

Published Sep 12, 2011

Published Monday September 12, 2011

Culture walks rich in lessons

By [Joe Dejka](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



Joe Dejka/The World-Herald

UNO associate professor Gigi Brignoni, left, leads students through South Omaha Friday as part of a culture walk to better understand diversity.

When Hannah Gaebler was growing up in St. Louis, the two biggest racial groups, by far, were blacks and whites.

She didn't have much contact with Latinos.

So Gaebler, 27, found herself in unfamiliar territory as she strolled South Omaha's 24th Street commercial strip; munched a lunch of tacos, beans and rice; and heard a panel of local community leaders talk with pride and passion about Latino culture.

Gaebler was among about 150 college students from the [University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Education](#) who strolled South, north and central Omaha on Friday to experience the racial diversity awaiting them in urban schools.

"I think it's been really neat," said Gaebler, a senior. "I've never been in a Latino community before. It's totally new to me."

Professors arranged the "culture walks" at three separate sites to provide insights for students who are about 18 months away from student-teaching.

Local school districts are increasingly pressing teacher colleges to turn out students who can teach in diverse classrooms, said Lana Danielson, chairwoman of UNO's teacher education department.

"All of this is part of that growing awareness of helping teachers to understand the students that they teach, and that they have relevant instruction for those children," Danielson said.

Educators who understand local culture can adopt more effective strategies, Danielson said — for example, tailoring how or what they teach.

Enrollment in the Omaha Public Schools is about 38.5 percent white, 30.7 percent black and 26.7 percent Hispanic.

At Omaha South High, however, Hispanics make up nearly 57 percent of students, and at some surrounding elementary schools, nearly nine in 10 students are Hispanic.

Blacks are similarly concentrated in north Omaha. A culture walk there originated at [Salem Baptist Church](#), 31st and Lake Streets. Professors also held one at UNO, where students learned about refugees.

Gigi Brignoni, associate professor of teacher education at UNO, led the South Omaha walk and served as moderator for the panel discussion inside [El Museo Latino](#), 25th and L Streets.

About 40 UNO students — almost all female — sat at brightly decorated tables and listened to panelists of Latino descent with ties to South Omaha.

The speakers stressed common themes: Latinos, in general, value culture, religion and the opportunity to build a better life for their children.

"Culture is very important to the Latino," said Brignoni, who told students she is of Puerto Rican descent. "It's a part of the identity, to keep it alive. It's a grounding. It's to know that you can still be who you are in a new land."

She encouraged the future teachers to get to know their students and understand that they are not "empty vessels" but come to class with life experiences, both good and bad.

Paco Fuentes, site director for [Boys & Girls Clubs of the Midlands](#) in South Omaha, said his parents — especially his father — wanted their children to be proud of their Mexican ancestry.

His parents felt that entrenching their children in culture would help them persevere against adversity, including the persecution and stereotyping of the 1950s and 1960s, he said.

"My parents always brought up our culture, and our culture was always surrounding us," Fuentes said. "Even to this day, my mother's house, which is about a mile away, when you're at her house, in her home, in her yard, it's like you're in Mexico. It looks like you're in Mexico. There's all the ceramics, Our Lady of Guadalupe."

Fuentes advised the UNO students, however, that the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are broad labels within which there is great diversity.

"When you talk about Hispanics and Latinos, you're talking about 39 to 40 countries that are on several continents — North America, South America, Europe," he said.

Fuentes encouraged the would-be teachers to make note of Latino accomplishments. Many discoveries considered American originated in Latin America or Spain, he said.

The Aztec calendar is the most accurate calendar known to man, he said. Cowboys came originally from Spanish-speaking countries, a consequence of the Spanish bringing horses to the New World, he said. Corn was cultivated in Mexico hundreds of years before it appeared in North America, he said.

"Now with Internet it's just a couple of clicks away to find something that you can pull to fascinate and engage your kids," Fuentes said.

Ana Barrios — director of the [Juan Diego Center](#), who came from El Salvador — told students that Latino parents, some from small villages back in the home country, recognize the value of education.

Many will do anything they can to ensure their children graduate from high school, but they need support, Barrios said.

Parents often work unusual hours at difficult jobs for low wages, and their children sometimes lack necessities, she said.

"It's not that a child is not interested or doesn't have the capacity," Barrios said. "It's more likely to be there are some things that require we add a little extra care and support for that child, and the child will flourish. Let me tell you, those kids are smart, very, very smart kids, and they are very eager to learn."

Immigrants are "almost masters" in problem solving because they are trying to survive in a new country, she said.

Living simultaneously in two cultures — Latino and American — increases their ability to be critical thinkers, "because you are pushed to use your creativity quite a bit," she said.

Lunch was catered by El Alamo restaurant on 24th Street, a traditional meal of beans, rice, beef taco, chicken enchilada, chips, salsa, guacamole and sour cream.

Brignoni then led the students on a half-mile walk past the ornately tiled raised flower beds, colorful storefronts with peppy Latin music blaring and street vendors with carts along the strip.

The walk left a good impression on Anne Boyd, 20, a student who was born and raised in Hastings, Neb.

"I feel like they're a really welcoming community," Boyd said.

Contact the writer: 402-444-1077, joe.dejka@owh.com

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Published Mar 19, 2012

Published Monday March 19, 2012

World-Herald Editorial: Time off to help others

If visions of college students drinking and partying are what come to mind when the term "spring break" is used, consider this: For the 10th year in a row, hundreds of University of Nebraska at Omaha students will help others rather than themselves.

No sandy beaches, but that never seems to bother the young men and women — more than 1,700 this year — who participate in Seven Days of Service, a volunteer event that began Saturday. Students disperse around the Omaha metropolitan area to help Habitat for Humanity, Lauritzen Gardens, the Stephen Center, Keep Council Bluffs Beautiful and 10 more nonprofit institutions.

The students renovate, repair, paint, build, plant or, in general, do what needs to be done for the nonprofits they help and for the people the nonprofits help. The project began in 2003 with seven students from a service-learning class. They rounded up a total of 70 volunteers, who worked on two houses. The project grew fast. Really fast.

At first, Seven Days of Service was the only community service project at UNO. Now there are 16 service days during the academic year that collectively, over the past 10 years, have contributed \$2.3 million in work to the Omaha area. Some 4,000 hours of work were given just last year during Seven Days of Service, according to UNO's Kathe Oleson Lyons.

Lyons, who coordinates service projects, said students tend to return year after year, sometimes asking for the same assignments. They "take ownership" of their projects, she said. About 95 percent tell organizers they will be back the next year to volunteer again. Some, Lyons said, return to the nonprofits they helped and become regular, year-round volunteers.

A few young volunteers do jobs directly related to their university studies, Lyons said. Construction science majors may help plan construction projects. Public relations majors interact with the media. The project teaches them a lot about leadership and event management, she added.

All of the various projects are popular with some volunteers, she said, but one activity — demolition — is an attention-getter. "They really love any kind of demolition, tearing things down," she said.

Many colleges do spring-break service projects, she said, but UNO is unusual in that it concentrates on the local community. Often, she said, students elsewhere travel to other parts of the country or around the globe to do their good works. It's important for UNO students "to learn that they can serve right here at home" and that there is a local need, she said.

UNO's wonderful focus on community stewardship and its efforts to instill in its students a broader view of Omaha and its people are as welcome as the spring crocuses now blooming. The long-term commitment the program fosters is welcome indeed.

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A banner for Alegent + Creighton Health Wellness Centers. The banner has a red background with a repeating circular pattern. On the left, white text reads "COMMIT TO BE FIT IN 2014. WE'RE MORE THAN A FITNESS CENTER!". In the center is a photograph of a person's feet running on a treadmill. On the right, the text "Alegent + Creighton Health" is in white, with "Wellness Centers" below it in a smaller font.

COMMIT TO BE FIT IN 2014.
WE'RE MORE THAN A FITNESS CENTER!

Alegent + Creighton Health
Wellness Centers

Published Apr 5, 2012

Published Thursday April 5, 2012

UNO teams stack cans to feed hungry

By [Maggie O'Brien](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



JEFF BEIERMANN/THE WORLD-HERALD

Pat Tompkins, left, and Whitney Prenzlow construct the UNO logo. Their team from the campus recreation department won the award for the most creative display by staff.

Members of UNO's student choir were kind of used to winning "most enthusiastic team" every year at a contest to help the [Food Bank for the Heartland](#).

After all, they sang the school's fight song while competing. You really can't get much more enthused than that.

This year was different. Wednesday, the team won for stacking the most cans of food — they had collected 603 in all — during the University of Nebraska at Omaha's 18th annual Bell Tower Challenge, held on campus next to the Memorial Campanile.

The event requires students and staff to stack cans as the bell tower strikes noon. They have a minute to complete their work. Three teams competed, and all three won a category.

"We sing great," said Dominic Green, 24, a senior in music education from Omaha. "But it was nice to win for having the most cans."

A team of staffers from the campus rec department used cans to create UNO's new logo. They won the most creative award for staff. Members of the National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association fashioned "UNO" with their cans. They won the most creative award for students.

Even though every team won, the food bank says the event's real winners are the hungry people who need help.

In its first 17 years, the contest has generated 47,000 pounds of food. Wednesday's event collected an additional 922 pounds of food for the food bank, said Angela Grote, a spokeswoman for the group.

"UNO has done so much," she said. "It's been a great way for college students to get involved and help out people in need."

Health education professor David Corbin created the competition and has run it since its inception. Corbin, who retired in August, says he saw it as a way to work for charity, have fun and honor the bell tower.

"We had the bell tower, and we had no traditions on campus," said Corbin, who still keeps an office at UNO. "Obviously, we wanted to start one, especially one that was for a good cause."

Pat Tompkins, a 24-year-old graduate student from Michigan and member of the rec department team, said he's competed for three years. He thought forming the new logo from cans of corn and green beans would be "easy and creative."

"We get bragging rights," he said with a chuckle. "But the main thing is, it helps the food bank."

Contact the writer:

402-444-3100, maggie.obrien@owh.com

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AdChoices 

Published Apr 25, 2012

Published Wednesday April 25, 2012

UNO study: Minorities more often arrested, jailed

By [Leslie Reed](#)

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — The pattern is clear, University of Nebraska at Omaha researchers say.

Black, Hispanic and Native American youths in Nebraska are more likely to be caught up in the justice system at nearly every turn.

Not only are they more likely to be arrested, they also are more likely to be prosecuted and sent to jail.

“People like to point fingers at the police department, but the disparities occur throughout the system,” said researcher Anne Hobbs, director of UNO’s Juvenile Justice Institute.

UNO was hired to conduct the federally mandated study on behalf of the Nebraska Crime Commission. At stake was more than \$1 million in federal funding that helps pay for juvenile services in Nebraska.

The study examined cases from 2010 and 2011. Some of the findings:

» African-American, Native American and Hispanic youths are more likely to be taken into custody after being stopped by police for suspected law violations.

Black youths, for example, comprise 6.9 percent of the state’s population ages 10 to 17. But they comprise 26 percent of the youths who were arrested.

» Although 37 percent of youths stopped by police are black, Native American or Hispanic, only 28.7 percent of youths referred to pretrial diversion programs are members of minority groups.

» Black, Native American and Hispanic youths are more likely to face charges in adult court, rather than being transferred to juvenile court.

