



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
**SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY**

# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 8 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2018



# INSIDE THIS EDITION

**4** **(R)EVOLVE**  
Podcasts include interviews from various people who lived abroad.

**10** **THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED**  
Students use their voice to engage with theatrical performances.

**13** **RESEARCH IN ACTION**  
Read how an Alice Buffett Magnet School teacher used service learning as research.

**6** **IT INNOVATION**  
UNO IT students create online classes for Siena Francis House guests.

**11** **WILDLIFE SAFARI**  
Students use water testing kits to see macroinvertebrates in the park's water ways.

**14** **AWARD WINNERS**  
Service Learning Academy recognizes three outstanding Mavericks.

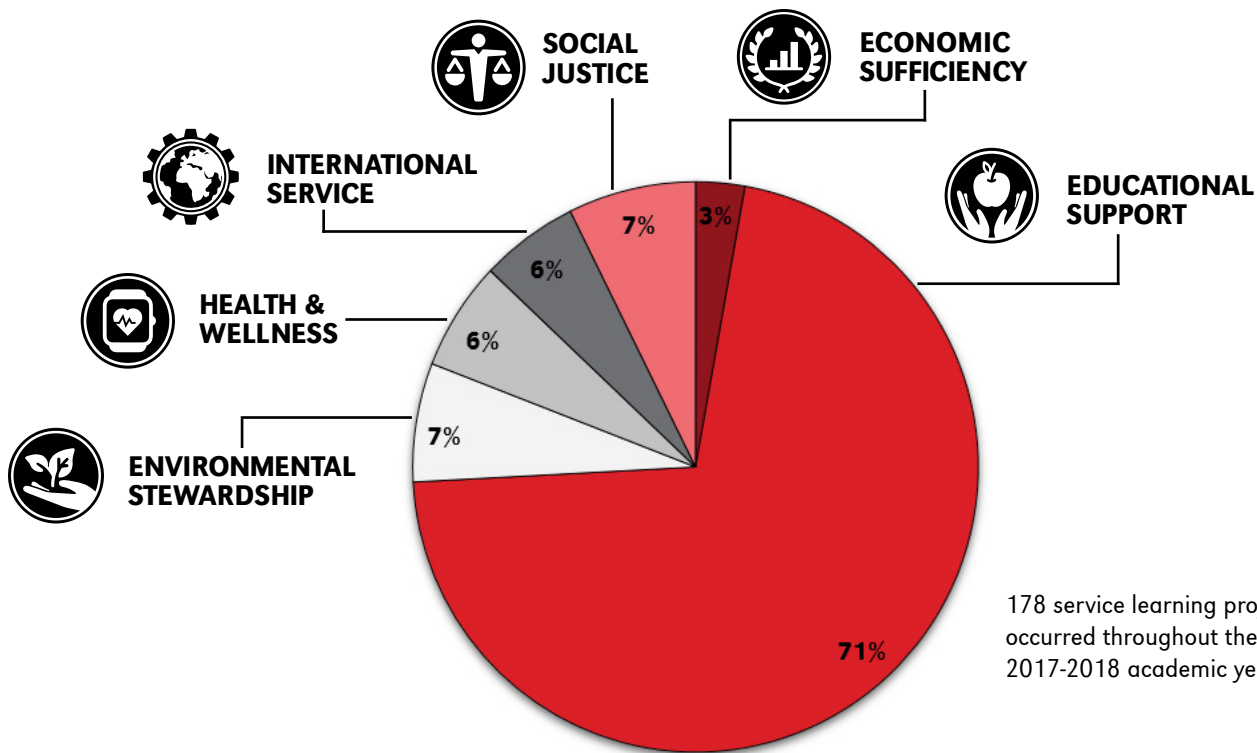
**8** **FOOD COMPUTER**  
Growing your own food via computer is possible for King Science and UNO students.

**12** **VOICES ACROSS GENERATIONS**  
Collaboration between generations creates an unforgettable experience.

**15** **SLA'S NEWEST STAFF**  
Kaitlin Carlson joins the crew while still making time for scuba diving.

## MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Not only do service learning projects provide connections to curriculum for UNO and P-12 educators, but many also align directly with six 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. Below are the six issue areas along with the percentage of projects that occurred in each issue area in the 2017-2018 academic year.



