

Elementary education major selected for rural leadership mentoring program

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OU senior Mairead Warner is among 20 students selected for a nationwide mentoring program that will develop the next generation of rural leaders. The newly launched Rural Leadership Mentoring Program is coordinated through the [Advancing Rural Communities Initiative](#) and will pair rural-grown students with leaders who serve in positions of rural impact.



OU student Mairead Warner will participate in a mentoring program aimed at developing leaders in rural communities.

Michigan is among several states prioritized by the ARC because of its high proportion of rural communities. Warner grew up in the village of Melvin, a small farming community in Michigan's thumb, about 20 miles west of Lexington.

“I grew up on a small centennial farm,” she said. “My family raised all sorts of animals, so growing up was quite an experience.”

Warner attended school in the neighboring village of Peck, graduating in a class of about 25 students. She cultivated a love for rural life and helping others.

“Though it was an incredibly small school, academics, school sports, community involvement and service were always strongly encouraged,” she shared. “This later translated into my love of community service and my commitment to making a difference. That is why this mentoring program stuck out to me the way it did, and why I am so humbled and honored to be given this opportunity.”

Warner, an elementary education major, said it’s important to support rural communities because of the challenges they face, such as lack of funding and inequitable access to resources.

“Basic resources can be difficult to obtain for rural families, because of the distance from cities and the lack of population in rural areas,” she said. “It’s unfortunately easy to leave rural people to their own devices, but in the end, this hurts children and people with disabilities the most. I want to give children, families, and people with disabilities the resources and opportunities they need to be successful.”

Warner will be paired with a rural field mentor who shares similar passions. She and the other participants will learn from ARC staff through interactive webinars, speaker series and one-on-one check-ins. The program will run from January 2021 through April 2021.