



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2019



VALUING OUR COMMUNITY ASSETS



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SUMMER SEMINAR

July 13-17, 2020

Don't forget to register for the Service Learning Seminar. During the Seminar, participants have a front row experience to learn all about service learning.

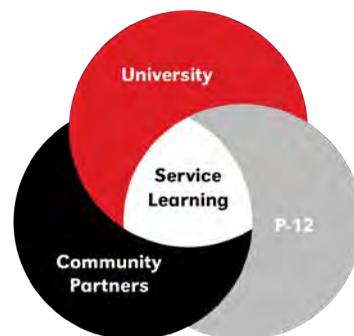
The 4.5 day professional development experience is an opportunity for P-12 and after school teachers, administrators, and UNO full and part-time faculty members to understand the fundamentals of service learning and develop a service learning project. Register at sla.unomaha.edu to reserve your spot. Visit page 13 for more information.

SLA APPROACHES

What is the difference between the types of projects? The traditional service learning projects focus on a collaboration between community partners and a UNO class. The P-16 Initiative focuses on the collaboration between a UNO class, a P-12 class, and a community partner. Throughout the newsletter, projects will be identified with Traditional or P-16 based on their project structure.



TRADITIONAL MODEL



P-16 MODEL

MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Not only do service learning projects provide connections to curriculum for UNO and P-12 educators, but many also align directly with six areas that encompass the community engagement work at UNO and in the Omaha community. Throughout this newsletter, these indicators will show a project's connection to one of these six issue areas.



**EDUCATIONAL
SUPPORT**



**SOCIAL
JUSTICE**



**ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP**



**HEALTH AND
WELLNESS**



**INTERNATIONAL
SERVICE**



**ECONOMIC
SUFFICIENCY**

LETTER FROM THE PAUL SATHER DISTINGUISHED DIRECTOR



Dear Partners,

What do you love about the Omaha community? What assets do you bring to the Omaha community? We asked these questions to attendees of the Service Learning Academy Open House this year, some whose photos grace the newsletter cover. The images communicate the significant assets that each person brings to the community, and in turn, the assets that they see in the community. I am proud that the Service Learning Academy is working to connect those assets and collaborate with diverse stakeholders to create real, transformational change in Omaha.

We do this by teaching faculty members how to use service learning as a method of instruction to make classroom learning come to life. We know service learning is an excellent way to build workforce skills and prepare students for their careers by developing skills related to public speaking, team work, problem solving, critical thinking and leadership. Recent data collected from UNO students in service learning courses indicated over 90% of students said they had developed these workforce skills in service learning courses. UNO students also shared that they found their service learning courses to be more engaging, meaningful and beneficial than lecture-only courses. We know the thousands of UNO students that take service learning courses have the opportunity to not only learn, but also practice the skills they need to be prepared for the workforce. UNO faculty take time to learn about best practices in service learning; as a result, their service learning instruction develops these student workforce skills in their service learning courses every year. One faculty member trained in service learning instruction that applies their learning to service learning courses can develop these skills in hundreds of students.

The Service Learning Academy is excited to share and build new assets with new and long-term partners. We do this because we know we are not only contributing to rigorous teaching and learning, but we are also shaping the future workforce and community. We look forward to learning and serving with you in the future!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Dierberger".

Julie Dierberger, Paul Sather Distinguished Director

PARTNERS AROUND EVERY CORNER

By: Brandon Carrillo

“What we do in the classroom,” as UNO faculty member Claudia Garcia said, “is a preparation for what we do in our communities; and because we interact with real people in real life, class materials become meaningful in unique ways.”

This very sentiment rang no truer than for Garcia’s *Saber Salud* course, which focused on Spanish for health providers within the context of provider interaction with Latinx communities. The project allowed students to utilize all of the skills they learned and practiced throughout the spring semester such as how to approach Spanish speakers respectfully and warmly, and how to communicate health facts in engaging and efficient ways.

In partnership with UNO faculty member Marcia Adler’s *Methods and Materials* class as well as several outside community partners like the Learning Community Center of South Omaha, Nena’s Market, Plaza San Luis, International Bakery, and the Public Library, students were given the opportunity to learn from health professionals and interact with people in the Omaha community. As part of their core

goal of a UNO Health Awareness campaign, students took to 24th St. on April 6th to address the local public and bring awareness to the following five health conditions: diabetes, hypertension, stress, heart attack, and stroke. Students created all materials and played an integral part in assuring that the day’s event was successful.