178 service learning projects occurred throughout the 2017-2018 academic year.

Note: Some courses have multiple projects and/or partners.

# WELCOME LETTER

Happy spring, partners! This semester has been exciting, innovative and rigorous in the Service Learning Academy. Just like the diversity of service learning projects that line this newsletter, we wanted to give some space to some new voices in the welcome letter. Thank you, Kirsten and LaTrina!

-Julie

As this semester comes to an end and we reflect on the past academic year, one thing stands out – service learning doesn't live in a box! Projects range from creating food computers to performing theatre for social justice, from finding an IT solution for a local nonprofit's various database needs to developing a museum exhibit of ordinary women throughout Omaha's history who have had an extraordinary impact on our community. The diversity of projects demonstrates how service learning can be incorporated in a myriad of courses across our campus while helping to meet a variety of community needs.

Strong service learning projects tie meaningful service to classroom curriculum. The cornerstone of these projects are the partners we work side by side with to address a community need. One shining example of how authentic partnerships can blossom is CultureFest, which hosted over 20 community groups and drew in over 600 attendees. Youth voice, a key standard in service learning, empowers students involved in service learning as they work with faculty and the community to find solutions to community issues. You can learn about how UNO and Central High School students came together to develop an opportunity for community members to learn and dialogue about conflict surrounding land ownership in Jerusalem.

Throughout these pages, you will find examples of projects that have addressed local to international issues, projects from each of the six colleges on our campus and projects working with countless community partners. If there is one thing that is constant in our work, it is that the sky is the limit!

As you read through these pages, we hope that you enjoy the highlighted projects as well as the stats we have shared that demonstrate how valuable this work has been in engaging more students within our community. We are so proud of what our faculty, students, and community partners have accomplished this past academic year and cannot wait to see what 2018-2019 has in store for us! Happy reading!

-Kirsten & LaTrina



Julie Dierberger,  
Paul Sather  
Distinguished Director



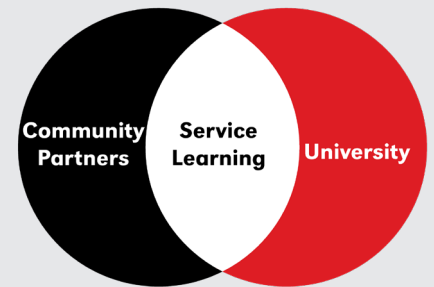
LaTrina Parker,  
P-16 Coordinator



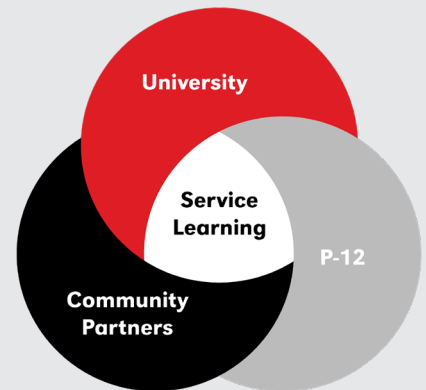
Kirsten Case,  
Community Liaison

# SLA APPROACHES

What is the difference between the types of projects? The traditional service learning projects focus on a collaboration between community partners and a UNO class. The P-16 Initiative focuses on the collaboration between a UNO class, a P-12 class, and a community partner.



**Traditional Model**



**P-16 Model**

Throughout the newsletter, projects will be identified with Traditional or P-16 based on their project structure.

# WOMEN IN OMAHA

By Jenna Greene

Have you ever been to a museum and recognized people and places that you consider home? UNO faculty member Elaine Nelson incorporated service learning into two of her courses, *Women in America Since 1875* and *Women and Gender in the American West*, in which students interviewed and recorded oral histories of 12 women in Omaha who shaped, changed, and trail



Rita Melgares observes exhibit pieces with friends and family.

blazed in their community. Students worked closely with curators from the Durham Museum to create an exhibit highlighting how the women forged positive change in Omaha's history. The exhibit, titled "Women in Omaha: A Biographical Sketch of Persistence Through History" opened with a private reception for the featured women, their friends and family, as well as Nelson's students. The exhibit featured the following women: Dr. Jacqueline St. John; Rita Melgares, JD; Ella Jean Rogers; Sarah Joslyn; Octa Keen, MSN; Rose Blumkin; Linda Garcia-Perez; Edwina Justus; Kimi Takechi; Cleo Moore; Margaret Suchy; and Ashleigh Buch, SSGT. "Women in Omaha" opened to the public at the Durham Museum in February and is on display until July 29, 2018.

