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WOU students present progress on term-long community service projects

MONMOUTH – Western Oregon University students will present service learning projects they have completed during the past term with the organizations in the surrounding community. The presentations will take place at 2 p.m. on Thursday, March 16 in room 114 of the New Physical Education building.

These projects are part of the Program Planning, Methods and Evaluation class. Community partners have included the Monmouth/Independence YMCA, Marion County Health Department, American Red Cross, Polk County Halo Program, Falls City School Elementary, Central School District and the Forgotten People Foundation.

Project SAFE (Spreading Awareness for Emergencies) works in partnerships with the Willamette Chapter American Red Cross to provide emergency preparedness training for school and the workplace. This chapter of the ARC responds to an average of 50 man-made or natural disasters in Marion and Polk counties each year.

The United Communities Against Meth project works with the Monmouth/Independence YMCA. They are working to secure a grant to create a position within the YMCA to unify all existing efforts to effectively impact the meth epidemic.

Students working on Project SMILE have teamed with the Falls City parents to plan and raise funds for a new playground, which will hopefully begin construction within the next year. The current playground at Fall City Elementary School does not meet the safety standards that are issued by the National Program for Playground Safety.

A group of students has teamed with Katherine Barlett of the Polk County HALO program in hopes to implement an effective anti-bullying curriculum in area schools. The students are developing a survey and supporting the school district in educational programs.

Students with the Fitness for Adults project have developed and organized a community basketball league for adults in Monmouth and Independence, in coordination with the YMCA. The activity was chosen out of a survey distributed, which indicated the popularity for the sporting league.

A group of students has met with the Central School District to help design district-wide policies regarding nutrition and fitness in schools. The reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is

required to be in effect in Oregon schools by June 2006, which requires schools to create and establish wellness policies that will provide healthier environments for students at school and equip them with nutritional values. This group of students hopes that revamping the district's exercise curriculum and altering food choices will attack childhood obesity at one of its sources.

Students have even reached beyond the Willamette Valley in their projects to places as far as Vietnam. The group is working with the Forgotten People Foundation, which they held a fundraiser for the organization and one student sat on its board of directors. This organization works with those in Vietnam who are hungry, lonely, the elderly, and those who are outcast because of illness and disease that live deep in the forest without proper care, food and shelter. The mission of the Forgotten People Foundation is to promote health awareness and provide vocational training for the unemployed, disabled and outcast people in Vietnam.

The group of students working with the final project is developing strategies to create a WOU recreation center on campus. This center would be a centralized fitness and wellness facility that would improve the overall health of students as well as increase recruitment and retention of students.

"Our students are discovering first hand the needs of the community, they are learning more about themselves in their interactions with others," said class professor Jerry Braza. "Most important they realize that others rely on them for results and they can make a difference."

For more information contact the class professor, Jerry Braza, at 503-838-8253.

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If you are interested in interviewing the class professor or any of the students, please contact Jerry Braza at the phone number above or attend the project presentations on Thursday.