

FULTON, MISSOURI

William Woods University

Dr. Lance Kramer, William Woods University provost, compares his student days to campus life today: “I recall John Kennedy’s assassination. I was in the Rathskellar at the University of Wisconsin, watching the TV with hundreds of other students. Today, if something like that happened, all the kids would run back to their rooms to turn on the TV. They’d be by themselves, or with a sole roommate. We don’t have the kind of ‘cohesive collective,’ if you will, that we used to. Kids are spending a lot more time in their dorms. Four out of five of our incoming freshmen want a private room.

“And if you go into dormitories today, you’ll find an electronic jungle:...elaborate stereo systems;...TV’s; ... Nintendo sets... computers; and CD burners. We have trouble retrofitting dorms electrically. They’re built to carry 1950 loads a radio, a lamp, and a hair-dryer and we’ve got a 1950’s forty-story building load-wise in each dorm room.

“This is not a Luddite anti-web response. To live in the twenty-first century you have to have a lot of that stuff, you have to have electronic access. But there’s a flesh and blood culture—interpersonal relations—that can’t be packaged. To access them, you’ve to get into meeting rooms, public lectures and concert halls.”

“I came here from Ohio State University” continues Provost Kramer “That place is so large, you could get a hundred students together for virtually anything. Here, there’s been a long and continuing discussion about how to get students more involved in non-classroom activities—how to increase the intensity of campus life. We finally came up with a completely voluntary program that was very enticing, because it hooked into financial aid. We started it with our new students in the fall of 2000. 92% of them, 193 of our new students, signed a contract to earn up to \$5,000 off their tuition for each of their next four years by attending campus activities. Current eligible activities include films, soccer and volleyball games, workshops in leadership and resume writing, art exhibits, plays, and Students For Social Work. Each student has a magnetic card and their attendance and participation in a variety of events is counted and monitored by four portable optical readers similar to the ones in grocery stores. Early indications are that student participation is increasing. We’ll carefully evaluate the program for four years until this year’s freshman class graduates.”

The program is called L.E.A.D.—Leading, Educating, Achieving, Developing—and its slogan is “*Try LEAD. It Pays.*” Dr. Kramer calls the program “very much a work in progress.” He’s quite aware of the irony inherent in the approach: do we make better student citizens by paying them to participate in campus life?

“Good old American capitalism” Kramer says. “The culture values money, its acquisition, utilization, and accumulation. And young people reflect those values. But I hope we’re fighting the good fight. We believe that our liberal arts curriculum, coupled with the LEAD program, represent our best effort to expose youngsters to values and ways of thinking that suggest there’s more than money to the good life.”

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