



# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 11 | ISSUE 1 | FALL 2020



LA Maria Jimenez



Talia Smith



Anni Zou



Grace Nelson



Claire Fischer



Bri Full



Kelsey Wagner



Madeline Hagar



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## SUMMER SEMINAR

July 2021

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

Typically a 4.5 day professional development experience held at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, the Service Learning Seminar will be condensed to a virtual format during the week of [July 12-16, 2021](#). It will provide an opportunity for P-12 and after-school teachers, administrators, and UNO full and part-time faculty members to understand the fundamentals of service learning to develop a service learning project. Register at [sla.unomaha.edu](http://sla.unomaha.edu) to reserve your spot.

## SLA APPROACHES

Traditional and P-16 service learning courses are taught at UNO. The traditional service learning projects are collaborations between community partners and a UNO class. P-16 service learning courses include collaboration between a UNO class, a P-12 class, and a community partner. Throughout the newsletter, projects are identified as traditional or P-16 based on their project structure.

### TRADITIONAL MODEL



### P-16 MODEL



## MAVERICK PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE

The student philanthropy model is another form of service learning which incorporates charitable giving. Students in this type of class practice philanthropic giving and learn how it affects community partners.

## MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

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



**EDUCATIONAL  
SUPPORT**



**SOCIAL  
JUSTICE**



**ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP**



**HEALTH AND  
WELLNESS**



**INTERNATIONAL  
SERVICE**



**ECONOMIC  
SUFFICIENCY**

## LETTER FROM THE PAUL SATHER DISTINGUISHED DIRECTOR



This semester's theme, *Leading and Learning Virtually*, is a perfect way to describe how our students, faculty members, and community partners managed the semester. (And that is the first time I used the word "perfect" to describe anything in 2020!) Folks experienced nearly insurmountable challenges only to meet them with leadership, collaboration, and creativity.

This newsletter highlights leadership in many ways. You will read about Dalton Meister, the inaugural recipient of the First Generation Student Service Learning Award and his significant service learning contributions over the years. You will learn how UNO expanded how math and data visualization is taught at UNO through service learning as the recipient of a recent National Science Foundation grant. You will also read about Marilyn Leach, whose advocacy for service learning at UNO led to a truly institutionalized engagement agenda.

Through these stories and the others within the pages of this newsletter, I hope you hear how students and communities transform through the leadership that brings opportunities for student and community growth through the high-quality service learning opportunities happening virtually. It is clear the opportunities for students to develop the skills and abilities we know they need to lead our community are exercised through the service learning experiences described in this newsletter.

Happy New Year from the Service Learning Academy team! We look forward to learning and serving with you in 2021!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Dierberger". The signature is fluid and cursive.

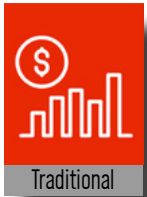
Julie Dierberger, Paul Sather Distinguished Director





## VIRTUAL TOUR OF OMAHA

By: Ali Al-Ghaithi



Traditional

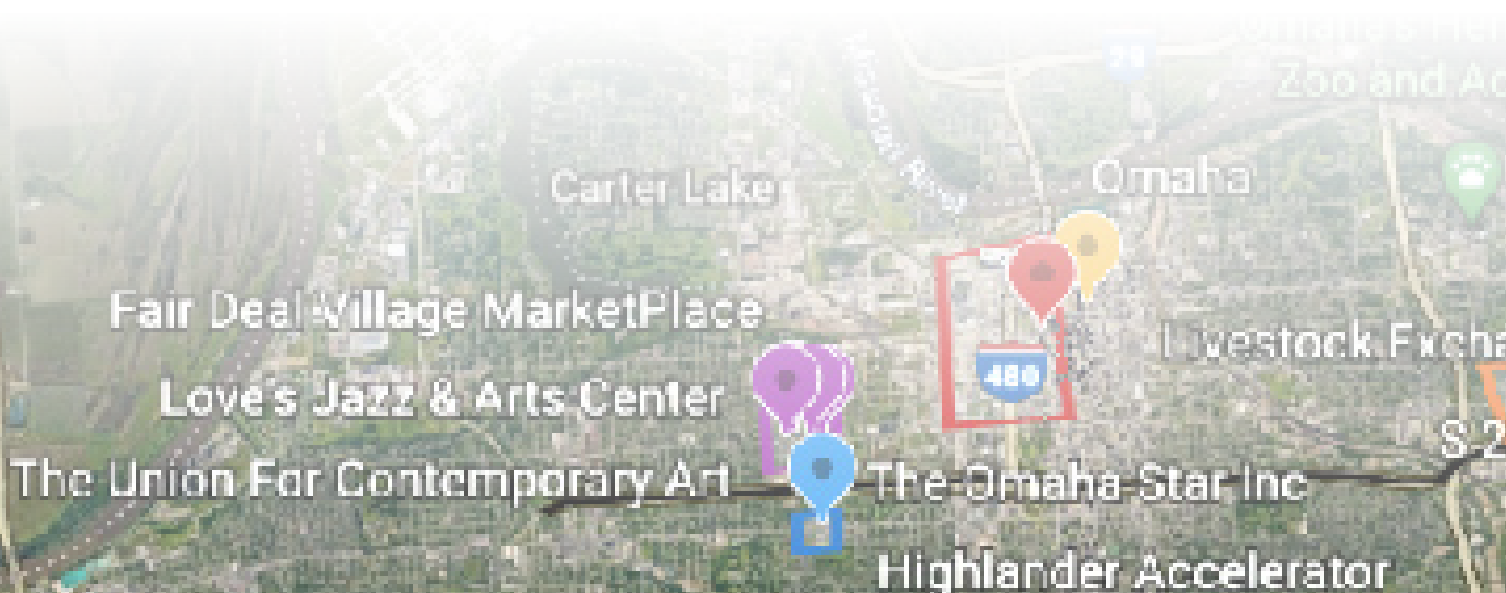
This semester, technology played a significant part in service learning projects. UNO faculty member Sajda Qureshi's *IT for Development* course collaborated with the Nebraska Business Development Center to provide an opportunity for students to work in conjunction with small businesses to identify technology needs and develop IT solutions that support and empower businesses.

