



News Release

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WESTERN STUDENTS “EXPERIENCE” POVERTY

St. Joseph, Mo. —Feb. 27, 2006—By the third week of the month, Joyce Jacoby, a 19-year-old single mother, had no money to pay her utilities and was facing an eviction notice. “It’s horrible!” she lamented.

Fortunately, Jacoby’s dilemma was not real; Missouri Western State University social work major Kristin Grimm was only playing the role of Jacoby in the Community Action Partnership’s poverty simulation exercise on campus Feb. 21.

More than 70 participants, which included Western students and members of Leadership St. Joseph, were each assigned a role and given information about their situation. For the next hour, they tried to make it through a typical month, with each 15-minute period representing a week. Throughout the month, participants visited different “agencies,” such as the U-Trust-Us National Bank, Big Dave’s Pawn Shop, Quik Cash, Realville Public School, Friendly Utility Company, General Employer and the Department of Family Services. A group discussion ended the exercise.

“No matter how frustrated or confused I got, I’m sure it was nothing compared to someone who faces these challenges everyday,” Grimm said. “I knew that no matter what, the whistle would blow in 15 minutes, and I could go back to being a middle class college student.”

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It seemed “frustration” was the most commonly used word by participants to describe the exercise. Liz Jalbert, employment and training program director for the Community Action Partnership, noted that the family situations and statistics in the packet were real. “This is a simulation, not a game,” she told the participants. “Poverty is not a game for over three million citizens.”

Grimm said the exercise affirmed her decision to become a social worker. “I know social work is where I belong. There are so many other aspects to social work than just dealing with those in poverty, but I do think that poverty and the problems that arise from it are something I need to fully understand to be the best social worker I can be,” she said. “I need to be able to see life through others’ eyes in order to work with them at bettering their lives.”

“I don’t think a lot of Americans realize that there are people right here in the United States suffering so badly. This experience definitely opened my eyes to the problems of those living in poverty every day.”

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Missouri Western State University is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The university 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.