» And black and Native American youths were more likely to be sent to jail — 27 percent of Native American youths and 18 percent of black youths sentenced in adult court got jail time.

Only 11 percent of white youths and 12.5 percent of Hispanics youths got jail time.

The study cost \$40,000, paid through a \$200,000 federal grant for juvenile diversion programs.

Christopher Harris, coordinator of Nebraska’s Disproportionate Minority Contact program, said the findings are consistent with previous research.

The Crime Commission official said Nebraska law officers and the justice system have made tremendous strides in the past decade to reduce disparate treatment of minority youths.

“This is not finger-pointing. This is a positive piece of information to help us move forward,” Harris said of the study. “There’s a lot of good work being done. This report is just another step for Nebraska to move forward.”

The study notes that youths charged with multiple and more serious offenses are more likely to be prosecuted in adult court and sentenced to jail.

But Hobbs and co-author Elizabeth Neeley said their analysis showed that the seriousness of the offense does not explain why minority youths are disproportionately involved in the court system.

Lacking data, the study did not attempt to evaluate how socioeconomic factors or prior court records influence racial disparity, Hobbs said.

She hopes to study those issues soon and is working with law enforcement to analyze factors that influence how frequently police stop minority youths for questioning.

One solution would be for the juvenile justice system to adopt more objective criteria for when youths can be arrested and detained, and for when they are eligible for diversion and probation, said Neeley, who is director of the court system’s Nebraska Minority Justice Committee. More alternative services also would help, she said.

Neeley noted that minorities continue to be over-represented at the Douglas County Youth Center, despite alternative services that have significantly reduced its population.

“Developing those alternatives didn’t reduce the disparity — but it did increase our confidence that we’re locking up the right kids,” she said.



Contact the writer:

402-473-9581, leslie.reed@owh.com

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Published Jul 9, 2012

Published Monday July 9, 2012

Girls blossom at UNO science, math camp

By [Maggie O'Brien](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



JEFF BEIERMANN/THE WORLD-HERALD

Nia Allison, 12, of Omaha finds the answer to professor Margaret Buerman's question as two dozen girls from Girls Inc. take part in the problem-solving game "fraction frenzy" last month in Omaha.

Thirteen-year-old Sotonye Green came to a startling realization as she extracted DNA from a banana and unscrambled a cryptic "spy" message: Science and math are fun.

"We did some pretty cool stuff," said Sotonye, who will be an eighth-grader this fall at Westside Middle School in Omaha. "I learned things I never learned in school before."

Sotonye was one of about 30 middle school girls to attend a four-week program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha last month highlighting the importance of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Eureka is a national program created and funded by Girls Inc. It was offered for the first time in Nebraska this year with the help of a \$40,000 grant.

The girls who participated all are involved with Omaha's Girls Inc. chapter and attended at no charge. If they attend the program every summer until they graduate from high school, they'll have an edge when they apply for college scholarships.

"The data shows that girls who stay in the Eureka program go to college," said Carol Mitchell, a UNO professor of science education who helped coordinate the program on campus.

The program's goal is to give young women the confidence to take more classes, including advanced classes, in STEM fields. Girls Inc.'s research showed that girls are less likely to take advanced classes in math and the sciences or go on to study those fields in college.

As a result, the organization says, women make up less than one in five people employed in computer science, mathematics, engineering and the physical sciences.

"In the past it's always been white males," Mitchell said. "We haven't been intentional in our effort to promote science, math, technology and engineering among women. This is an effort to change that."

In 2009, 401 girls participated in the program nationally.

During their month at UNO, the girls learned fractions using colorful blocks. On another day they extracted DNA from a banana and built a DNA strand using toothpicks and marshmallows. They also learned about how math — in this case, cryptography — can decipher a secret message.

"My message said 'Go to Paris,' " said Nia Allison, 12, a soon-to-be eighth-grader at McMillan Magnet Middle School.

The classes were taught by UNO science and math professors, and Girls Inc. staffers were on hand to run the show. When they weren't doing cool math and science stuff, they learned to swim or played another sport.

Girls begin the program before they enter eighth grade. If they remain in it, they attend the summer classes at UNO the first three years, then can earn an internship in a STEM field the final two years.

“What we are doing is different ways to engage girls,” Mitchell said. “We want them to feel confident to ask a question in class and comfortable saying ‘Hey, I can do that.’ ”

Contact the writer:
402-444-3100, maggie.obrien@owh.com

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Published Jul 15, 2012

Published Sunday July 15, 2012

Omaha teens scoop up work skills in summer program

By Ross Boettcher

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



CHRIS MACHIAN/THE WORLD-HERALD

Rishard Pelton, a participant in the Summer Works program, shovels sand back into the sandbox at Pipal Park last week. "If I weren't doing this, I'd probably just be laying down in bed, but I'm glad I'm doing this because I'm up early in the morning, workin', then I get to go home and be about my day," the Omaha North student said.

It's morning and already steamy, and Atiya Olloway and Rishard Pelton are in good spirits while hard at work.

Donning a uniform of green T-shirts, with glistening beads of sweat on their foreheads and a pair of large shovels, the Omaha North High School students busily scoop sand from the sidewalk near the playground at Pipal Park.

They're both smiling. It's payday, and they're nearing the end of week six of the nine-week Summer Works program, an offering organized through the University of Nebraska at Omaha that, now in its second year, is putting 150 teenagers — most of whom live in north Omaha — to work at city parks, golf courses and other outdoor venues.

"We get to help clean up the community, so that's been cool," said Pelton. "I wanted to do this this summer to keep me out of trouble and to stay active.

"If I weren't doing this, I'd probably just be laying down in bed, but I'm glad I'm doing this because I'm up early in the morning, workin', then I get to go home and be about my day."

Summer Works is funded by private donations from the Peter Kiewit Foundation, the Robert B. Daugherty Charitable Foundation and the Sherwood Foundation. The program caters to students between the ages of 15 and 18 who live mostly in north Omaha and who have no prior work experience. The students are paid \$7.25 an hour.

The official goals of the Summer Works program are simple:

- » Respond to the needs of Omaha's high school youths.
- » Teach them new skills. Give them work experience. Expand their understanding of being community members.
- » Help beautify and restore the parks and other properties.

But under the surface, the program is much more than that.

It also sets up the participants with savings accounts through Bank of the West and bus passes so that they can arrive to work on time and have a safe

ride home after the workday is over.

The bank accounts, said Lyn Ziegenbein, executive director of the Kiewit Foundation, were a tricky hurdle to overcome. Since the students are minors, opening a bank account typically requires a parent to co-sign the account, which would also give the adults access to the kids' money, Ziegenbein said.

In an effort to avoid that, Bob Dalrymple, an executive vice president with Bank of the West, agreed to co-sign every single one of the accounts, which require the students to physically go to the bank in order to withdraw funds. Program organizers hope the students will develop an understanding of how banks work and build relationships with their bankers.

There have been other, similar programs in the past that have failed, Ziegenbein said. The hope is that, after this year, organizers will create a blueprint that other communities can use to organize similar privately funded programs, she said.

"I could see this working nationally," Ziegenbein said.

On a normal day, the teens arrive at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, 6316 N. 30th St., between 8:30 and 9 a.m. From there they meet with their teams, typically made up of about six students who are led by team leaders — schoolteachers, college graduates or master's-degree students who are hired at the beginning of the summer to help coordinate the program.

After a short discussion and a light breakfast, the teens turn in their cellphones, which are stowed in plastic bags, and are issued their work assignments for the day. On this particular day, a handful of groups are assigned to Pipal Park, near 78th Street and West Center Road, where they were tasked with cleaning up the playground, painting fresh lines in parking lots, raking leaves, spreading mulch and brushing a fresh coat of green paint onto the park's picnic tables.

Sam Bojanski, 25, who next year will be a teacher at Omaha South High School, is the group's senior leader, directing both the students and their group leaders. Bojanski is a no-nonsense fellow. Before doling out instructions for the group, he has a few nits to pick.

"In the morning, I don't want a 'what's up?' or a head nod," he barked. "I'd like to hear a 'good morning.'"

"That's it."

That strict approach, he said, is important to convey because that's how it is in the real world.

"I've worked with kids for a long time, but this is a whole different ballgame when you're out here paying them and asking them to do things that they really don't want to do," he said. "It's pretty tedious work, but they do a really good job."

While the tasks may be tedious, many of the students appreciate the opportunity. The 150 admitted into the program this year were whittled down from more than 550 applicants. A year ago there were 500 applicants for 100 positions.

Olloway, while taking a short break from shoveling, said she's grown a new appreciation for keeping the community's parks clean.

"Now, I get mad when I see people throwing stuff on the ground," the 17-year-old said. "And mulch. I haven't ever noticed that before I started this program. It does make stuff look a lot nicer."

If it weren't for Summer Works, Arkeisha Williams, 15, also an Omaha North student, might be doing something illegal, she said.

"It's helping me stay out of trouble," she said. "Summer Works has helped me a lot, because I would be doing bad stuff right now, so instead of getting into trouble, I work."

After lunch at noon, the teens work until 3 p.m. and then head home. On Fridays, they participate in community field trips. Last week they listened to a presentation from Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine, Douglas County District Judge Peter Bataillon and defense attorney Jim Schaefer. Previous trips have included the Old Market, the Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium, the Joslyn Art Museum and a lunch at a sit-down restaurant.

"For a lot of the kids, they've never done a lot of these things," Ziegenbein said. "They're learning a lot more about their community and learning about the kinds of jobs that are available."

The positive impact isn't just on the kids, though, said Kathe Oleson Lyons, Summer Works director. The City of Omaha's parks department also reaps massive benefits.

Kenny Humpal, a city parks employee who works as a liaison with Summer Works, said the teams of program participants are able to complete jobs in hours that would take city employees days or even weeks to fit into their schedules.

"It's normal stuff that city employees would do, but we get so busy with mowing, tree work, trash, that it's just nice having the extra sets of hands," Humpal said. "Some of the tree work (the kids) do, at Lake Cunningham, they cleared this huge overlook hill of trees, and when you have 30 people doing it, it goes quick."

“If the Parks Department were to go do it with two or three guys, it would take days.”

This year, the program is expected to cost roughly \$750,000. Ziegenbein said there's a “very strong” possibility that the program will be back for a third year next summer with a new group of students. Each person can participate in the program only once.

“What we're trying to do is empower these students who want to learn about the world of work,” she said. “So many programs that have been there offering programs to these kids haven't kept their strengths up and have disappointed the students.

“Ideally, I would love to see us continue this.”

Contact the writer:

402-444-1414, ross.boettcher@owh.com

twitter.com/rossboettcher

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Published Oct 8, 2012

Published Monday October 8, 2012

'Community engagement' more than buzz to UNO

By [Leslie Reed](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

University of Nebraska at Omaha officials often invoke the term “community engagement” as they discuss their vision for the UNO of the future.

The campus will break ground later this month on a \$24 million Community Engagement Center, to be completed in 2014.

After the 60,000-square-foot facility opens, UNO will play host to a major conference of urban and metropolitan universities focusing on community engagement.

Yet it's not always clear what community engagement means.

The phrase should not be dismissed as the latest buzzword for community service or volunteer work, said Barbara Holland, a Portland State University professor and an international expert in the growing discipline.

