



News Release

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EXPERIENCE OUTDOOR SEMESTER

St. Joseph, Mo. —Nov. 14, 2006—An outstanding travel experience, a chance to explore the plains of the western United States and follow in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, and a tremendous learning opportunity are all part of Outdoor Semester, Missouri Western State University's unique multidisciplinary course. On Nov. 30, students and faculty members who participated in the fall 2006 Outdoor Semester will talk about their experiences in Spratt Hall, Kemper Recital Hall. Exhibits will open at 6:30 p.m. and the presentations will begin at 7 p.m. It is free and open to the community.

“Many students will say it was the most extraordinary thing they did as a student,” said Dr. Elizabeth Latosi-Sawin, professor of English and one of the faculty members for the Outdoor Semester. “Many come home and say they’ve never known this kind of peace.” Of course, she added with a laugh, part of that peace could come from the fact that all cell phones, laptops, Ipods and electronic devices are left at home.

This year's group was accompanied by videographer Dan Defendorfer, who plans to create a documentary about the program.

In the Outdoor Semester, students take at least four classes together, and this semester it was Writing and Research, American Indian Literature, Physical Geography, and Outdoor Education. The program consists of 12 weeks in the classroom, and 12-14

days hiking, canoeing and camping throughout the western United States. For the past three years, the groups have canoed on the upper Missouri River in Montana in honor of the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery.

From its first year in 1995, Native Americans have been an important focus in the program. Throughout the years, students have had the opportunity to experience sweat lodges and rare Native American ceremonies, and dance in Powwows. They have explored sacred Native American sites and studied Native American literature. “Students say they experience history from a different point of view,” said Dr. Latosi-Sawin.

A few years back, a student conducted research to determine the uniqueness of Western’s Outdoor Semester program. After examining programs at approximately 400 universities across the United States, Dr. Latosi-Sawin said they determined that the program is unique in the state, and rare in the nation. “We can take you places other people don’t go.”

Dr. Latosi-Sawin and Jim Grechus, professor emeritus of health, physical education and recreation have been involved in the Outdoor Semester since it began, and Dr. Latosi-Sawin said she hopes it will continue for a long time.

“Students really connect and bond. They help each other study, and they watch out for each other.”

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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.

