesting alongside her Father (who was also a professor) in Raleigh, North Carolina during the Civil Rights movement. She grew up with the sense that "you have to do something" if you didn’t like your circumstances.

Dr. Ardrey has carried that passion for citizenship and social responsibility into the classroom at WKU. "I think education is meant to introduce you to different ideas...ideas that may be different from yours...it’s through an exchange of ideas that we grow to understand the other's perspective," says Dr. Ardrey. "This institute is just a natural part of that. The interaction and interpersonal relationships that grow from that is the key in any classroom."

Coordinators of the ICSR recognize that higher education can be much more than a credentialing institution. Dr. Paul Markham describes higher education institutions "as a place that moral transformation occurs...people learn to be particular..."
kinds of people. The Institute is such an important piece of this because it is a visible place where people can come together in open dialogue and in a free public space to discuss and imagine how we can work together to form a generation and ultimately renew democracy,” says Markham.

Such sentiments are echoed by Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, who sees higher education as a transformative engine for society and a place where real change is nurtured. “I am committed to the role that higher education can play in that process,” says Bain-Selbo.

WKU has so many students already involved in community engagement activities, and the Institute is designed to give some direction to those activities. The Institute will allow students the opportunity to reflect on their work, to earn academic credit for it and will serve as a resource that connects students with others who have similar goals and concerns so they can partner to address those issues.

Some of the initiatives already underway for ICSR include:
• The creation of a network of faculty and students interested in the ICSR mission and objectives.
• Development of ICSR Fellows. Individuals initially can become Fellows either through the Carnegie Scholar for Political Engagement program or the ALIVE Center Fellow program.
• Organize faculty colloquia on issues of citizenship and social responsibility, allowing faculty from across campus to discuss specific issues and develop ways in which to increase relevant student learning.
• Multiple courses developed beginning Fall 2009

ICSR is temporarily housed at the WKU ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships. Students, faculty, staff or administrators interested in connecting with ICSR should contact Saundra Ardrey (Department Head, Political Science), Eric Bain-Selbo (Department Head, Philosophy and Religion), or Paul Markham (Director, ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships). For more detailed information on the goals, initiatives, and long-term considerations for ICSR, or upcoming courses available, visit www.wku.edu/icsr.
Little did Dr. Nancy Rice know when she began her job at Western Kentucky University as a Cellular and Molecular Biologist, she would soon be traveling to Kenya, bringing with her students and physicians to treat residents of seven rural villages. It all started when she was asked to be a pre-professional advisor in 2006. Her previous work during her Ph.D. and post-doctoral programs had provided her with a good understanding of medicine, so it only made sense for her Department Head in Biology to appoint her as a pre-medical/pre-dental advisor. But what got her to Kenya was a panel discussion she attended at the national meeting of the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. The panelist described a service-learning course where students traveled with a faculty member to Romania to learn neuroscience. During the course, the students participated in clinical and social work in several orphanages and studied first-hand the results of neglect and malnourishment on cognitive development. Rice wondered if the same type of experience could be accomplished with a class at WKU. Her research led her to a possible partnership with St. Olaf College and Children’s Surgery International, but when that became unfeasible, a colleague mentioned work that was currently underway in Kenya through WKU. Why not bring in a pre-med component? A planning trip was organized in 2006, and after solidifying contacts on the ground and identifying clinics in which to work in the Kasigau area of Kenya (Rukanga, Buguta, Makwasenyi), her preparations for an official course began.

Her inaugural trip with eight WKU students and three physicians from the Bowling Green, KY area took place December 28th, 2008 through January 12th, 2009. For students, preparations began during a Fall 2008 semester-long course, where they learned about the culture, history, geography and medical practices of the area. They knew they were expected to take what they had learned in their course and apply it in the field. They were also expected to give back to the community at-large by providing a “workshop” for students at Moi Primary School. The workshop, devised and implemented solely by the students, consisted of proper dental hygiene and an explanation of germ transmission and the importance of washing hands. Reflection, another important component of service-learning, took place each evening around the campfire, and
each student was required to keep a daily journal. During the seven days of clinic, Rice’s students and the physicians treated over 1,000 patients, many of whom had never seen a doctor in their entire lives.

