Learning Community Students Help Flood Victims

About 20 freshmen who study together through a learning community at Western got a lot more than a grade for a recent classroom project that took them to flood-ravaged Macon County. They also gained a sense of appreciation for what the word “community” really means.

The freshmen, who live in Harrill Residence Hall, traveled Saturday, Oct. 9, to the home of Everett and Jeannie Ball in the Peace Valley community of Macon County to help the family begin to pick up the pieces of a household shattered by floodwaters spawned by the remnants of Hurricane Ivan in September.

The effort was the brainchild of Marjorie Askins, instructor of English at Western, who teaches in a learning community with Sandra Kay Weden, instructor of theatre arts. A learning community is an effort at Western to provide an immediate support group for new freshmen by clustering those with similar interests into the same residence hall. In addition, the students take some of the same classes – including freshman composition – that are linked together by common themes.

In their learning community, Askins, Weden and their students have focused on themes that include the importance of family and rising above problems. When Askins heard of the plight of the Ball family, who lost nearly everything they owned in the horrific flooding of Sept.

Ergonomics. It’s a funny word for making your body interact safely and effectively with the things you use every day. But the pain you can get from the failure to apply ergonomic principles is no laughing matter.

According to some estimates, musculoskeletal disorders among U.S. workers cost businesses $20 to $40 billion in workers’ compensation every year. When you add lost time from work, reduced productivity, retraining time and other variables, the cost of work-related injuries rises to $170 billion annually.

That’s why students in Western’s graduate program in physical therapy learn to assess workplace ergonomics and identify conditions that can lead to repetitive stress injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. And they’re swamped with study participants when they call for campus volunteers each year. Working in pairs, the students visit 10 to 12 offices, write reports, and recommend improvements.

This year, for the first time, they’ll return to each office in a month to see if the volunteers actually used their suggestions to improve the ergonomic conditions. “This service-learning project is great, not only for the participants, but also for the students,” said Todd Watson, assistant professor of physical therapy, as he supervised the work of a team in Irene Mueller’s hospitality and tourism office.

“The students get a more varied experience than a lab experiment could offer, they get to interact with real people in real office settings, they suggest useful interventions, and they get to see whether their ideas worked.”

At the team’s suggestion, Mueller moved her phone to a different place on her desk, a small change which she says has made a big difference. “I was glad to have the ergonomic assessment done,” she said. “It was a good experience for [me], and it is also great for the students.” For more on evaluations, see http://www.wcu.edu/aps/
Jacquie Jacobs, professor of educational leadership and foundations, presented a paper titled "Leading Learning through Professional Dialogue: Old Problems-New Strategies" at the Southern Regional Council for Professors of Educational Administration Conference in Raleigh on Nov. 5.


Irene Mueller, health information administration program director, and Mary Teslow, health information administration faculty member, presented a tutorial session, "Professional Practice Experience for E-HIM™ Innovative Educational Management Strategies," at the 14th International Federation of Health Record Organizations' Congress in conjunction with the 2004 AHIMA National Convention and Exhibit, Oct. 9-14 in Washington, D.C. Mueller, a Western MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching) Committee member, has been re-appointed as a MERLOT Health Science Peer Reviewer for the 2004-2005 academic year. MERLOT is a faculty-oriented, faculty-controlled, free gateway to more than 10,000 peer-reviewed open, on-line resources for college and university students.

Robert F. Mulligan, associate professor of economics, presented a paper that he co-authored titled "United States Short Sea Shipping: Opportunities and Challenges" at the third European REALISE Workshop on Infrastructure and Intermodal Services for Short Sea Shipping, in Genoa Italy, in early October.

Otto Spilker, professor emeritus in the department of health and human performance, was recognized with an acknowledgement award at the annual convention of the South Carolina Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance held Nov. 19-21. This award recognizes individuals who have made a significant contribution to the fields of health, physical education, recreation and dance.

Members of Western’s Division of Student Affairs made a strong showing at the Annual Conference of the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) held in Chattanooga Nov. 6-9.

Jane Adams-Dunford, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs, served as the program chair for the conference, providing overall leadership for the program planning and delivery. Dwaun Warmack, associate director for programs in Hinds University Center, won the New Professional Award, recognizing the professional who has provided exemplary service with no more than five years of full-time professional experience. Warmack also was the coordinating presenter for a session titled "How to Effectively Advise NPHC Councils at Predominantly White Institutions."

Tim Inman, resident director of The Village, Linda Riouff, senior associate director for student activities in the University Center, and Julie Walters-Steele, director of Hinds University Center, co-presented a session titled "Put Future Leaders on Track with a Living/Learning Experience." Walters-Steele also facilitated a SACSA Book Club discussion on Eviatar Zerubavel’s "The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books."

Jacquelyn Carr McHargue, director of student judicial affairs, and Bill Haggard, associate vice chancellor for student affairs, co-presented a session titled "Embracing Classroom Misconduct: Developing Change Through a Powerful Partnership." Haggard also facilitated a SACSA Book Club discussion on David Kirp’s "Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education."

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16, she decided to take a group of students to help clean up – and to see first-hand a real family trying to overcome real adversity.

The students spent a Saturday sorting through debris to salvage whatever personal items could be saved. “As a team, we cleaned out their entire front room, picking up items from the wreckage like toys, old pictures and more,” Askins said. “We shoveled their floors and removed the mud, and then power-washed many items for them, including all of their appliances and tools. After hours of work, we had a cleaner house, two Dumpsters full of ruined materials, and freckles on our faces from the dirt.”