In previous years, service learning students could go on a tour around the Omaha metro to learn about the community and businesses in Omaha. But this year, the project partners had to get creative due to the restrictions in place to keep the community safe during the pandemic. Instead of a physical tour, the Service Learning Academy took the UNO students on a virtual tour using Google Earth.

Service Learning Academy staff member Kirsten Case and graduate assistant Ali Al-Ghaithi worked with Sajda Qureshi to develop the tour, and together they drove the virtual bus around Omaha, making stops during the trip and describing the locations to students as if they were physically there. The UNO students were able to see and visit different places in South and North Omaha, including the Livestock Exchange, South Omaha City Hall, the Union For Contemporary Art, and other sites, in order to learn about the business community as well as the impact of practices such as redlining.

With Google Earth, the students experienced live navigation around the city using street view, pictures, and a section for information that students could use to revisit these stops and read more about each site. Using technology, the service learning students were able to experience the tour of Omaha even with social distancing requirements.

[Click here to view the tour!](#)



# STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

By: Kelsey Wagner



The Wellbeing Partners is a coalition of organizations and individuals that seek to promote community wellness through collaboration. This semester, the Wellbeing Partners furthered this mission by collaborating with UNO classes on two service learning projects.

The first project addressed health and wellness. UNO faculty member Danae Dinkel's pursuit to provide children the ability to live a physically active lifestyle sparked her long-standing partnership with the Wellbeing Partners. Over the course of this fall semester, UNO students in the course *Motivation for Physical Activity* collaborated with The Wellbeing Partners to illustrate the importance of physical education for school-aged children. Students created infographics and video models of activities that children and their families can do together. The students applied the concepts learned in their course and provided the materials to the Wellbeing Partners for use in their programming.

In the second project, UNO students worked with the Wellbeing Partners to address issues of health and neighborhood walkability. UNO faculty member Becky Brusky's *Data Literacy* class analyzed statistical data about walking routes to schools and local businesses for Omaha community members. The UNO students created visualizations of the data that had been accumulated by the Wellbeing Partners in order to promote positive social change for the neighborhoods.

Whether focused on health and wellness or social justice, the service learning partnerships between UNO faculty members Danae Dinkel and Becky Brusky, their students, and the Wellbeing Partners showcased the ways that collaboration can positively impact the Omaha community.

*Students created infographics (right) that promote being physically active and making healthy choices.*



## Let's Get Moving!

Every time you complete an exercise, cross it off! Get outside, be active, and have fun!

Jump up and down 10 times

Spin around in a circle 5 times

Hop on one foot 10 times

Run to the nearest door and run back

Walk like a bear for a count of 5

Do 3 cartwheels

Do 10 jumping jacks

Hop like a frog 10 times

Balance on your left foot for a count of 10

Balance on your right foot for a count of 10

Jump rope for a count of 10

Do 3 somersaults

Hyde Park  
Quantum

Riverside Park

Bellevue

Old Market

Metropolitan Community College - South Omaha Campus

South Omaha City Hall

Greater Omaha Packing Co, Inc.



# NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY BUILDING

By: Bri Full



Traditional

The Neighborhood Capacity Building service learning project was newly established for the Fall 2020 semester and culminated in real-life changes for community members of North and South Omaha.