Through the students’ journals, Rice has learned how deeply this class affected them. For some, the trip was a reaffirmation of their decision to pursue medicine. For others, it shifted their focus to possibly practicing medicine in rural America. In all cases, students realized how much their skills were appreciated and benefitted three small communities. They also learned about teamwork and thinking creatively to solve problems, an essential skill when triaging hundreds of patients. For some students, it was their first time out of the country. Rice realizes this trip was basically baptism by fire, but she explains, “You will be out of your comfort zone at certain points, but that’s a good place to be. Students need to be pushed into places that stretch them in different ways. You need to make yourself malleable and flexible.” That flexibility was also experienced by the attending physicians who learned as much as the students. For them, they were sharpening basic skills and dealing with illnesses like leprosy, which are no longer common in the United States.

Rice admits she worked extremely hard planning the trip, but she’s glad she followed through and completed what was for her, her students, and the physicians a “fabulous first trip.”

“It’s the right thing to do, doing more than just giving content, because I feel it’s my responsibility as an educator to prepare students at this age to be people. People are participants in their world, positive participants, someone who’s aware and involved. I try to help them develop a sense of responsibility, and that’s more than just giving them the content from a textbook. It’s helping them understand how they can apply that textbook knowledge and how they can make a difference with it.”

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-Dr. Nancy Rice

Photos provided by Nancy Rice
“It takes an entire community to do something to truly help others.”

Listening to the Future

by Paul Markham

Photo provided by Kristen Houser
I spent an evening with six WKU students. My goal was not to teach a class or orchestrate a co-curricular event; rather, I was there only to listen. After simply asking them to describe their passions and what they hope to accomplish during their time at WKU, it didn’t take long for me to realize that I was listening to the future of our university and our society at-large.

I have always had an empathetic nature and wanted to help others. I’ve found that this is the most effective way to do that – getting students involved in their communities. It takes an entire community to do something to truly help others. Instead of doing random acts of kindness here or there, we really have to be in the mindset that our everyday actions are what truly makes a difference. – Rebecca Katz

Following the 2008 election, a number of publications have focused on the increase in civic engagement among the millennial generation. While following electoral politics and voting is important to these young leaders, these students are thinking much more in terms of local organizing and development.

During my second year of college I wrote a newspaper article about MLK day and human rights. At that point I realized that there were so many issues on the local level – there are things that I could be doing right here, right now. The notion of “saving people” always sat really uncomfortably with me. I have come to realize that it’s not about saving anybody. It’s about working together to achieve justice. – Greg Capillo

For these students, the university is a space where character is shaped in significant ways. All of the students that I spoke with have achieved a high level of academic excellence in their classroom studies but are sensitive to the crucial growth that occurs outside the classroom.

When I came to college, I found others who shared the same sort of passion and hope that in a world with so many problems, things could be better, and that we as young people can determine our own future – we can write our own history. It has been very inspirational being around all these people that care so deeply about these things. – Matt Vaughn

When I got to college, I realized that just being in a classroom and learning “stuff” wasn’t good enough for me. I wanted to learn by doing it and being involved. I have learned so much here that did not come from a textbook. I think that it is hard not to care about important social issues when you are surrounded by people that are passionate and knowledgeable. – Sara Moody

Sara Ferguson reminded me of the practical impact students can bring to our campus and community. Her leadership with “GreenToppers – Students for Campus Sustainability” culminated in the adoption of a campus-wide energy policy. Ferguson noted that “The education and knowledge combined with our constant communication with administration, I feel, has been our contribution to the energy policy. It hasn't been about protests and petitions but rather about bringing all stake holders together and coming up with a tangible goal for everyone to meet.”

I was impressed with the depth of vision these students articulated. They see their work as having a lasting impact on WKU.

I think that a lot of the work that we are doing has led the leaders and administrators of this university to think about institutionalizing civic engagement. Of all the things that we are doing, I am most proud of the type of education that we are developing here – a place where students can learn about the state of the world and how to change it. – Joey Coe

I want to see a day when, like school spirit, we develop a sense of community spirit and that is what is expected from WKU students. – Sara Moody

As our campus and communities come together to shape the future of our society, this conversation serves as a critical reminder of the task of higher education and the role we play in creating a more just and sustainable world.
It started as a simple idea: Former Bowling Green High School student, John Bullington, concerned with the alarming rates of childhood obesity in Kentucky, conceptualized a discount card for students to use at local restaurants to purchase healthy foods. With funding from the Institute of Medicine’s Kellogg Health of the Public Fund, researchers from Western Kentucky University and members of the Healthy Weight Kids Coalition of Southern Kentucky developed this simple idea into the “Smart Bites” program, a national pilot program aimed at getting youth to make healthier food choices while eating out at restaurants.