“The conversation is a necessary one,” as Garcia said, “and we are privileged to be a part of a community who is home to a welcoming and thriving Latino population. Our *Saber Salud* project has allowed us to be agents and participants in a Public Health Initiative in our own community. Community learning makes it possible for all of us to learn together, inside and outside the classroom.”



Traditional

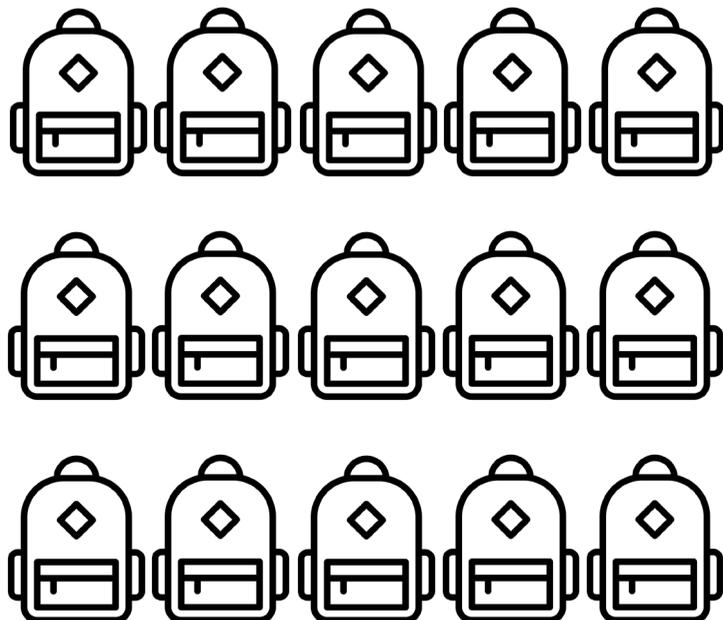
Garcia and her class exploring the South Omaha community.

DID YOU KNOW...

In Spring 2019

75

courses at UNO used service learning as a method of teaching



*Each backpack represents 5 UNO courses

DIVERSITY IN ACTION

By: Socorrito Salcido

This spring semester, UNO faculty member Laura Walls' *Spanish for Heritage Speakers* class collaborated with Norris Middle School students from Katrina Jacobberger's service learning class to participate in the Diversity in Action project.

Together, both groups of students worked to support a special South Omaha Public Library annual event titled *Children's Day/El día de los Niños*. The event is partially based on a well-known Mexican tradition that celebrates children.

The partners met throughout the semester to brainstorm ideas for educational activities. The purpose of the activities were to teach guests about the many different ethnic cultures that are embedded in South Omaha. Their goal was to include as many ethnic cultures as possible while bringing together our Omaha community. It was important to the students to represent as many ethnic cultures as possible during the activities because they wanted to promote inclusivity for every child attending the event.

After several interactions and meaningful reflection, the students created and displayed a "Trip Around the World" activity. This provided an opportunity for South Omaha Public Library visitors of the community to learn about the many cultural groups South Omaha has to offer through activities such as paper making and reading.



A Norris Middle School student teaches Omaha Public Library attendee how to make a paper box at the *El día de los Niños* event.

WATCH ME GROW

By: Amy Zeller

English Language Learner (ELL) students in Omaha are influenced by rich cultures from around the globe. Through incorporating hands-on projects into ESL courses, students not only become active agents in their own learning, but they are also able to celebrate their diverse backgrounds with the community. The service learning project, Watch Me Grow, achieved this goal by providing a unique opportunity to local students at Holling Heights Elementary aiding in the creation of a cookbook filled with student-favorite cultural recipes.

Watch Me Grow was an intergenerational collaboration between UNO faculty member Linda Loftus's *ILUNO Intensive English* and Kim Brown's Holling Heights Elementary ELL students. Overall, at least nine languages were represented in the project. Students from both classrooms were partnered randomly into groups to complete the cookbook, which fostered meaningful mentor and mentee relationships among participants.

The student groups participated in fun icebreaker activities and an interactive field trip to Lauritzen Gardens. Students practiced interviewing skills within their groups to gather important information for the project's final cookbook including recipes and family traditions. The interactions scaffolded classroom learning objectives by allowing each student the opportunity to exercise skills in vocabulary, reading, listening, and critical

thinking, which align with elementary standards.