The students in UNO faculty member Daniel Scheller's *Urban Studies Seminar*, community partners at

Together Inc., and the Heartland Workers Center Youth Neighborhood Association (YNA) joined forces after identifying that some members of North and South Omaha felt like they lacked a sense of community sanctuary in their neighborhoods. The project partners believed that increasing youth volunteerism rates could improve community cohesion and that the creation of programming for youth was necessary.

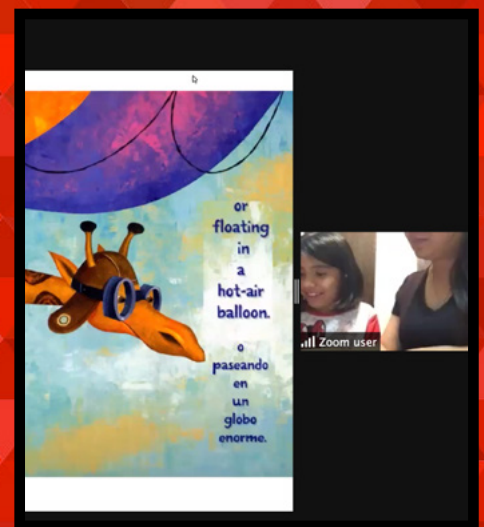
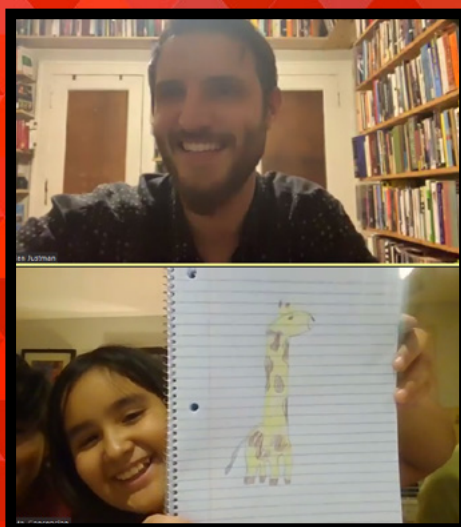
UNO students and the YNA set out to create a logic model to guide local organizations as they develop strategies aimed toward motivating young people to participate in their communities. An important aspect of the project was to intentionally including local community members and organizations. UNO students reached out to various community organizations along the 24th Street corridor and set up virtual listening sessions to identify opportunities to get more youth involved. Before the listening sessions, the UNO students learned skills such as setting agendas, facilitating meetings, and using ethical research practices in communities of color.

After UNO students and the Heartland Workers Center listened to members of the community and identified the appropriate changes, they used the logic model and advocacy plan to pave a path toward fostering better youth engagement. These actions plans were given to North and South Omaha nonprofits to be implemented at the beginning of the 2021 year.

FALL 2020  
IN REVIEW



1,998 UNO students  
participated in service  
learning projects



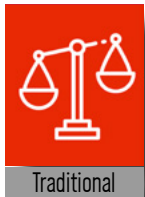
Students in the College Prep and Family Learning service learning project shared stories, drawings, and laughs over Zoom this semester.



Students engaged in discussions about women's roles in faith communities.

## WOMEN AND RELIGIOUS EQUALITY

By: Anni Zou



Students in UNO faculty member Jeannette Gabriel's *Special Topics in Religion* class collaborated with Lacey Studnicka from Habitat for Humanity to examine the historical, cultural, and religious contexts that highlight women's involvement or exclusion from activity and power within various religions. Students compared and contrasted how women in different

global contexts choose to practice their religions while also analyzing how feminism has affected women's participation and leadership in public religious discourse and policy.

For the service learning project, the students and Habitat for Humanity invited community members to engage in a round table discussion about women's roles in faith communities. They discussed how these religious roles have been an integral part of the rising tide of women's leadership and the continuing fight for gender equality in other countries as well as for refugees in the United States.

During the project, the Service Learning Academy worked with students to provide technical support and to help create instructional content about how to have conversations with people from different cultural backgrounds. The students used those skills while meeting with community members during the round table discussion. In addition, students and community members created videos reflecting on their experiences.

Through this project, students had an opportunity to meet with community members who have experienced oppression based on gender and religion. The resulting videos will continue to support Habitat for Humanity's efforts to serve the refugee community in Omaha.

FALL 2020  
IN REVIEW



40 community organizations  
partnered with the Service  
Learning Academy in the  
Omaha area



# VIRTUAL SERVICE LEARNING SEMINAR

By: Grace Nelson

This summer, the Service Learning Academy conducted the Service Learning Seminar in a virtual setting for the first time. The COVID-19 pandemic required the SLA to transform the traditional model of engagement into a new, virtual environment.

