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Social Innovation Challenge Begins at Lindenwood

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May 5, 2021

By Tori Lohmann

This year, Dr. Michael Leary, Dr. Lynda Leavitt, and Dr. Bethany Alden-Rivers brought the Social Innovation Challenge to Lindenwood. “The Social Innovation Challenge is a special professional development experience for up to 25 Lindenwood University faculty, staff, and students,” in which teams compete for the Porter Prize and a cash prize of \$500. Essentially, teams are led by a Design Thinking coach, which are Leary, Leavitt, and Alden-Rivers, and “participants engage in a series of four design thinking workshops, where they learn methods for creative problem solving.” After the workshops, the teams’ main objective is to create a solution for a unique social problem that is created by President Porter in just six weeks. “Each team will present [their] creative solution to a panel of judges, who will evaluate the proposals and award The Porter Prize.”

The main purpose of this experience is “to provide a unique and immersive experience to faculty, staff, and students in applying design thinking to a difficult real-world issue facing higher education.” This challenge provides the Lindenwood community with an opportunity to “address pressing social issues and questions in our region by [using] empathy, observation, and intensive creativity.”

This is the first year the challenge has been held, and it is a huge accomplishment for Lindenwood’s community to have such an exciting challenge like this taking place. This is a very unique experience that offers students, faculty, and staff with a chance to connect with one another to solve real-world issues. As Alden-Rivers states, “This has been one of the most interesting experiences many participants have had in higher education,” and it is an experience students cannot get just anywhere. Lindenwood values giving students real experiences, and that is exactly what this challenge is all about – giving people the opportunity to make an impact in the world. Everyone who participates in the challenge will receive a “design thinking certificate from Lindenwood University,” which will look great on the resumes of the students that participate since “design thinking is an interdisciplinary creative problem-solving approach highly valued in today’s top organizations.”

Alder-Rivers mentions that this challenge “engage[s] Lindenwood University in the creative problem-solving process to develop innovative solutions to real issues confronting the University and the surrounding community,” which ultimately connects Lindenwood to the outside community of St. Charles and St. Louis. “We need to keep finding ways to connect the life of LU with our community, and we hope that the Social Innovation Challenge will continue to help us find ways to forge these pathways,” she states, reflecting on the experience.

The Social Innovation Challenge represents Lindenwood’s desire to connect with those around us, and Alder-Rivers discusses how “it was exciting to have such [strong] support from the President and a variety of LU partners in this effort to think in new ways about what we can accomplish together at LU on behalf of our community.” The challenge was a huge success this year, and Lindenwood is lucky to have faculty, staff, and students who are committed to making our community a better place.