After transcribing their interview notes and compiling the recipes, students celebrated their efforts at the final meeting of the semester in April. After receiving a personal copy of the finished cookbook, students beamed with pride knowing their contribution to the project involved bringing a small piece of home to Omaha.



Holling Heights students smile while working with an ILUNO student.



SJS students simulate corrosion and runoff during a visit to UNO's campus.



Maier searches for creatures in the water at Heron Haven with SJS students.



SJS students tour and photograph Heron Haven watershed for the first time.

ONE WATERSHED AT A TIME

By: Kayla Zebrowski



P-16

Heron Haven Nature Center's wetland sanctuary is at risk with the urbanization of Omaha and its surrounding land. Construction and alteration of land can cause blockages and pooling within a watershed and can then affect the habitat of the wetland. Urban wetlands like Heron Haven offer a unique way to filter water while providing the city with a place for Omaha residents to enjoy nature.

The Heron Haven Wetland Sanctuary is a spring-fed wetland and is one of few remaining oxbow wetlands of Big Papillion Creek. Within Omaha city limits, it provides a location for Omaha's ecosystem to survive and thrive. Some of the animals that reside in the wetland sanctuary are foxes, turtles, minks, deer, fish, and woodchucks. Wetlands store water to prevent flooding, filter, and replenish ground water.

Over the last two semesters, students from UNO faculty member Harmon Maher's *Independent Study* course worked with fifth grade students from Shelley Brown's Science class at St. James Seton School. In 2018, Heron Haven joined the team as the community partner. Together the students created a video library about springs, wetlands, and watersheds for Heron Haven Nature Center to share with its visitors. The three categories were chosen to help bring attention and awareness to visitors as they tour Heron Haven. Their goal was to communicate with the public the importance of conserving the wetland sanctuary.

UNO and St. James Seton students visited Heron Haven's wetland sanctuary and nature center. While there, they walked on the boardwalk, visited the butterfly garden, and saw various birds and animals native to Omaha. Very quickly the students realized the importance of taking care of not just housing communities but wildlife communities as well. UNO students helped educate St. James Seton students on ways to improve the wildlife community. The St. James students then created story boards to guide the video footage and overall design of the video. Students captured photographs and videos of the wildlife and wetlands to use in the topic-specific videos. Shelley Brown said,

"My 5th grade students learned, through this project, that what they learn can help others. They are educating others about science concepts while at the same time learning new skills. They became screenwriters, camera crew members, audio-visual technicians, casting directors, movie directors, actors, and editors."

St. James Seton School and UNO students were able to enjoy an exclusive family night at Heron Haven Nature Center as their final celebration to conclude the project. St. James Seton School students acted as tour guides for their families. Over 150 participants attended the movie premieres. The final videos are available on the Heron Haven's YouTube channel. The partnership between Maher and Brown has lasted many years and continues to evolve as new community partners come on board.

CULTURE IN OUR BACKYARD

By: Amanda Anderson & Mustapha Barry

For the ninth year in a row, CultureFest participants graced the UNO campus. The halls of the Milo Bail Student Center were flooded with music, dancing, food and immersion of the various cultures Omaha has to offer. Beveridge Magnet Middle School, Omaha South High Magnet School and the Service Learning Academy hosted the ninth annual CultureFest: The Art of Telling Our Stories. Over 450 participants and guests took part in CultureFest. This year, a Graduate Assistant from the Service Learning Academy signed up not only as a volunteer, but as a participant. Mustapha Barry spoke about his life's journey and the importance of sharing his culture. Barry reflected on his experience as a participant of CultureFest:



"I was honored for the opportunity to share my story in spoken word during CultureFest 2019. In the midst of other participants from various high schools and departments from UNO, I shared about life experiences, especially life changing events that occurred to me during my childhood. Just within West Africa, my life revolved around four countries. My parents were born in a French speaking country then immigrated to an English speaking country where I was born. After my elementary school, we had to flee for our lives due to a civil war.

Two years later, at the age of 14, I had to leave my family and step out to the wider world in search of educational opportunities. A year later, I enrolled in school to further my education in a different country where I was a refugee but later naturalized. After high school, I moved to the United States for college education leaving my entire family in Africa.

I shared my story with other students in a spoken word hoping that they would be inspired. It was my hope that by listening to my struggles for education, my audience would realize that they can help make the world a better place to be if they take advantage of the educational opportunities they have and make the best out of it.

