

## **UW System grant helps move University Studies Program forward**

**by Mandy Potts - Monday, September 24, 2012**

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Lori Carrell knows first-hand the amount of intellectual and creative effort that has gone into reinventing general education requirements at the university level.

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh communication studies professor and director for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is co-leading the development of the innovative redesign of general education requirements – the University Studies Program (USP).

The USP is innovative and aimed at being high-value and high-impact for students. And come fall 2013, students coming into and graduating from UW Oshkosh will benefit from a different kind of general education. This summer, UW Oshkosh's landmark USP earned another tremendous endorsement when it was awarded a three-year, more-than \$400,000 UW System institutional grant – "Promoting Student Success through Curricular Reform." It will help support USP development and implementation over the next three years.

“We’re reinventing how we teach first-year students, allowing our faculty and staff to try new things that will inspire their students and, in the long run, our entire community,” said Tracy Slagter, assistant professor of political science.

The USP didn’t just happen; the historic redesign of “gen eds,” as students call them, is an effort a long time in the making.

“The University Studies Program is the result of years of dedicated work by faculty committed to both increasing student retention and enhancing the quality of learning,” said Lane Earns, UW Oshkosh Provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Leading up to the launch of new classes and opportunities, though, comes much work by the faculty and staff members at UW Oshkosh, said Carleen Vande Zande, assistant vice chancellor for curricular affairs and student academic achievement.

In many ways, the key grant, which was approved in July, will help move the USP at UW Oshkosh along. General education requirements as a whole, until now, have not been redesigned in four decades so much behind-the-scenes planning is needed, Vande Zande said.

“This UW System grant affirms the value of all the work as well as the potential of this new program to positively impact student learning,” said Carrell.

According to Vande Zande, the grant will help UW Oshkosh do three things. First, it will provide opportunities for professional development of faculty, a very important part of the process. The grant will

also help align existing academic and student support services with the new USP curriculum and it will allow for the development of tools to monitor student success.

“This grant really allows us to do the right things in the right ways to make this successful,” said Vande Zande. “I think it shows that the UW System believes in us and of the good ideas of our faculty and how they want to educate students for the 21st Century.”

As part of the USP, students will explore “signature questions” through what are called “Quest” classes. The USP connects learning experiences to three key questions that directly tie into the University’s established Essential Learning Outcomes: “How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?” “How do people understand and engage in community life?” and “How do people understand and bridge cultural differences?”

Quest classes are now in the development phase by UW Oshkosh faculty. Professional development as it relates to the new courses is also underway. In October, the University will welcome dozens of nonprofit organizations and agencies from throughout Northeastern Wisconsin to campus for the Provost's Teaching and Learning Summit to learn more about how they'll benefit from the coming waves of student civic-engagement and service-learning projects -- a major component of the USP.

“Our Quest courses are the first classes new students will take at UW Oshkosh and we’re creating them mostly from scratch,” said Slagter. “Faculty and staff have been hard at work developing courses that give students foundational knowledge and skills and that pique their intellectual curiosity and make them eager to learn more.”

Beyond the revamp of classes, the USP will provide students with learning communities and peer mentors while simultaneously pushing them out into the community to be active and engaged citizens, which Vande Zande calls “authentic and situational learning.”

As the fall 2013 semester grows nearer, the UW Oshkosh teaching community continues to work on curricular changes, while other departments and campus services also organize themselves for the changes the USP will bring.

“As we move forward into implementation, all faculty, staff and students will need to step up and commit themselves to additional investments of time and intellectual energy,” said Earns. “Our goals are lofty, and our assessment plan will ultimately reveal the impact of this program not only in retention and graduation rates, but in the quality of the educational experience at UW Oshkosh.”

Learn more:

- [University Studies Program](#)