



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY

# P-16 INITIATIVE

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## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

Not only do Service Learning projects provide meaningful connections to curriculum for P-12 and UNO educators, but many align directly with the University of Nebraska at Omaha's university-wide goals of focusing on:



SUSTAINABILITY



EARLY CHILDHOOD



STEM



GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Throughout this newsletter indicators will help to show a project's connection to one of the four goals.



## COMMUNICATION & LEADERSHIP SKILLS LEARNED THROUGH TEACHING

By Jodi Korth

Kinex tower building competitions, robots, and personality quizzes were just a few of the tools UNO engineering students used to teach concepts of communication and leadership to Field Club Elementary students throughout their eight-week P-16 service learning project. Dr. Stuart Bernstein's *Interpersonal Skills for Engineering Leaders* course aimed to provide a solid base of communication and leadership skills for future engineers – concepts that were learned by the students becoming teachers themselves.

"Reading about interpersonal skills is not the best way to learn them," shared Dr. Bernstein. "The best way is to put them into practice for themselves and that is what working with the Field Club students enabled them to do. Their interpersonal growth over the course of the semester was phenomenal."

During the semester, UNO students traveled to Field Club to work with students in the Completely KIDS after school program. They covered such topics as active listening, perception, self-concept, nonverbal communication and

handling stress. UNO students shared the project helped them to understand course content on a deeper level. "The most important thing I took away from the service learning project was the concept I taught to them. I actually experienced communication skills while teaching kids about them," said one UNO student.

The project culminated at Field Club Family Night where all participants shared their findings and the fifth graders were presented with a hard-cover book summarizing topics covered during the semester.

## FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

By Rebekka Erks



Over the course of two weeks, students from Melanie Caudillo's Art class at Accelerate Alternative Program and Bart Vargas's 3-D Art class were challenged to create skulls for a Día de los Muertos celebration at the Intercultural Senior Center (ISC) in Omaha.

“Personally, for me, I am very proud of my students for overcoming language barriers, embracing new materials and collaborating with such diverse groups.”

The students first met with the seniors at the ISC to discuss the project. Differing cultural backgrounds and languages provided challenges for both the seniors and the students as they finalized their design plans. Then the students met to

create the skulls using recyclable materials such as milk jugs and cardboard boxes. They molded the materials into skull shapes and painted them solid colors, working together to bring personality to the skulls by adding top hats and hair as well as many other knickknacks. Finally, the students returned to the ISC where the seniors helped them put the finishing touches on the skulls. Some added sparkly paint while others added trinkets. The skulls then served as Día de los Muertos decorations.

Overall, the students and seniors benefited from the project and were able to gain knowledge that surpassed any course requirements. Professor Vargas said, "Personally, for me, I am very proud of my students for overcoming language barriers, embracing new materials and collaborating with such diverse groups. The smiles on the faces of everyone involved warmed my heart."



## INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES ETHNIC POTLUCK

By Olivia Tarry



Food is often an expression of culture and identity, and serves as a celebration for many shared communities. Over the past two months, English Language Learner (ELL) students from Millard Central Middle School and Dr. Maria Arbelaez's *World Civilization I* class collaborated to create the "Ethnic Potluck Cookbook" as part of a project with Inclusive Communities' Omaha Table Talk programming.

Each recipe in the cookbook reflected on a different culture and included personal testimonies about the recipe's importance. One K-12 student wrote about her recipe, "I love tortas because they remind me of my grandma before she passed away. She used to make them for my birthday and special occasions. They also remind me of living in Mexico." Many cultures were represented in the cookbook and shared with a variety of people in the Omaha community at the Omaha Table Talk Ethnic Potluck event in October.

In December, the Millard Central Middle School and UNO history students gathered to discuss what culture, food, and language means to them and how it compares to others around them. They used the "Ethnic Potluck Cookbook" to share ideas and experiences in their own lives.



## DELICIOUS FOOD AND GOOD COMPANY FOOD FOR THOUGHT DOES IT AGAIN

By Christina Deutsch

This fall marked the beginning of P-16 project Food for Thought's sixth year. The partnership between Ms. Thelma Bell's Blackburn Alternative culinary students, Dr. Christopher Kelly's *Programs & Services for Elderly* students, and Adams Park Senior Center is an event to which everyone involved looks forward.

Every Wednesday, Blackburn students prepared dishes in their culinary class then traveled to Adams Park to serve the food to the seniors. UNO students provided support and also helped build relationships across all generations. Although new to teaching culinary at Blackburn, Ms. Bell has managed to help her students

become master chefs, leaving seniors eager to taste what they'll cook next.

As the year went on the crowds grew, all culminating with an extravagant Fall Harvest Celebration on November 4th. Alize, a student in the culinary class explained, "I really enjoyed the time I got to spend with the seniors. It gave me a lot to think about." The semester-long program ended with the seniors coming to Blackburn to celebrate with the students everything for which they are thankful, one of which is the ability they have to share these meals together week after week, participating in intergenerational conversations, and forging meaningful relationships along the way.

