

Childhood obesity addressed in statewide competition

A group of four Oakland University students took third place in a statewide competition proposing how to eliminate childhood obesity.

Each year, Michigan holds the Students Reinventing Michigan Competition, engaging undergraduate students from Michigan universities in finding solutions to problems facing the state. The 2014 competition awarded OU students Nusrat Zaman, Maryam Hasan, Phillip Johnson and Blessy Mathew third place with their proposal “Countering the Childhood Obesity Epidemic in Michigan.”

“We wanted to take a holistic and realistic approach to the topic of childhood obesity,” said Zaman. The team’s proposal discussed the

aspects of education, school lunch programs, physical activity, food access and current policy. They suggested that utilizing and adjusting steps from existing programs could reduce childhood obesity. They proposed:

- Schools use resources such as My-Plate and Health School Action Tools self-assessment to formulate and implement effective and healthy lunch programs.
- Children participate in 60 minutes of aerobic, bone strength and muscle strengthening exercise at least three days a week
- Eliminate "food deserts" — communities with little to no access to nutritious, affordable foods — by giving tax breaks to farmers and

store owners to encourage the production and sale of locally grown foods

- Re-instating the "Double up Food Bucks" program to incentivize purchasing healthier foods with food stamps.



The OU team ranked third out of 45 proposals received from students throughout Michigan. In April, they presented their proposal to the Joint House and Senate Health Policy Committee in Lansing, answering questions and discussing their solution to promote the health and well-being of Michigan’s children.

Jennifer Lucarelli, faculty mentor and assistant professor of health sciences at OU, helped Zaman, Hasan, Johnson and Mathew with their proposal by teaching them processes she uses in her own research.

“This is an excellent example of students taking what they are learning in their classes and applying it to real world problems to create innovative solutions,” Lucarelli said. “The students worked together to integrate knowledge of health and nutrition with politics and business to create a feasible plan based on best practices.

Michigan conference promotes undergraduate research endeavors

Innovative research from top Michigan universities come together at the 22nd Annual Meeting of Minds (MOM) conference at Oakland University.

“MOM gives our undergraduate students a wonderful opportunity to present the products of their research and scholarship activities to a friendly audience that will assist them in developing and testing their presentation skills,” said Robby Stewart, associate dean of OU’s College of Arts and Sciences.

MOM is a daylong conference in which students from Oakland University, the University of Michigan-Dearborn and the University of Michigan-Flint gather to present research through visual and oral presentations. The initiative showcases the results of student-faculty collaboration across all academic disciplines.

This year, more than 140 students are presenting their research to the nearly 300 people registered to the event.



Capstone research explores health care support for young adults with ASD

How difficult would it be to abruptly be plopped down in a foreign country, with no knowledge of the culture and language — no translation handbook — while learning how to drive for the first time?

Once hitting age 18, this is the type of pressure and confusion often felt by those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as they're suddenly expected to act as independent adults in managing their own health care.

What a difference a day makes.

In turning from 17 to 18, the difficulty for those with ASD is that although their legal status changes to "adult," their developmental age lags behind chronological age. Those with ASD are challenged by abnormal development of communication, social skills and reasoning that impacts independence.

Whether calling for appointments, filling out forms, dealing with pharmacies or interacting with physicians and their staff, it can be overwhelming for those with ASD. Depending on the age limit in pediatric offices, those with ASD may also face having to find a new physician. At the same time, their caregivers may hit unexpected obstacles helping their loved ones because of health care legalities and privacy issues.

Mary Dereski understands.

"Autism awareness within pediatrics has been tremendous and has resulted in children being accurately diagnosed much quicker," says Dereski, associate professor of biomedical sciences. "But now, in terms of sensitivity to their different situation,

we're hearing of young adults with ASD falling off the cliff within the health care system. This is yet another stressor for those already dealing with so much."

Dereski is also director of the OU William Beaumont (OUWB) School of Medicine's capstone program. As director, she engages with medical students in the program's research initiatives. It's in this capacity that she hopes to facilitate some changes to help the young adult ASD population more comfortably navigate the health care system.

About one in 88 children has ASD, according to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network.

"In ever-increasing numbers, our medical students will see ASD patients in their practices," says Dereski. "They can be attuned to making their health care experience less stressful."

Oakland University is on the cutting edge in its efforts on behalf of those with autism. The OU Center for Autism Research, Education and Support (OUCARES) integrates academic coursework and research with hands-on community work to prepare professionals to be leaders in the autism community.

"It's inspiring," says Dereski, "and it makes for an ideal foundation for this particular ASD research."

How can this be accomplished? First stop: team up with OUCARES for outstanding support. Next stop: go to the source.

"We need to gather information from those with ASD and their caregivers," says Dereski. "We want to

know the difficulties they're experiencing at physicians' offices."

Often, those with ASD don't appear outwardly different, so they may blend into the crowd in a busy physician's office.

