



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY

# P-16 INITIATIVE

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha

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## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

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



**SUSTAINABILITY**



**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

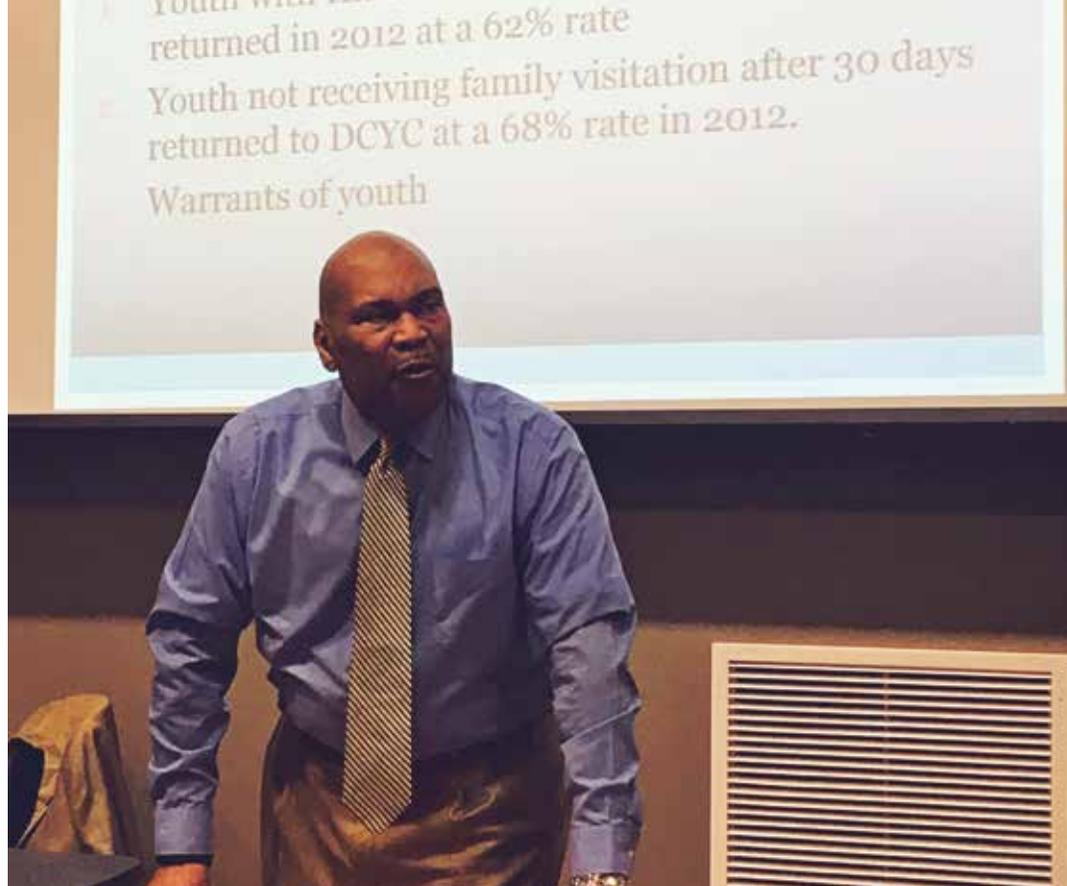


**STEM**



**GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT**

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



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## GAINING PERSPECTIVE: RACE & OUR JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

**By Camtrice Bexten**

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UNO students had the unique opportunity during the spring semester to examine a complex issue in our society: disproportionate minority contact in the local juvenile justice system. Dr. Dennis Hoffman's *Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Justice* class worked with both youth and professionals throughout the semester to examine this issue and create a resource guide.

After touring the Douglas County Youth Center (DCYC) to get a better view of juvenile corrections, the UNO students spent time with youth in DCYC's Encouraging Positive and Intelligent Choices (EPIC

Program. As a result, students experienced youth interaction while being introduced to the professional component of the juvenile justice system through attendance at the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) committee meetings, a group of professionals working in the juvenile justice system.