## EXPLORING CULTURE THROUGH ART

By Carol Redwing



Holling Heights Elementary School students got to be college students for a day as part of a year-round endeavor where students are paired up with UNO's Dr. Jasney Cogua-Lopez's *Intro to Latino/Latin American Studies* course to encourage dialogue between university students of diverse backgrounds. This partnership empowered youth to consider college as a place for them through cultural exploration via the arts.

An important thread within these conversations and exchanges was that there are many students of different ethnicities and cultures who have advanced their lives through education. Holling Heights instructors Kim Brown and Pam Erixon say an important part of fostering the realization that college is a possibility

for all included parental involvement as a means to provide exposure to UNO.

Furthering the exploration of college life, students met at the Bancroft Art Market and UNO's campus to understand cultural representations in art. Local artist Paula Wallace, of the WhyArts? organization, gave an interactive lecture on their final event of the semester.

Ultimately, using artistic expression speaks a language that has the ability to bind all cultures, and in this setting it helped students see a new potential. Of the experience, second grader Christian described UNO as "a dream house," when discussing his "new dream" of going to college.



## THE SCHOOL TO PRISON TRANSFORMATION

By Daniel Walsh

"Does this stuff really work?" a youthful offender from the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility (NCYF) asked a UNO graduate student from social work instructor Jeffrey Knapp's *Generalist Practice I* course. NYCF's Warden Ryan Mahr believes so. Over the course of four visits to the correctional facility, UNO students had an opportunity to develop skills and techniques essential to generalist social work practice by working with clients who have a significant amount of realistic barriers to overcome.

In the process of developing a discharge plan for inmates, one UNO student believed "it was the best way to learn to talk and listen to someone." Throughout the project, the youthful offenders had an opportunity to receive a detailed and individualized discharge plan appropriate for the community to which they are returning, while NCYF benefits from giving the students a unique insight into the corrections environment. Another UNO student shared that there is also a community benefit, where if even "one inmate can become successful then they can contribute back to the economy."

In the end, Warden Mahr reflected, "I'm not aware of any correctional facility who has implemented a program like this anywhere. I believe this partnership and program has been a win-win-win for everyone involved."



## EXPLORING NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AND MUSIC

By Angeela Shreshtha



Sounds of drums and singing were joined by feet moving to Native American dances during a November afternoon at the Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition (NUIHC). Liberty Elementary School students from the Native Indigenous Centered Education (N.I.C.E) program and Dr. Chris Kelly's gerontology students worked together on the NUIHC service learning project.

The students spent an afternoon with the seniors at the NUIHC location, learning and doing craftwork together along with listening to Native American stories, and



learning the basics of Native American drumming, singing and dancing. They engaged in an intergenerational dialogue with the elders as a means of learning about their health and nutritional needs.

The project provided experiential learning opportunities for the students and met the identified community needs – realizations that were captured as part of in-depth reflection activities.

The UNO students recorded reflections through journaling, presentations and academic papers. Strong partnerships were formed and effective learning has taken place as a result of this well planned and implemented project. Of the experience, Anthony West, Liberty Elementary School teacher said, "My students were engaged, and they enjoyed participating in the activity. They loved making bracelets and necklaces with the Native American elders."



## INCLUSIVITY IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

By Kelly Prange

In UNO's Health, Physical Education, and Recreation building, 40 students from Bryan High School enrolled in a lifetime wellness class collaborated with graduate students taking Dr. Danae Dinkel's *Implementing Physical Activity in Diverse Populations* class.

Together, they participated in a service learning project that included partnering with the Omaha nonprofit Ted E. Bear Hollow, which provides grief counseling

## BLACK VOTES MATTER

By SaraAnn Staley

Benson High School African-American History classes and a UNO *Black Politics* class joined together on and off campus this semester to empower local voters. Benson High School teacher Rebekah Sidzyk and UNO Professor Preston Love, Jr., worked together to find common ground in their curriculum to best benefit learning in both classes. With the support of the League of Women Voters, these students met three times to discuss the history of black politics and how they can make a difference in today's political landscape.

These exchanges sparked the idea for an exciting event that made making a difference a reality. The students worked together inside UNO's Milo Bail Student Center Food Court, where they provided fliers and engaged in conversation on



the importance of voter registration and impact of every vote. As a result, they collaboratively registered 25 new voters!

The event benefited both UNO and Benson students. African-American history, specifically voting history, came to life with vivid discussions and voter registration activities. One Benson

student was grateful for the project which encouraged voter participation from African-Americans. Another student said the experience "inspired her to want to learn more about African-American history." Taking the learning beyond the textbook and into making an effective change for our community made this a unique semester to remember!

and support services to families suffering and healing from the loss of a loved one.

As a way to engage youth in physical activity through their grief and healing process, the students designed a series of physical activities that will be implemented at Ted E. Bear Hollow's teen camp in the spring. The final product, "The Amazing Ted E. Bear Hollow Race," included a series of games, or challenges, that the teens will complete.

Each activity was designed to serve two purposes:

1. To allow teens to be physically active
2. To teach the kids what grief is like and how they can cope

OF THE PROJECT, ONE STUDENT COMMENTED:



I had a great time working with Julianne from Ted E. Bear Hollow and Marquita from Bryan High School, they were both very helpful and it was good experience to work with a different groups in the community and develop a fun physical activity program that the kids will enjoy!





