

Collaborations take students 'Beyond Classroom Walls'

by Kristen Manders - Wednesday, October 27, 2010

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/6681/beyond-classroom-walls/>

At the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, teaching and learning are not confined within the four walls of a classroom.

Some students spend their days in waist-deep waters, collecting samples. Some head to prison to learn about life behind walls, while others start their day when someone shouts, "Action!" to work on a film production.

These real-life experience projects are invaluable to students. On Thursday, Nov. 11, UW Oshkosh College of Letters and Science educators will showcase the impact that higher education is having on their students with an exhibit called "Beyond Classroom Walls: UW Oshkosh Student & Faculty Take on the Real World."

The day begins with a celebration of collaborative work from UWO students, faculty and staff members that will be on display in an exhibit in the Gail Floether Steinhilber Gallery in Reeve Memorial Union, 748 Algoma Blvd.

At 6 p.m. the presentation will start in Reeve Union Theatre with opening remarks from John Koker, dean of the College of Letters and Science. The instructors involved in the showcased projects will be recognized.

One highlight of the evening will be a special viewing of "Airboat Rescue 1: When the Ice Breaks," a documentary made by students and faculty. Music professor Andre Gaskins, a professional cellist and conductor, who composed original music for the documentary, and his students will perform some selections from the CD soundtrack.

- [View the trailer for "Airboat Rescue 1: When the Ice Breaks."](#)

Chancellor Richard Wells and state representative Gordon Hintz close the presentation.

"Beyond Classroom Walls" consists of five projects that took students out of the standard classroom setting. Students who participated in these class projects gained experiences that they can apply to their professions after graduation.

The Nov. 11 event will spotlight the following collaborative projects:

- **Lights, Camera, Action!** — Troy Perkins, coordinator of the radio-TV-film department, invites students to work with industry professionals during the summer on films written and directed by Perkins. Films from this project have won several national and regional awards.

- **Prison From the Inside Out** — Carmen Heider, associate professor for the communication department, taught a course inside of Taycheedah Correctional Institution, where 10 female inmates and 10 UW Oshkosh students attended class together. The course was the first in Wisconsin to participate in the national Inside-Out Prison Exchange program.
- **The Grand Plan** — Under advisement from Sara Steffes Hansen, journalism professor, and Dana Baumgart, adjunct professor, UWO students researched The Grand Opera House in Oshkosh, created a marketing and branding plan, and developed a slogan to increase college students' interest in the local opera house.
- **Testing the Waters** — Colleen McDermott and Greg Kleinheinz, professors of biology and microbiology, oversee the Environmental Microbiology Collaboration project, which has students testing bacteria levels at 34 different beaches and reporting those numbers to the Environmental Protection Agency and county health officials.
- **Airboat Rescue 1: When the Ice Breaks** — This collaborative effort from Grace Lim, adjunct professor; Shawn McAfee, UW Oshkosh Learning Technologies; Andre Gaskins, music professor; radio-TV-film students; and music students tells the story of a family of heroes who were struck by tragedy in 1977. The products of this effort include a 16-minute documentary, a 28-page full color book and an original score composed by Andre Gaskins.

High-impact learning

With changing times, faculty and staff are realizing that students need to be prepared to enter an ever-evolving job market. At UW Oshkosh, students work with professors who have industry experience and provide students with valuable experience through course work inside and outside of the classroom.

Sara Steffes Hansen said that students are getting an experience unlike anything they would get from the conventional classroom lesson plan.

“The students are walking away with an understanding of how research works and how it integrates with all the time and money spent on advertising campaigns in the real world,” Steffes Hanson said.

Jordan Steinert, a senior at UW Oshkosh, saw the value he got out of working with a real-life client, The Grand. “I think the actual experience getting out in the real world really pays off,” he said. “There’s so much more value in this class than just in a regular textbook.”

Students in the beach monitoring program are communicating with national agencies, including the EPA, about bacteria that could potentially be harmful to beach goers.

“Students get laboratory experience. They get field experience. They get to figure out and develop critical thinking skills because things are never cut-and-dry like they are in a textbook,” biology and microbiology professor Kleinheinz said. “There is no substitute for actual, real-world experience, no matter how many labs or lectures you have in an academic setting.”

These high-impact learning experiences have affected people in the community, as well. Joe Ferlo,

executive director of The Grand Opera House said he was delighted to have so many new ideas that he and his staff did not come up with.

After attending classes with students from UW Oshkosh, inmates from Taycheedah Correctional Institution were inspired to continue on in education and advocate for people in prison.

Kristine Frankiewicz, who participated in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, said the collaboration with the University students and fellow students from inside Taycheedah have encouraged her to work toward a career in communications.

"I want to help the outside public understand more what's going on in the prisons and help the prisoners when they get out," Frankiewicz said.

Every semester, UW Oshkosh faculty, staff and students are taking the initiative on projects that will have real-life, measureable impacts on the communities throughout the state.

Professionals, be ready. Prepared students are coming your way.

- For more information about the components of "Beyond Classroom Walls," visit www.uwosh.edu/colsreports.

Photos provided by Shawn McAfee/UW Oshkosh Learning Technologies.