



3240 Fort Road • Toppenish, WA 98948
(509) 865-8500

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Contact: David Mance, Media Relations Coordinator, (509) 969-6084 or
mance_d@heritage.edu.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heritage University hosts Seattle area students during community service visit to the Yakima Valley

Toppenish, Wash. – Heritage University will host 70 tenth graders from the Northwest School in Seattle during the students' community service visit to the Yakima Valley on May 18-20, 2016. The students will install raised gardens at ten homes in the Lower Valley during the day, and camp at the Heritage University campus overnight.

Northwest School is a private middle and high school located in the First Hill neighborhood of Seattle. Every year, each grade level of the school participates in service projects in communities that are vastly different from the ones in which the children live.

"We want to expose our students to the realities of other neighborhoods outside of the I-5 corridor," said Kevin Alexander, dean of students at Northwest School. "These trips give them an expanded perspective that you can't read in books or learn in the classroom."

Alexander says the school became aware of Heritage University through an NPR broadcast, and learned that the two institutions shared a few similarities, among them, both were started in the 1980s by teachers. Northwest School officials were interested in showing its students where the food they eat is grown, and it was not lost on them that one of the most fruitful agricultural regions in the country was in their own state, two hours to the east over the Cascade Mountains.

A conversation started between the two institutions, and Dr. Jessica Black, interim director of the Center for Native Health and Culture and assistant professor of Environmental Sciences at Heritage, came up with the idea for the students to build raised garden beds, and install them at locations near the Heritage campus.

"A raised garden bed is the best way to teach students about 'food justice,'" said Black. "By helping to build raised gardens, they will learn about a community's right to grow, sell and eat healthy food. It also increases their awareness of food and farm issues."

"We believe this community service project involving Heritage University will give our students a better understanding of the agriculture industry and get them involved in issues they normally wouldn't be exposed to," said Alexander.

For more information contact Jessica Black at (509) 840-3847 or Keven Alexander at (206) 375-9452.

PHOTO/VIDEO OPPORTUNITY: The students will begin installing the raised garden beds on Thursday, May 19 at different locations simultaneously. Please contact David Mance at (509) 969-6084 for help with coordinating coverage.

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