Before leaving at the end of the day, the students signed a piece of paper for the Ball family. The paper, including thoughts and wishes for recovery and muddy student thumbprints next to the signatures, will be the first thing the family hangs on the new walls of the home once work is complete.

After returning to campus, the professors asked their students to write papers about the experience, and Askins and Weden say they found themselves honestly moved by what their students had to say.

“I have discovered that we are now more than classmates; we are a gracious community reaching out to others,” said Lauren Gillespie of Gastonia. “I have built strong relationships with my classmates, which have now turned into friends.”

“This trip taught me a lot – mainly to appreciate what you have and that all mankind isn’t going to hell in a hand basket,” said Stantin Miller of Denver. “There are people who care and there is hope for a brighter tomorrow. We really made a difference. That means a lot to me, and I’m sure it meant a lot to the family.”

And the Western students weren’t finished helping yet. They took the initiative on their own over their fall break to collect items such as clothes, toys and household supplies from their hometowns, and delivered the items to the Ball family on Friday, Nov. 5.

“I have never been more proud of a group of students,” said Askins. “We did more than clean up their home that day. I think we gave them hope.”
**November**  

**Monday, Nov. 22**  
**Speaker** — Tom Fisher, vice president of information technology for QUALCOMM, will talk on the topic of entrepreneurship and technology.  
1 p.m. Theater, A.K. Hinds University Center. Open to the public free of charge. (227-7492)

Lady Catamount basketball — vs. Eastern Kentucky. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Concert** — Western Carolina University Jazz Ensemble. 8 p.m. Recital Hall, Coulter Building. (227-7242)

**Tuesday, November 23**  
Catamount basketball — vs. Emmanuel. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Wednesday, November 24–Sunday, November 28**  

**Thanksgiving Holiday**  
One more reason to be thankful!

**Monday, November 29**  
Classes resume.

Catamount basketball — vs. Montreat. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

Recital — Musical Theatre Scenes. 8 p.m. Recital Hall, Coulter Building. (227-7242)

**Tuesday, November 30**  
Catamount Concert Series — Western’s Wind Ensemble. 8 p.m. Recital Hall, Coulter Building. (227-7242)

**December**

**Wednesday, December 1**  
Lady Catamount basketball — vs. High Point University. 5 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

Catamount basketball — vs. Liberty. 7:30 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Friday, December 3, and Saturday, December 4**  
Madrigal Dinner — annual holiday event reenacting celebration of Elizabethan England with authentic madrigal entertainment, costumes, music, and food. Admission: $17 Western students; $29 all others. 6:30 p.m. Grandroom, A.K. Hinds University Center. (227-7206)

**Saturday, December 4**  
Open House — for prospective students and their families. Registration 8:30 a.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7317)

Lady Catamount basketball — vs. UNC Asheville. 2 p.m. Civic Center, Asheville. (227-7338)

Catamount basketball — vs. UNC Asheville. 4:30 p.m. Civic Center, Asheville. (227-7338)

**Sunday, December 5**  
Arti-Facts! — series designed for children ages six through 12 to explore the region’s natural and cultural heritage, presents a Family Holiday Open House. No admission charge, but reservations required. 2:30–4 p.m. Mountain Heritage Center, H.F. Robinson Building. (227-7129)

**Monday, December 6**  
Lady Catamount basketball — vs. Appalachian State. Southern Conference game. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Tuesday, December 7**  
Catamount basketball — vs. East Carolina. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Concert** — Western Carolina University Technology Ensemble. 8 p.m. Recital Hall, Coulter Building. Catamount Concert Series event. (227-7242)

**Thursday, December 9**  
Catamount basketball — vs. Atlanta Christian. 7 p.m. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. (227-7338)

**Concert** — Holiday Prism concert. 3 p.m. Recital Hall, Coulter Building. Call for ticket information. (227-7242)

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Tickets are still available for Western’s annual Madrigal Christmas Dinners on Friday, Dec. 3, and Saturday, Dec. 4.

A Yuletide tradition bringing the pageantry of Elizabethan England to the campus and surrounding community since 1970, the dinners will take place in the Grandroom of A.K. Hinds University Center.

The dinners, sponsored by Western’s music department and Hinds University Center, re-create 16th-century England, with authentic madrigal entertainment, costumes, music and food.

This year’s all-new dinner menu will feature a choice of three entrees: pork loin stuffed with dried fruits with cabernet demi glace, honey citrus glazed Cornish game hen, or a vegetarian plate. Accompaniments include traditional wassail; hearts of romaine salad with sugared pecans, and raspberry and red currant vinaigrette; duchess-roasted garlic potatoes; oven-roasted root vegetable medley; white chocolate bread pudding with brandy caramel sauce; rolls; and beverage.

The program begins at 6:30 p.m. and all patrons must be seated by 6:25 p.m. Tables will seat eight patrons each.

Tickets are $17 for Western students and $29 for all others. Tickets will be available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until noon, and from 1 until 4 p.m.

Tickets may be purchased in person at the University Center administrative offices, or by calling (828) 227-7206. All telephone registrations must be paid with a credit card (MasterCard or Visa.) Reservations are made on a first-come, first-served basis. All sales are final.