But not understanding their differences can have unintended consequences. "If someone with ASD gives incorrect information or answers questions (verbally or on forms) based on misunderstandings, this impacts care," Dereski says.

"Additionally, their perspective may differ from their caregiver's perspective, so that caregiver input is vital to nurses and physicians."

Sensory issues can also be a problem.

"Many with ASD get overwhelmed by too much stimuli," adds Dereski. "For some, waiting for a long time in a crowded, noisy waiting room can be excruciating."

After compiling feedback like this from ASD families, the next step in the research process will be making office calls.

"We need to consult with area physicians," Dereski says. "In bringing concerns and ideas to them, I think some very reasonable changes can be made to better accommodate this population with medical directives."

To create greater awareness, Dereski plans to produce an online continuing education module regarding this issue.

"The changes that can be made to help this special group can be of global benefit because the need exists everywhere," Dereski says. "That's a goal worth pursuing."

State and National Headlines

Impact of Academic Preparation on Dropout Rates

The academic preparation of incoming college students has a strong impact on dropout rates, according to a newly released report from the ACT, which is a nonprofit testing organization. The findings show that students have the greatest risk of dropping out if they earn lower scores on college readiness assessments, particularly students with less-educated parents.

Inside Higher Ed
April 10, 2014

Education requirements for employment on the rise

The rising bar is even extending beyond the bachelor's degree in some cases. One in five employers (20 percent) are now targeting Master's degree holders for positions previously held by those with four-year degrees. A third (33 percent) of employers are sending current employees back to school for an advanced degree, and a majority of that group (81 percent) are at least offering partial funding.

"The economic value of a college education for workers has long been known, but as occupations evolve and as companies rely more heavily on professionals with strong interpersonal and technical skill sets, workers can't afford to stop their education at high-school," said Matt Ferguson, CEO of CareerBuilder and co-author of *The Talent Equation*. "The trend toward higher-educated labor is already paying off for companies. We see that both in our surveys and data analytics research."

Ferguson notes, however, that higher-education institutions and policy makers must do more to control and bring down the costs of attaining a degree. Businesses, on the other hand, should continue to invest in training and development, he says.

A large majority of employers hiring college-educated workers for occupations previously held by high-school graduates are seeing positive results. Eighty-six percent cite at least one positive impact, including revenue:

- Higher-quality work: 56 percent
- Productivity: 45 percent
- Innovation/Idea generation: 41 percent
- Communication: 41 percent
- Employee retention: 27 percent
- Revenue: 19 percent
- Customer loyalty/retention: 17 percent
- None: 16 percent

WBNG.com
March 21, 2014

Gov. Brownback Takes Higher Ed. Message To Emporia State

Governor Brownback hit the road, touting his advocacy for investing in higher education.

Brownback and Board of Regents member Kenny Wilk visited four of the state's regents universities to applaud the increase funding for higher education.

At Emporia State, the governor spoke with administrators and student government representatives on the importance of investing in higher education close to home.

"We need to have excellent institutions where students can get a high

quality education and go forward in the world. My hope is they get a great institution and great training here and go some place around the world and come back and make their career and life here in the state of Kansas because need you! We need your future invested here," said Brownback.

ESU President Michael Shonrock presented the Governor with a basket of chocolates made locally in Emporia.

WIBW.com
April 15, 2014

From homeless to higher education

This was Greg Davis' first week on the job at Leading Technology Composites, Incorporated. Among several things, he'll make parts for airplanes. Like any new hire, he's pretty excited.

"I feel blessed. I have a job now and I'm moving forward," Davis said.

But the 55-year-old isn't the average employee. You start to get an understanding of that when you listen to his new boss.

"We just feel blessed to be a small part of his story," LTC President Todd Lair said.

At one point in his life, it looked like no one would want to hire Davis. He was homeless and didn't have a high school diploma. But that changed.

"When you want something out of life you've got to strive for it, and that's exactly what I did," Davis said.



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State and National Headlines *CONTINUED*

Davis found assistance at the Union Rescue Mission. Then, he earned his GED. After that, he enrolled at Wichita Area Technical College. Davis learned skills and earned certificates that helped him get his new job.

“We’re changing lives and I think that’s the greatest thing to see,” Gidget Watson of the National Aviation Consortium said.

A federal grant for the NAC paid for Davis’ higher education and helped him find a job. Davis had the strength to accomplish his goals. But he knows he didn’t do this alone. “I thank everybody for helping me,” Davis said.

KWCH.com
May 9, 2014

College Loans/Costs Top Money Issue for Young Adults

A new poll by Gallup has found that paying for college or paying student loans is the top financial problem for adults who are 18-29 years old, with 21 percent citing the issue.

That issue beats out lack of money/low wages (15 percent) and housing costs (14 percent). Paying for college or students was also the top issue cited by those 30 to 49 years old, but the percentage citing the issue was smaller (14 percent).

Inside Higher Ed
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