

**Program Title:** *Martin Luther King Jr Student Scholars Academy*

**Institution:** *Western Michigan University*

**Innovation Category:** *Underserved Populations,  
Retention/Completion*

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WESTERN MICHIGAN  
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### **Project Description:**

In response to the assassination of Dr. King in 1968 and Black students' discontent, the university established a student development program model known today as the MLK Student Scholars Academy. Although born out of civil unrest, the program remains and has maintained its goal of student success and engagement. As a retention effort, the Academy works with students from first year through graduation who have demonstrated academic excellence in high school and fit the criteria of being first generation, low-income or part of a pre-college or bridge program. Originally titled Project 73, the program was slated to last four years, but celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in 2018. Originally funded by "Friends of WMU" and subsequently through a \$194,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the program now is funded by the university.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Student Scholars Academy is a four-tier comprehensive program designed to offer academic, social and professional development services that assist program Scholars from their first tier at Western Michigan University through graduation. Each tier is designed to address particular developmental milestones associated with that phase of a student's matriculation. The model has been replicated.

### **Project Objectives:**

1. 90% of WMU-MLK Student Scholars will successfully complete the 2019-2020 academic year with a GPA of 2.5 or better.
2. 90% of WMU-MLK Student Scholars will be retained from fall 2019 to fall 2020.
3. 100% of WMU-MLK Student Scholars will engage in at least three high-impact activities/experiences during the 2019-2020 academic year.

### **Target Population:**

We recently have returned to targeting incoming students who are low-income, first generation or who have gone through a bridge or migrant program in high school. Potential scholars submit an essay addressing their involvement with diversity and leadership along with plans to increase their involvement. A committee reviews and scores the submissions.

### **Quantifiable/Qualifiable Outcomes:**

*All MLK scholars benefit from the following services and learning outcomes:*

- Academic guidance
- Diversity and multicultural exploration

- Professional & career coaching
- Peer leader coaching
- Elearning based

Average retention rate for the last three years: 90% (All tiers)

*Learning Outcomes:*

1<sup>st</sup> Tier

**Diversity** - Scholars in the First Tier attended programs and activities and reflect on their unique and actual experiences as related to diversity, particularly, Cultural during the fall semester. Additionally, Scholars viewed and submitted a short essay on their reflections of the Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes video, developed by Jane Elliott.

**Career Development** – Scholars were made aware of WMU’s career resources, Scholars registered and enrolled in WMU’s Handshake program, offered through the Career and Student Employment Services office. Further, Scholars attended at least one workshop or lecture related to their chosen career path.

**Academic Engagement** – For a solid academic head start, Scholars in the First Tier enrolled in the *Mentoring for Success* program offered through the Division of Multicultural Affairs. Scholars will be required to attend at least two sessions per academic semester for Fall and Spring semesters.

**Study Abroad** – To become familiar with all of the study abroad opportunities through WMU, Scholars in the First Tier attended an informational workshop on study abroad facilitated by the Office of Study Abroad.

**Leadership** - Research has shown that students who are active in student organizations tend to have a more positive college experiences than those who do not. To that end, Scholars in the First Tier identified student organizations that promote academic and professional development.

**Research** – As an introduction to research opportunities, Scholars attended an informational workshop facilitated by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs on the mechanics of research and research opportunities available to engage in at the undergraduate level.

2<sup>nd</sup> Tier

**Diversity** - In an attempt to increase awareness and tear down barriers, Scholars identified, attended and report on at least one (1) Diversity event in one of the 11 domains of Diversity Domains identified by WMU for the Fall semester.

**Career Development** - To gain a competitive edge for jobs and internships, Scholars submitted a draft copy of resume and cover letter & will investigated any Beyond the Classroom requirements for their major by the end of Fall semester. Scholars also visited CASES or the Career Center in HCOB for critique. Scholars accessed and completed Big Interview assignment and uploaded video.

