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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heritage University Awarded \$15K Grant from Yakima Valley Community Foundation

Toppenish, Wash. – Heritage University is pleased to announce it has received a \$15,000 grant from the Yakima Valley Community Foundation (YVCF) for its annual “People of the Big River Field Class.” The grant will cover the cost of sending up to 20 college and high school students on a 1,500 mile journey through tribal lands in eastern Washington and Oregon next summer. The students, over the last three years have met with leaders from the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, Spokane, Coeur D’Alene, Nez Perce and Colville tribes, as well as scientists and natural resource managers in a unique two-week course that blends Western science with Native American Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

In partnership with the Yakama Nation Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service, and Heritage University’s Center for Native Health and Culture, the students from Heritage University and White Swan High School will visit several tribal reservations to meet with tribal elders and engage in the scientific process of conducting locally based environmental research. Projects include studying animals native to the reservations, creating botanical notebooks which profile native and invasive plant species, and researching the impact of wild horses on local vegetation.

Jessica Black, associate professor of environmental science at Heritage University, is grateful to the YVCF for contributing to the opportunity to send the students once again on this important learning experience.

“This project is designed to strengthen tribal students’ interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields by engaging them in a range of cultural and scientific activities,” she said. “Immersing young people in these cultures forges a sense of identity and belonging between their peers and elders. Students can act as a bridge between cultures and serve as key agents in promoting peace and intercultural understanding. We could not be more grateful to the YVCF for their support of this project, which has a powerful effect on lives of the young men and women who participate in the program.”

YVCF Grant Committee Chair Dave Edler says the People of the Big River project is the perfect example of the type of education-based initiative the Foundation believes in supporting. “The Big River Project is such a fascinating project that not only was I excited to fund it, I wanted to participate! I’m excited that YVCF can help connect generations and connect young people to their traditional culture,” says Edler.

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The students from Heritage University and White Swan High School are expected to leave for the next People of the Big River Field Class in July of 2016. During the trip, the students will share their experience daily through online blog entries which will be found on the Heritage University website, Heritage.edu.

For more information, contact Jessica Black at (509) 865-0719 or black_j@heritage.edu.

About the Yakima Valley Community Foundation

Yakima Valley Community Foundation has awarded grants in the Yakima Valley since 2004. The Yakima Valley Community Foundation's mission is to connect people, resources and ideas for thriving people and vibrant places.

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