Students conducted interviews with both youth and professionals to gain further insight and collect valuable data. Mark LeFlore, DMC Committee Chair, commended the project's insightfulness, stating that Dr. Hoffman had challenged his students "to

recognize disproportionality at the various system points that touch juveniles; as well as having students interview members of the DMC to gain further insight on the DMC problem."

Students presented their findings to the DMC Committee, and provided the information as a new resource for the organization to use moving forward. The project has not only benefited the community, but has better prepared students for professional life as community-engaged citizens.

# MAPPING HISTORIES: LEARNING ACROSS THE AGES

By SaraAnn Staley



Human geography is the study of human activity through topic by topic coverage of cultural traits – an area of study that offered a learning experience for multiple generations. This was the basis for a service learning experience shared by Professor Leigh Ann Opitz's *Human Geography* students who partnered with Ms. Annie O'Farrell's 4-6 graders at Montessori Co-op School. The partnership allowed students to see their curriculum in the real world in partnership with the seniors at the Intercultural Senior Center (ISC).

Through the project, students were able to experience cultural topics in everyday life. Students met with seniors from the ISC to build rapport and share in culturally-rich experiences that included a talent show, interviews, and a final celebration. After researching the ISC seniors' countries of origin, Montessori students shared what they had learned through the process with the seniors.

One UNO student described the project as an opportunity to learn about culture, and experience conversation with others.

“ I think one of the biggest problems in our society nowadays is lack of interaction and communication with each other. People learn a lot from each other. I was scared at first of the thought that I would have to be there and do activities with the seniors. However, after visiting ISC a few times, I found out that I was happy to be there.”



# COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS CHARACTERISTICS FOUND IN SERVICE LEARNING

By Samantha Kanouse

College and career readiness are two topics at the forefront of many educators' minds. Pre and post assessments from the fall 2015 semester highlighted trends of college and career readiness foundational

skills among students participating in service learning across the P-16 spectrum. This started at the elementary age group where service learning participants reported forming the necessary skills to work in a collaborative and diverse environment. Ninety-two percent of middle and high school students indicated they plan to go to college after they graduate, showing when a student's confidence in their ability to find information to solve problems goes up, so does their desire to go to college. Among college students, 88 percent reported wanting to take a service learning class to make themselves more marketable post-graduation. During their service learning experiences, students gained or improved upon the necessary skills to aid in their career readiness.



100%

of elementary students agree that they like to work with people who are different from them.



92%

of middle/high school students plan to go to college after they graduate.



88%

of UNO students selected service learning classes to make themselves more marketable.



# GIVING VOICES TO THE VOICELESS

By Rebekka Erks

The semester-long "Voices of Hunger" service learning project connected UNO and Burke High School students with the Hunger Collaborative to give a voice to food-insecure citizens in

Omaha. This project set out to hear from individuals about their experience and put a human face and voice to the issue of food insecurity.

Mrs. Holly Murphy's Burke High School English Honors students worked to improve their writing and interviewing skills by composing questions and interviewing food-insecure clients of Together Inc., while Dr. Angela Glover's UNO *English Composition* students had a similar mission as they sought to learn more about hunger through literature. To accomplish these goals, the groups met, exchanged letters, and worked together to interview patrons of Together Inc. under the guidance of Hunger Collaborative's Mr. Craig Howell and Hunger Free Heartland's Ms. Tiffany Jones.

Mrs. Murphy's students were impacted by the interview experience. She said her students, "took this experience seriously, represented the school well and displayed compassion, empathy, and respect," in ways she did not expect. Students "brought voices to the voiceless," and experienced high levels of emotion in the process. One student was even brought to tears following a patron interview.

In the final project phase students created clay pots that featured quotes from the interviews they conducted. Then, at the culminating event, the students displayed their final project and welcomed the public and media to learn more about the Voices of Hunger in Omaha.