Holland said UNO is on the cusp of a significant shift in academic culture, one in which a university's faculty and researchers work hand-in-hand with members of the community to address the problems that community faces.

Supplementing the more traditional approach of conducting and publishing research, community engagement calls for academics to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, local governments, schools and others to discover the best solutions to social problems.

It often involves learning in which students take part in tasks and activities outside the classroom.

A traditional academic researcher might gather statistics about the incidence of Type 2 diabetes in a community, Holland said.

But a community engagement researcher would work with people in the neighborhood to learn about food availability, lifestyle and habits, employment and wages and other factors that might contribute to the incidence of diabetes.

Holland on Wednesday visited UNO to conduct a forum on higher education organization, service learning and community engagement.

It was the latest in a series of visits Holland has made to the Omaha institution in the past five years.

In Holland's view, UNO's emphasis on community engagement can help put it at the forefront as the baby boomer generation ages and Generation X and Generation Y begin to dominate faculty ranks.

“It's a very, very smart and timely strategy,” she said. “Whether they meant to or not they're creating an environment that's going to make them very attractive and very competitive to a new generation of faculty.”

Holland's own career intersects with the development of the community engagement discipline.

She holds a journalism degree from the University of Missouri and spent 17 years working in institutional advancement and media relations for colleges and foundations.

Growing weary of seeing colleges and communities “talk past one another,” she made a midlife return to the classroom, earning a doctorate at the University of Maryland.

That led to stints at the University of Southern Colorado, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis and the University of Sydney in Australia, where she worked from 2007 to 2011.

Holland said she is excited about the facility being built at UNO.

The building will house a public service resource center, a service learning academy, a public service student leadership program and a staging area for community engagement initiatives.

“This is the first place I know of that's actually building a facility explicitly meant to be a shared space for shared work,” she said. “Many other institutions will be watching to see how this goes.”

Contact the writer: 402-473-9581, leslie.reed@owh.com



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Published Oct 24, 2012

Published Wednesday October 24, 2012

'Cutting-edge' buildings to transform UNO

By [Leslie Reed](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



The Biomechanics Research Building, shown in a rendering above, will be the first facility of its kind in the world and the first building on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus wholly dedicated to research.

With groundbreakings today, UNO launches two highly anticipated construction projects: a \$6 million Biomechanics Research Building and a \$24 million Community Engagement Center.

Officials say both projects have the potential to transform the University of Nebraska at Omaha — the biomechanics laboratory because it may be the first facility of its kind, and the engagement center because it could expand UNO's growing metropolitan community service mission.

"Both of these new buildings, funded with private support, are truly cutting-edge," UNO Chancellor John Christensen said. "Biomechanics research puts UNO on the map both nationally and internationally. The engagement center ... is already attracting attention from nationally renowned engagement scholars."

The 23,000-square-foot Biomechanics Research Building, scheduled to be completed by August 2013, will house the Nebraska Biomechanics Core facility and related programs, said Nick Stergiou, an Isaacson professor of health, physical education and recreation and director of the core facility.

Stergiou described it as "the first stand-alone building on the planet dedicated solely to biomechanics research." It also is UNO's first building wholly dedicated to research, he said.

Biomechanics uses mathematics and engineering to understand the mechanics of human motion. It can be used to improve athletic performance, but also is used to prevent and treat physical ailments. Biomechanics researchers also develop robotic prosthetics to aid disabled people and injured veterans.

"It's not just me, and it's not just UNO that will benefit," Stergiou said. "It's Nebraska and it's Omaha."

UNO DODGE STREET CAMPUS



SOURCE: UNO

MATT HANEY/THE WORLD-HERALD

The 60,000-square-foot Community Engagement Center, to be completed in 2014, will serve as UNO's front door, officials said. It will be located near the bell tower, to make it easy to find for visitors from off-campus.

Both ceremonies will be held at a parking lot near the Health, Physical Education and Recreation Building, with the Biomechanics Building ground-breaking set for 3 p.m. and the Community Engagement Center's two hours later.

The Ruth and Bill Scott family were the lead donors for the biomechanics laboratory. The Barbara and Wally Weitz Family Foundation, Union Pacific and the Scott family were lead donors for the engagement facility.

Ruth Scott said she is inspired by Stergiou's research.

"I'll never forget the first time I met Dr. Stergiou and heard about his amazing research," she said. "He and his staff are improving the lives of people of all ages

throughout the world.”

Barbara Weitz said she anticipates that the Community Engagement Center will unleash energy and excitement over UNO's collaborations with nonprofit agencies, government subdivisions and citizens.

For example, three UNO staff members collaborate with Building Bright Futures on a grant-funded initiative to improve K-12 school attendance. Student volunteers with Maverick Solutions, a student advertising agency, developed public relations materials for the collaborative.

In addition, more than 100 UNO courses now require student volunteer work.

“It (community engagement) is deeply entwined in our mission; it's really where we've been going in the past several years,” said Sara Woods, associate dean in the College of Public Affairs and Community Service. “The center is really going to put us on the map.”

UNO officials expect both buildings to be completed in time for national conferences in Omaha over the next two years — the American Society of Biomechanics in September 2014 and the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities in 2015.

Contact the writer:

402-473-9581, leslie.reed@owh.com

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Published Nov 13, 2012

Published Tuesday November 13, 2012

Business pitches win cash at UNO competition



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

During a pre-contest coaching session at Pitch Pizzeria on Sunday night, University of Nebraska at Omaha professor Dale Eesley, seated at center, and entrepreneur and Pitch's founder Willy Theisen, standing at center, listen to student Chad Zimmerman give his "elevator pitch." Zimmerman's idea is a cutout system for motorcycle exhaust pipes that controls noise levels.

Mike Santo has a problem.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha IT innovation major who moonlights as a disc jockey can't efficiently search through his audio files without disrupting the flow of music.

So Santo developed an advanced audio library management tool that recommends songs to DJs. It works like Pandora, a service that lets you enter a song or artist and then plays similar selections. Santo's invention allows a DJ to manipulate the playlist.

Santo and nine other UNO students competed Monday night in a elevator-pitch contest. ("Elevator pitch" means the summary of an idea should be delivered in the time span of an elevator ride, or about 30 seconds to 2 minutes.)

The UNO entrants had 90 seconds to explain their product and its feasibility, market sales potential and benefit to society. The contest was sponsored by the Center for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Franchising at UNO's College of Business Administration.

The top three winners received cash prizes of \$500, \$250 and \$100 and free consulting to help develop their product.

Santo took home the grand prize and, because his product already is developed, will use the money to hire a designer to "make it look cool."

While it was the idea that got Santo and the others into the contest — the 10 were chosen from a pool of 180 — it was their 90-second pitches that gave winners the edge, said Dale Eesley, director of the innovation center.

"Ninety seconds goes by so fast, so you can't explain in detail how your product works," he said. "The key is to get the audience and judges interested. You have to explain there's something wrong in the world and you can fix it with your product."

Before the contest started, Willy Theisen, an old pro at starting businesses, showed the students how it's done. The founder of Godfather's Pizza and, more recently, Pitch Pizzeria gave his own pitch, describing a scenario of a 27-year-old asking a bank for a \$50,000 loan to start a pizza place.

The entrepreneur was nervous and uncomfortable when he asked the banker to take a chance on his idea, one similar to Big Fred's and Pizza Hut, Theisen said.

"(The banker) said when they come in, they wanted to make sure I'm there every night," said Theisen, revealing that the anecdote actually was the story of how he got Godfather's off the ground.

He followed the banker's advice and has been in the restaurant business ever since.

It was the second time students heard from Theisen.

At a pre-contest coaching session Sunday night at Pitch Pizzeria, students practiced their presentations and were critiqued by Theisen and other experts on how to perfect them.

"Yours is a team approach. I like that," Theisen said to one group. "There's strength in numbers."

"Get to the point faster. And your hand in your pocket? That's a no-no," UNO speech instructor Marlina Davidson said to another.

"A lot of it's theater. It's performance," Eesley said. "It's that you care enough about your idea to have passion."

Allison Watson won second place for her idea for a website that provides support through live chats to people affected by cancer while generating funds for new cancer research ideas.

Taking third place was Chad Zimmerman, who proposed a cutout system for motorcycle exhaust pipes that controls noise levels.

Eesley said the best thing about the contest — which is in its third year — is that it engages students from all areas of study. He has seen aviation and theater students apply and win.

Without the contest, Eesley said, those students might have never considered looking into entrepreneurship.

"The great thing about this is you can have a great idea in chemistry or it could be in gerontology," Eesley said.

"It gets students from lots of majors involved and says 'Hey, entrepreneurship has something to offer.'"

Contact the writer:

402-444-1192, emily.nohr@owh.com

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Published Nov 14, 2012

Published Wednesday November 14, 2012

UNO program puts bright but poor students on college path

By [Leslie Reed](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



MATT MILLER/THE WORLD-HERALD

Denise O'Gara, now retired from OPS, volunteers as a counselor at Sacred Heart School. O'Gara was able to attend UNO through the Goodrich program, which did much more than pay her tuition. "You could get tutoring help, you could get counseling, you could just get people to talk to. It felt like a family, and I loved it."

Denise O'Gara was 19 years old when she hit Omaha in 1972, suitcase in one hand and electric typewriter in the other. She had \$800 saved from her \$1.60-an-hour, minimum-wage job as a cashier at a discount store in Florida, where her parents lived. She intended to make something of herself. "I grew up poor," she said, "but I was not going to be poor forever."

O'Gara got her shot when she learned of an innovative scholarship program launching that fall at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. It would pay full tuition and fees for 100 bright but poverty-stricken students.

The Goodrich program — named in honor of the late State Sen. Glenn Goodrich, who helped wheedle money from state coffers for its support — put O'Gara on the path toward a master's degree in guidance and counseling and a career of more than three decades as a community counselor in Omaha.

Forty years later, she is among more than 1,400 alumni who have earned degrees and now contribute to their communities as lawyers, educators, nurses, doctors, social workers, artists, police officers, writers and others.

The program is working to improve records of its alumni and recently established a Facebook page to connect students with alumni, said faculty member Michael Carroll.

Carroll quickly ticked off a number of alumni, including perhaps a dozen lawyers in Nebraska, a half-dozen teachers, and people who have served on local governing boards, including: Mark Martinez, a former Omaha Public Schools board member who now is U.S. marshal for Nebraska; Teresa Coleman Hunter, who heads the Family Housing Advisory Service; Mark Fleisher, a psychiatry professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; Larry P. Bradley, a managerial partner with KPMG in New York City; Bart Vargas, a local artist; Troy Romero, who became a Goodrich faculty member; and Randy Stevenson, a partner with Omaha's Baird Holm law firm.

The Goodrich program is not simply a scholarship payment. Recognizing that most of its students are the first in their families to attend college, and thus lack role models and support for an unfamiliar experience, the Goodrich program requires students to take a common core of classes during their freshman and sophomore years.

It also has half a dozen faculty members permanently assigned to the program to work closely with the students and help catch them when they stumble.

"They called it the learning center," O'Gara recalled. "You could get tutoring help, you could get counseling, you could just get people to talk to. It

felt like a family, and I loved it.”

The award-winning program eventually proved so successful that it became the model for the Thompson Learning Communities, which rolled out the concept to all University of Nebraska undergraduate campuses in 2008.