I also believe that by sharing my culture with my audience and colleagues, it will promote acculturation, unity and acceptance among students and the public in general. As a Black Muslim Immigrant, I consider sharing my culture and experiences as an effective way of building bridges, fostering peace and understanding and eradicating hate, stereotypes, and discrimination in our societies.

As I listened to the stories, poems, and expressions of other students who presented in this forum, I saw a display of strength, intelligence, and ability to present and the power to confront societal vices and promote cultural harmony. By listening to them, I felt belonged, supported, and welcomed."

"We don't have to travel miles to visit other countries. We can simply step outside our back door," said a CultureFest participant. CultureFest has continued to showcase many diverse communities found in Omaha.



Mustapha Barry speaks to a crowd about his culture and upbringing.



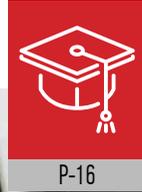
Flamenco Omaha Kids dancer showcases her award winning dancing.



UNO Friends of Japan play a Japanese game with CultureFest attendees.

PARTNERING WITH A PURPOSE

By: Stephanie Diaz



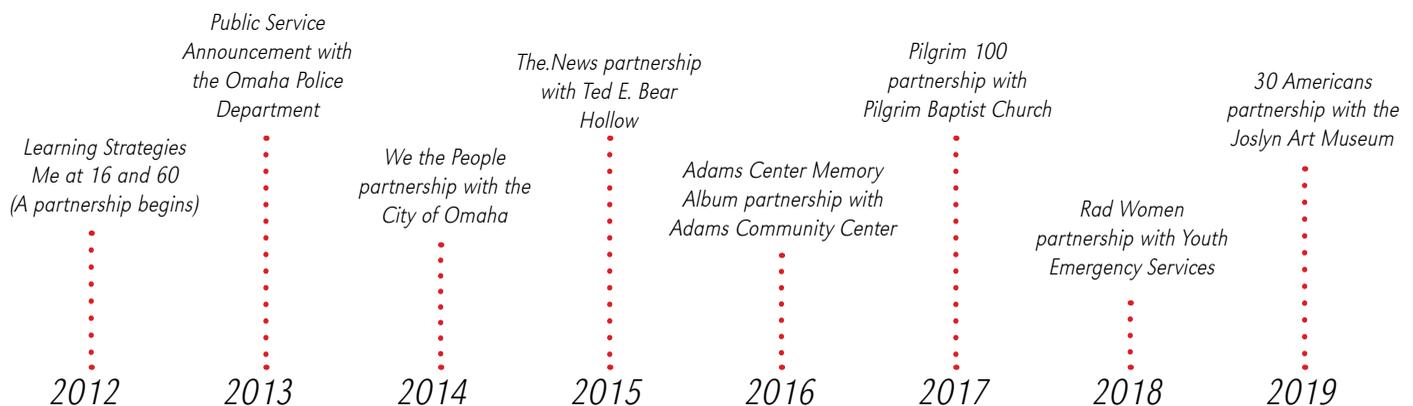
Rad Woman exhibit at the Community Engagement Center. Photo credit: The Community Engagement Center

To Blackburn Alternative Program and UNO Speech Language Pathology students, community means more than a location or people living in the same place. Community is finding that shared feeling among yourself and others, resulting in a common goal. The collaboration between Blackburn Alternative Program teachers and UNO faculty member Mitzi Ritzman has been in the works since 2012. Together they created a space for their students to grow both their creative side and language skills while coming together to talk about real world issues and reach a common goal.

Throughout the years, the students from Blackburn and UNO Speech Language Pathology worked during the spring semester to develop speech and vocabulary skills. With the new skills, the Blackburn students were able to use their creative talents to create art through various media. In 2018, students, teachers, staff and Omaha community members created a list of RAD Women of Omaha whom they felt embodied what

it means to be a woman who pushes the glass ceiling. The Blackburn students created screen prints, paintings, posters and clay sculptures of the RAD Women of Omaha. A book was also created to showcase the women's extraordinary lives. The exhibit was originally installed as a one-day pop-up at the Omaha Design Center and was nominated for an Omaha Entertainment and Arts Award in the category, Best Presentation in a Non-Traditional Format.

In the spring of 2019, Blackburn and Ritzman joined forces with the Joslyn Art Museum as a community partner. The Blackburn students created podcasts discussing various topics such as race, identity and social issues. Over the years, the UNO students developed professional skills while the Blackburn students tapped into their creative and innovative spirit. The graphic below showcases the ever evolving partnership with Blackburn and Ritzman as they created multiple collaborative relationships within the Omaha community.