Students and faculty at WKU had the opportunity to work not only across academic departments and colleges, but also with community partners to gain invaluable, hands-on experience in their respective fields of expertise,” explains Leah Ashwill, Community Engagement Coordinator for the ALIVE Center.

During the first phase of the project, WKU faculty from Public Health, Consumer and Family Science, and Marketing partnered with the local school districts to conduct focus groups with middle and high school students to determine the best ways to encourage healthier eating. Overwhelmingly, most students reported they’d make healthier choices if the food cost less and if they were rewarded for doing so, but also admitted they weren’t always sure of what was a healthy choice.

The Smart Bites program was developed based on the focus group findings. To assist students in identifying healthy choices, Dietetic students and faculty analyzed menu items from numerous local restaurants and categorized them using criteria established by the National Institute of Health’s We Can program. The “anytime” and “sometime” menu selections were then published in the “Guide to Healthy Eating in Bowling Green” and on the program’s website (www.smartbitesbg.com). Guidebooks were distributed at program’s kickoff events in each the city and county middle and high schools in Bowling Green in January 2009.

Healthy menu selections were also used to create point-of-purchase displays for each participating restaurant that served as “environmental prompts” for students to make a healthier food selection. Additionally, the participating restaurants discounted these menu items, providing an immediate savings incentive. Middle and high school students could also get their magnetized “Smart Bites” card swiped for a chance to win a monthly prize and the grand prize, awarded in May, of a Wii game console with Wii Fit system.

Below photos are provided by Smart Bites Graduate Assistants
“No matter how many times students used their card each month, they were only counted once, so that students who use the card once a month have the same chance to win as those who use the card multiple times,” explained Dr. Marilyn Gardner, Professor of Public Health and Principal Investigator. “We do not want to encourage eating out, but the reality is that so many youth and families eat out routinely,” added Ms. Ashwill. “What the Smart Bites program wants to convey is that if you are going to eat out, make a healthy choice.”

Did the program work? “We’re in the process of analyzing data to determine whether there were changes between before the program began and now,” said Dr. Gardner, “but what we do know is that students used the cards, which indicates making a healthy food choice. But if you ask if the program was successful, I’d say yes, without hesitation.” Gardner and Ashwill went on to explain that one of the objectives set by IoM was to generate community buy-in to create a sustainable and replicable program. Several local businesses donated prizes and other services to support program activities. To assist other communities in implementing the Smart Bites program, the program staff is creating a toolkit which will be made available through the Institute of Medicine.
Dr. Jennifer Mize Smith, Assistant Professor in Communication, is currently using service-learning for the fourth semester in her Small Group Decision Making class. Her past work experiences with interns in her job as a nonprofit manager and fundraiser convinced her that students got more from their learning when they were able to incorporate textbook concepts to real-life situations. She also knows that skills learned through curricular service-learning can be applied to any job, including teamwork, problem solving, and small-group decision making.

Each semester she has teamed groups of five students with a local nonprofit. The majority of times, the issues for the nonprofits are marketing and fundraising. It is important to note that Mize Smith always asks the community partner to identify the needs and that it’s not the students coming in to “save” the nonprofit. Once the need has been identified, it is the student group’s responsibility to analyze and research an organizational issue in order to come up with an action plan for the nonprofit that can either be used that same semester or held on to for implementation at a later date.

Successful past projects have included a new logo and identifying a corporate sponsor for BRIMS (Barren River Imaginative Museum of Science). Mr. Charles Phillips, the Executive Director, was so impressed by the work of the student group, he asked them to come to a board meeting and present their ideas for approval. Mize Smith says that one of the most satisfying aspects of these service-learning projects for students is that they can actually see the fruit of their labor. BRIMS immediately took on the idea of a new logo for their t-shirts, and once these were in stock, BRIMS made sure students got to see the finished product.

This semester brings a different challenge to Mize Smith’s classes in that they are working with nonprofits that have been in the area for less than three months. Newborns in Need and Blessings Unleashed worked with student groups to get the word out to their target audiences, as well as get appropriate information out to the community in
general. Also, both nonprofits are volunteer led, a unique situation because there is no home office per say or full-time staff. Students are learning that even though a local nonprofit may not have the large resources of a national nonprofit, it can still have a tremendous impact on the lives of those in need of its services.

