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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heritage University and University of Washington to use \$750,000 federal grant to combat wood smoke pollution in Yakima Valley

Toppenish, Wash. – Heritage University (HU) and the University of Washington will use a \$750,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on a three-year project to reduce wood smoke pollution in the Yakima Valley. The grant is funded through EPA's "Science to Achieve Results (STAR)" program.

The project known as "Next Generation Sensors and Scientists (NextGenSS)," involves UW scientists guiding students from Heritage University and local high schools how to use new, low cost air pollution sensors to study wood smoke. Armed with this data, the students will develop strategies to reduce wood smoke's effect in a highly impacted, multicultural setting.

The NextGenSS project enhances an existing successful EnvironMentors program that pairs upper-level Heritage University environmental studies students with area high school students. The students represent their community's predominantly Native American and Latino immigrant population. Wood smoke is a dominant factor influencing air quality in many communities, including the rural areas where the students live. "Involving these two groups of students will be a big part in the success of the NextGenSS project," says Dr. Jessica Black, faculty advisor for the HU EnvironMentors program. "As community members affected by wood smoke pollution, the students can give useful perspectives on identifying problem areas, and developing solutions."

Black also says the NextGenSS project will enhance the students' future capacity to contribute to environmental health improvements. The project will also yield information which can be used to develop policies and influence decision-making which improve air quality in the Yakima Valley.

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