Throughout the week, Service Learning Academy staff and guest presenters worked with 31 seminar participants, including both UNO faculty and P-12 teachers, to learn about quality service learning instruction and project design. Participants completed pre-work for each day to prepare for discussion, attended daily presentations covering a wide variety of materials, and engaged in small breakout groups to further dive into the content.

Participants also connected with 27 different community organizations at the virtual Community Partner Fair. SLA staff facilitated “speed-dating” style breakout rooms so that participants and community partners could learn more about one another and brainstorm potential partnerships.

“The one-on-one meetings were the most helpful to me because I got to ask questions and narrow down my plan more. I also appreciated and benefitted from the breakout sessions.”

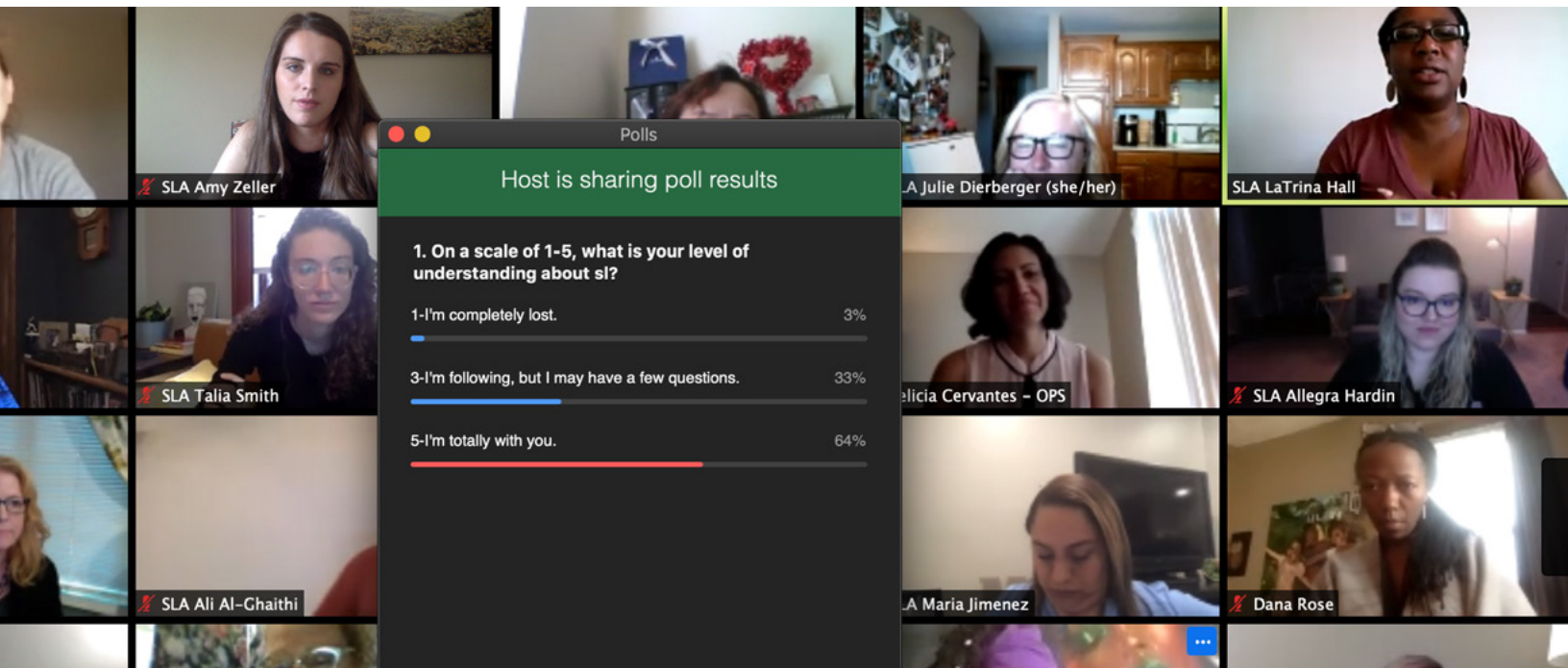
– Seminar Participant

This year’s virtual Seminar was made possible by the innovative use of technology. The SLA team worked with UNO Digital Learning to identify resources for online delivery. Through digital platforms, resources were stored and shared with participants in a user-friendly manner. Google Sites served as the primary platform and held the daily schedules, Zoom links, and learning materials for each presentation and activity. Additional materials and activities were presented through Padlet, Kahoot!, and Milanote. Using these technology tools, the SLA was able to provide valuable and transferrable tools that participants could continue to access after Seminar.

“The different frameworks to use to understand service learning helped me to see how layered and multifaceted service learning is.”

