



Included below is a press release regarding a unique, student-led philanthropic grant at Ferris State University. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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### **Grant Helps Ferris Students 'Pay It Forward'**

BIG RAPIDS – Students at Ferris State University are getting the chance to “pay it forward” this fall through a unique, student-led philanthropic grant.

*Pay It Forward: Strengthening Communities Through Student-Led Philanthropy* will engage students in the classroom to make a difference in their community, said Stephanie Thomson, Ferris assistant professor of Communication. The grant uses academic service learning to engage college students in hands-on philanthropy while meeting their specific course objectives. At the same time, non-profit community organizations receive much-needed funding.

Thomson's Persuasive Speaking students, along with Ferris associate professor Sandra Burns' Dental Hygiene Community Dentistry students, will spend fall semester researching non-profit agencies, learning about them through volunteerism and identifying which community organization(s) will most benefit from the grant funding. The grant also provides for a third course to host the program in spring 2011 semester.

“This is really exciting because students are learning about the course specific topic and philanthropy while at the same time having an opportunity to give back in a very big way,” Thomson added. “We're giving them the reigns and allowing them to determine how to distribute the grant funding.”

Burns, RDH, RN, MS, agreed. “Service learning allows students to get a really hands-on experience, and it gives them an eye inside that will make them much wiser in the future. The Community Dentistry class has focused on service learning in the past, so this program fits right into the course. It's nice to be able to give back to local organizations, which will be able to do so many more things.”

Part of the Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio Campus Compact organizations, in partnership with Learn and Serve America, the grant for student philanthropy will provide each class of students \$4,500 to be invested in local 501(c)3 non-profit agencies through class projects. Each class also will receive approximately \$500 in support funding for course activities related to the project.

All funds awarded require a 100 percent match of cash or in-kind support from Ferris, and must focus on one of the three following areas of need: 1) children and youth programs; 2) neighborhood development and revitalization efforts; or 3) needs related to hunger, homelessness and health issues. The non-profit organizations also must be based in Lake, Mecosta or Osceola counties.

The process infused into the course-curricula for students will include management of philanthropic funding, including conducting needs assessments; establishing funding criteria; researching local non-profits; interviewing community members; and developing writing, decision-making, accounting and evaluation skills, Thomson explained.

“This is an invaluable learning experience for students to build stronger communities and enhance their connection to the surrounding areas,” she added.

In addition to Ferris State, seven other Michigan colleges and universities are participating in the program during 2009-10, with 18 campuses between Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio. This includes 34 Pay It Forward courses with 739 student participants completing 12,934 volunteer service hours. There have been 89 community non-profit organizations that were awarded \$153,000.

The student philanthropy project originated in 2005 with Cincinnati businessman, philanthropist and speaker Roger Grein, who wanted to tackle two challenges. First, supply local community organizations much-needed funding, and second, introduce young people to philanthropy while broadening their knowledge of their communities. Through his partnership with Campus Compact, this initiative is being replicated nationwide.

For more information about the initiative at Ferris, call Wendy Samuels, Academic Service Learning co-coordinator, at (231) 591-5896.

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