BEYOND THE WALLS

By: Brandon Carrillo



UNO student watches the camera during the filming of a mental health worker from the Omaha community.

As a community, how much do we really know about each other? The needs of some are not always overtly visible. For UNO faculty member Peter Szto, this poses a challenge to teach mental health concepts. “Mental health concepts are inherently difficult to understand because they are internal human processes and experiences that are invisible to the external observer,” said Szto.

Szto’s *Social Work in Mental Health* course posed this challenge to students by having them provide support to the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program at Heartland Family Services in Council Bluffs, IA. ACT strives to deliver comprehensive, community-based mental health assistance to the most vulnerable persons afflicted with severe and persistent mental illnesses.

ACT services currently “include case management, initial and ongoing assessments, psychiatric services, employment and housing assistance, family support and education, substance abuse services, and more,” according to the organization’s website. Students throughout the spring

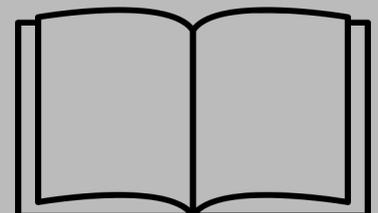
semester produced resource training manuals and an ACT website to help accomplish and promote ACT’s goals of broadening the organization’s reach to more community members to offer these services. The products created in the service learning project were done with longevity and sustainability in mind in order to maximize the potential long-term impacts that this work can have for people all around the Council Bluffs community.

The impact and importance of the service learning project extends far beyond the products students were able to provide for program. As Szto explains,

“The goal is to de-mystify and confront stigma towards mental illness through direct experience. When students have direct interactions with staff and clients ... the encounters offer time to reflect and re-examine past assumptions and uninformed biases.”

DID YOU KNOW...

In Spring 2019, 54 UNO faculty members incorporated service learning as a method of teaching into their classroom.



STEPPING TOWARDS COLLEGE

By: Jessica Foreman

For over five years, the College Prep and Family Learning project has offered families from the Learning Community Center (LCC) of South Omaha the opportunity to learn more about college readiness and to begin exploring opportunities for continued education. This semester, families were paired with students from UNO faculty member Dawn Mathis' *Introduction to Teaching ESL* course. The project provided UNO students with the opportunity to begin working with English Language Learners. By preparing specialized lesson plans to teach ELL families, students gained experiences relevant to their academic and career goals of teaching ELL students. This experience offered families and UNO students valuable information and experience as well as the opportunity to connect across cultures, creating valuable relationships between students and families. Anne O'Hara, Family Learning Director at LCC shared that,

"Families where English is not the first language spoken at home benefit greatly by learning about college while their children are still young. Children and parents who are interested in attending college in the future leave the program with a clearer vision and steps they would need to take to make college a reality for their family."