– Seminar Participant

As COVID-19 requires changes to the learning environment, educators are continually challenged to find new ways to engage with students and bridge community relationships across disciplines. The shift to a virtual Seminar was a great learning experience for the Service Learning Academy. The SLA team was given an opportunity to refine skills in virtual engagement and look forward to sharing these skills and lessons learned with faculty and community partners.





WHAT IS ONE WORD YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU HEAR THE TERM "SERVICE LEARNING"?



The Service Learning Academy came up with creative ways to engage with Seminar participants including polls (left) and word clouds (above).

## KEEPING IN TOUCH REMOTELY

By: Maria Jimenez

The office environment in the Service Learning Academy (SLA) was a little different this semester, but team members were still able to interact, laugh, and share great memories. The sense of community that the SLA creates in the work and project environment was something we did not want to let go of when the pandemic forced our office to go remote. Our full-time staff, graduate assistants (GAs), and undergraduate assistants worked together to brainstorm ideas to stay connected virtually.

We began using Slack, a channel-based messaging platform, to work together on projects and engage in social activities even while physically distanced. For example, the SLA Social Committee posted weekly hashtags, and SLA team members would post a photo or comment related to that hashtag. One week the hashtag was #Foodie, and our team members posted wonderful photos of their favorite foods, recipes and food items. #MotivationMonday was also popular, and team members posted encouraging and motivational messages for each other.

The SLA also stayed connected with faculty, students, and the community using our social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook. We created SLA Team Spotlights to showcase our team members so that others could learn more about them. We also practiced our Zoom picture skills and posted screenshots of creative team activities like virtual high-fives and meeting warm-up stretches.

Since the majority of service learning projects happened virtually, we also engaged the community by showcasing the projects on social media. The SLA team has seen increased engagement from followers on Facebook, with some of posts reaching over 1500 users. The SLA's social media pages have also received positive comments from students, faculty, and staff across other departments on campus.

Follow the SLA on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to stay up to date on staffing, programming, and professional development opportunities!



SLA team members stayed connected with weekly show and tells using Slack. GA Grace Nelson shared a favorite vacation for #TravelBug (top), and Maria Jimenez shared a chicken taco recipe for #Foodie (bottom).



# MAVERICK PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE UPDATE

Initiated in 2019, the Maverick Philanthropy Initiative allows students to participate firsthand in building community capacity through advocacy. Maverick Philanthropy Initiative courses are designed to encourage an interest in philanthropy while educating students on the real-life impacts of giving. By offering a tangible benefit to a community partner that students discover, vet, and select together, the courses provide a unique and memorable learning opportunity.

Students in this type of service learning class practice philanthropic giving and learn how it affects community partners. These courses meet student learning outcomes related to course content, civic responsibility,

and philanthropic giving practices. Each course uses the standards of quality service learning and partnership development while incorporating philanthropic giving into the premise of the course. Community organizations provide expertise on community-identified issues and solutions by submitting funding applications, which are chosen and advocated for by students.

*The Service Learning Academy is expanding and adapting the initiative to other courses across UNO. If you would like to learn more about incorporating the student philanthropy model of service learning into your classroom or community organization, please contact Kirsten Case Fuller at [kcase2@unomaha.edu](mailto:kcase2@unomaha.edu).*

## EMBOLDENING FUTURE LEADERS

This fall, seven course sections from the Fundamentals of Public Speaking engaged in philanthropic efforts with 54 community partners in their service learning project. These courses link service learning to charitable giving in the local community.

## GRANT RECIPIENTS

FALL 2020

Food Bank for the Heartland

Generation Diamond

Kids Can Community Center

Open Door Mission

Restoring Dignity

Sarpy Museum

## IMPACT OVERVIEW



**22 COURSES**

**520 STUDENTS**



**21 AGENCIES FUNDED**

**\$24,000 INVESTED**



## NEW COURSES IN SPRING 2021

Since Fall 2019:

CMST 1110: Fundamentals of Public Speaking

Beginning in Spring 2021:

CMST 4510/8516: Persuasion and Social Influence

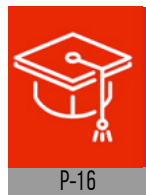
TED 2400: Plan for Effective Teaching

HONR 3020: Honors Colloquium - Humanities

Learn more on the Service Learning Academy's [Maverick Philanthropy Initiative webpage!](#)