Financed by the Susan T. Buffett Foundation, the Thompson program provides scholarships each year for hundreds of students, many of whom live and study together at UNO, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska at Kearney. UNO alone has 817 Thompson scholars this year.

“It was visionary when it began, and it remains visionary to this day,” UNO Chancellor John Christensen said of the Goodrich program.

UNO marked the program's 40th anniversary last week during an invitation-only program. The event was part of a yearlong anniversary observance of UNO's College of Public Affairs and Community Service, also established in 1972. The Goodrich program is an academic department within the college.

Gregory Brown, a retired middle-school art teacher and administrator from Omaha, is another member of the first Goodrich class.

At the time, he had no clue the program would be anything more than an experiment.

“You didn't know if the program was going to go forever — you knew you were in the program and your college was paid for,” he said. “I never knew it was going to go this far.”

He laughed when he recalled a faculty-led bus trip to Washington, D.C.

“They were kind of hippie-like people. They were fun to be around,” he said.

The Goodrich program remains smaller and more selective than the Thompson program, said Imafedia Okhamafe, a philosophy professor who chairs the Goodrich program.

After being qualified through UNO's financial aid office, the top 65 to 70 students — the number varies year to year — are chosen based on academic record, references, a personal interview and an essay.

This year, 68 freshmen were selected for the program. In all, 304 Goodrich scholars currently attend UNO. It costs about \$2 million per year for faculty salaries, scholarships and other expenses. The number of scholarships is fewer than offered in the past, in part to allow some funds to be used for book allowances and summer school.

In recent years, the program has had a 90 percent retention rate for freshmen who return for their sophomore years, compared to a 73 percent retention rate for UNO as a whole, Okhamafe said. About two-thirds of the scholars earn degrees within six years.

O'Gara actually had to wait until the fall of 1973 to join the Goodrich program. She hadn't lived in Omaha long enough to qualify as a Nebraska resident.

She attended UNO part-time her first year and caught up with the rest of her class by taking summer classes. She lived in a tiny apartment and struggled to pay her \$75 per month rent. She worked fast food. She worked in a factory. She worked as a sales clerk in a bridal salon.

“I was not enjoying the poverty thing. I had no TV, no car, no phone,” O'Gara said. “I was dead serious about getting out of that situation.”

Brown, who eventually earned a master's degree in computer science, said Goodrich made the difference for him.

“Otherwise, you were just a number,” he said. “No one cared about you out there except for the Goodrich program.”

“It was good — it was way beyond good,” he said. “Matter of fact, when I (taught) school, whenever I ran across a kid talking about going to college, I'd ask, 'Have you thought about Goodrich?'”

Contact the writer: 402-473-9581, leslie.reed@owh.com



Published Nov 27, 2012

Published Tuesday November 27, 2012

UNO lounge caters to active duty, military vets

By [Matthew Hansen](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



ALYSSA SCHUKAR/THE WORLD-HERALD

UNO students with military affiliation make use of the Veteran Student Lounge, which is one of the advantages offered by the Military and Veteran University Services Office, or MaV USO.

Head into UNO's Eppley Administration Building, walk toward the admissions office, and across the hall you will find an oasis for troops who once fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The veteran student lounge is a place for active-duty service members and vets alike to study, surf the Internet or sit and chat.

And that lounge, which is connected to a one-stop service office for the school's 1,132 military-affiliated students, is one reason why a military magazine now considers the University of Nebraska at Omaha one of the country's most military-friendly colleges.

"Veterans are used to that camaraderie, so it's kind of nice when they can find people who have been through some of the same things they have been through," said Hayley Patton, director of the service office. "They can connect with people who have their same experience."

Military Times, a well-known military publication and website, lists UNO as the sixth-most-military-friendly college in the country, according to its Best for Vets 2013 list released this month. Eastern Kentucky University is first in the magazine's rankings, while UNO sits ahead of the University of Kansas (tied for ninth), Chadron State College (11th) and Bellevue University (tied for 58th). No other Nebraska or Iowa colleges — including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln — are on the list.

UNO ranked ninth on the Military Times' list last year. The university's move up the rankings comes after the school opened its veteran service office, informally known as MaV USO, in April.

That office now gets up to 50 visits and phone calls a day, Patton said. Those calls and visits spike around the first of every month, as veterans get their monthly stipends and other benefits as part of the post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Javier Saldana Jr. is a Nebraska National Guard member who spent most of 2011 in Afghanistan. Now he's a sophomore at UNO, and a part-time worker in the service office. He's often on the other end of the line when a veteran or active-duty service member calls with a question.

"If they call me and say 'Hey, I didn't get my money,' I get that," Saldana says. "It's frustrating to me, too, because I know that's how you pay your bills. I'm in their same shoes."

UNO's proximity to Offutt Air Force Base means that a large number of veterans have always attended the college, officials say. But in recent years UNO has attempted to beef up its veterans services and attract a larger share of the hundreds of thousands of airmen, Marines, sailors and soldiers using the G.I. Bill as the post-9/11 wars wind down.

This year, the 1,132 veterans and active-duty military members enrolled at UNO make up more than seven percent of the school's total student body.

Online programs now allow a UNO student to continue taking classes even if he or she deploys, Patton said, and those service members are first in line to register for classes when they return home. The service office is open daily, explaining the various benefits that a veteran can receive to pay for textbooks, tuition and rent.

The school also has recently partnered with two local organizations, the Omaha Vet Center and At Ease, which offer anonymous free counseling and group sessions for veterans who are struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, battling depression or simply having a hard time readjusting to civilian life.

The Omaha Vet Center, which is affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, holds a PTSD support group on campus. At Ease, a program offered through Lutheran Family Services, may offer on-campus counseling soon, Patton said.

"Going to school is stressful to begin with," Patton said. "If you are dealing with PTSD, a traumatic brain injury, depression, that's going to make it more difficult. We don't want to hinder their success at getting a degree. We want to help."

Click [here](#) to view the entire Best for Vets 2013 list.

Contact the writer: 402-444-1064, matthew.hansen@owh.com



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Published Dec 4, 2012

Published Tuesday December 4, 2012

UNO study: Immigrant workers boost local economy

By [Christopher Burbach](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

[Click here](#) to download and read the UNO study.

The labor and spending of immigrant workers in three economic sectors supports 34,000 jobs in metropolitan Omaha and Council Bluffs, including many filled by U.S.-born workers, according to a new University of Nebraska at Omaha study.

Those jobs, the study found, include not only the roughly 13,000 jobs filled by immigrant workers in the meat processing, construction and food service sectors of the local economy. They also include employment in enterprises that the immigrant workers support with their labor and spending, the report asserts.

Each year, immigrant workers contribute \$1.4 billion to the Omaha-Council Bluffs economy through their spending and the economic activity it generates.

Those were among the major findings of the report, "Economic Impact of Latin American and Other Immigrants." It was produced by UNO economist Christopher Decker, UNO demographer Jerry Deichert and Lourdes Gouveia, director of UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies. The report is to be formally released today.

Its findings are similar to those in research UNO published in 2008. But the 2008 study focused on Nebraska, and the current study focuses on Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, as well the states of Iowa and Nebraska.

It is the first study to make such assessments for the metro area, Gouveia said. She called the results a "powerful validation" of the contributions of immigrants in general, and those from Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean specifically.

"Without the immigrant and Latino populations, this region's economy would be in serious trouble," Gouveia said.

The findings should help counter what she called a common narrative that those populations "are a drain on the economy."

The researchers primarily relied on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey for the years 2006 through 2010.

Researchers did not differentiate between documented and undocumented workers because they did not have reliable data for those populations, Decker said.

Among the study's findings:

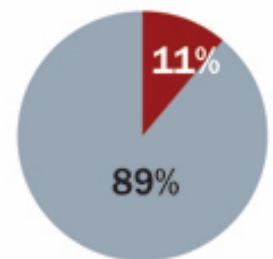
» In the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, the immigrant labor force accounted for 54 percent of employment in meat processing, 11 percent of employment in construction and 10 percent of employment in restaurants and other food services.

» In Iowa, immigrant spending generated between \$2.5 billion and \$3.2 billion worth of total economic production. Of

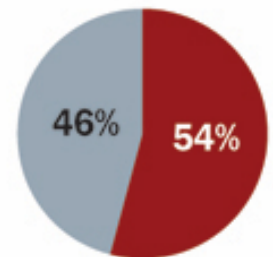
EMPLOYMENT MAKEUP OF VARIOUS INDUSTRIES

■ Foreign-born
■ Native-born

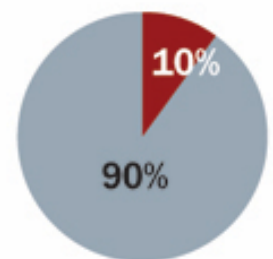
Construction



Manufacturing-animal slaughtering and processing



Restaurants and other food services



SOURCE: University of Nebraska at Omaha

DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

that, Central or South American immigrants generated \$477 million to \$615 million.

» In Nebraska, the spending figure generated between \$1.9 billion and \$2.4 billion in total economic production, with Central or South American immigrants generating between \$834 million and \$1.1 billion of that.

» In Iowa, the foreign-born population accounted for 3.4 percent of state revenues from income, sales and gasoline taxes. Immigrants received 3.1 percent of total state expenditures on public assistance, Medicaid and education.

» In Nebraska, immigrants accounted for 4.3 percent of state revenues from income, sales and gasoline taxes, while receiving 4.1 percent of total state expenditures on public assistance, Medicaid and education.

The researchers concluded that Central and South American-born people in the two states paid into state coffers in taxes roughly the same amount as they drew out in public assistance, Medicaid and education.

Such calculations draw criticism from opponents of illegal immigration because they do not take into account all public expenditures on immigrants.

“That’s a legitimate criticism,” Decker said. “It’s true that we’re not incorporating all costs, but to try to do so would be fraught with problems.”

Precise data isn’t available, he said. Gouveia said researchers also left out immigrants’ economic contributions that couldn’t be quantified precisely.

Decker said they tried to make a focused, meaningful comparison based on the contributions and expenses of which they could be certain.

Among other questions, the researchers asked this hypothetical: What if immigrant workers all vanished immediately?

This was meant as a way of measuring the groups’ economic impact, Decker said, and not based on an assumption that the workers were undocumented and would be deported.

The study found that 34,000 jobs would go away in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area alone.

They base that on a multiplier of 2.5. In other words, for every job lost because an immigrant wasn’t available to do it, another 1.5 jobs would be lost through ripple effects.

For example, because a meatpacking plant would have fewer workers, it would have less production, the plant would need less transportation and industrial supplies, so those related industries would employ fewer people.

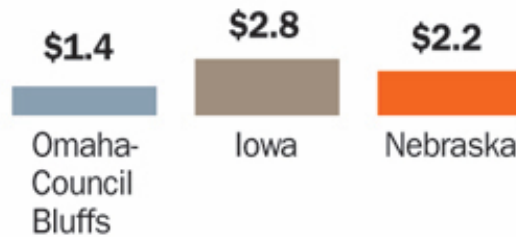
Also, fewer employees would mean less household spending. Thus, less revenue for the hardware store and its suppliers.

Of course, not all of the jobs immigrants do would go away without available immigrants. Native-born workers would do some, Decker said.

