

OU earns grants to support teaching and research initiatives in Pakistan and Guatemala

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Oakland University's Office of Global Engagement was recently awarded a pair of grants from the U.S. Department of State that will deepen the university's impact on teaching and research around the world.



The first grant, worth over \$400,000, will bring Pakistani secondary teachers to OU for two five-week sessions in 2020 and 2021. They will work with OU faculty in the School of Education and Human Services to develop a tool or process to identify students in their respective classrooms who may have a learning disability, modify their teaching strategies to support identified students, and record their observations and results. The initiative is targeted toward any condition that impedes learning, such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and autism spectrum disorders to name a few. The group will also learn about the programs offered by The Joanne and Ted Lindsay Foundation Autism Outreach Services, commonly known as *OUCARES*.

By collecting data through classroom-based action research over a 20-month period and disseminating findings in Pakistan, this pilot project is designed to improve equity and access in education at the local level and inform efforts to develop a data set at the national level.

Data on learning disabilities in Pakistan is not collected or published in any systematic way by national or international authorities. However, it is estimated that 10 to 18 percent of students in Pakistan's private schools have learning disabilities and that the number is higher in public schools (*Siddique, 2011*).

The project reinforces the themes of education for students with disabilities, access and equity in education and, through its design, will reinforce U.S. public diplomacy goals.

"The U.S. State department seeks to expand and strengthen people to people relationships through these kinds of projects," said Rosemary Max, OU's executive director of Global Engagement. "It gives OU and people in our surrounding community a chance to do that. We are very excited about the public diplomacy aspect of this work."

The second grant is part of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund, an education initiative that provides students with dynamic academic exchange programs to gain technical skills critical for today's workforce. The \$25,000 award will support student research on freshwater resources and human effects on the environment in the OU Biological Preserve and other locations throughout Michigan, as well as in Guatemala.

As part of the grant, 12 students from the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) will travel to Michigan for two weeks. They will perform hands-on research in OU's 110-acre Biological Preserve as well as other locations throughout Michigan, such as the Au Sable River, where OU maintains research programs. They will also receive instruction in building lesson plans in biology and ecology, helping to alleviate a critical national shortage of teachers in Guatemala who are conversant with ecological concepts, while improving their English with targeted lessons building on the scientific work they are doing in the field.

Following the return of these students, 10-12 students from OU will travel to Guatemala for two weeks, led by Professor of Biology Scott Tiegs, to reconnect with the USAC students they hosted and performing fieldwork at diverse locations from the lush mangrove forests of the Pacific Coast to the azure shores of the Caribbean, aided by USAC's national reach and expansive ecological research programs. They will also connect with an indigenous organization in the historic city of Antigua, exploring native responses to climate change while practicing Spanish language skills and learning basic conversational K'iche', a Mayan language.