## MUSIC AS MEDICINE

By: Mustapha Barry



P-16

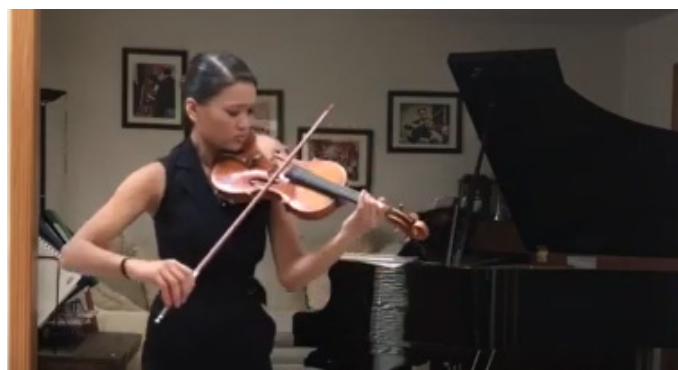
In a partnership between UNO and Central High School, the Sound Health service learning project connected music and medicine by giving music majors the opportunity to engage with caregivers and individuals living with cancer in the Omaha community. In this project, UNO faculty member Mary Perkinson's *Applied Music* class teamed up with Brad Rauch's Central High School orchestra. Considering the challenges posed by the pandemic, they came up with a project idea that was practical, accessible, and beneficial for both UNO and Central students.

Over a six-week period, Central High School students met with UNO students for virtual music lessons. Rauch and Perkinson provided support as the UNO students led the mentoring experience using a video discussion website called Flipgrid. For the final performance, UNO students recorded a piano accompaniment and the Central students played along to substitute the experience of playing with a piano without having to meet face-to-face with a pianist.

*"[The project] reminded me of the power of music and community and the importance of getting outside of the practice room."*  
 – UNO Student

The final video was shared with the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center Healing Arts Program and for viewing in patient rooms. The opportunity to share these acts and sentiments with patients, families, and caregivers was heartwarming for all involved. "It was really great to break the fourth wall with the audience," a Central student mentioned.

This partnership between UNO, Central High School, and the Healing Arts Program helped students feel more engaged with the community. All partners demonstrated compassion for others and a desire to collaborate to make musical artistry. Brad Rauch said, "I am certain this will have a lasting impact on our young students."



*Service learning students recorded their parts for the final performance.*

## LEADING WITH LESSON PLANS

By: Katie Pankonin



P-16

UNO faculty member Germaine Huber is no stranger to the power of online service learning projects. In her second completely virtual project with the 2019 cohort of the UNO Teacher Scholars Academy, students were paired with community partners Kids Can and the Learning Community Center of North Omaha (LCCNO) to create remote learning lesson plans for the elementary school students participating in these community programs.

Over the course of the semester, UNO students engaged in Zoom meetings with staff from Kids Can and the Learning Community Center of North Omaha to gather information about the types of lesson plans that would best suit their participants. For the LCCNO, UNO students were also paired with an Educational Navigator who acted as a mentor and guide through the lesson planning process. UNO students were given full creative freedom, and whether it was an interactive video or artwork, students were encouraged to channel their "future-inner-educator."

For the presentation of the final products, UNO students explained their lesson plans to Josh Gilman from Kids Can and Tameshia Harris from the

Learning Community Center of North Omaha in a virtual meeting. The lesson plans will be utilized by Kids Can for their "STEM Smart Academy" online website which participants can engage with from home. The LCCNO will also be integrating the lesson plans into their remote learning programming.

Leading with Lesson Plans is a project that demonstrates how, even in a fully virtual world, service learning can positively impact UNO students, faculty members, and community partners alike.

### MATERIAL NEEDED

- Color pencils (18 different colors)
- Regular Pencil & Eraser
- Printed out Animal & Plant Cell Diagrams
- Printed out Cell Vocabulary Cards

*Students created videos presenting their lesson plans.*



# EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH NATIVE TEACHINGS

By: Talia Smith



P-16

This semester, UNO faculty member Lequisha Sims' *Ethnic Diversity in Social Work* class collaborated with the Omaha Public School district's Native Indigenous Centered Education (NICE) program on a service learning project that provided educational support for Indigenous elementary, middle, and high school students who were adjusting to learning in a remote environment.

The NICE program provides support in all schools throughout the district, with a mission "to educate and empower Indigenous students, families, and communities to seek and achieve holistic well-being through academic excellence, cultural strengths and self-advocacy." Due to this year's switch to remote learning, Lequisha Sims and NICE staff member Lily DeFrank identified an opportunity for UNO social work students to assist the program in fulfilling its mission by creating learning activities that NICE students could do with their families at home.

Throughout the project, DeFrank and NICE Cultural Specialist Steven Tamayo met with the UNO students to introduce the social and emotional learning concepts that NICE teaches to OPS students. The concepts were based on the Seven Grandfather teachings of the Ojibwe culture, and included

Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth. The UNO students then incorporated what they learned about Indigenous cultures into remote learning activities for each concept that were appropriate for different age groups.