Students in Nelson's courses learned about museum studies, public history, conducting oral histories, and duration through this year-long project. Curators from the Durham Museum, the women interviewed, and Nelson all served as co-educators for these students, and for the community broadly through this exhibit. The exhibit and the women featured crystallized the notion that women's stories and experiences are integral to the understanding of history in communities. UNO student Aubrey Dinslage reflected on her time spent with Dr. Jacqueline St. John. "Dr. St. John discussed the importance of feminist activism in society as a whole, but especially in our own communities. The opportunity to interview her empowered me as a feminist and as a student to use my education to champion and fight for issues that are most important to me."

# (R)EVOLVE

By Alex Bauer

Students from Beveridge Magnet Middle School, Northwest High School and a UNO *International Studies* class asked the question: "How has travel changed you?" The group of students, led by teachers Mel Hoialmen, Alyssa Gudenkauf and UNO faculty member Patrick McNamara, met throughout the semester to develop interview questions, conduct interviews, and produce a final product in the form of a podcast for the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation's radio station. Throughout the semester, students participated in conversations about how their own experiences shaped their perspectives as well as opened their minds to the perspectives and experiences of others.

During one interaction, Beveridge and Northwest students broke up in groups and listened to assigned guest interviewees who shared their experience about living in another country. The guest interviewees consisted of college students who had studied abroad, men and women who served in the military overseas, refugees who currently live in Omaha and many others. The students celebrated and reflected on their work at the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation where attendees were able to listen to some of the podcasts.



Northwest High School student reflects on his interview.



**UNO students gave over  
20,000 hours of service  
through service learning  
in fall 2017**

# ETHNIC DIVERSITY

By Sami Morford

Undergraduate social work students from UNO faculty member Jieru Bai's *Ethnic Diversity* course ventured out into the community to engage with diverse populations throughout Omaha. The UNO students split up between three different community partners: Completely Kids, Girls Inc., and Lutheran Family Services. Before working with each agency, the UNO students completed research through a literature review to inform them of the populations with whom they would work.

At Completely Kids, the first group of UNO students discussed cultural identity with elementary students. They explored the differences between how elementary students and their parents connected to the idea of cultural identity. The UNO students created a survey to collect parent input regarding cultural identity and used it to guide their conversations with Completely Kids students. The project culminated with a presentation by the UNO students, which incorporated the viewpoints of both the elementary students and their parents and highlighted the generational differences of navigating cultural identity.

The second group of UNO students worked with Girls Inc. high school students to discuss their goals for life after high school. Many young

women from Girls Inc. identified college as a goal; the UNO students offered a guided tour of UNO's campus. The social work students identified resources for Girls Inc. to incorporate into their college readiness curriculum.

Finally, students at Lutheran Family Services had the opportunity to work with the refugee population. The UNO students developed and implemented a health navigation seminar for refugees. They also gathered information from a Lutheran Family Service employee during refugee walk-in days. Through each project, UNO students gained experience working with a new population and made connections to area nonprofit organizations.

“Service learning is one of the key pedagogy in the School of Social Work. It strengthens the connection between service providers and schools. It helps students apply what they learned from the class to practice.”

Jieru Bai, UNO Faculty Member



UNO Student reads *Goodnight Moon* in Spanish to Completely Kids students.

# IN SPRING 2018, 77 SERVICE LEARNING COURSES WERE ASSOCIATED WITH A COLLEGE

College of  
Communication,  
Fine Arts & Media

13

College of  
Information &  
Technology

10

College of  
Arts & Sciences

18

College of  
Education

11

College of  
Public Affairs &  
Community Service

21

College of Business  
Administration

4

Note: This excludes service learning courses not associated with an academic college.

## IT INNOVATION

By Jenna Greene

Students in UNO faculty member Magie Hall's *Agile Development Methods* course partnered with Siena Francis House and mooqita.org - an online education system - to develop a web-based learning platform focused on building technical skills. By using their skills in information technology, creative problem solving, and database management, UNO students developed a platform for the guests of Siena Francis House. The guests will be able to participate in classes that could increase their employability. The classes focused on in-demand technical skills like computational thinking, Python programming, and legacy technologies. Students broke into teams based on previous experience and interest to focus on different aspects of the project. Many student teams met with local companies about their needs while other students met with guests of the Siena Francis House to understand their needs.