Through the reflection paper completed at the end of the semester, Mize Smith reads about the positive impact these projects have on the students. The biggest complaint she has heard from students in the past was that they learn all these ideas from their textbooks, but they never learn how to apply it. Service-learning provides that missing link. Mize Smith’s advice to her colleagues that want to incorporate service-learning into their classes is, “It is a lot of work, it is a lot of time, but the real essence of teaching is to make that connection to how students are going to use what they’re reading about, learning about, what they’re being tested about.” To her, another indicator that service-learning projects have made a difference in a student’s life was when a couple of her students from last semester asked if they might come to one of her current classes and speak to her students about what to expect and how to make the partnership with the nonprofit and the project successful.

“My role as an educator is to really bring that material to life, to add to that textbook and those concepts in a way that they can see the value and its usefulness so that they want to retain it. You can’t make them retain it. You have to make them want to retain it.”

She also insists that faculty not get frustrated and to remember that each nonprofit has its own identity and character. “Keep trying. There is always room for improvement. Keep finding different ways to do things. Be flexible. Figure out the community needs on the front end in order to make the best match for the students and the partner. Any experience for students with collaboration is a good endeavor.”

Photos taken by Clinton Lewis & Cheryl Kirby-Stokes
Edward Lindeman, an American pioneer of the adult education movement, once said, “Adult education must show that each individual can fulfill his [sic] own personality only as he finds his place in relation to the common good.”

What better way could a public institution of higher education respond to this call for engaged learning than Western Kentucky University has with its creation of the wkuREAL, which stands for Reaching Each Adult Learner?

wkuREAL is reaching out to adult learners attending college for the first time, as well as those who may be considering a return to school to continue their education. Census data shows that approximately 550,000 residents in the state of Kentucky have some college education.

The challenge is to reach out to these Kentuckians in ways that make it practical to come back to school or start college for the first time and graduate, so that they can then go back to their respective communities and make an impact.

The mission of wkuREAL is “To reach each adult learner by providing opportunities and support for educational success.” Housed in University College, wkuREAL joins and works with other groups at all of WKU’s campuses committed to addressing the needs of adult learners. Funded largely by the Council on Postsecondary Education, the purpose of wkuREAL is to serve as a “concierge” so non-traditional students can have questions answered, get connected to the proper services, and receive personalized support.

According to Dr. Jim Berger, a member of the Adult Learner Advisory Council, fully one-third of students on WKU’s main campus are non-traditional (by age, 25 or older) and historically, a number of key services have not been tailored to them.
At regional campuses, very few students are traditional. In fact, the work of wkuREAL is a concept that WKU Regional campuses have successfully implemented for many years. With the combination of adult learner counselor services on main campus and a rich history of those services at the regional campuses, WKU is equipped to serve adult learners across the entire WKU service region.

The reason the Council for Postsecondary Education is encouraging higher education institutions to reach out to non-traditional students is that Kentucky has been losing ground relative to other states in terms of the percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher. As the Director of the Kentucky State Data Center, Ron Crouch, says, “Kentucky’s reality is that we will sink or swim not on how well we educate our youth, but on how well we educate our entire population, whether age 15, 35, 55, or 75. For the most part, our workforce of tomorrow is just our workforce of today grown older. We must educate not just our youth but every one of us. We must educate and re-educate, train and retrain.”

Not only is the educational attainment problem for adults acknowledged by policy makers and postsecondary education providers, it is also recognized at a more grass roots level by the WKU Regional Stewardship Advisory Council (RSAC).

In the report for the RSAC that detailed the input from five regional forums hosted by the WKU ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, concerns such as the following were frequently raised:

- the need for facilitating the non-traditional student returning to education
- the need for more programs for non-traditional students

Thus, a clearly defined regional problem that emerged from the regional analysis was greater access to higher education, particularly for working adults. However, adult learners face challenges when they try to access higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, adult students often:

- have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education; may lack a standard high school diploma
- attend part-time while working full-time
- are financially independent of parents
- are a single parent and/or have dependents other than a spouse

If left unaddressed, any one of these issues can become a significant barrier to an adult learner’s access to and completion of a college degree. University College, thanks to CPE regional stewardship funding, formed a planning and implementation committee in August of 2008, which worked throughout the fall to review research on adult learners at WKU and to coordinate several new initiatives to complement the good work already being done by several organizations on campus to address the particular needs of adult learners (non-traditional students).