The UNO social work students who took part in the project gained hands-on experience working with and learning about diverse cultures in preparation for their future careers while also providing a valuable service for the NICE program. "With all the uncertainty in the world, promoting social and emotional learning skills has become even more important for students," DeFrank explained. She said the time and effort the UNO students put into creating the lessons allowed NICE staff members to focus on adjusting to the constantly changing remote environment. NICE will also use the activities in future semesters as they continue to teach the seven concepts.

## What is a skill you gained from this project?

- 7  A skill I learned was just increasing my empathy and ability to put myself in the shoes of the kids that might be participating in the activities. I think th...
- 6  I Learned how to relate with indigenous people and their culture.
- 5  Just working on my creativity in general when it comes to lessons and thinking outside the box. How can I make things approachable to youth (various ages).
- 4  Throughout this project I learned to be more creative when creating the projects and thinking outside of the box. As well as, keeping in mind the current pande...

*In the final meeting, students used an online poll to reflect on what they learned from the project.*

# MATH AND SERVICE LEARNING: CONNECTIONS THROUGH DATA

By: Sanaa Ahmed

This fall, UNO students had the opportunity to fulfill their general education requirements in a new class that connected data literacy with service learning. Students who took the course represented majors from across campus and can take the data visualization skills they learned into any discipline. The course shows that math can be fun, intriguing, and applicable to many different career paths.

The course was created by an interdisciplinary team of UNO faculty and staff members. Michelle Friend, Betty Love, Becky Brusky, Mahbubul Majumder, and Julie Dierberger were awarded a three-year grant in the amount of \$299,985 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to create the new service learning math course.

In the course, the students provided data analysis and data visualization services to Wellbeing Partners, a local nonprofit focused on eliminating health disparities. Using statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, students uncovered insights about food deserts and hunger.

They then presented their findings to the class and Wellbeing Partners. Through service learning and with the support of the NSF grant, UNO students in the new course were able to make connections between mathematical concepts and real-world applications.

"This course, specifically, provides students with an opportunity to apply what they're learning immediately and solve authentic problems for a local non-profit. It builds on UNO's incredible strength in community engagement and allows students to see why the material is worth learning."

– Michelle Friend, UNO Faculty Member

# UPWARD BOUND LEADERSHIP BUILDING

By: Claire Fischer



Students met on Zoom for the Upward Bound Leadership Building project.



UNO faculty member Sharon Storch had an idea to incorporate service learning into her class this semester, but the transition to a virtual environment altered the original plans. The Service Learning Academy was able to provide support and come up with a new plan to incorporate service learning into her *Business and Professions* class in a virtual format.

The goal of the class was to help students develop a better understanding of persuasive communication and how to present information to business clients. For the service learning project, the UNO students partnered with high school students from Nebraska Methodist College's Upward Bound Program as well as from St. Luke's Teen Center. The UNO students

developed and led career and college readiness activities for the high school seniors attending the Teen Center's online seminars.

This project provided both the UNO and high school students with the opportunity to gain first-hand experience communicating professionally. During the semester, the high school and UNO students met five times, and each meeting had a different learning goal. For example, one meeting was about showing enthusiasm and value via phone and video. This topic was especially relevant because many of the high school students will be applying for college and career opportunities via online interviews.

*"The Service Learning component of this course offered UNO students an increasingly meaningful and higher-level learning experience by applying the course content to the development of programs and learning experiences for the senior students of Upward Bound."*

*– Sharon Storch, UNO Faculty Member*

"I have observed the students successfully building skills in problem solving, teamwork, diversity, and communication in various contexts," said Storch. "Additionally, I noticed a greater motivation for their learning and impressive enthusiasm to share their learning with the Upward Bound community." Both the UNO and high school students were able to learn and practice important skills that will be useful to them as they prepare for college and career opportunities in a new virtual environment.

FALL 2020  
IN REVIEW



125 UNO courses used  
service learning as a  
method of teaching

## FROM AN IDEA TO PRACTICE: IN MEMORY OF MARILYN LEACH

By: Madeline Hagar



Marilyn Leach

Through determination, innovation, and visionary leadership, Marilyn Leach brought service learning to life at UNO. Leach, who worked as the head of the Center for Faculty Excellence at UNO for 29 years, passed away on September 2, 2020. During Leach's tenure, she continuously connected with UNO faculty through both her work and her advocacy for service learning.

Pedagogy was at the heart of Leach's work as she shared teaching strategies and cultivated a community amongst faculty from

different disciplines. So when she learned about service learning during a faculty leaders conference in the mid-1990s, it was no surprise that it captured her imagination and fueled her efforts at UNO.

As Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs & Dean of Graduate Studies Deborah Smith-Howell recalls, "Marilyn saw, very early on, how service learning was the absolute perfect thing for this campus. It fit with our metropolitan mission. It fit with our willingness to collaborate across

units. It fit with the idea of how we empower our students and help them learn more deeply. She just saw it and got it. And then she took it on a mission to help the rest of us understand [service learning]."

Through workshops, one-on-one meetings with faculty and department chairs, and thoughtful budgeting, Leach took service learning from an idea discussed amongst a few faculty and transformed it into an initiative within the Center for Faculty Excellence. From there, it grew into a standalone office called the Service Learning Academy (SLA).

Remembered for her tenacity and affinity for giraffes, which adorned her office as a reminder that you "sometimes you have to stick your neck out," Leach showed up for and supported UNO faculty. In doing so, Leach brought many ideas such as service learning to UNO. When she retired in 2004, Paul Sather, Director Emeritus of the Service Learning Academy, recalled that UNO "lost a giant who made the goal of faculty excellence real."

Leach's legacy and contributions to the establishment of the Service Learning Academy are truly innumerable. Her passion for service learning continues to shape the work in the SLA, and the entire SLA team thanks Leach for her dedication to this campus, its teachers, its students, and the Omaha community.

## OUTSTANDING FIRST GENERATION SERVICE LEARNING STUDENT

By: LaTrina Hall



Dalton Meister

The Service Learning Academy (SLA) awarded its first Outstanding First Generation Service Learning Student Award to Dalton Meister, an undergraduate majoring in Social Work and minoring in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The award, which was presented at the First Gen Guild's First-Gen National Day of Celebration event, honors undergraduate or graduate students who have taken at least one service learning course at UNO and have shown significant leadership and contributions.

For Dalton, being a first-generation student provided him opportunities to grow and share what he learned with others. "As a first-generation college student, I was the first of my family to attend college," Dalton said. "Though this presented many unique challenges and barriers, it also provided me with the opportunity to seek out pathways pursuant

to my dreams and goals in an authentic and original manner."

Candidates for the award were expected to have shown growth in their personal and professional skills through the service learning experience. Dalton demonstrated this growth during his social work and civic engagement service learning course, which partnered with Grief's Journey, a non-profit with the mission to provide grief support to those in need. "While at Grief's Journey, I worked with the staff to develop a program and training for facilitators of the service agency that educated participants on a multicultural, trauma-informed approach focused on diverse religious norms relating to grief and bereavement," Dalton shared about his service learning experience.

As much as Dalton's service has impacted others, Dalton sees it as his way of just giving back to others as part of "the cycle of care that maintains the structures and social support network that makes our community grow and thrive." The Service Learning Academy is proud of Dalton and his meaningful engagement with campus and community partners that supports the SLA's goal to achieve UNO's metropolitan mission to transform and improve the quality of life locally, nationally and globally.



## CONTINUING ANTI-POVERTY WORK

By: Allegra Hardin

Allegra Hardin returned to the Service Learning Academy (SLA) this summer as the 2020-2021 AmeriCorps member serving with Campus Compact Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Before completing her Master's in Communication from UNO in May of this year, Hardin previously worked as an undergraduate assistant at the SLA. "I am thrilled to be returning to such a collaborative and community-focused environment," Hardin said.



*Allegra Hardin*

In the Campus Compact VISTA program, members across the country serve at organizations that work with high poverty populations. By engaging with community members to identify and utilize local assets, AmeriCorps members work to meet the area's most pressing challenges through capacity building efforts. Even though she was returning to a virtual version of the SLA office, and the planned in-person meetings transformed into video conferences, Hardin's goal at the SLA remained the same: to address poverty in Omaha through service learning.

Last year, the Campus Compact VISTA project emphasized researching the intersection of education, service learning, and poverty. Building upon this foundation of knowledge, this year Hardin is focused on developing sustainable anti-poverty resources that can be used while planning service learning projects. "Even though service terms are typically spent interacting face-to-face with the community, we're using new ways to connect and continue anti-poverty work in a virtual setting," Hardin said.

One such method of promoting anti-poverty work came in the form of virtual share out sessions. This fall, the SLA hosted a Redlining Share Out Session featuring a panel of service learning partners who have all participated in projects that address the systemic disinvestment of resources in specific Omaha communities based on race.

"Share out sessions are a great way to connect educators and community partners to anti-poverty service learning," Hardin said. "We're looking forward to hosting additional sessions in the spring, so be on the lookout for more information!"

For resources and best practices that address the intersection of service learning and poverty, contact Allegra Hardin or visit [sla.unomaha.edu](http://sla.unomaha.edu).

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## SERVICE LEARNING SEMINAR 2021

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# SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

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Cover Photo: Service Learning Academy staff and graduate assistants practice a virtual high-five as an icebreaker activity during a Zoom meeting.

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