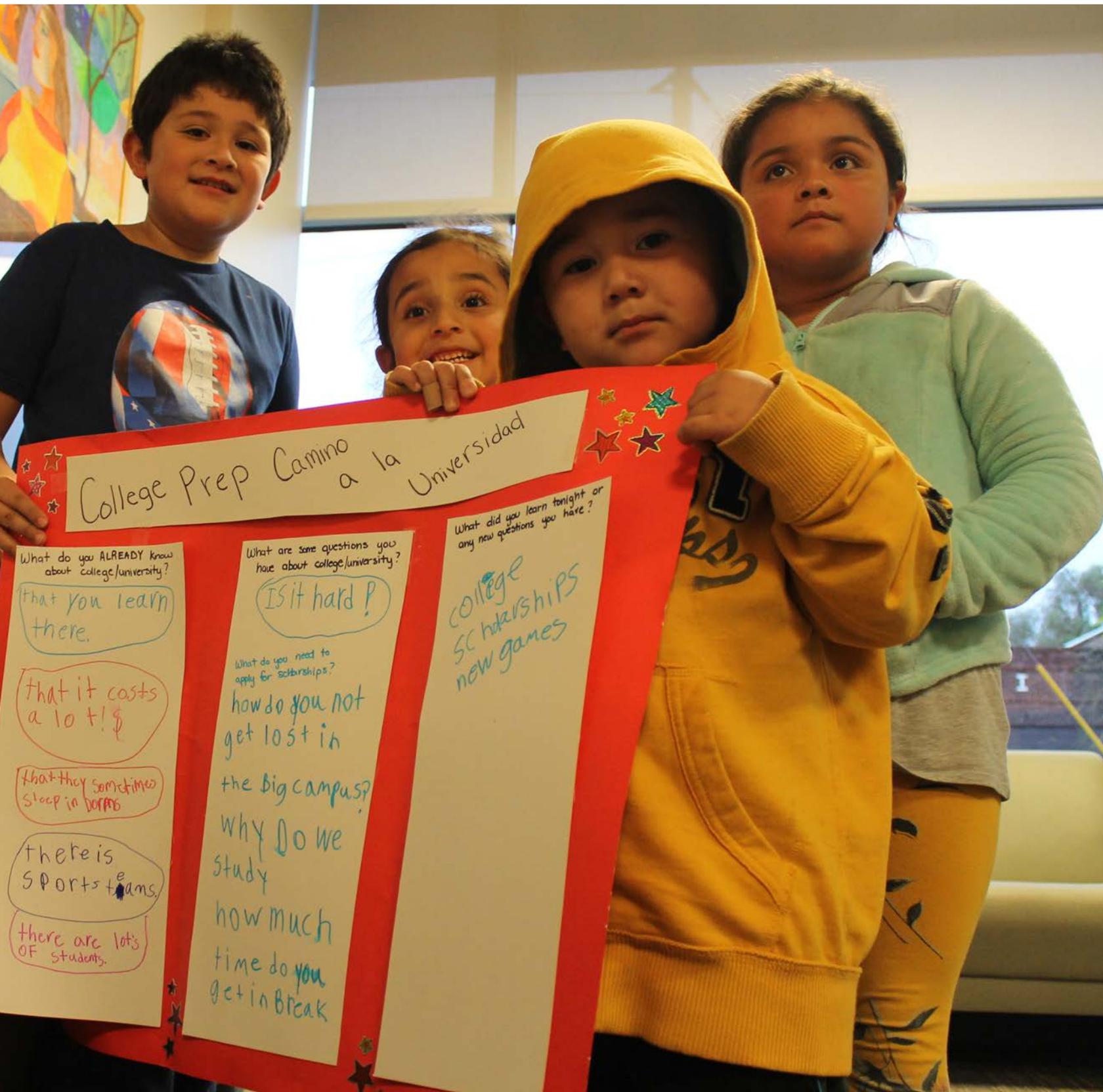
UNO students and LCC families met at various locations, including the Learning Community Center, Gateway Elementary and both Scott and Dodge Campuses at UNO. Families and UNO students enjoyed a meal at each event where they discussed their goals and interests, and took time to get to know one another. After dinner, families and students participated in various activities that had been arranged by the UNO students.

On the days they visited UNO's campuses, students guided LCC families on tours of the various buildings, and answered questions that were specific to the career interests of their assigned families. The College Prep and Family Learning project has so greatly impacted many families who utilize LCC that the program expanded to two nights a week so more families and students could enjoy the various resources and experiences this project provides.



Left: UNO student enjoys a meal with his LCC buddy. Right: LCC children showcase a poster created during the interactions between LCC and UNO students.





ADAPTATION IS KEY

By: Tracy Gilman



P-16

Students from UNO faculty member Bruce Chase's *Honors Colloquium* class partnered with Kristin Utterback's Health Care Academy class from King Science & Technology Magnet Middle School to learn from and support clients at MSforward. MSforward was created in 2003 as a person-focused place where those combating the effects of disease or aging could go to engage in movement and strengthening in a supportive, inspiring, and safe space. The idea for this new project was born through a desire to provide students an opportunity to learn, interact, assess, and understand more about individuals living with chronic conditions. MSforward founder Daryl Kucera thought this chance to connect his clients to students so they could share their stories and experiences would be equally empowering. Chase, an expert in molecular genetics and neuroscience, worked with students and MSforward clients to provide education around genetics and how they play a role in chronic disease.

Throughout the semester, the King Science Health Care Academy students visited MSforward to practice health care assessments, build relationships, and learn more about the conditions that their MSforward partners manage every day. During two of these visits, UNO students were able to provide added support to the middle-schoolers through conversations about new terminology while helping them teach MS Forward clients about what they were learning. Kucera observed that

these interactions were valuable to the MSforward clients because often times these folks struggle with loss of purpose; being able to interact with the students gave them a newfound sense of purpose and a chance to give back to the community. This project was a wonderful hands-on learning experience that challenged students to think about whole-person centered care.