The UNO students experienced firsthand what it was like to work with a client. They utilized the knowledge of Siena Francis House staff and guests along with various community businesses to create an asset-based program that would work best for Siena Francis House. This project focused on creating an open, online course to address unemployment and grow the skill set of individuals to learn certain technological skills many Nebraska jobs now require.

“ This service learning project has given me the chance to apply some aspects of the IT Innovation curriculum into practical use: consulting with stakeholders, designing systems, and working in an Agile framework.”

Quinn Nelson, UNO Student



UNO students present the asset-based course program for Siena Francis House guests.



P-16

Central High School student prompt the question, “Why is it important for Omaha to discuss Jerusalem?”

# INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

By Lindsey Kriekemeier

Students from UNO faculty member Curtis Hutt’s *Jerusalem* class worked with Central High School’s Gary Groff’s *World Religions* class and Inclusive Communities to plan a Table Talk held at Central High School. A Table Talk is an event where participants share their views and ideas about a topic along with hearing from others. The topic covered the conflict over landownership that is currently taking place in Jerusalem. The UNO students created fact sheets that contained information about the conflict. The Central High students created invitations and sent them out to members from the community to invite them to participate in the event. Students were educated and trained by Inclusive Communities staff on how a Table Talk typically works to facilitate table conversations.

The main event consisted of a panel featuring Hutt and Groff. Central High students prompted questions to Hutt and Groff and the participants were able to hear their perspective on why it is important to learn about Jerusalem and why the students are studying the topic. The latter half of the evening included a discussion led by UNO and Central High School students. The students acted as moderators at each table, leading the participants through a list of questions. After the discussion, one moderator from each table gave a summary of the table’s discussion. The discussion and event brought together many people from the Omaha community and engaged them with not only issues in Jerusalem, but also issues connected to Omaha.

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# FONTENELLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

By Jessica Foreman

Students from Rachael Arens’ *AP Environmental Studies* class at Northwest High School and from UNO faculty member Steve Rodie’s *Intro to Sustainable Landscape Design* class studied the current and future management plans for Fontenelle Forest’s north

location, Neale Woods Nature Center, and a current and potential trail system. They developed ideas to help identify all of the current and proposed plant communities, and created signage to help visitors interpret management plans. The students walked the visitor trails to take photographs of the plants, wildlife, and landscape to document the current state of the park. Finally, they proposed a potential trail system and identified locations along the trail where signage would be most valuable. A goal of this project was to help Neale Woods’ visitors understand specific land management strategies.



