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WKU recognized for diversity, inclusion efforts

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Feb 3, 2018

Western Kentucky University has earned recognition for its diversity and inclusion efforts from a group dedicated to expanding access to global education opportunities.

Diversity Abroad has named WKU the Diversity and Inclusion Champion in the 2018 Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion in International Education Awards, according to a news release.

“The faculty, administration and professional team members at WKU are honored by this award,” Provost and vice president for academic affairs David Lee said. “This recognition sends a strong message that WKU is succeeding in our goal to provide transformational international opportunities through diversity and inclusion.”

Diversity Abroad, according to its website, is “the leading professional consortium of educational institutions, government agencies, for-profit and nonprofit organizations dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusive good practices ... in global education.”

The award comes as WKU continues developing and implementing a five-year plan that is aiming to make the university a more diverse and inclusive place by enrolling more students of color, increasing student success and recruiting more diverse faculty and staff.

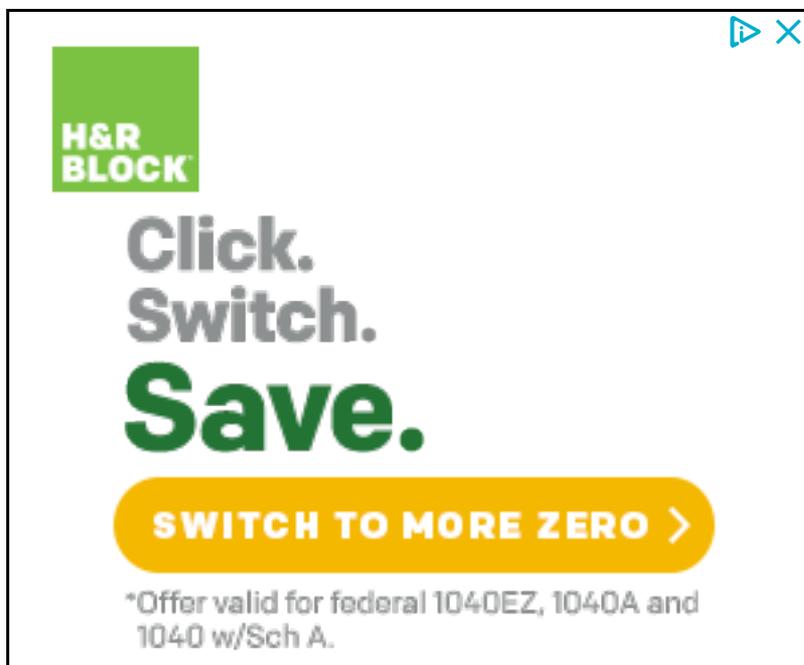
On Friday, the Council on Postsecondary Education approved diversity plans for each of Kentucky’s public universities and the 16 colleges of the state’s community and technical college system, according to a news release.

“These plans represent an unyielding commitment to diversity and inclusion where all students, faculty and staff can thrive and feel welcome on our campuses,” said CPE President Bob King in the release.

Lee said the award acts as an incentive for the university to keep moving forward.

“It inspires us to continue diversifying the students we send abroad and increase our efforts to provide life-changing international education experiences for a greater and more diverse number of WKU students,” he said.

Over the last several years, almost 40 percent of the average \$246,000 in annual study abroad scholarships the university provides went to diversifying participation in international education, the release said.



Craig Cobane, the current executive director of the Mahurin Honors College, acted as WKU’s chief international officer from 2012 to 2017. During that span, the university overhauled its policies and procedures to create more study abroad opportunities for diverse students.

Between academic years 2011-12 to 2016-17, WKU saw a growth of more than 110 percent in underrepresented minority students participating in study abroad programs, according to the release. It also saw an increase of 190 percent in African-American students participating in study abroad.

During last month's Board of Regents committee meetings, campus officials outlined efforts by WKU's Intercultural Student Engagement Center. That includes an academy that integrates first-year students of color, first-generation students, those eligible for Pell grants and underprepared students.

Through the program, students are paired with upperclassmen minority mentors and they live in a learning community in Douglas Keen Hall.

Martha Sales, executive director of the Intercultural Student Engagement Center, said at the meeting that the academy provides both academic and social support to students of color.

“There are other factors, especially when it pertains to students of color, that they need in order to feel like they belong here,” she said. “We’re just not looking at the academic and the financial perspective of what the students need but also that social-cultural perspective to keep them here.”

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