But given the tight labor market in Nebraska and Iowa, native-born workers wouldn’t fill all or even many of the jobs, he said. There would still be an

PRODUCTION IMPACT OF TOTAL FOREIGN-BORN SPENDING

In billions of 2010 dollars

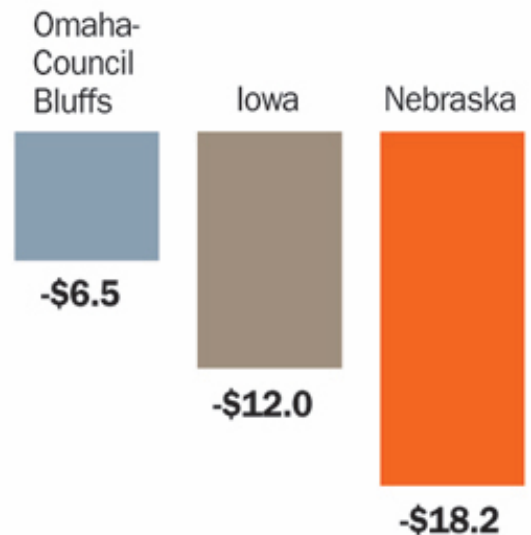


SOURCE: University of Nebraska at Omaha

DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

PRODUCTION IMPACT OF REMOVING TOTAL FOREIGN-BORN LABOR

In billions of 2010 dollars



adverse impact on the states' economies and that of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, the study found.

The researchers plan to share their results in community workshops conducted in Spanish and English, Gouveia said. The first took place Friday in Council Bluffs. Additional sessions have not been scheduled.

She said the findings will give immigrant communities “a very powerful way of talking about what they contribute to this economy.”

Funding to support the research came from the Iowa West Foundation and the Mammel Foundation, as well as UNO, its College of Arts and Sciences and its College of Business Administration.

Contact the writer: 402-444-1057, christopher.burbach@owh.com

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Published Dec 13, 2012

Published Thursday December 13, 2012

UNO studies end by finding real-world software solution

By [Leslie Reed](#)

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Instead of writing a research thesis to conclude their master's degree studies, 19 University of Nebraska at Omaha graduate students formed a team to develop software for a Lincoln company that needed a better tool to track its workers' billable hours.

It was a real-world experience that benefited both the students and the business, Nebraska Air Quality Specialties, said professor Deepak Khazanchi, associate dean of UNO's College of Information Science and Technology.

"If you want to prepare graduate students for the workplace, we need to have experiences that are realistic at the end of the educational process," he said. "So we actually have them work on a real-life problem."

The company's time-tracking system will be unveiled at 6 p.m. today at an event at the Kiewit Institute on UNO's south campus.

The project was the result of a capstone course for students who will graduate this weekend with a master's degree in Management Information Systems. For more than three years, UNO has given students in that field the option of tackling a capstone project instead of writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive exam.

The students' "clients" are chosen from among nonprofits and small businesses that have sought UNO's assistance with their information technology dilemmas because they can't afford to hire information technology experts.

The project was a learning experience even for students like Nate Clute and Kurt Johnson, both of whom were part-time graduate students while working full-time at information technology-related jobs.

Clute, for example, is a systems analyst for Science Applications International Corp. in Omaha. It's a job he landed through an internship when he was a UNO undergraduate more than 10 years ago.

Johnson is director of network technology for NorthStar Financial Services Group. He served on the documentation team.

Clute's classmates selected him to serve as the project manager.

"I have a little experience managing in my job, as a supervisor — but I've never managed that many people before," he said. "It was quite an experience."

Clute said Lincoln businessman Piyush Srivastav approached the students with a problem.

Srivastav's company, Nebraska Air Quality Specialties, is a consulting firm that helps businesses comply with government standards for air quality. His workers travel a lot and needed a more effective way to track their working hours for billing purposes.

Srivastav wanted a Web application that would interface with mobile devices so that employees could record their time before they forgot it without having to carry a lot of slips of paper. He also wanted a way to export the data to a spreadsheet program for analysis.

Clute said the cost of such a project could be prohibitive for many smaller businesses.

The 19 students divided into teams in much the same way they would while working in the private sector. One student was assigned to be client liaison and others served on the documentation team. There was a technical lead, a project manager, a database team and a development team.

The students involved came from around the world — China, Saudi Arabia and Malawi — as well as the U.S. Many already are working for Omaha technology companies.

They learned techniques commonly used in the working world to manage software development projects, such as a "Scrum" framework. Named after a rugby maneuver, the Scrum method requires team members to routinely report their progress and problems to the rest of the team.

Collaborating and communicating with others actually are the major skills taught by the capstone project and are critical to being successful, said Shonna Dorsey, an adjunct instructor who works as a software consultant with Sogeti of Omaha.

Dorsey herself was a student in the capstone class two years ago. She said it allowed her to move into her present job, in which she works with clients, gathering information about their needs and developing and delivering a project that serves those needs.

“It’s had a huge impact on my professional career,” she said.

Contact the writer:

402-473-9581, leslie.reed@owh.com

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WARM SPIRIT OF SERVICE

User Rating: ★★★★★ / 0

Details Published on 24 January 2013 Hits: 699



In just under an hour, 740 Crete Elementary students, with the aid of over 150 teachers, staff and community volunteers had covered the gym floor with 151 fleece blankets. In the center was a stockpile of 1,485 non-perishable food items.

On the sound system played the voice of a leader from decades ago. His words have lived on.

Crete teachers, Elementary Principal Erin Gonzalez and Dr. Kathleen Oleson Lyons from University of Nebraska Omaha told students they were living by the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. in their actions on Friday.

“Look at what you did,” teacher Ellen Miller happily said at the beginning of the assembly Friday afternoon.

The students clapped and cheered as they spotted the blankets they had made. Students’ hands tied two large pieces of fleece with tabs cut on all sides. They created 151 brightly colored, warm, comforting blankets for donation to Blue Valley Community Action.



UNO and its Student-Community Leadership and Service (SCLS) office celebrated the life of Martin Luther King Jr. with days of service in Omaha and, for the first time, Crete.

Gonzalez’s husband, Matt, is a graduate student and became involved with Oleson Lyons’s programs at UNO.

In the weeks leading up to MLK National Day of Service, from Jan. 7, SCLS began a partnership with Crete Elementary to organize a food drive and the making of blankets, culminating in last Friday’s assembly where students and staff all sported project t-shirts.

Crete Third graders from the 21st Century Learning Community (CCLC) afterschool program, helped coordinate the food donations.

Erin and Matt Gonzalez were new to the Crete community this school year when Erin became the new principal at Crete Elementary. They were both encouraged by the support of this project and enthusiasm from students and hope to continue service projects within the school.

For questions about any of UNO’s Martin Luther King Jr. service projects, contact Julie Smith in the SCLS office at (402)554-4083 or by email at juliesmith@unomaha.edu.

For more on this story see the Jan. 23 print or e-editions of The Crete News.



Published Jan 10, 2013

Published Thursday January 10, 2013

Colleges, businesses team up on preparing students

By Todd von Kampen

WORLD-HERALD CORRESPONDENT

From the top of the educational ladder, two groups of people are best perched to judge the strength of the rungs: those on each side of the hiring table.

Colleges and universities know the encounters between their graduates and potential employers reflect upon their own performance. In recent decades, they've increasingly formalized their conversations with both groups to help keep their offerings responsive to employers' needs, say leaders of Omaha's two public higher-education institutions.

At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, efforts to improve coordination with employers are most visible in the proliferation of program advisory boards made up of interested employers, alumni or both and the use of employers as adjunct faculty members or guest lecturers.

UNO also surveys employers, students and alumni, conducts regular program reviews and tracks employment trends, said B.J. Reed, senior vice chancellor of academic and student affairs. But some of UNO's most cutting-edge programs have arisen from direct input from alumni and the work of the advisory boards.

"They're the ones who really say what direction we're going in and what kinds of skills and competencies our graduates need," said Reed, who joined the UNO faculty in 1982 and took up his current post in September 2011.

Before the 1980s, UNO deans and administrators were more likely to obtain such input through informal discussions, said Reed and College of Business Administration Dean Louis Pol. By contrast, Metropolitan Community College has had permanent advisory boards since the two-year institution was founded in 1974, said Executive Vice President Jim Grotrian.

"They help shape our curriculum and help us anticipate what those minimum standards and competencies are," Grotrian said. "We have to prepare the students to hit the ground running with business." Metro has a close partnership with UNO as well, he said.

Questions about the University of Nebraska system's responsiveness to Omaha's business community directly influenced the 1996 founding of the Peter Kiewit Institute, home to UNO's College of Information Science and Technology and Omaha-based programs of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Engineering.

PKI's collaboration with employers has remained intimate, said IS&T Dean Hesham Ali. His college's IS&T Advisory Board, consisting of about a dozen chief information officers of employers within and outside Omaha, dates to PKI's founding. IS&T also has an Alumni Advisory Board, founded in 2011, and smaller "curriculum advisory groups" corresponding to the college's degree programs.

All these groups, Ali said, helps his college adjust to the rapid evolution of computer technology. "We like it that way, because it keeps us dynamic," he said of the need for IS&T to remain nimble.

Ali said three of PKI's newer career tracks bioinformatics (2005), information assurance (2008) and IT Innovations (2010) bear the mark of the IS&T Advisory Board. Discussions between board members and IS&T faculty members alerted the latter to the need for such programs, and the advisory board helped shape their missions and course offerings.

Energetic discussions within that board, Ali said, resulted in a switch in the standard programming language across all IS&T programs from C++ to Java. In its brief life, he said, the Alumni Advisory Board has stressed the importance of developing students' "soft skills" their ability to think, write, speak and present their ideas. Some alumni have given guest lectures at IS&T, he said.

About half a dozen members of Omaha's business community teach at IS&T as adjunct faculty members, he added. Local employers also account for a significant share of the more than 50 adjunct faculty members in UNO's College of Business Administration, located across a parking lot from the Peter Kiewit Institute.

The business college has had a 25-member National Advisory Board since the mid-1990s, said Pol, its dean since 2004 and a faculty member for all but two years since 1984. Separate advisory boards for finance, accounting and real estate programs were founded later.

Pol noted that UNO's 10-year-old "investment science portfolio management" program grew from an offer by Col. Guy M. Cloud, a successful alumnus of the business college from Austin, Texas, to provide seed money to start a student-managed investment fund.

Before that time, “our students who had been hired in the investment industry really had some limitations on where they could go initially because of the courses they had and had not taken,” he said.

Input from Omaha's accounting professionals, Pol added, aided UNO's response to a national requirement that certified public accountants complete 150 credit hours of higher education in addition to passing the CPA exam. The result was an upgraded, more popular master's program in which accounting students can count three undergraduate courses anywhere in the business college toward their advanced degree.

Other UNO degree programs now have advisory boards, Pol and Reed said, but the programs that already had vocal constituencies were faster to adopt them. Both said liberal-arts programs need to tune in more to their local employers, who are showing greater interest in liberal-arts majors due to their thinking and communication skills.

“Employers over the last five to 10 years have been coming to us and saying they don't want to pigeonhole (and hire) only business majors, IS&T majors, communications majors,” Reed said. “They want to access students more broadly.”