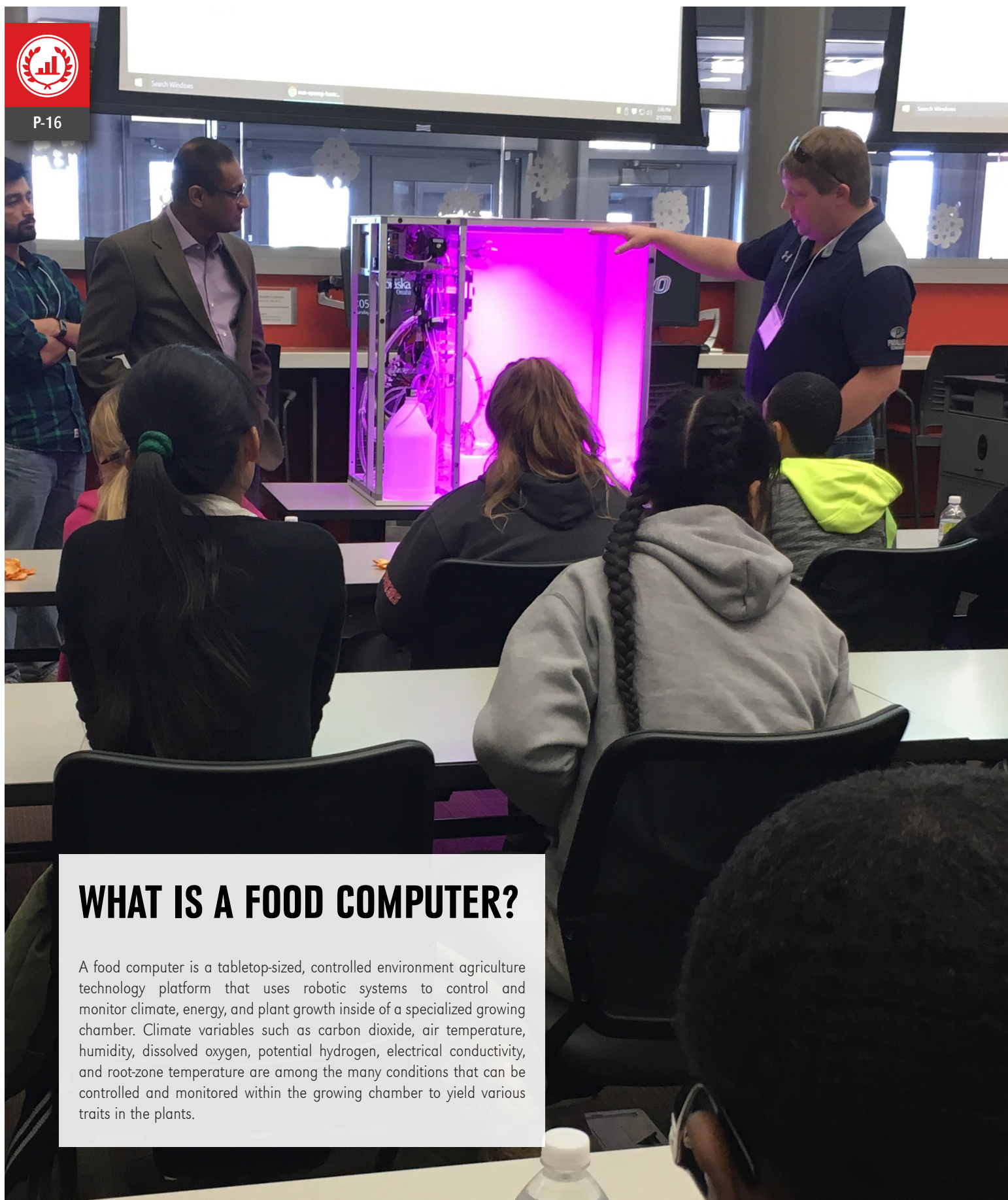
P-16

Students capture a photograph of seeds native to Omaha.

The focus for UNO students was to produce posters that document the site conditions and potential ideas for signage locations and signage design. Omaha Northwest students focused on the development of the signage, which included information about the management strategy and a Q/R code connection to a web-based information platform. Students had one meeting at UNO, made one visit to Neale Woods, and participated in virtual meetings for the remainder of their projects. For the final presentation, students met at UNO with the community partners to present maps, posters, and signage.



P-16



## WHAT IS A FOOD COMPUTER?

A food computer is a tabletop-sized, controlled environment agriculture technology platform that uses robotic systems to control and monitor climate, energy, and plant growth inside of a specialized growing chamber. Climate variables such as carbon dioxide, air temperature, humidity, dissolved oxygen, potential hydrogen, electrical conductivity, and root-zone temperature are among the many conditions that can be controlled and monitored within the growing chamber to yield various traits in the plants.



# FOOD COMPUTER

By Kyle McGlade

Over the course of the spring semester, students from UNO and King Science and Technology Magnet Center and community partner Parallel Technologies collaborated on a P-16 service learning project. UNO faculty member Sachin Pawaskar's graduate capstone class *Management Information Systems* joined with King Science 7th grade science teachers Hollie Burson and Cathryn Skoumal, to work together to construct a food computer. This project introduced the concept of a food computer to K-12 students. UNO students assisted in building the food computer while the King Science students developed formulas for growing food. The students collaborated together at both UNO and King Science to put their formulas to the test. Parallel Technologies' Omaha office was instrumental in building the food computer and guided the students in troubleshooting the working of the hardware and integration of the software components.

While all students learned about the food computer with the community partner, the King Science students were specifically exposed to a new field in STEM that could spark their interest. Using fun and interactive learning methods helped ignite an enthusiasm for STEM fields. The focus on sustainable agriculture was especially useful and met another goal to increase the level of interest in farming and agriculture in Nebraska and the US, given that only two percent of the total U.S. population is involved in agriculture today, according to the Farm Bureau. Students met several times over the semester and had a final day of presentations to discuss their findings.