An MSforward client smiles as he uses a modified version of an upper body workout created by King Science students.

16,209 hours dedicated by P-12 students in Spring 2019



LASTING IMPRESSIONS

By: Brandon Carrillo



Traditional

The Service Learning Academy prides itself in the sustainable, genuine connections continuously built everyday between UNO and the surrounding Omaha communities. The many relationships formed between the two are important in understanding how we are best able to listen and share assets. UNO faculty member Christine Toh's *User Experience Design* course offered within the College of Information Science & Technology is just one leading example of the kind of collaboration that strives for shared ambition and mutual success for students and community partners alike.

During the spring semester, senior-level and graduate students tackled the issues of housing quality and homeowner rights with the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (or MAPA for short) and the City of Omaha Planning Department as their guiding partners. Specifically, the project focused on efforts in piloting a Smart City test bed in the Aksarben

area near UNO. Toh shared, "Through this project, students are engaged with solving real-world challenges brought by our community partners ... [and] perform a range of problem exploration, definition, and solution finding activities." The end goal? Students delivered empirically-supported solutions in the form of prototypes of platforms and technologies for which members of the Omaha community can meaningfully interact in order to address these particular issues.

Some examples include the creation of a new mobile app, a redesigned website, or even the implementation of improved and innovative public transit. The impacts of this project were remarkable, especially for Toh's students.

"The service learning project in this class simulates this type of relevant challenge and equips students with the techniques, skills, and experience to respond to this complex design environment," she noted. "The impression left on my students will far outlive the duration of the class."

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH STUDENT LEADERSHIP

By: Megumi Makisaka



P-16

The members of UNO Student Government Freshman Leadership Council (FLC) and Student Government at Nathan Hale Magnet Middle School collaborated on a year-long service learning project aimed at meeting the needs of the community while cultivating their own leadership goals. FLC is an extension of UNO's Student Government for freshmen students who apply and interview to be selected. The 20 freshmen are introduced to Student Government through legislation, committee work and the opportunity to serve as Freshmen Senators. Many FLC members started their Student Government career in middle school and high school Student Governments much like Nathan Hale's. Nathan Hale's focus is primarily on leadership through encouraging their students to take on leadership roles and responsibilities at school and in the community at large. UNO FLC and Nathan Hale's Student Government has been fostering the partnership through a service learning project for nearly 10 years.

Throughout the 2018-19 academic year, FLC and Nathan Hale Student Government members contributed to the Omaha community through various service activities. The two groups collaborated to find various service activities that could support the Omaha community. They partnered with two community organizations, Children's Hospital and Medical Center Omaha and Keep Omaha Beautiful, Inc. In the fall semester, the students decorated winter themed door hangers

to brighten up children who stayed at the hospital. In the spring semester, they organized two activities for Children's Hospital: making colorful placemats for patients and the "Color My World" drive in which they collected coloring books, crayons, color pencils, and markers for patients and their families. In addition, with assistance from Keep Omaha Beautiful, the students cleaned up Benson Park located a few blocks south of Nathan Hale.



FLC members clean up Benson Park during one of the many FLC Nathan Hale gatherings.

85,630.25 hours dedicated by UNO students in Spring 2019



MORAL COURAGE

By: Katie Pankonin



P-16

What does it mean to be an upstander? Is it choosing to take action? Is it standing up for what you believe in? Students from UNO faculty member Rosemary Strasser's *Introduction to Psychology* course paired alongside senior students from Marian High School's Honors World Literature course to discover the answer to this question. An upstander is a person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause.

Both student groups worked with Ayanna Boykins from The Anti-Defamation League to create curriculum based on the importance of being an upstander rather than a bystander within society today. The curriculum is being used by both the Anti-Defamation League and The Institute for Holocaust Education for trainings held at their agencies.

For this brand new project, the students conducted a majority of their meetings through Zoom, an online conferencing tool, throughout the

semester. This allowed students to participate in active discussion from the comfort of their own classrooms, the perfect resource for a cold Nebraska winter to help maximize their time together. This online tool allowed for the project to exist with time constraints that challenged the partnership interaction.

In March, Marian students attended a speaking event at Marian High School with Michael Krausman, whose father was a Holocaust survivor. Krausman's speech focused on the importance of being an upstander, the very center of Moral Courage. The event was broadcasted through Zoom for UNO students.

