HP grant will boost global educational collaboration

The University is one of 30 educational organizations across 11 nations selected to participate in HP's Catalyst Initiative, a global social innovation program designed to develop more effective approaches to education in the STEM disciplines—science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

A global social innovation program, the initiative aims to develop more effective approaches to education in the STEM disciplines—science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

It will create five global consortia in 2010, each focusing on a specific innovation theme for transforming STEM education, building on the Obama Administration's "Educate to Innovate" coalition that seeks to improve national outcomes in STEM subjects.

Pnina Ari-Gur, mechanical and aeronautical engineering, will direct the effort at WMU. The University will receive an award valued at more than $150,000. The award will include $20,000 in cash as well as equipment, software and services. Ari-Gur's team will use the award to create a 3-D virtual laboratory for engineering and applied sciences education.

The award and the 3-D virtual lab will allow the University to play a significant role in the HP Catalyst "New Learner" consortium, which the company calls "an elite cohort that will be exploring what the future of STEM learning and teaching can be." The award, according to HP, is intended to build on the Obama Administration's "Educate to Innovate" coalition, which is aimed at improving national outcomes in STEM subject areas.

"We're excited about this opportunity to explore some really innovative ways to transform methods of STEM education," says Ari-Gur. "Perhaps the piece of this project that will be most challenging and rewarding is the opportunity to collaborate in a global network with organizations that bring an incredible array of perspectives to this goal."

The HP Catalyst Initiative creates five global consortia in 2010, each focusing on a specific innovation theme for transforming STEM education. The five themes include:

- approaches to teacher preparation, online education, using technology to measure learning outcomes, and engaging students in global, collaborative learning experiences.

The WMU project is part of the "New Learner" Consortium, which will engage formal and informal education institutions as they explore ways to build a network of learning opportunities for students. The goal is to create new, engaging models of student-driven STEM-plus learning that lead to higher school completion rates and promote "learning how to learn."

Member organizations were selected through an open and competitive global call for proposals. Eligible countries for 2010 included Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Kenya, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States.

"The HP Catalyst Initiative underscores our vision of a world where innovation and collaboration are enabled by investments in technology and education," says Gabi Zedlmayer, vice president, Office of Global Social Innovation for HP. "The program is designed to help foster potential solutions to society’s most critical challenges by educating and nurturing leaders who will be critical in ensuring we develop new communities and find new ways of doing things."

WMU officials point out that the University has a track record in discovery and a diverse international component that makes it...
an ideal setting for the kind of work the HP award will foster.

"Western Michigan University is uniquely qualified to partner with HP for innovation in STEM education," notes Dr. Daniel Litynski, WMU vice president for research. "Our broad spectrum of discovery and disciplinary excellence spans science, engineering, education, the humanities, evaluation, and service learning among many others. Our faculty, staff, and students are ideally suited to bring their diverse global experience to this collaborative initiative and create new models for learning."

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