**Academic Engagement** – 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier students not in good standing are required to attend at least two (2) study sessions offered by the *Mentoring for Success* program in an effort to get them back on track academically.

**Study Abroad Reflections**- - Academy Scholars submitted Reflections around specific topics during the Spring semester. One Reflection focused on Study Abroad.

**Leadership** – To share their philosophy on what makes a leader, Scholars defined what Leadership means to them personally and Investigated an academic/professional organization or registered to vote. Scholars also had the choice to complete at least two (2) hours of community or volunteer services in an area within their major, community or DMA and submit completed AVF to Academy Leader's dropbox.

**Research** – As a continuation from First Tier, Academy Scholars investigated and reported on at least one research opportunity offered through WMU to expose Scholars to the opportunities and benefits of working alongside faculty and receive grants to subsidize their engagement in scholarly efforts during the Spring semester.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Tier

**Diversity** - Scholars identified a diversity partner and maintained a progressive diversity log allowing them to reflect on their unique and actual experiences as related to diversity since their tenure at WMU.

**Career Development** - Scholars in the Third Tier program continued to enhance their career development. Scholars updated, enhanced and produced a marketable resume by the end of academic year. Scholars were required to complete a Mock Interview with CASES or the College of Business or access the Intern Catalog offered through CASES and sharing with Academy Leader one new fact learned from accessing the Intern Catalog using the approved header format and submitted to Academy Leader's dropbox.

**Engagement** – During the Academic year, Scholars participated in regular discussions posted in Elearning and facilitated by the Academy Leader. These discussions are designed to invoke thought around specific topics.

**Graduation Prep** – Scholars examined a Graduation tool box based on their likely pathway (graduate or professional school, work force, or pondering); Scholars also reviewed and commented on pertinent supplied articles.

**Leadership** - Scholars supplied one Reference or Recommendation letter from faculty, staff or community and defined the difference.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Tier

**Diversity** - Scholars in the Fourth Tier will reflected and shared their unique and actual experiences as related to diversity since their tenure at WMU with other Scholars in the Academy.

**Career Development** - Scholars completed a graduation audit, applied to graduate school and/or participated in the Career Fair, offered through the Career and Student Employment Services office.

**Engagement** - Scholars in the Fourth Tier design, developed and implemented a "griot-style" reflective program to present their experiences at a designated time/place.

**Study Abroad** - Scholars in the Fourth Year shared their individual study abroad experiences with students interested in studying abroad.

**Leadership** - Scholars in the Fourth Tier identified and engaged in leadership positions through student organizations that promote academic and professional development.

**Research** - Scholars in the Fourth Tier attend an informational workshop facilitated by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs on the mechanics of research and research opportunities available to engage in at the undergraduate level.

Average retention rate for the last three years: 90% (All tiers)

**Challenges/Problems Encountered:**

One challenge is that even after 50 years, too many departments around campus are not aware of the MLK Academy or its mission. The program has progressed from a developmental program for Black students to an academic scholarship for all students who qualify, but not enough people on and off campus are aware of this. Better communication with faculty and staff, especially academic advisors and Academic Chairs, is needed. Communication with the Admissions and Student Financial Aid would also be beneficial.

**Evaluation Approach:**

The Academy uses the survey and quiz functions in Elearning to track Scholars' progress. Scholars are required to submit forms summarizing their participation in required assignments as well as complete open-ended surveys posted on Elearning. The Assistant Director coordinating the respective tiers are responsible for compiling and summarizing the data.

**Potential for Replication:**

The MLK Academy model was a forerunner in its design and has been replicated on WMU's campus by the Seita's Scholars program and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).

**Vendor Involvement:** No vendors involved.

**Requisite Program Manager Competencies:**

Master's degree in related field from an accredited institution.

Five years' relevant experience.

Supervisory or lead experience.

Strong interpersonal, written and verbal communication skills

Budget management experience

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