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Spring break of service still fun



ALYSSA SCHUKAR/THE WORLD-HERALD

Kelsie Forristall, 15, leads the way as Clayton Gillett, 17, pushes Joseph Gilman, 16, on a wheelbarrow. They, along with fellow Lewis Central High School students and volunteers, spent Tuesday creating gardens at the Union for Contemporary Arts in Omaha. The event and others like it were organized as part of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Nonprofit Organization and Management course. "I like how it's very hands-on," Kelsie said of the service day.

Published Apr 3, 2013

Published Wednesday April 3, 2013

3 from UNO, 1 from UNL to attend Clinton Global Initiative University

By Haley Dover

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

Three UNO students from Cameroon will attend the Clinton Global Initiative University this weekend in St. Louis. From left are Benadette Ngamelue, a biotechnology major; Sister Rosemary Arrah, a graduate student studying special education; and Larisa Akah, a science major.

Four University of Nebraska students will get the chance to share their visions for a better world at this year's Clinton Global Initiative University.

CGIU is an offshoot of the Clinton Global Initiative, which was formed in 2005 by former President Bill Clinton to bring together world leaders to create and implement solutions to world problems.

It focuses on the work of university and college students, who submit commitments to action on issues such as health care, hunger and literacy.

This year's conference will be Friday through Sunday at Washington University in St. Louis.

Three students who will attend from the University of Nebraska at Omaha share the dream of opening a public library in their native country of Cameroon.

Sister Rosemary Arrah, a graduate student studying special education at UNO, and two fellow students were selected for the conference to work toward a goal that hits close to home.

Arrah, Benadette Ngamelue, a biotechnology major, and Larisa Akah, a general science major, submitted a proposal that laid out a \$16,000 plan to create the first public library at St. Joseph Elementary School in Mamfe, Cameroon.

"Primary schools just don't have libraries," Akah said. "This would be one of a kind."

Arrah said she was struck by the availability of resources for students at UNO.

"The more resources available, the more successful students can be," she said. "I couldn't remember reading a book in primary school because they weren't available."

Ngamelue said students at her elementary school did not read unless they were assigned books for a literature class or to prepare for a high school entrance exam.

"Here you see people reading in the airport or in the doctor's office, but there you don't see people reading while waiting for anything," Arrah said. "It just isn't a hobby."

The group's goal is to make reading more accessible in Cameroon. So far, they have held a book drive that collected 6,000 books and shipped them to Cameroon.

The funding they could receive at CGIU is not for books, Ngamelue said, but for the library itself, including tables, chairs, bookshelves and other materials.

Regardless of whether the team receives funding at CGIU, they will have a fundraiser in an effort to travel to Cameroon and help however they can.

"It's not only funding we need," Arrah said. "If someone can provide (airline) miles to fly us there, we will take the help we can."

Casey Heier, 23, a senior biological systems engineering major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is also attending CGIU. He is the head of the World Energy Project, a nonprofit organization he started at UNL with five other students.

Heier traveled to Costa Rica last winter to study renewable energy and used that for his commitment to action for CGIU.

While abroad, Heier taught K-12 students about renewable energy and connected them to schools in Africa that didn't have electricity, he said.

"(Students) would fundraise to power a school, we would install the system and allow the schools to Skype and connect with each other," Heier said.

More than \$400,000 in funding will be awarded to select conference attendees. Because students have the opportunity to share their ideas with so many people, networking is the main way for attendees to get funding.

A few attendees may also be selected to go to the larger Clinton Global Initiative conference, where they might get funding for their projects, said Dan Shipp, UNO Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs.

"A big part of the CGIU experience is to get students to develop business plans or nonprofit programs that will allow them to be self-sustaining," Shipp said.

If Heier's commitment to action receives any funding, it will go toward a solar panel system to power a school.

"With the World Energy Project, we have the experience and technical knowledge to install that system ourselves," he said.

More than 1,000 students will be in attendance this weekend to hear from Clinton, political satirist and comedian Stephen Colbert and world leaders, as well as meet other students.

"I'm most excited to meet other students that want to solve all of these global problems," Heier said. "Being around people who are actively trying to do something inspires me."

Contact the writer: haley.dover@owh.com

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Published Jul 20, 2013

Published Saturday July 20, 2013

A 'school' for new superintendents? Academy aims to get newbies up to speed

By [Jonathon Braden](#) / World-Herald staff writer



Keith Lutz, Millard superintendent, worked with UNO to develop the Midlands Superintendent Academy, which begins in September.

Keith Lutz remembers his early days of being a superintendent: speaking in front of thousands of people, forgetting how to breathe, where to look and how to handle his nerves.

Nothing in his college speech or educational courses prepared him for that, he said.

Lutz, who leads the Millard school district, saw versions of himself as a young man when he looked at the roster of Omaha-area superintendents: Educators who, despite their advanced degrees and years of experience, may be overwhelmed.

What if, thought Lutz, the metro area had a program that trimmed the amount of on-the-job training needed?

When Lutz spoke with other area superintendents and officials at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, he had an interested audience. The Midlands Superintendent Academy starts at UNO in September.

The idea apparently has a market in Nebraska and western Iowa. To date, 13 of the class's 15 spots have been filled. About half the students are superintendents, and nearly two-thirds of the leaders are from the Omaha area, said Dick Christie, a UNO assistant education professor sharing instruction of the class.

"They are people who know their craft inside out, but they don't know how to manage an organization that will deliver the services of their craft," said Mary Hamilton, another UNO faculty member who will help lead the class.

Having well-trained superintendents is important because turnover is high. Eight of the metro area's 12 superintendents have started their jobs in the past four years.

National studies have shown that the average tenure for superintendents is three to four years in urban districts and six to seven years in districts of all sizes.

Ralston Superintendent Mark Adler said he applied to get better in all areas of school leadership. "I've been in school administration a long time, but the superintendent position is so unique," said Adler, who started as Ralston's superintendent a year ago.

He expects his district to pick up the \$2,000 academy cost.

New Papillion-La Vista Superintendent Andrew Rikli also has applied, a district spokeswoman said.

Christie, a former Council Bluffs superintendent, will lead the 10-month program with

Midlands Superintendent Academy

Who can apply?

New superintendents, superintendents of smaller districts, associate and

Hamilton, who years ago started a similar program at UNO for public managers.

They want the academy to broaden the pool of superintendent candidates, which has been shrinking, and help the leaders gain management skills.

Christie and Hamilton see the program serving as an intense run-through for people just starting their superintendent gigs or for leaders who want to become the district boss.

“You’re in your career and you want to build a new set of skills,” Christie said. “It’s sort of the transition.”

Superintendents in Nebraska have to have a doctorate of educational administration or an educational specialist degree. In Iowa, superintendents must at least have their master’s degree, a State Education Department spokeswoman said.

But despite hundreds of hours of classes, superintendent academies — essentially more education — have popped up across the country to address gaps in the formal training.

New OPS Superintendent Mark Evans attended one of the nation’s best-known academies, the Broad Institute’s Superintendents Academy.

“It was the best learning opportunity I’ve ever had,” Evans has said about the yearlong fellowship in which he traveled to some of the nation’s highest-performing urban districts.

Christie and Hamilton aren’t trying to compete with Broad or other similarly themed programs. But they do have the same, broad mission as the national academies: they want their program to thrive where the typical preparation programs lack.

Take the process of creating a strategic plan and making sure it drives everything that happens in a school district.

The best urban districts in the country have such focused, long-term plans. The plans take months to create and countless hours to monitor and review to make sure they’re being followed.

In regular education preparation programs, a professor might talk about strategic planning for a class or two, then move on.

The academy will go deeper.

assistant superintendents of larger districts and principals with at least three years of experience. All applicants must hold or be eligible for a superintendent’s license.

What do I need?

A recommendation from the school board president or superintendent in the district in which you work.

How much does it cost?

\$2,000. School districts or administrators can pay for the academy.

Is it too late for this year?

Not quite. Thirteen of the 15 slots have been filled.

Source: University of Nebraska at Omaha

Omaha area superintendents and their experience

School district	Superintendent	Tenure started
Bellevue	Frank Harwood	Jul-11
Bennington	Terry Haack	Jul-04
Council Bluffs	Martha Bruckner	Jul-07
Douglas County West	Dan Schnoes	Jul-12
Elkhorn	Steve Baker	Mar-09
Gretna	Kevin Riley	Jul-99
Millard	Keith Lutz	Apr-96
Omaha	Mark Evans	Jul-13
Papillion-La Vista	Andrew Rikli	Jul-13
Ralston	Mark Adler	Jul-12
Springfield Platteview	Brett Richards	Jul-12
Westside	Blane McCann	Jul-12



Business professors and a visiting superintendent will ask the students to critique their own district's strategic plans. The students will then develop and outline a strategic plan for their district or tweak the existing document.

In similar ways, the class also will explore ethical behavior, working with school board members and media relations, among other topics.

"Many of them have certainly not had that hands-on experience or seen their boss do that," Christie said.

The academy will have nine classes — one a month except for December — that will last eight hours each.

Students can go to class remotely or in person, but, before class, they must have completed their readings and finished their homework.

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UNO Housing World's Largest Community Engagement Library

Posted: Tue 9:22 AM, Nov 12, 2013

By: wowt [Email](#)

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Scholars from around the globe can now look to Omaha as the source for the world's largest collection of research literature on how to connect teaching and scholarship to community needs.

Starting this month, UNO becomes the custodian of more than 10,000 volumes of scholarly work on service-learning and community engagement.

The creation of the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service [Learning](#) and Community Engagement at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) collection will be updated and enhanced with the addition of international publications and resources.

The collection features publications regarding engagement in higher education, K-12 schools, the community-based organization sector and the Tribal Nations.

The collection will be housed at the UNO Library.

The collection will be available to the UNO campus as well as partners who will be coming to campus next year as residents of the new UNO Community Engagement Center.

Opening in spring of 2014, the UNO Community Engagement Center [building](#), which is the first of its kind in the country, will serve as both the front door to the campus.



Martin Luther King Jr. Day Of Service

Updated: Fri 9:08 AM, Jan 17, 2014

By: WOWT Email

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UNO will be participating in a day of service on Monday, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Hundreds of volunteers are expected to be involved in a variety of projects across the metro.

Those projects include creating fleece blankets for children served by Project Harmony, assisting Habitat for Humanity at area build sites, making tie-dye shirts for children served by Project Kindle, using recycled T-shirts to make blankets and dog toys, designing a mural for Leavenworth Street, organizing and sorting books donated for libraries in Cameroon and assisting with food [drives](#) at schools and at the University of Nebraska Omaha.



Anyone interested in volunteering should visit unomaha.edu/serve to sign up or call the Office of Civic and Social Responsibility at 402-554-4083.

Goodwill YouthBuild Omaha students and staff will be volunteering their time on Monday to read to youngsters at Micah [House](#) and Completely Kids in the morning and doing various tasks at the Open Door Mission in the afternoon.

Published Jan 20, 2014

Published Monday January 20, 2014

5 more groups join UNO Community Engagement Center

By [Kate Howard Perry](#) / World-Herald staff writer

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has announced more organizations to be housed in the university's Community Engagement Center, scheduled to open this spring.

Two UNO groups and three from the Omaha community will be housed in the new space on the Dodge Street campus.

The organizations selected are UNO's Spirituality, Public Health and Religious Studies and its Social Media Lab for Research and Engagement; and community groups Nebraskans for Civic Reform, WhyArts? and the Omaha Public Library.