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# SERVICE LEARNING AROUND THE WORLD

By Carol Redwing



“Around the World” is a P-16 Service Learning collaboration between Professor Stephanie Lynam and Professor Linda Loftus’s *Intensive English* (ILUNO) program students and Ms. Beth Grimmond’s third grade students at Washington Elementary. Interactions throughout the semester provided a time for the pairs of students to meet and practice English reading skills, an “Around the World” culture presentation, and intercultural interviews. This event helped students to practice their interviewing skills in a way that creatively bolstered English reading, writing, and speaking.

ILUNO students toured a typical American elementary school, then learned more about each other with group activities.



The students read books that focused on multicultural heritage to practice reading and speaking skills. During the “Around the World” presentations, Washington Elementary students received a glimpse into the customs, foods, and languages of university students from various nations.

The project prompted dialogue between Washington Elementary

and ILUNO students about customs, hobbies, and games that are popular in the United States and abroad. A third grade student proclaimed, “I liked that we got to talk to people from different countries and learn about them. I also like that we got to learn about the countries that they came from.”



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## MEET SLA’S NEWEST STAFF MEMBER

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Angie Carlton joined the Service Learning Academy in December of 2015 as the Service Learning Associate. She has her Bachelor of Social Work from Mount Mercy University and a Master’s in Social Work specializing in Leadership and Development of Social Services and a certificate in Nonprofit Management and Philanthropy from Loyola University Chicago. Prior to joining the SLA team Angie worked with nonprofit organizations facilitating opportunities for people to participate in community service.

When asked what she enjoys most, Angie said, “I am a part of an awesome group of professionals who work very hard to support the mission of the Service Learning Academy. They model teamwork and collaboration well and make work an enjoyable place. I am honored to learn more about the work of the metro

nonprofits, the partnerships between the UNO faculty and students and the P-12 partners who work together to advance the learning of our students in their classes.”

Angie has resided in Omaha since 2010 and has grown to enjoy being back in the Midwest. Some of her favorite Omaha activities include the summer concert series in the parks and exploring different hiking spots around the community. Angie also enjoys baking, photography, and painting.

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# STUDENTS' COLLABORATION LEADS TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

By John Matthews

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Students from Professor Steve Rodie's *Landscape Appreciation and Environmental Sustainability* course and Ms. Rachael Bunn's Omaha Northwest (ONW) science students worked diligently last fall to design a rain garden for the grounds

of the ONW campus. After working collaboratively in groups to survey, calculate and design the rain garden utilizing environmental sustainability and STEAM concepts (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math), the designs

were synthesized into a single, unified plan.

This spring, students implemented their design plan with the construction of ONW's first rain garden. The effort will not only increase sustainable solutions to storm water runoff in the area, but it will serve as a means of vital continuing environmental education for the ONW community for many years to come. Along with recognition from the school and community, Samsung awarded ONW \$20,000 for the project's innovative integration of STEAM concepts.

Professor Rodie stated in addition to students' course learning outcomes and the development of new interests in environmental or community causes, other important learning objectives were realized through this project. "When UNO and ONW students actively shared information such as life experiences, neighborhood knowledge, where to go to college, I think the life benefits for every student reach a whole new level of importance and impact," he reflected.



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## MULTIPLE COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS CREATED DIVERSE EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS

By Amber Smit

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Students from Ms. Rachel Olive's *Social Work & Civic Engagement* course teamed up with several partners to expose students to diverse opportunities within the social work profession while supporting community partners. One project, Gardening with a Purpose,

worked with Mrs. Jennifer Doll-Fowler's Edison Elementary second graders and residents at Quality Living, Inc. (QLI). UNO students created lesson plans and activities for the residents and second graders to plan and plant a garden at QLI. The experience culminated with everyone sharing the task of planting produce, a collaboration QLI's Ms. Sue Hall-Erickson said helped fulfill the organization's mission to instill purpose and create hope. "Not only did we benefit by getting the actual raised bed gardens, but ... hopefully made some lasting friendships with everyone involved," she said.

