



News Release

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WESTERN SELECECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

St. Joseph, Mo.—April 15, 2003—Missouri Western State College is one of only 19 colleges and universities recently selected to participate in a National Learning Communities Project designed to strengthen innovative approaches to college teaching and learning.

Each participating campus will send a team to the Evergreen State College for a five-day residential institute, then begin the process of building or strengthening their learning community initiative on their campus. In addition, each campus will receive consulting help on learning community development, assessment and administrative matters.

Learning communities provide opportunities for first-year students to take classes and live together. It is meant to naturally enhance first-year students' academic success.

The Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) best represent the learning communities concept at Western. They link clusters of two or three freshman classes around common themes. First semester Western freshmen, entering in the fall, are strongly urged to enroll in a FIG. FIGs began in the spring of 1996. Class size is limited to 22 to 25, smaller than most open enrollment general studies courses.

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“The goal of attendance will be to come to a better understanding of learning communities,” said Dr. Diane Gorcyca, professor of speech at Western. “Based on that understanding, the participants will develop a workable plan to facilitate attempts at higher levels of collaboration.”

Western’s team includes: Dr. Martin Johnson, dean of liberal arts and sciences; Dr. Diane Gorcyca, professor of speech; Kristi Schulte, assistant director of housing and residential life; Beverly Payne, instructor of business; Bill Church, instructor of English; Dr. Jason Baker, assistant professor of biology; Dr. Mitch Haney, assistant professor of philosophy; Bob Klostermeyer, assistant professor of legal studies; and Dr. Dan Cox, assistant professor of government. The group was selected because of their participation in the FIG program or because they expressed interest in learning communities. The group will be attending the residential institute from June 24 to June 29.

Leading the National Learning Communities Project is The Washington Center for Undergraduate Education based at The Evergreen State College, an international leader in developing innovative interdisciplinary programs. A clearinghouse for learning community approaches, the Washington Center is directing the project under the auspices of a \$1.7 million grant from The Pew of Charitable Trusts.

Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.

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