Women in STEM living learning communities continue to grow

PLATTEVILLE, Wis. — Living learning communities, or LLCs, have been steadily growing in number at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville for the past three years. Headed by the Department of Residence Life and run with the assistance of several other UW-Platteville offices, UW-Platteville currently sponsors three LLCs and two interest communities in its fleet of residence halls. In addition to the Global Exploration and Leadership LLCs, the Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, or WiSTEM, LLC has experienced exceptional retention for its participants in Dobson Hall.

“Our LLCs are providing ways to enhance our student learning,” said Linda Mulroy-Bowden, director of Residence Life. “They are collaborations between Residence Life and other offices on campus.”

“In the WiSTEM LLC, you’re surrounded by similar majors who understand how challenging STEM fields can be and the effort it takes to study those subjects,” said Kelsey Tempas, a sophomore mathematics major with an actuarial science emphasis and minors in Spanish and business administration from Sheboygan Falls, Wis.

WiSTEM began as an LLC in fall 2012 for women interested in STEM fields who wanted to build strong personal academic connections with each other and with UW-Platteville faculty and professionals. The freshmen of that year returned this year to form a second wing of WiSTEM sophomore participants and a new group of freshmen filled the original WiSTEM wing. The women in these communities usually take the same classes, participate in the same activities, and use each other as resources for academic help and support.
“Because we now have two levels of WiSTEM LLCs, the younger women look up to the older women in the sophomore community,” said Becky Homa, a sophomore biology major and psychology minor from Minooka, Ill., and the resident assistant for the sophomore WiSTEM LLC.

“All of my friends live in the LLC, we have a developed community, and it is nice to go back and do it all again,” said Tempas, one of several freshmen of last year’s WiSTEM LLC who now lives with the sophomore group. “Why should I leave something that’s working?”

“I can name every person who lives on my wing,” said Megan Kubatzke, a freshman reclamation major with a minor in environmental horticulture from Greenfield, Wis. “Through the LLC, you get to know people better. For me, the most impactful part of this experience has been the connections I have made with other people.”

For the next academic year, the WiSTEM community will continue to grow. Next year’s juniors will have the opportunity to stay on as part of an alumni mentor group, the freshmen will move to the sophomore wing, and a new group of freshmen will join the community.

“Being a part of this LLC gave me more confidence in going into an engineering field,” said Sarah Willie, a freshman civil engineering major with a structures emphasis from Dodgeville, Wis. “I got to know other women in the field, and together we became a community that supports one another. I can go to the sophomore wing and ask them for class and professor advice.”

Plans are in place for additional LLCs and interest communities for 2015. Robin Gore, assistant director of Residence Life, and her staff are currently working on LLCs including: criminal justice, entrepreneurship and sustainability. Additionally, new interest communities within the residence halls will include an engineering hall, a K12 hall and a creative expressions hall. These and additional LLCs and interest communities will be available to future students.
“I would recommend living in an LLC because you can look at the participants and say, wow, they did it, so I can do it too,” said Homa.

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