Left: Jay Stark from Parallel Technologies and UNO Faculty member Sachin Pawaskar present the food computer they built to King Science students.

Above: A UNO student explains the different parts that make up a food computer.

# THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

By Jenna Greene

Students in UNO faculty member Doug Paterson's Thompson Learning Community class, *Introduction to Theatre*, learned about



UNO students and NYCF youth meet for a final performance and celebration.

community-based theater by spending seven class periods at the Nebraska Youth Correctional Facility (NYCF) helping the youth create and perform short vignettes about their life experiences. Paterson has led over 200 Theatre of the Oppressed workshops. This unique type of theater, originally created by Augusto Boal, allowed for the youth at NYCF to become "spect-actors," in which audience members can stop the performance at any time, talk about how they think the protagonist would behave differently in the situation, and then get on stage to replace the protagonist to demonstrate their ideas. This continued for seven visits as an ongoing process, which helped NYCF youth develop their ideas and solutions for the final presentation.

Through these workshops, youth from NYCF not only thought about how to change difficult situations with their family, friends and choices they are faced with every day, but also got on stage and enacted the kind of change they were imagining. UNO theater students learned alongside the youth from NYCF about the power of community-based theater and its ability to challenge power structures and generate social change.

# CULTUREFEST: TELLING OUR STORY

By Stephanie Diaz

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to visit multiple countries at once and be submerged in culture with food, performances and artifacts? CultureFest provides that opportunity for the Omaha community. The 8th annual CultureFest was held in April at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center with the theme "Telling Our Story." CultureFest is a collaboration with Omaha South High School, Beveridge Magnet Middle School and UNO.

The event was a celebration of the rich cultural diversity in the Omaha community. Clubs, organizations and community partners set up tables and activity booths where children and families enjoyed crafts and displays of the countries' histories. Attendees enjoyed food from around the world, such as samosas, jackfruit, mangosteen and rambutan. Performers were invited to share a dance, musical piece or drama to showcase their country's talents and traditions. Over 600 people participated and joined in on the festivities at CultureFest. More than 20 groups from UNO, area schools and the community provided the guests with activities such as henna, button making from the Joslyn Art Museum, Chinese character names and more. Guests walked away with a visit around the world, multiple take-home goodies, memories of beautiful performances – even "Let It Go" sung in Czech.



Above: Flamenco dancers perform for the first time at CultureFest 2018. Below: Young CultureFest visitor watches in anticipation for her drawing to be made into a button at the Joslyn Art Museum booth.





P-16



Jake Wiebe from Wildlife Safari Park and a UNO student test out the underwater camera while Northwest students track data.

## WILDLIFE SAFARI

By Megumi Makiska

Throughout the spring semester, UNO faculty member Dana Richter-Egger's *Chemistry in the Environment and Society* students worked with Rachel Benzoni's *AP Chemistry* students from Northwest High School. The classes teamed up to test the Pawnee Creek that runs through the Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park and Wildlife Safari. This project aimed to deepen students' understanding of the interconnection between water chemistry and the overall health of the environment. UNO and Northwest students visited the park on different occasions to collect water from the section of the river close to the Wolf Canyon and Crane Meadows. Students, teachers and Wildlife Safari Park staff geared up in boots and buckets to explore the river for common Nebraska macroinvertebrates.

The students also used kits to test the water's pH, nitrate and phosphate levels. Jake Wiebe from Wildlife Safari Park commented on the work the students are doing, "Establishing a baseline for each area will allow us to learn more about how our water systems act as a piece of the entire puzzle. Not only do we want to be able to know how what the health of our waterways is now, but also be able to spot trends further down the road."

In the final presentation, UNO and Northwest High School students presented their findings from the water tests to Henry Doorly Zoo and Wildlife Safari Park representatives. Both student groups were able to use their knowledge of chemistry to support the Wildlife Safari Park's reptile and amphibian project.

Richter-Egger reflected on his students' experience, "The experiential nature of service learning is often the first 'field experience' that in which my students engage. That experience is powerful motivation to either continue or reevaluate their career goal(s)."

“ One of the questions I most often hear is “When are we ever going to need this?” By incorporating service learning into my classroom, it allows students to actively engage with college students and faculty in a collaborative effort to address real-world issues through the lens of science.”

