

# PRACTICES EXCHANGE

## NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 65

**Growing the Coalition** If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at [glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org).

### YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Heritage University (WA)



**Heritage University** (Toppenish, WA) is a private, non-profit, liberal arts college located in the heart of the Yakima Valley in central Washington State. Its main campus sits on the ancestral lands of the Yakama Nation, surrounded by hop fields and farmlands. In addition to its main campus, Heritage operates a satellite location in Kennewick, WA, that allows for four years of undergraduate study, and a satellite location in Pasco, WA, at Columbia Basin College, where transfer students complete the last two years of study. Heritage is a charter member of the Yes We Must Coalition.

Heritage was founded in 1982 to serve those traditionally left out of higher education—low-income and first-generation students and individuals from marginalized communities. The mission is as vital 42 years later as it was the day Heritage opened its doors. Heritage is

a commuter school, and most of the University's undergraduates are the first in their families to attend college; many are the first to graduate from high school. Additionally, 92% of Heritage's undergraduate students are Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or from two or more races. Three-quarters of its students are female, and 97% of its undergraduates rely on grants and/or scholarships to fund their education.



This fall Heritage University welcomed its largest group of new students since 2017. A total of 347 students started their educational journey, marking a significant milestone for the University and the community it serves. This remarkable achievement came about despite the challenges faced by students and families, particularly with the delayed release of funding through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The University's Financial Aid Department played a crucial role in overcoming these hurdles, working tirelessly to help students secure the necessary funding to pursue their education. In addition, the University's generous donors stepped in to fill any financial gaps, ensuring that no student was left behind due to financial constraints.

Providing a multicultural education that celebrates its students' rich and varied cultures is a founding principle that guides Heritage in all that it does. It is the only university in Washington State designated a Hispanic Serving Institution and a Non-Tribal Native American Serving Institution. Additionally, it is the only university in the country to be located on an Indian reservation that is not a tribal college.

The University is divided into the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education. Between the two, it offers 36 undergraduate degrees, with the most popular being Accounting, Business Administration, Criminal Justice, Education, Nursing, and Social Work. Additionally, it offers five graduate degrees: M.I.T., Elementary Education; M.Ed., Educational Administration; and M.A., Multicultural English Language Literature; M.S.W., Social Work; M.A., Mental Health Counseling. Since its founding, Heritage has awarded more than 10,000 degrees and has helped to strengthen the diversity of the professional fields in the communities in which it serves. Heritage also offers non-degree and certificate programs in subjects that include educational administration, medical laboratory science, and writing and rhetoric.

Heritage University is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Additionally, its education program is accredited by the Professional Education Standards Board, its nursing program is accredited by the Commission on Nursing Education, and its social work program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.

For more information, please contact Bonnie Hughes, Communication Officer, at [hughes\\_b@heritage.edu](mailto:hughes_b@heritage.edu).

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## Institutional Resources/Practices

### Point University, Student Financial Awareness

**Point University** (West Point, GA) invites applications and admits students from a variety of backgrounds. A large percentage of our student body is eligible for Pell funding; 97% of our students receive financial aid; we prioritize keeping tuition lower than the national average; and many—if not most—of our students are first-generation, who need support in a variety of ways to be successful. Point has a rich history in helping students achieve upward mobility for its students. A common struggle for students from these backgrounds is the accumulation of student loan debt, which translates to significant financial burden after graduation.

To address this critical issue, Point has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving financial literacy and planning among its students. One of the most notable efforts is an annual financial planning event organized by Jaunelle White, Vice President of Intercollegiate Athletics and Chief Student Development Officer, in collaboration with Planned to A.T, a nonprofit organization based in Atlanta, GA.

The mission of Planned to A.T. (<https://www.plannedtoat.org>) is to “...serve young people primarily from underserved communities to improve their futures, through financial literacy education.” Their motivation is to give young adults a functioning skillset for managing income for life-long financial stability, and their educational style is to engage young adults in the learning experience.

A component of the most routinely offered program (<https://www.plannedtoat.org/curriculum>) involves posing a challenging series of financial scenarios to students. The instructors, who are from Planned to A.T. in Atlanta, guide participants through taxes, paystubs, and a variety of related financial realities. Student loan debt and credit card debt are the primary concerns. Most recently 50 students participated, mostly juniors and seniors who were required to be part of the event. No credit is given for participating in the event. In the end, students leave, having learned about needs versus wants, spending habits, and how to build financially sound goals. Student feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with students conveying that they have learned a great deal from their experience and that they plan to adjust spending and saving habits immediately. One student successfully paid off \$10,000 of her debt by implementing the strategies she learned.

### Ongoing Efforts

It is our goal to hold the event annually. We would like to have sessions each semester. Aligned with the YWMC goals of helping students from low-income backgrounds, Point University continues to strategize ways to offer a college-level education while attempting to minimize—or eliminate—debt. The University seeks to do this through scholarships, donations, and partnerships with business owners. We continue to investigate ways to offer increasing value to our

students through their educational experiences, and we pride ourselves on helping our students develop essential life skills and gaining experiences that will help them succeed after they graduate.

For more information, please contact Jon Ernsberger, Chief Academic Officer, at [jon.ernstberger@point.edu](mailto:jon.ernstberger@point.edu).

## **Submissions for Future Issues**

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, [barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org).