The five new members will join 15 other community organizations, selected in November, as tenants of the center, including Omaha By Design, Nebraska Shakespeare Festival and UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies.

"This second round of partners brings additional diversity, expertise and purpose to the CEC," said Sara Woods, assistant to the senior vice chancellor for community engagement at UNO.

2 Hastings College students place at forensics tourney

Two Hastings College students were finalists this month at the 15th annual Hell Froze Over Forensics Tournament in Austin, Texas.

Miranda Klugesherz, a junior from Colorado Springs, Colo., finished first in persuasive speaking and fourth in informative speaking. Jared Buskirk, a senior from Holdrege, Neb., finished third in impromptu speaking.

UNL biologist publishes tree growth study results

A new report co-written by a University of Nebraska-Lincoln biologist found that trees never stop growing during their lifespans. The findings were published last week in Nature.

The report, co-written by UNL biologist Sabrina Russo, found that growth accelerates even after trees have reached massive sizes, meaning that older trees play a substantial and disproportionate role in the Earth's carbon cycle.

Researchers analyzed the compiled biomass growth measurements of 673,046 trees belonging to 403 species from various temperate and tropical regions across six continents, according to UNL.

UNK music professor wins Distinguished Faculty Award

A University of Nebraska at Kearney music professor has been awarded the 2013 Leland Holdt/Security Mutual Life Distinguished Faculty Award this month.

The award was presented to Valerie Cisler, chairwoman of the department of music and performing arts, during winter commencement ceremonies at UNK, according to the university.

"Her record of teaching, scholarship and service is described by colleagues as 'exemplary' and her dedication to her students as 'tireless,'" Chancellor Doug Kristensen said while presenting the award.

Cisler has taught at UNK for 19 years.

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KVNO News

New Community Engagement Center set to open this spring

By **Brandon McDermott, KVNO News**

February 5th, 2014

Omaha, NE – The new Community Engagement Center (CEC) on the campus of UNO will house more than 20 groups.

The 60,000 square foot building is still being constructed, but will be finished before the grand opening this spring. Sara Woods, assistant to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement at UNO, said the primary goal for the CEC is outreach.

“It is both expanding the services that the campus offers throughout the community and it will also enable people to access the university more easily and take advantage of what we offer here,” Woods said.

The CEC is the first standalone, comprehensive facility based on a university campus that is fully dedicated to community engagement, according to Woods. Selection of members of the new CEC involved a written application as well as formal interviews with a university panel. The new CEC will contain both UNO organizations as well as external community groups.



The Community Engagement Center (CEC) will open in April 2014. (Photo Courtesy UNO)

University groups include The Social Media Lab for Research and Engagement, Spirituality, Public Health and Religious Studies (SPHRS) and Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS). Community groups include the Omaha Public Library and Nebraskans for Civic Reform (NCR).

Woods said when groups applied the biggest area UNO looked at during the selection process was their ability to collaborate and participate with the CEC's other members.

Woods said there are lots of initiatives and activities that are available at UNO and the CEC will help better link those services, its members and the community.

“They can avail themselves of our service learning academy,” Woods said. “They can take advantage of student volunteers. We will be able to connect them better with faculty and student expertise. We will be able to connect them to resources that will be located in the building and outside.”

Claudia Lucero is the Community Engagement Coordinator for OLLAS at UNO. Lucero said it’s important to remember who the university serves – the student.

“With the students I definitely think it’s going to be a space (where) they can expand their horizons, they can expand their knowledge,” Lucero said. “Get to know more about the partners that we have, they might have different opportunities for internships, for learning beyond the classroom.”

Michele Desamarias is the director of Spirituality, Public Health and Religious Studies (SPHRS) at UNO. SPHRS is a service organization that helps link people and projects together whose work has to do with spirituality and wellness. Desamarias said the CEC will be a breeding place for growth for UNO and Omaha. She said it is too early to make predictions about specific ways each groups will co-evolve. However, Desamarias looks forward to working with other groups in the building and helping students succeed.

“I am sure that we will learn a lot from the other groups,” Desamarias said. “It will be a tremendous benefit to our students to place them in internships, meaningful (and) practical internships with groups that are doing incredible work in the community both locally and internationally.”

Director of OLLAS, Lourdes Gouveia, said her group is excited to get started. She pointed to a luncheon of newly chosen applicants to the CEC where many of the groups had a chance to meet for the first time.

“It was amazing,” Gouveia said. “Right there we started all these conversations, ‘oh, you are in the youth organization?’, ‘oh, we are not doing anything there, maybe we should get together,’ and ‘where are you in the building, we are here.’ Already these conversations kicked off during this luncheon.”

Woods said the level of excitement is sky high among the CEC’s new members. Woods said in the end the true beneficiary will be students.

“So we see this as a real win for students, Woods said. “Students are really the core of our academic enterprise. They are really important in terms of what we do here and the engagement center is a way for us to serve them in the best possible way.”

The CEC will officially open to the public on April 17. Woods said there will be an extensive opening ceremony to coincide with the opening of the CEC.

UNO Part Of Clinton Global Initiative University Network

Posted: Wed 8:34 PM, Feb 05, 2014

By: WOWT Email

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As of this year, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has joined the Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U) network, a select consortium of colleges and universities from across the world, as Nebraska's only member [school](#).

The CGI U network is designed to support, mentor and provide seed funding to student leaders, innovators and [entrepreneurs](#) who are developing solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

UNO is one of only approximately 50 member universities from across the world, stretching from Rhode Island's Brown University to Ireland's University College Dublin and the American University at Dubai.

Otherwise known as "Commitments to Action," CGI U projects are designed to address global challenges across five [focus](#) areas:

- [Education](#)
- Environment and Climate Change
- Peace and Human Rights
- Poverty Alleviation
- Public Health

Since 2008, CGI U has brought together more than 5,500 student leaders from 135 countries and more than 800 [schools](#).



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Published Feb 11, 2014

Published Tuesday February 11, 2014

Led by UNO, grass-roots effort in Council Bluffs aims to mold leaders within Latino community

By [Kate Howard Perry](#) / World-Herald staff writer



MARK DAVIS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Bertha Jauregui, left, Juan Pablo Vargas and Sofia Sandoval participate in a conversation with Claudia Lucero-Mead, below, a community engagement coordinator with UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, during a recent meeting of Council Bluffs Latino leaders. The leaders hope to provide a stronger voice for the growing Latino population in the Bluffs.

Nearly one in 10 Council Bluffs residents is Latino, but many of them still feel invisible.

A slowly building grass-roots effort aims to replace that feeling with empowerment. Members of the “Comite Fuerza y Unión” — strength and unity committee — hope to gain the knowledge they need to advocate for themselves and become leaders in Council Bluffs.

The effort is led by the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, which started the committee after its study last year found a need to develop Latino leadership.

“This is a very vulnerable population that can't always have their rights be heard and observed,” said Lourdes Gouveia, director of UNO's Latino studies office.

The best way to address that problem, Gouveia said, is to build leaders within the Bluffs' Latino community.

Through a grant from the Iowa West Foundation, the UNO office hired a community organizer to conduct workshops to educate people about basic rights and services: whom to call if your garbage isn't getting picked up, where to file housing discrimination complaints, and how to interact with the police.

Organizer Claudia Lucero-Mead recruited participants from those workshops and area churches to join the committee, now about a dozen strong and looking to grow.

They gather once or twice a month, either at a member's house or at the office of Centro Latino, a social services organization. They meet at night, when its members have clocked out for the day, sipping coffee and eating pastries while their children play and watch movies.

Lucero-Mead, who was a community organizer in Chicago before joining UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies last year, said members are enthused and eager to do more.

“While we are helping them in this process of developing their leadership skills, this is going to be a hands-on experience,” Lucero-Mead said.

Members plan to spend some weekends passing out fliers at supermarkets and stores, letting other residents know about the committee. They have been brainstorming questions for the police chief, who they hope to meet with to create more mutual understanding.

The grass-roots effort grew out of “Invisible & Voiceless: Latinos in Council Bluffs, Iowa.” The report, produced last year by Gouveia's office, found recognition among the city's leaders that employers rely on the immigrant workforce and that immigrants often work two or three times as hard for the same pay as others.

There are few, if any, Spanish speakers in local government, or Spanish-language GED classes nearby, though the school system employs an interpreter. Interactions with the rest of Council Bluffs are peaceful, Latino residents say, but superficial, because they live separate lives.

Many Latinos said they wanted to play a role in the broader community, where they make up almost 9 percent of the population and about 15 percent of students in its schools. Study participants also recognized they need better English skills and more understanding of their rights.

And the residents told researchers that for undocumented immigrants, many who came to Council Bluffs for work in the food-processing plants, meatpacking factories or casinos, speaking up about bad landlords, bad employers or interaction with police is too dangerous.

Council Bluffs Police Chief Ralph O'Donnell said he hasn't heard any complaints about interaction between his officers and Latinos, and he's looking forward to starting a dialogue if there are issues he can address.

“They are the largest-growing population in the city of Council Bluffs and they are members of this community,” O'Donnell said. “We want to work with them.”

Sofia Sandoval, director of the Centro Latino office, spends most of her time helping clients with basic needs such as setting up doctor appointments and helping find child care or other services. But she hears often from residents who struggle with housing, saying potential landlords fear renting to them.

“Unless you know your rights, people will take advantage of you, whether you're documented or not,” Sandoval said.

One recent evening, LuceroMead led a discussion of leadership: What qualities do leaders have? What are some ways you already show leadership with families and friends? What are some problems you could help fix in your own neighborhoods?

Sabrina Escamilla worries about the future of her husband, who is undocumented, and fears that even a traffic stop could send him back to Mexico. They come together to committee meetings.

“I want to see what I can do to help my family, and maybe others who need that help, too,” Escamilla said.

Those are the reasons that Guadalupe comes, too, and already she feels she is helping. Guadalupe, who asked that her last name be withheld because she's undocumented, volunteers with her church. Since word got out there that she's part of the UNO committee, other congregants have been coming to her for help when they need to explain something to their children's teachers or when the police pull them over.

She speaks some English, so with the teachers, she can help. For the police, she still needs to know more.

“I like to help,” she said. “I recognize that's a lot of work. I am not scared about that.”

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Published Mar 3, 2014

Published Monday March 3, 2014

StratCom, UNO join forces to help forge leaders

By [Steve Liewer](#) / World-Herald staff writer



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

At the launch Saturday of a new fellowship program involving the U.S. Strategic Command and the University of Nebraska at Omaha are, from left: Gina Ligon of UNO; Robert Hinson, a retired Air Force lieutenant general; and Adm. Cecil Haney, commander of StratCom.

The military service branches have long trained their officers how to be leaders. Now the U.S. Strategic Command is going local to do the same for its civilians.

Saturday, StratCom and the University of Nebraska at Omaha kicked off a first-of-its-kind leadership program at UNO, with the StratCom commander, Adm. Cecil Haney, speaking at an introductory event. Classes are slated to begin today.

Ten StratCom civilians will spend 13 weeks studying leadership full time at UNO's College of Business Administration. They'll have their own offices at the college's Mammel Hall.

About 50 people were nominated for the program, said Pat McVay, StratCom's director of joint exercises and training. A board made up of a StratCom general and several civilian leaders selected the 10 fellows from throughout the command structure.

