

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Robert Morris University Illinois, Chicago, IL

In **Robert Morris University** Illinois is located in the heart of downtown Chicago. This location plays a critical role in helping RMU to fulfill its mission of educating and graduating students from local communities who are easily overlooked by other schools and are impacted by achievement gaps and underemployment. RMU's students are 44 percent first-generation and 60 percent Pell eligible. For nearly a decade *U.S. News & World Report* has rated RMU the "Most Diverse University in the Midwest." RMU's graduation rate for bachelor's-degree-seeking students is 76 percent, and more than 90 percent of students graduate in less than four years. Each program at RMU provides a direct line to a career upon graduation, and the experiential focus ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills to be successful in their careers from the start.



RMU's career-focused, experiential academic programs provide students opportunities to learn through immersion in experiences that relate to real-life and allow students to experience their careers while still in school. Experiential teaching and learning have been infused across all academic programs, including mandatory internships, service learning projects, and projects with external clients. To further support career-readiness, all students take a sequence

of four EBL (experience-based learning) courses, one each year, that provide career management skills such as resume development, interview skills, and service learning with non-profits like Feed My Starving Children.

As part of the commitment to experiential education, RMU is one of four strategic partners with the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), positioning RMU among national conversations around experiential education. RMU also has over 20 faculty and staff, including President Mablene Krueger, who graduated from NSEE's Experiential Education



Academy, a six-course certification professional development program for experiential educators. Faculty also infuse active and experiential learning into courses.

RMU's student-centered, experience-based culture has resulted in several successful outcomes including 90 percent of RMU graduates report being employed six months after graduation and 9% of bachelor's degree graduates enrolled in graduate school. RMU was one of only six private, not-for-profit universities that participated in a study with the State of Illinois Department of Employment Security to determine the progress of its graduates. According to the study, from one year post graduation to four years later, RMU graduates from the class of 2012 increased their salary by 43 percent. Of particular note, African American males increased their salaries by 87 percent, and Hispanic females increased their salaries by 50 percent.

RMU is a founding member of the Yes We Must Coalition. Mablene Krueger, RMU's President, currently serves as the YWMC's Treasurer. RMU participates in a number of YWMC initiatives and projects including the Longitudinal Data Project and the Ascendium Grant to Promote Employer Engagement.

For additional information or questions about Robert Morris University Illinois, please contact presidentsoffice@robertmorris.edu.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Health and Wellness Programming

Salem College (NC) is a liberal arts college for women that "values its students as individuals, develops their unique potential, and prepares them to change the world." Through their Women in Nature (WiN) program, a student-led outdoor education and leadership initiative sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Students and the Office of Student Wellbeing, the College creates opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to connect with the natural world. Through participating in WiN activities, students learn how spending time in nature can be an effective practice for managing the core drivers of poor health for female college students: sedentary lifestyles, increase in screen time with digital technology, negative impact of social media on self-image, and negative impact of stress on academic performance.

WiN is committed to promoting mission-grounded programs that raise student awareness about positive options for managing stress and improving overall health and wellbeing, which ultimately support students' academic and personal success. The primary focus of WiN is to raise student awareness about the health benefits associated with increasing physical activity, engaging in community, and spending time in nature, and to encourage students to incorporate these practices into their way of living in college and beyond. They also learn problem-solving skills and practice intercultural communication.

The Office of Student Wellbeing sponsors 10–12 outdoor programs each year, with between 15 and 25 students typically participating. Programs vary from low-challenge activities such as a short hike to a campfire with singing and s'mores to more extensive hikes and overnight trips in cabins. Like many schools, Salem has limited resources, but is able to keep costs low by using campus vehicles and drivers. Ultimately, WiN strive to provide meaningful and enjoyable outdoor activity options at no cost to students. For additional information contact Susan Harding, Director of Student Wellbeing. Susan.harding@salem.edu.

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.