wkuREAL has now completed Phase II, which included the establishment of the Adult Learner Advisory Council with representatives from across the campus and in the community, as well as hired adult learner counselors who have begun the real work of reaching adult learners. For more information on wkuREAL, visit www.wku.edu/real or email real@wku.edu.
Current economic times call for innovative measures, and Dr. Wil Clouse, Executive Director of the WKU Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and the Mattie Newman Ford Endowed Chair, has begun transformative measures through the Lincoln Trail Innovation Center.
WKU students have been a part of this new entrepreneurial initiative as well. It was Clouse’s students who provided the draft versions of each of the eight counties’ needs assessments for the Think Tank. They may also be providing data to the counties through Dr. Dawn Bolton’s Marketing Research Class in the Fall semester of 2009, identifying small business start-ups. In many cases, the students are residents of one of the Lincoln Trail counties, and this provides a viable, relevant and logical connection for the student. Clouse thoroughly endorses this approach to student learning because, “it shows students the connection between academics and practical application.” Clouse hopes to encourage, “a paradigm shift not only in the way communities think about business development, but also a paradigm shift in the way students learn at WKU.” One of these ways involves the Festival of Ideas that students participate in directly alongside local business people. Students are responsible for presenting to the business people, who are volunteer “judges,” plans for start-ups or needs assessments of local businesses. In this way, students are not only being graded for the project, they are also making connections with people who can advise them after graduation or even provide them employment.

He sees this growth as a great opportunity to take advantage of stimulus funds to rebuild and rethink county infrastructure to meet the revitalized real estate market and patronage of local businesses.

Funding through the Elizabethtown Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has allowed Clouse to begin programs that will benefit the area. An example is the Think Tank Institute for Entrepreneurship that was offered at the Elizabethtown Tourism & Convention Bureau on April 24th, 2009. At this WIB supported meeting, small business owners and entrepreneurs got to meet with entrepreneurs from around the country in order to help them identify potentially successful small business start-ups, network, develop action plans for specific counties, and develop the economic future for the Lincoln Trail Area Development District. The funding also supported an eight week workshop at four sites among the eight counties where entrepreneurs and small businesses could meet and consult with attorneys, accountants and other small business owners about how to devise a business plan, how to set up books, and all the other skills that are necessary for a successful organization.

Clouse has a philosophy of teaching he calls Whole-Part-Whole. He asks students at the beginning of each semester to think from the end, to envision what they want from the class. He then starts class from where the student is academically and teaches them the Parts that will bring them to the Whole. In this way, students are not simply receiving isolated bits of knowledge but are learning how the Parts come together. Clouse believes this philosophy can work for the Lincoln Trail District, as well as students, training business people and entrepreneurs to envision what their communities may become and bringing that vision to reality. “We’re losing population. The old strategies don’t work anymore. Where do the jobs come from? They have to come from visions from your head, and its economic development through entrepreneurship, infusing communities with the entrepreneurial spirit that will win the day.”

"a paradigm shift not only in the way communities think about business development, but also a paradigm shift in the way students learn at WKU.”

-Dr. Wil Clouse
Partnership Incentive Funds Set to Improve Quality of Life

By: Leah Ashwill

Is there a role for higher education to help improve quality of life? At Western Kentucky University, we believe that indeed there is, and more importantly, we believe this can be best accomplished by partnering with those outside the institution to do so. Why should it be important for institutions of higher education to actively seek ways to make an impact? For those already doing it, the general consensus seems to be that students who have the opportunity to put their knowledge into action can only then realize the power and potential of their education.

In the Fall of 2008, the WKU ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships launched the Community Partnership Incentive Program to help stimulate campus-community partnerships that address local and regional needs. The creation of the Community Partnership Incentive Program is meant to stimulate collaborative work by providing funds to carry out a wide variety of projects throughout the region.

The overall goals/outcomes of the incentive program are to:

- Stimulate engagement and partnership efforts across or within academic departments
- Address a wide variety of concerns – community needs and priorities
- Expand and improve understanding of partnership
- Link university and community assets

Since program inception, the ALIVE Center has put forth for selection a wide variety of project proposals intended to address needs in the areas of healthcare, education, economic development, and nurturing communities. Campus and community partners have demonstrated much creativity and innovation in getting students, faculty and staff connected to issues that exist throughout our region.