Rachel Benzoni, Northwest HS Teacher



SLA Graduate Assistant Socorrito Salcido helps a Black Elk Elementary student trace her hands.

## VOICES ACROSS GENERATIONS

By Socorrito Salcido

UNO students from faculty member Tami Williams' graduate level *Educational Leadership* class, Danielle Elsasser's 3rd grade students from Black Elk Elementary and seniors from Royale Oaks Assisted Living all connected on a service learning project to compare and contrast their life experiences through artistic, literacy, and engaging activities. The partners took turns visiting each other at Royale Oaks Assisted Living Center or Black Elk Elementary. The seniors offered words of wisdom to the young students in regards to life, and in return, the Black Elk students taught them how to play an online game where participants answer questions via electronics. Using technology in the classroom was an experience the seniors never had during their school days.

The Black Elk students interviewed their senior buddies and discovered they had a lot more in common than they originally thought. The UNO students were in awe as they witnessed how much trust and rapport was built between the two groups with very different age differences and backgrounds. The group then created art together and they traced their hands and placed them in the shape of a heart on top of a painted image of the world to demonstrate unity among diversity. Their art literature pieces were placed into books created for both the

Black Elk students and the Royale Oaks Assisted Living seniors to enjoy for many years. The group wrapped up the project at UNO where the seniors, UNO students, Black Elk students and their families shared dinner, reflected on their experiences throughout this project, and enjoyed each other's company one more time.



## SL RESEARCH IN ACTION

By Wendy Kaiser

Why do research on service learning? “Curiosity!” said Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School Teacher Jessica Winter. Winter conducted research during her spring service learning project, which connected her 8th grade journalism students with UNO faculty member Don Bowen’s *Media Storytelling* class and the nonprofit organization, Mode Shift Omaha. Together, students studied transportation problems in Omaha and analyzed what they found. They presented their findings to Mode Shift, who incorporated the work into public media messaging.

Winter focused her research on ways to engage her students in the classroom. Previously, Winter had experienced a lack of interest from her students in classroom content resulting in tardiness or absences. However, with the incorporation of a service learning project, Winter saw a change in her students’ behaviors. The observation led Winter to research her classroom’s engagement.

When students were participating in the community application component of the course, Winter saw students begin to show up on time, attend regularly, and participate in classroom discussions. Students engaged in critical thinking, asked important questions, and realized the impact they can have in the community. Winter was excited that service learning sparked many of her students’ interests in higher education.

A service learning project can be a great opportunity for schools to conduct research over engagement in the classroom, Winter said. She suggested knowing the priorities of your administration and school as she was able to align her research with her district’s emphasis on increasing attendance. Winter said being flexible throughout the

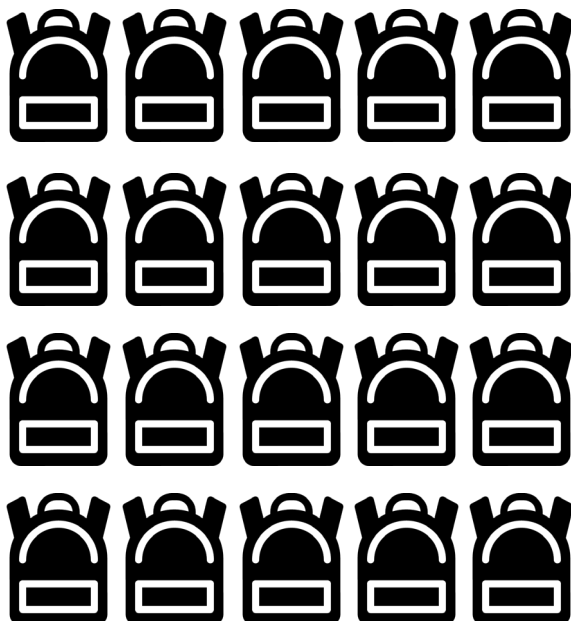


Teacher Jessica Winter listens to her student’s idea for improving the 67th and Pacific intersection.

process and connecting early with OPS Research Division can ensure research will meet any guidelines and expectations set forth by a school district. Through service learning, research opportunities are available to tell the story of the effect of rigorous teaching and learning.

### What is Mode Shift Omaha?

Mode Shift Omaha advocates for transportation options that enhance quality of life and opportunities for everyone to live, work, and play.



