

Pontiac nonprofit leaders boost skills through OU certificate program

When Oakland University leaders launched a Nonprofit Management Certificate program in 2016, part of their mission was to engage and support the surrounding region, including the city of Pontiac, with which the university shares a strategic partnership.

Kevin Corcoran, dean of OU's College of Arts and Sciences, said "the certificate is exactly the kind of program that uses the talent and expertise of our faculty and staff to serve our community and strengthen our region."

With a focus on promoting community development, the university recently awarded full-tuition scholarships to six individuals in the program who have strong ties to nonprofit organizations in Pontiac.

Tamara Orza-Ramos is the founder of Instituto de Capacitación Socioeconómica (Institute of Socioeconomic Empowerment), a nonprofit serving Pontiac's Hispanic community by connecting residents with opportunities to strengthen their economic, social, educational and civic powers.



Six Pontiac nonprofit leaders were awarded scholarships in OU's Nonprofit Management Certificate program. Pictured from left: Coleman Yoakum, Kermit Williams, Tamara Orza-Ramos, Norbert Burrows, Kristen Lambert and Ryan Russell.

Kermit Williams is a Pontiac city councilman, as well as a board member for Pontiac-based nonprofits High Place Community Outreach, a summer enrichment program; Identify Your Dreams Foundation, which is dedicated to enriching the lives of children who have lost a family member to violence; and Leaders of the Future, which provides leadership training and community service opportunities for high school students.

Coleman Yoakum is the director of the Micah 6 Community, a nonprofit focused on improving health and wellness, stabilizing neighborhoods and fostering spiritual growth in Pontiac. He is also a board member for Leaders of the Future and Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County.

Ryan Russell is the assistant director of Dream Center of Pontiac, a nonprofit, volunteer-driven organization committed to building a resilient and self-sustainable community by addressing hunger, poverty, addiction, education and human trafficking. He is also the program director of the Oakland County Sheriff's Police Athletic League, which provides recreation opportunities for Pontiac youth and builds connections between the department and community.

Kristen Lambert is a registered art therapist and president of the board at The Art Experience, a Pontiac-based community nonprofit art studio dedicated to improving lives through the arts.

Norbert Burrows is president of the Street Sweepers Team, a group that works with other nonprofits to provide scholarships and mentor programs for youth in Pontiac.

The scholarship recipients are working toward completing the yearlong program, which follows curriculum guidelines from the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council and is composed of six courses:

- Management Best Practices in the Nonprofit Sector
- Entrepreneurship and Fund Development
- Financial Management and Accountability for Nonprofit Managers
- Performance Metrics in Nonprofit Management
- Leadership and Human Resource Management in NPOs
- Communication, Marketing and Outreach for Nonprofit Managers

Each course consists of classroom and online instruction, which allows for a more comprehensive education, according to program coordinator Suzanne Rossi.

"Typically, our students are working professionals who can only devote so much time to the classroom," she said. "The online aspect provides some flexibility and allows for more information to be covered."

Dembs said Oakland's certificate program fills a "definitive need" in the community, given the lack of formal education focused on nonprofit and the robust job growth in the sector.

"The nonprofit sector is the fastest-growing job sector in the country, when you take into account all the jobs in government, education, health care, human services, arts and culture, and trade associations," said Dembs. "But there aren't a lot of programs that teach people how to operate a nonprofit. The students in our program get real-world perspectives and up-to-the-minute information on trends in this sector."

For more information about the program, visit the [website](#).