"It was a really rigorous, competitive selection progress," said Gina Ligon, an assistant professor of management at UNO and the program's lead faculty member. "We're getting the very best of the best emerging leaders at StratCom."

The program will teach team-building, collaboration and project management, among other skills, said Lou Pol, dean of the College of Business Administration.

The subject matter will be tailored toward subjects important to StratCom, whose mission involves anticipating and deterring threats to the United States.

The program will draw on experts from the University of Nebraska as well as other universities in areas such as cyber- and space law, counterterrorism and response to chemical and biological attacks. Local business leaders also will contribute.

"The expertise that our civilians are going to bring, added to the expertise of the University of Nebraska faculty — we're getting the best of both worlds," McVay said.

Each participant will be paired with a faculty member as a mentor and adviser and will write a paper on a topic related to a StratCom mission, publishable in a peer-reviewed journal.

The fellowship program is an outgrowth of a two-year-old partnership between UNO and StratCom, which in 2011 announced the creation of a University-Affiliated Research Center, one of 14 such military-university partnerships around the country.

At the time, the Defense Department agreed to spend up to \$84 million over five years on the research center.

McVay said StratCom civilians in the past have at times been sent to out-of-town leadership training. But with budget cuts severely restricting Defense Department travel, StratCom was pleased to help create a local program.

“The beauty of this program is that it's local,” Ligon said. “They can save a lot of money.”

He said \$90,000 has been budgeted for this initial fellowship program. But the hope is that it will continue and be offered twice a year.

“I think the future for this program is bright,” McVay said. “This is a wonderful strategic investment in our human capital here at StratCom.”

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Students Sew In Style

Updated: Thu 6:28 AM, Mar 20, 2014

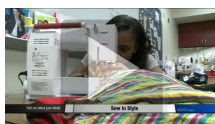
By: Katie Stukey - Email



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Students Sew In Style



Goodwill Hunting



Passion For Fashion

Omaha Fashion Week has come and gone, but a big fashion show takes place Thursday. Sew In Style features the work of students and combines the principles of service and [learning](#).

Students from Omaha North and Omaha Central high schools started their mission at Goodwill headquarters. They got a limited [budget](#) to shop around and then it was on to the sewing room to turn their finds into one-of-a-kind looks, learning to find value in otherwise unwanted stuff and make it brand new.

"I consider it like a fairy dress almost," says North High senior Ruby Bless, almost finished turning an old strapless gown into a walking work of art. "It's a much more personal project for me."



Her work, along with her classmates, is part of UNO's P-16 Initiative, pairing up college students with younger learners to work toward a common [goal](#) centered around a community organization.

"I decided with Goodwill nearby and the kids like to remake their clothes and it helps with the cost, too, teach them be thrifful," says North High consumer science teacher Susan Witty. "It's fun to see them budget. I can get these three items for the \$10 or I could get this."

With just the \$10 in hand, the students found their fashion show materials inside a Goodwill thrift store. "I always head toward the dresses first 'cause I always end up getting dresses for like \$1," says Bless.

They also took a tour behind the scenes, getting to see how Goodwill works and why its operation make a difference in the community. "They reuse everything and it doesn't go to waste."

Back in class, UNO public relations students put their own studies to the test, helping their younger peers write a script to accompany their design in the show. "It's really cool what these kids have been able to change just everyday Goodwill stuff in to," says UNO junior Rani Potter. "I think it's really great that they have the [opportunity](#) to do this kind of thing. I never got to do this kind of thing when I was in high school. It was just kind of like, get your schoolwork done and get out, but I think it's really cool that they get to try something that they want to do potentially for the rest of their life."

"It's actually really exciting to see all our things go down the runway and I think everyone has a good time 'cause they get to see all their hard work pay off," says Bless, who plans to study business after [high school](#) so she open her own shop with all handmade and re-purposed items.

You can check out Bless and her classmates' designs soon as they'll go into display windows at Goodwills across the metro.

WOWT NBC Omaha 3501 Farnam Street Omaha, NE 68131 (402) 346-6666 sixonline@wowt.com



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Published Mar 22, 2014

Published Saturday March 22, 2014

Young volunteers get to work on day of service

By [Amanda Brandt](#) / World-Herald staff writer



MARK DAVIS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Angel Aguilar and Manny Garcia help hang siding at a Habitat for Humanity home during the United Way of the Midlands' first "Young Professionals Day of Service" in Omaha on Saturday.

When Robert Jones heard about the 60 gallons of paint it was going to take to coat the interior of UNO's child care center, he chuckled.

"That's a lot of paint," he said. "A lot of paint." But he dutifully grabbed a roller and dipped it into the sky blue hue.

Jones was one of about 30 volunteers Saturday in the first Young Professionals Day of Service, sponsored by United Way of the Midlands. The event was part of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Seven Days of Service project, which happens every year during the school's weeklong spring break.

The day of service was the product of a presentation Agne Dizona recently gave at Omaha's Young Professionals Summit. Dizona is the vice president of community engagement and volunteering at United Way.

Young professionals are described as working individuals under 40. Dizona said this group often shows a desire to volunteer but faces obstacles such as work and family obligations. She held a "mini summit" to see how to better engage them in community service.

One response? Hold an event on a weekend.

So on Saturday, volunteers in their mid-20s painted the interior of UNO's day care or helped build Habitat for Humanity houses.

About 25 volunteers showed up at the child care center. Day care teachers chose the desired paint colors, and then the light mauve, brown and pale sea-foam green were carefully applied to the walls.

Ji Seul Kim, a doctoral student in public administration, said it was a nice way to escape from her studies.

"My brain is relaxing while my body is busy," said Kim, who is from South Korea.

Jones participated on behalf of Goodwill's YouthBuild program. The 10-month program teaches students the construction trades.

He will graduate in July and begin an electrician apprenticeship in Kansas City, Mo. His long-term goal is pharmacy school. For right now, he was the "expert painter" in the toddler room.

"This edging is no joke," Jones said. "You have to be precise with it."

One thing was certain: the early morning start wasn't how volunteers would normally spend a weekend.

"I'm not usually doing this Saturday mornings," said Abby Johnson, gesturing to the careful trim work she was doing around a baseboard.

Johnson, a Brayton, Iowa, native, is a freshman studying speech language pathology at UNO. She works in the child care center's toddler room during the week.

At the Habitat for Humanity site, five volunteers helped prepare two homes on North 37th Street.

Kara Kammerer, 30, spent her morning edging the entire upstairs of a house. Kammerer works as a graphic designer at UNO.

She learned of the event via the Omaha YP Facebook page, and it seemed like an easy way to get involved.

"I had free time, and I like to help out in the community," Kammerer said.

Next door, Brazilian international students Luciana De Souza and Douglas Contel were hanging siding in the chilly wind. Both are studying construction management and civil engineering.

Dizona said the goal of the day of service was to make "community engagement and impact" possible in Omaha. The volunteers had a more concrete goal in mind: finish their assigned tasks.

"We have a lot of painting to do, that's for sure," Jones said. "But so far, I'm enjoying it."

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Published Mar 22, 2014

Published Saturday March 22, 2014

Salvation Army, UNO to stock Omaha food pantries



REBECCA S. GRATZ/THE WORLD-HERALD

Salvation Army volunteer Judy Grace helps Robert Bowman (center), 6, and his brother, Caleb, 2, reach the kettle to make a donation.

OMAHA (AP) — University of Nebraska at Omaha fraternity members will help stock the Salvation Army's two food pantries in Nebraska's largest city.

The food drive and homelessness awareness campaign called "Just Can It" begins March 31 and runs through April 4. Omaha Fire Department neighborhood stations and Fareway Food Stores will accept donations of non-perishable food during the drive.

Members of UNO's Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity will sleep outdoors at Crossroads Mall in cardboard homes and accept donations of money and non-perishable food.

In 2013, the Salvation Army filled nearly 8,500 food pantry orders.

Last year, the Just Can It drive collected more than 37,700 food items. This year, the goal is to collect 45,000 food items.

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KVNO News

New Community Engagement Center set to open this spring

By **Brandon McDermott, KVNO News**

February 5th, 2014

Omaha, NE – The new Community Engagement Center (CEC) on the campus of UNO will house more than 20 groups.

The 60,000 square foot building is still being constructed, but will be finished before the grand opening this spring. Sara Woods, assistant to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement at UNO, said the primary goal for the CEC is outreach.

“It is both expanding the services that the campus offers throughout the community and it will also enable people to access the university more easily and take advantage of what we offer here,” Woods said.

The CEC is the first standalone, comprehensive facility based on a university campus that is fully dedicated to community engagement, according to Woods. Selection of members of the new CEC involved a written application as well as formal interviews with a university panel. The new CEC will contain both UNO organizations as well as external community groups.



The Community Engagement Center (CEC) will open in April 2014. (Photo Courtesy UNO)

University groups include The Social Media Lab for Research and Engagement, Spirituality, Public Health and Religious Studies (SPHRS) and Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS). Community groups include the Omaha Public Library and Nebraskans for Civic Reform (NCR).

Woods said when groups applied the biggest area UNO looked at during the selection process was their ability to collaborate and participate with the CEC's other members.

Woods said there are lots of initiatives and activities that are available at UNO and the CEC will help better link those services, its members and the community.

“They can avail themselves of our service learning academy,” Woods said. “They can take advantage of student volunteers. We will be able to connect them better with faculty and student expertise. We will be able to connect them to resources that will be located in the building and outside.”

Claudia Lucero is the Community Engagement Coordinator for OLLAS at UNO. Lucero said it’s important to remember who the university serves – the student.

“With the students I definitely think it’s going to be a space (where) they can expand their horizons, they can expand their knowledge,” Lucero said. “Get to know more about the partners that we have, they might have different opportunities for internships, for learning beyond the classroom.”

Michele Desamarias is the director of Spirituality, Public Health and Religious Studies (SPHRS) at UNO. SPHRS is a service organization that helps link people and projects together whose work has to do with spirituality and wellness. Desamarias said the CEC will be a breeding place for growth for UNO and Omaha. She said it is too early to make predictions about specific ways each groups will co-evolve. However, Desamarias looks forward to working with other groups in the building and helping students succeed.

“I am sure that we will learn a lot from the other groups,” Desamarias said. “It will be a tremendous benefit to our students to place them in internships, meaningful (and) practical internships with groups that are doing incredible work in the community both locally and internationally.”

Director of OLLAS, Lourdes Gouveia, said her group is excited to get started. She pointed to a luncheon of newly chosen applicants to the CEC where many of the groups had a chance to meet for the first time.

“It was amazing,” Gouveia said. “Right there we started all these conversations, ‘oh, you are in the youth organization?’, ‘oh, we are not doing anything there, maybe we should get together,’ and ‘where are you in the building, we are here.’ Already these conversations kicked off during this luncheon.”

Woods said the level of excitement is sky high among the CEC’s new members. Woods said in the end the true beneficiary will be students.

“So we see this as a real win for students, Woods said. “Students are really the core of our academic enterprise. They are really important in terms of what we do here and the engagement center is a way for us to serve them in the best possible way.”

The CEC will officially open to the public on April 17. Woods said there will be an extensive opening ceremony to coincide with the opening of the CEC.



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UNO students volunteer during spring break

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