**Over 5,000 UNO  
and P-12 students  
participated in SL  
projects in 2017-18**

*\*Each backpack represents 250 students*

## OUTSTANDING SERVICE LEARNING FACULTY AWARD

STEVEN RODIE



Steven Rodie is a professor of Biology at UNO. Rodie has incorporated rigorous service learning in his courses over many years through four different courses he teaches at UNO. Many of these courses focused on sustainable landscape design. Those who have worked with Rodie remain inspired by his enthusiasm and passion for environmental causes, community advocacy, and student learning. Students of Rodie's have even come back to

help with projects after completing their service learning course.

Rodie's commitment to service learning can be seen in his commitment to relationship-building and addressing community needs through local, grassroots change. His service learning projects are uniquely positioned in this work and live long after the course is complete. His students integrate their course content into the creation of the gardens and landscapes designed to serve as tools for experiential instruction in local schools.

## OUTSTANDING SERVICE LEARNING STUDENT AWARD

ELIZABETH BROWN



Elizabeth Brown participated in the *Interpersonal Skills for Engineers* class in the fall of 2016 as a part of her Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering degree. The class included a service learning component for which Brown became passionate. During the class, Brown worked with Field Club Elementary fifth graders through the Completely Kids after school program, teaching them about interpersonal communication, leadership

skills, self-awareness and building trust.

Recently, these experiences led her to become a teaching assistant for the UNO class. As the teaching assistant, Brown went above and beyond teaching and providing advice to the UNO students as they prepared their presentations to the fifth graders. UNO faculty member Stuart Bernstein, the lead teacher of this course, shared that Brown excelled in this position as a role model for the UNO students as they prepared for this project.

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## 2018 NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOW

CASSANDRA GRIFFIN



Cassandra Griffin is a passionate advocate for community involvement and a leader in service to her community. Griffin is a sophomore in the Department of Political Science and a program manager at The Collaborative within the Office of Civic and Social Responsibility. Through her work at The Collaborative, she served as an intern at the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table and at Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, led large groups of volunteers in serving over 20 nonprofit organizations during campus Service Days, and mentored other student employees. In her work, Griffin seeks to engage and connect with all community residents and voters, especially those who have been historically overlooked, so that local organizations can better understand and advocate for those they serve.

Griffin brings passion, energy, and empathy to all of her work. Her dedication to her community inspires those around her, both as a student and as a community leader. She is especially passionate about civic involvement and legislative projects as a political science major, which has been an especially good fit with her work at Planned Parenthood of the Heartland. As UNO's Newman Civic Fellow, Griffin will have a chance to learn more about strategies for solving challenges in her community and travel to Boston to meet the other Newman Civic Fellows.

# MEET SLA'S NEWEST STAFF MEMBER



## KAITLIN CARLSON

Kaitlin Carlson is SLA's new Administrative Technician. Carlson joined the Service Learning Academy in January of 2018. She has her Bachelor's degree in Biology from UNO and is currently working towards a Master's in Biology from UNK. As visitors stop by the office, Carlson is the first face that greets them. She assists with processing paperwork, event planning and organizing for P-16 and Traditional projects along with special events hosted by the SLA. Carlson enjoys serving as a resource and gaining experience working with a diverse group of individuals, community members, organizations, students and more.

Carlson is passionate about animals and the ocean, which translates directly into her love for biology. She enjoys traveling to new places and experiencing new things and cultures. Additionally, she enjoys scuba diving and underwater photography. When not assisting the Service Learning Academy, Carlson spends time with friends and family. Her favorite thing to do is go to the movies and binge-watch new television shows, while making time for studying.

**“ Service learning is a very unique opportunity and people who get involved learn a lot from it. It never hurts to try something new and develop a new passion you've never had before.”**

**Kaitlin Carlson**

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## SERVICE LEARNING SEMINAR 2018

July 9-13, 2018

Register at: [sla.unomaha.edu](http://sla.unomaha.edu)

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# SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

Cover Photo: A child from the Learning Community Center (LCC) “pets” a UNO Symphonic Wind Ensemble student’s trumpet while a UNO Spanish Language student describes the trumpet in Spanish. The Instrumental Petting Zoo is a project where LCC families can observe and listen to various musical instruments.



 @UNO Service Learning Academy

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