Another group of UNO students partnered with Mr. Wes Jensen and Ms. Erika Mardock's Omaha Street School (OSS) students to create "Conversation Ball Pits." Throughout the semester, UNO

# STUDENTS LEARN TO SPEAK MANDARIN

By Susan Wallis



Sharpening Mandarin language skills and learning about Chinese culture were two key components of the collaboration between students from UNO and Beveridge Magnet Middle School. Mrs. Hui Zhu's *Mandarin I* UNO students partnered with Beveridge teacher Mrs. Ching Lam's Chinese II and V classes to create an interactive experience that allowed students from both schools to meet several times to learn together as they participated in Mandarin learning activities and traditional Chinese cultural activities. The project benefited from Mrs. Zhu's experience serving as a Fullbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant who spent the last two semesters at UNO sharing her country's language and culture.



Learning a new language can be a challenging task, Mrs. Zhu explained. "This wonderful project provided my students the opportunity to learn from a different teacher and from other students. We cooperated together for the same goal." Together, students made New Year's dumplings and created blown ink art pieces, projects that were eventually on display at the sixth annual CultureFest—a

service learning partnership between Omaha South High Magnet School, Beveridge Magnet Middle School and UNO's Service Learning Academy. CultureFest brought together nearly 500 people from area schools and the community at large, to experience and celebrate cultures from around the world through interactive informational booths and special performances.

and OSS students built relationships and planned ball pit activities, which were implemented on UNO's campus and downtown Omaha. During the events, students invited community members to sit in the ball pit to engage in conversations and find commonalities between strangers. Of the project, Mr. Jensen said, "this service learning project allowed our students to practice this skill in a setting that engaged their peers, instructors and the Omaha community at large. It gave individuals the chance to take a moment out of their day to truly get to know someone, to let them be heard despite all the noise and distractions around us."





## INFUSING RIGOR INTO SERVICE LEARNING: A K-12 TEACHER & UNO PROFESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jodi Korth



*For many K-12 and UNO educators and nonprofit organizations, the very idea of developing a service learning project can seem daunting. Ensuring the project is rigorous can seem even more difficult. This article highlights a service learning partnership that focused on rigor from the very beginning, and as a result, is meeting community and student learning goals.*

Looking back now, Lewis & Clark Middle School

English Language Learner (ELL) instructor Mrs. Barb Brimmerman, and UNO Literacy and Learning professor Dr. Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo say their service learning partnership was unexpected.

“When we went through that first meeting, I just couldn’t see this project being a fit for my students,” shared Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo. Matched as potential partners three years ago by Lucy Garza-Westbrook, SLA’s Community Liaison,

initial conversations revealed each educator’s independent learning goals for their students and the brainstorming began. Mrs. Brimmerman wanted to increase her ELL students’ language skills and give them opportunities to research and to write, while Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo wanted to give her students – future educators – experience teaching ELL students.

To meet these objectives, UNO students developed

several lesson plans using educational tactics such as graphic organizers and reading strategies, and taught the Lewis & Clark students during meetings throughout the semester. Together, the group partnered with UNO’s Glacier Creek Preserve (as featured in the *P-16 Initiative* cover photo). Students explored the prairie, took pictures and practiced language skills by writing captions for the photos they took – through lesson plans developed by

UNO students. For the project's conclusion, Lewis & Clark students presented their learning with a formal presentation for students and administrators highlighting their learning takeaways. Materials developed through the project will serve future student Prairie visitors.

The project created an opportunity to learn and engage that was nearly impossible without service learning. "It went above and beyond and offered a lot of rigor that one teacher and 20 kids may not have been able to get at that level," explained Mrs. Brimmerman. Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo echoed the project's importance for the UNO students, who typically lack any experience working with ELL students prior to taking her course. "Getting that exposure before they graduate is extremely important," she said.