## ...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL: POSITIVE POLICING

By Susan Wallis

As seen recently in news headlines, cities across the country are contemplating how to build relationships between communities and law enforcement. Blackburn Alternative Program, Inclusive Communities and UNO *Social Work and Civic Engagement* students have embarked on a project aimed to do just that.

To start, Blackburn Alternative Government students job shadowed teachers, counselors and school resource officers to

become student managers. In this role, students addressed tardiness with fellow students, allowing them to gain empathy for the challenges people in positions of power face when enforcing rules. In addition, these students were trained by Inclusive Communities—a local nonprofit engaged in social justice and advocacy—on power, authority and conflict de-escalation. As Krystal Boose, Chief Operations Officer at Inclusive Communities explained, “We begin by

teaching youth how to have healthy dialogues around how power, respectability politics, and law enforcement influence each other and their lives.”

The project concluded with a lunch gathering between Blackburn students and area law enforcement, moderated by Inclusive Communities facilitators, and UNO students. Students reflected on their “lessons learned” as student managers and engaged in meaningful discourse

about power, authority and their shared experiences.

Cathy Nelson from Blackburn, reflected, “We see disconnect between law enforcement and teenagers and created an opportunity to humanize the badge—an empathy project for our students, and an opportunity for law enforcement officers to see the scholarly and thoughtful side to our students.”

## BIRTH TO 5: PROMOTING LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

By Olivia Tarry



Reading children’s books promotes a rich language and learning environment and is long recognized as a favorite pastime for many, yet some children have little chance to enjoy this experience.

Over the past nine years, Dr. Mitzi Ritzman, a UNO professor in the Special Education and Communication Disorders department, has partnered with the Omaha Public Library and Humanities Nebraska to meet this need.

UNO students in the *Birth to 5: Language Disorders* course visited the Charles B. Washington Branch Library for a six week PRIME TIME Family Reading program promoting the importance of language and literacy. The students selected specific children’s books and applied knowledge from their course to engage in

dialogic reading with North Omaha families. As Dr. Ritzman stated, “It’s a methodology where adults and kids look through the picture books together and talk about the book, going beyond the written word. So instead of just reading the text, the adult, in this case the student modeling for the parent or caregiver, uses those language techniques to promote a dialogue.”

The program allows families to join together to share breakfast and a reading experience with their children. Caregivers are encouraged to join in the conversation and utilize the strategies modeled by UNO students. As one mother stated, “I am so grateful for this program. It helps enforce what we practice at home every weekend in our community.”



## INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Hello! I'm Samantha Kanouse and I am thrilled to have recently joined the Service Learning Academy team. In my role as the Program Assessment & Evaluation Associate, my focus is on assessing the effects of service learning on the participating students in a multi-faceted framework. I am excited to share with you some of our P-16 Impact data as well as build relationships with new individuals who are interested in conducting or furthering their research in their service learning projects.

One of the things that I see through research of service learning projects is the positive impact they have on students in their current and future lives. The Service Learning Academy conducts research to identify the impact of service learning on student learning, engagement and self-efficacy.

As a result of these assessments, we have learned that 84% of elementary-aged students think that what they are learning in school is important for their future, and 76% feel like they can make a difference in their school or town. 99% of middle and high school students have goals and plans for their future and 86% agree that their school work is meaningful and important. Finally, 95% of college students agree that they can make a difference in their community and take action on causes in which they believe.

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## LETTER FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Service learning as a method of instruction cannot be done alone; partnerships are an essential component of engaged teaching and learning. During the past five years we have seen partnerships in all stages of development with the same goal: to develop strong, sustainable partnerships where assets are shared and engagement is high for all. These relationships require trust from partners and often include very human moments that remind us why this work is essential. This year the UNO Service Learning Academy and our partners have been acknowledged for two awards and one UNO faculty for her collaborative service learning instruction.

The Mountain-Plains Museum Association Excellence in Programming Award highlighted P-16 service learning projects with the Joslyn Art Museum, Blackburn Alternative Program, Our Lady of Lourdes School and UNO. At the Heartland Campus Compact Conference in Kansas City the UNO Service Learning Academy P-16 Initiative and Omaha Public Schools received the Outstanding Community and Campus Collaboration Award from Nebraska Campus Compact. Dr. Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo, an assistant professor at UNO, received an award for Excellence in Community-Based Teaching and Scholarship from Nebraska Campus Compact. Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo has a history of leadership in service learning in the Omaha community with many partners that have included: South Omaha Boys and Girls Club, Learning Community Center of South Omaha, Omaha Public Schools and Glacier Creek Prairie Preserve.

This newsletter is a testament to our partners who say "yes" to innovation and rigor, are flexible to meet mutual goals, and have fun along the way. Thank you to all our partners for a truly remarkable five years—we simply cannot wait to dream with you in the next five years of creating engaged citizens and the healthiest possible Omaha.

Sincerely,

Julie Dierberger, P-16 Coordinator

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