

# PRACTICES EXCHANGE

## NEWSLETTER

MAY 2019

<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 22

### YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Heritage University, Toppenish, WA

In the middle of hop fields on the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation in the heart of one of the most impoverished communities in the State of Washington is probably the last place you would expect to find a thriving college campus. Nonetheless, here sits **Heritage University**, a private, nonprofit college that has been transforming lives for 37 years. The University's main campus sits on 48 acres in rural Toppenish, WA and Heritage also operates a regional site at Columbia Basin College in Pasco, WA. Heritage is a founding member of the Yes We Must Coalition and its own founding president, Dr. Kathleen Ross, served as Secretary of the YWMC Board of Directors for the past 8 years.



“Heritage is a university unlike any other,” said Dr. Andrew Sund, President. “We are the only non-tribal university in the country to be situated on tribal lands. This is by design. Our mission is to serve those who have traditionally been left out of higher education — first-generation college students, minorities, those who are economically disadvantaged. It is a mission that everyone here at Heritage is passionate about, and it shows in the way students are served and the outcomes that they achieve.”

The University's student body is a reflection of the communities surrounding the campus.



The vast majority of the 700 undergraduate students — 80% — are either Native American or Hispanic. Nearly all qualify to receive some form of federal or state financial aid. Moreover, most enter college needing developmental math and English courses. Heritage's enrollment practice — to meet students where they are — embraces these students.

“Our goal is to break down barriers that keep students from earning their degrees,” said Sund, “whether those barriers are economic, social, cultural or academic preparedness.”

The University does so through intensive supportive services that go hand-in-hand with academic rigor. Financial aid, including institutional scholarships, along with the lowest tuition of any private university in the state, help to mitigate financial hardships. To bring students up to college readiness with minimum of out-of-pocket costs, the University offers math and English bridge programs that can bring them up one or even two levels without dipping into their financial aid. In addition, the University's focus on providing inclusive, culturally sensitive education means that students of all ethnicities find a safe and welcoming environment.

Heritage is changing the academic landscape of central Washington. Since its founding, nearly 10,000 men and women have earned their bachelor's or master's degrees and launched fulfilling careers. Heritage graduates are found in virtually every sector of business and industry in the region, from agricultural management to healthcare to tribal management and education. Every K–12 school in the areas where the university serves has teachers and administrators who earned their degrees from Heritage.

“We see the impact Heritage makes on individuals and their families on a daily basis,” said Sund. “We are still so young. But the impact we are making on our community is growing each year as new graduates enter the workforce and serve as role models to younger generations, showing them that they too can go to college, can succeed and can have the life of opportunities that they deserve.”

## Institutional Resources/Practices

### First Year Experience Program Revisions

At **Martin Methodist College** (TN), the First Year Experience program looked good on paper — it was evidence-based with substantive student learning outcomes. However, the results were not impressive. After an unexpected change in leadership and a year of study, FYE faculty concluded that the program did not sufficiently fit the needs of their first-year students, with too much emphasis on academic discourse and not enough on “how to do college.” In particular, Martin Methodist's FYE was not addressing the transition from high school to college for first-gen students from largely rural and poor communities.

One of the first changes to FYE was to replace the “common reader” with an even more common, though less carefully read reader: the college catalog. From day one at the beginning of the semester, the FYE students used the catalog in a variety of ways, including a “Catalog Question of the Day” at the beginning of each class period. “What do I do if I want to drop a class?” “What is drop-add?” “What does TTh mean on the schedule?” “What is FERPA? And FAFSA?” — all serious questions that can lead to expensive lessons for those who are learning the language of college.

A second change that led to an immediate change in student behavior was the implementation of the philosophy to learn by doing, so instead of faculty telling students about campus resources, a whole class took a “field trip” to the support offices on campus. In the past, these offices had come to meet with each class, inviting students to visit on their own. Now, though, students physically walked up the hill to the Clinic, down the hill to the Library, across the campus to the Student Resource Center, etc. These visits ensured that students not only knew what services were offered, but where they were located; more importantly, they met staff and were able to put faces with the office and its services. Student use of support services increased dramatically, especially in the library, the Clinic, and the campus life house.

A third change focused on incorporating college students into the community at large, via a semester-long, problem-based, learning assignment that began when first-year students

arrived on campus and concluded with a presentation during finals week. Each class was tasked with discovering a “problem” on campus or in the community. Once the project was identified, the group was charged with researching the solution to the problem and presenting on their findings at the end of the semester. Another component added to FYE was a day of service during opening week. All first year students, their faculty, some staff, and about 100 other students walked “Into the Streets” with bright red, “town and gown” tee-shirts, to engage in service projects across the community. This project was invaluable in so many ways, from helping FYE groups bond to acquainting students with their community to emphasizing the importance of giving back.

Student evaluations told us we were doing something right, and retention from fall to spring increased almost 10% over the previous year. Students told us they felt at home, felt a part of things, and many declared that FYE was their favorite class.

For more information, contact Program Directors **Pat Ford** and/or **Laura Morefield**.

## **YWMC Webinar Series**

The next YWMC Webinar in our Spring Series will focus on Ways To Use Data in Decision-Making and is scheduled for Thursday, June 20, at 1pm ET. To register for this event, go to:

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_WDRtAIXGQoeBznINaMxbnQ](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_WDRtAIXGQoeBznINaMxbnQ).

Recordings and accompanying slides of past webinars are available at <https://www.yeswemustcoalition.org/publications-webinars/#webinars>.

## **Submissions for Future Issues**

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. Send brief descriptions to Nia Lane Chester, YWMC Program Manager. [niachester@gmail.com](mailto:niachester@gmail.com).