This spring marked the third year groups of Lewis & Clark and UNO students have experienced their curriculum through service learning. The project has evolved over the years, and both teachers point to reflection as the critical element that ensured learning goals remain rigorous and tightly-linked to curriculum. "Reflection meetings are extremely important," said Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo. "Having those conversations is crucial in the beginning, middle, and throughout." Mrs. Brimmerman agreed, sharing that part of reflection for her is continually assessing the learning the project offers her students. "I'm a real stickler on rigor. If it doesn't have any rigor in it, I'm not going to do it," she said.

Perhaps the strongest beneficiaries of the project's rigor have been the students, who have experienced learning through a new lens.

“ It's about empowering them. I don't want them to learn something in a room with four walls, I want them to take it outside, into the world, and be better people because of it.”

- Mrs. Brimmerman

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## TOP 5 TIPS FOR SERVICE LEARNING RIGOR

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1

### FOCUS ON YOUR CURRICULUM

Don't reinvent the wheel, but use what is already in your syllabus and explore how can you translate that into a service learning experience.

2

### ESTABLISH STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Find other educators who are as passionate as you are and work together.

3

### REFLECT

As the project evolves, continue reflecting with partners and students on what works well and what can be approached differently.

4

### KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

What experience do you want them to have and what knowledge should they walk away with?

5

### ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Be creative and think outside the box when planning your service learning project. Start small and celebrate success along the way!



## A LESSON IN ETHICS: WHAT WOULD A BOYS TOWN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT DO?

By Rosa Najera

A student cheating on a test, underage drinking, and homophobia were all topics of ethical scenarios performed by UNO students for a classroom at Boys Town. As part of their service learning project, Dr. Amy Rodie's *Business Ethics* class partnered with Dr. Jeff Westerman's Boys Town High School students. The goal of the project was to have both

student groups understand the meaning and consequences of being an ethical person. The UNO course prepared students to be ethical individuals in the business setting, and encouraged discussions of personal experiences. As part of the project, a UNO student shared with the Boys Town students that making right

choices greatly impacts your life, and stated: "If you lose a friend over a good choice, then they weren't a good friend to begin with." After exploring different ethical problems together, the Boys Town High School and UNO students co-created skits that were performed for middle school students at Boys Town. UNO students facilitated conversation with Boys Town Middle School sparked by the scenarios to discuss the difficult decisions and implications that occurred in the scenarios. Students said the project was beneficial in many ways. "The Boys Town students were motivated to participate in the collaboration and it showed in their commitment to the project," said Dr. Westerman.

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## LETTER FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Many times over the past few months I've been asked, "how does service learning meet the metropolitan mission?" The frequency of the question led me to wonder if Chancellor Christensen had started a secret shopper-type program to ensure everyone at UNO was on message!

All joking aside, this is an important question that deserves a thoughtful answer. Fulfilling the metropolitan mission means to be teaching, learning, researching and serving within the metropolitan community and using shared resources and assets to meet those goals. Service learning courses at UNO are just one of the many ways we partner with the community to live out this mission. There is no shortage of creative ways that a motivated, collaborative and dedicated community can come together to shape Omaha for the better.



We recently had the opportunity to celebrate an award-winning articulation of the mission: the OPS and UNO service learning partnership. P-16 service learning started with an idea and collaboration nearly a decade ago, which led to our current partnership that engaged almost 15,000 OPS P-12 students and UNO students between 2010-2015.

As we look into the next year, exploring scholarship and research with community partners is one aspect of living the mission that we are excited to deepen. Another is finding opportunities to make STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) come to life for students in their coursework by applying concepts to real needs. We look to you, our dedicated community, to share your creative ideas, course connections, needs or interest in finding a potential partner. The Service Learning Academy is committed to the metropolitan mission and making Omaha the healthiest community possible. If you ever want to understand just how important this mission is to us, just ask!

Sincerely,

Julie Dierberger, P-16 Coordinator



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