

UO program coming to Medford for next project

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A swarm of 500 students from the University of Oregon will descend on downtown Medford next fall to ask local residents a lot of questions to help make the city a better place to live.

The students will make the journey to Medford from Eugene to collaborate with local governments on up to 18 projects, such as creating signs to help visitors find the city center.

This is the fourth year of the university's Sustainable Cities Initiative, which gives students a chance to tackle real-world issues.

Previously students worked in Gresham, Salem and Springfield.

"Every class will be visiting Medford at least once," said Bob Choquette, program manager for the university.

The students likely will work on 15 to 18 projects, such as emergency preparedness, placement of historical markers in the downtown, expansion of neighborhood watch programs and programs to reach out to the Latino community.

The city anticipates spending \$10,000 to \$15,000 toward each project. The projects already are part of the city's strategic plan adopted this year.

Students from economics, journalism and other classes will take on different projects, working with city officials, the Rogue Valley Transportation District and other government organizations.

The one-of-a-kind university program grew out of a sense of frustration that the students' skills weren't being engaged into a real-world setting, said Marc Schlossberg, an associate professor.

"The faculty was frustrated at all the knowledge we had available," Schlossberg said.

The university works with cities that have various goals but don't have the manpower to conduct the planning needed.

Schlossberg said he hopes the university can export its program to other universities and hopes to develop some kind of relationship with Southern Oregon University.

In Salem, 600 students undertook 25 projects, such as making better use of the riverfront, designing a new police facility, restoration of natural areas in an urban park and connecting parks with urban trails.

In the next few months, the city of Medford and the university will agree on which of the more than 20 projects identified by the city are taken on by the students.

Some of the more technical projects proposed include revising the housing code, developing floodplain management techniques and creating a fire department strategic plan.

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