Some of the project ideas that have received funding include:

**Hispanic GED Program** – Dr. Jim Berger in Special Instructional Programs at WKU has developed a partnership with students, faculty and staff within WKU’s Special Instructional Education program,
State Street United Methodist Church, and several members of the Hispanic community in Bowling Green. The goal of this local pilot program is to provide the opportunity for Hispanic residents to obtain their GED in their native tongue so that they can have greater opportunities to attain employment. Phase two of this project will ideally incorporate an ESL component for Hispanic families to help them better matriculate into the community and workforce.

**College Bound Communities Program** – Martha Sales of WKU Educational Talent Search has developed a partnership between students across multiple departments, staff at Trio Educational Opportunity Centers at WKU, and Warren Central High and Bowling Green High Schools. Although Educational Talent Search at WKU is funded to recruit low-income, first generation college students to WKU from across the region, their funding restricts them from serving Bowling Green/Warren County. With CCP Incentive Program funds, students from WKU will serve as mentors to potential college bound students at the two local high schools with the goal of those students enrolling at WKU after graduating high school.

**Outdoor Sensory Classroom** – Lisa Murphy with the Clinical Education Complex’s Early Childhood Center developed a partnership between program staff and the families which they serve. The Outdoor Sensory Classroom will serve as a tactile learning tool for children with developmental disabilities such as Autism. Families throughout the region benefit from the services at CEC’s Early Childhood Center, and the addition of this outdoor sensory classroom, installed by parent and student volunteers, will provide a unique opportunity for ECC clientele to engage in these unique learning experiences that better serve their needs.

We look forward to seeing many more project proposals that address need throughout the region. This is a great opportunity for students, faculty and staff at WKU to apply their knowledge in the real world and have a substantial and lasting impact throughout WKU’s service region.
More Than Service: How Service-Learning Impacts Students
By: Paul Markham

Generally speaking, we all know that service is a positive thing. Effective service can address critical needs, assist in economic development, and strengthen communities. WKU is fortunate to have a number of committed faculty and staff who provide numerous opportunities for students to serve in a variety of contexts. Oftentimes we tend to focus on the external benefits of service and overlook the development that occurs within students as a result of the engaged learning experience.

Effective service-learning occurs when faculty, students, and community partners work collaboratively to orchestrate a rich educational experience for students. Special attention is given to the reciprocal nature of the experience (partners are co-educators), as well as the critical reflection that occurs throughout the process. As an institution of higher education, WKU is committed to the good work of serving our communities and understands this effort to be more than a one-way form of service delivery. When embraced within the academic context, service-learning becomes an indispensable vehicle for the personal and professional development of our students.

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), located at the University of California – Los Angeles, is committed to informing educational policy and promoting institutional improvement through an increased understanding of higher education and its impact on college students. The growing recognition of the role of service in effective teaching led HERI to create a substantial report on the impact of service-learning in higher education. Some of the key findings are listed below:

- Participation in service-learning shows significant positive effects on: academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism and to promoting understanding of diversity), self-efficacy, leadership, interpersonal skills, and commitment to civic participation beyond college.
- Embedding effective service-learning into curriculum adds significantly to the benefits associated with community service – students grasp the reciprocal nature of engagement beyond simply providing “services.”
- Benefits of service-learning were strongest for academic outcomes, especially writing skills.
- Participation in service-learning has a strong effect on student’s decision to pursue a career in a service field.
- Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that providing students with opportunities to process or reflect on service experiences is an indispensable aspect of engaged learning – compared to “community service,” an effective service-learning course is more likely to generate critical student discussion.
- Service-learning enables students to see tangible results from the application of academic knowledge – they see how they can “make a difference.”
- Impact on student learning is greater when service-learning is embedded in the student’s major field.
- Data suggest that service-learning is effective in large part because it facilitates: (1) an increased sense of personal efficacy, (2) an increased awareness of the world, (3) an increased awareness of one’s personal values, (3) increased engagement in classroom experiences, and (4) a heightened sense of civic responsibility.

The points above are intended to highlight the many ways that engaged learning benefits our students, our city, our state, and ultimately our world. As we conclude this issue of the WKU Spirit of Engagement, we want to thank those that contribute to meeting this very important goal of shaping generations of college students to become active and thoughtful citizens in an increasingly complex world. These include WKU faculty, staff, and students, as well as our many community partners throughout our region.

Effective service-learning occurs when faculty, students, and community partners work collaboratively to orchestrate a rich educational experience for students.

Western Kentucky University
Building Partnerships To Strengthen Communities Across Central Kentucky