In celebration of their work, an end of the semester lunch and learn was held at Marian High School. This was an opportunity for all involved to reflect upon their experience learning about what it means to be an upstander and how they have been and will continue to be upstanders in their community.

SERVICE LEARNING AWARDS



Outstanding Service Learning Faculty

Dr. Cecilia Tocaimaza-Hatch

Cecilia Tocaimaza-Hatch is an Assistant Professor in the department of Foreign Languages and Literature. Her philosophy of teaching is grounded in socio cultural theory, emphasizing the role of language as a tool that enables and mediates the development of cognitive skills. The integration of service learning into each of her courses has been a primary avenue through which her students engage in interactions that foster true and long-lasting learning. Dr. Tocaimaza-Hatch has presented on the impact of community engagement at local and national conferences, and was a 2017 American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education Faculty Fellow. Service learning will continue to be a central part of Dr. Tocaimaza-Hatch's activities as a faculty member at UNO. Her immediate endeavor involves international service learning through a study abroad experience in Spain the summer of 2019.



Outstanding Service Learning Graduate Student

Kabao Lor

Kabao Lor is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology with an expected graduation of 2020. Service learning has been a part of her college experience since her undergraduate studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. During her time at UNO, she has participated in six different service learning projects, each targeting a unique audience. Service learning has provided Lor with a greater understanding of how she can effect change in her community. Lor's commitment to excellence throughout these experiences speaks to her genuine commitment to serving individuals with communication disorders. She has even chosen to continue her involvement with one of her service learning partners, the Autism Society of Nebraska.



Outstanding Service Learning Undergraduate Student

Bradley Carlson

Bradley Carlson is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biology and participated in the Animal Behavior Laboratory project. During the service learning project, Carlson supported sixth grade students from St. James/Seton School by providing instruction and support for data collection that would benefit the staff of the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium. In addition to the technical support he provided, one of his greatest contributions was being able to turn complicated scientific information into language sixth grade students could understand. When reflecting on his service learning experience, Carlson shared that service learning has made him a more empathetic and approachable individual and that it allows him to fulfill "a simple desire to make the world a better place."

DID YOU KNOW...

2,232

P-12 and UNO students participated in service learning projects in Spring 2019

REDLINING

By: LaTrina Hall

The phrase “tearing down the four walls of the classroom” to expand learning took on new meaning as 45 P-12 teachers, UNO faculty members, and representatives of community organizations boarded a bus to explore parts of Omaha affected by redlining. The event, hosted by the UNO Service Learning Academy with the support of representatives of Omaha community organizations, gave participants an opportunity to learn about redlining through maps, relevant data and historical documents. The ultimate goal for the experience was for conversations to lead to the development of service learning projects for students and address historical injustices.

An additional goal for the event was for attendees to see the present-day impacts of redlining practices from long ago. Laura Alexander, a UNO faculty member who attended the event shared,

“I learned many things I did not know and got to see both the detrimental effects of redlining and how communities are working diligently to revitalize.”

Redlining refers to the literal practice of the New Deal era Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) marking neighborhoods with minority occupants in red deeming them “high-risk for mortgage lenders” according to Camila Domonoske in an October 2016 article for NPR. This discriminatory practice fostered a pattern of arbitrarily denying or limiting financial services to specific neighborhoods and people of color.

The event organizers opened the day with a reflection activity that guided participants to think about what areas in Omaha they spend most of their time working and socializing, which put into context how and why people gravitate to certain neighborhoods. The discussion shifted to how the idea of the redlining tour came about and what redlining is, which was contextualized with data and historical and current maps.

The tour consisted of three planned stops: 24th and L Streets, the Double Tree Hotel at 16th and Dodge Streets, the original UNO campus at 2221 N. 24th St. and the Malcolm X birth site located at 34th and Evans Streets.

Some revitalization efforts were explored through talks provided by various community organization representatives during different stops on the tour.

The work will continue this summer as attendees of the tour and participants of the 2019 Service Learning Seminar gather to further discuss redlining, its social and economic implications for the Omaha community, and the ways that service learning can address these issues. Planning is underway for future opportunities to bring interested educators and community partners together to explore redlining in these contexts.

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Cover Photo: Attendees from the 2018 Service Learning Academy Open House reflected on two questions; “What do you love about the Omaha community?” and “What assets do you bring to the Omaha community?” Over 100 attendees reflected on these questions while enjoying food, observing posters and artifacts about service learning and participating in other engaging activities during UNO’s Durango Days.

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