



P-16 INITIATIVE

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Sculpting New Experiences

By Erika Jacobson



Art is one way for people to improve the world around them. Mr. Bart Vargas and Mrs. Jody Boyer sought to instill this very idea into their students with their service learning project, "Art in a Public Space." Bart Vargas, a UNO instructor and working artist, familiarized students with creating 3-D geometric shapes in his *Foundation Drawing Design II: 3-D* course. Mrs. Jody Boyer, a 7th grade teacher at Norris Middle School and a UNO adjunct instructor, wanted to teach these same concepts to her art students in 7th grade art as well as participants in the

Redbird After School Academy (RASA) facilitated by Completely KIDS.

Mr. Vargas visited the Norris students to teach them how to make geometric sculptures and to show the sculptures that he has made as a professional artist. The Norris students traveled to UNO to work with Mr. Vargas's students to create 3-D sculptures with the UNO students. The UNO students then traveled to Norris Middle School to continue their artistic collaboration. The sculptures they created were donated to RASA in which Mrs. Boyer and

two other Norris teachers, Ms. Hubbling and Mr. Heybrock, taught a club where the students learned about public art and completed the outer design of the sculptures. The UNO and RASA students came together for a sculpture exhibition to display the work they did and to celebrate a successful service learning project.

The sculptures will be installed in the foyer of Norris Middle School. "Seeing how engaged my students were with one-on-one attention from the UNO students made the entire project worth it!" commented Mrs. Boyer.

Service Learning is an experiential, collaborative method of teaching using projects that promote academic learning and are tightly linked to course content while meeting the need of the community.

CONTACT US:

- Paul Sather
Director, 554-6019
- Julie Dierberger
P-16 Coordinator, 554-3268
- Laura Krueger
Service Learning Associate,
554-2712
- Lucy Garza Westbrook
Community Liaison,
554-3055
- Pamela Ashley
Program Eval. & Assessment,
554-3656
- Brandy Klipfel
Administrative Technician,
554-2427

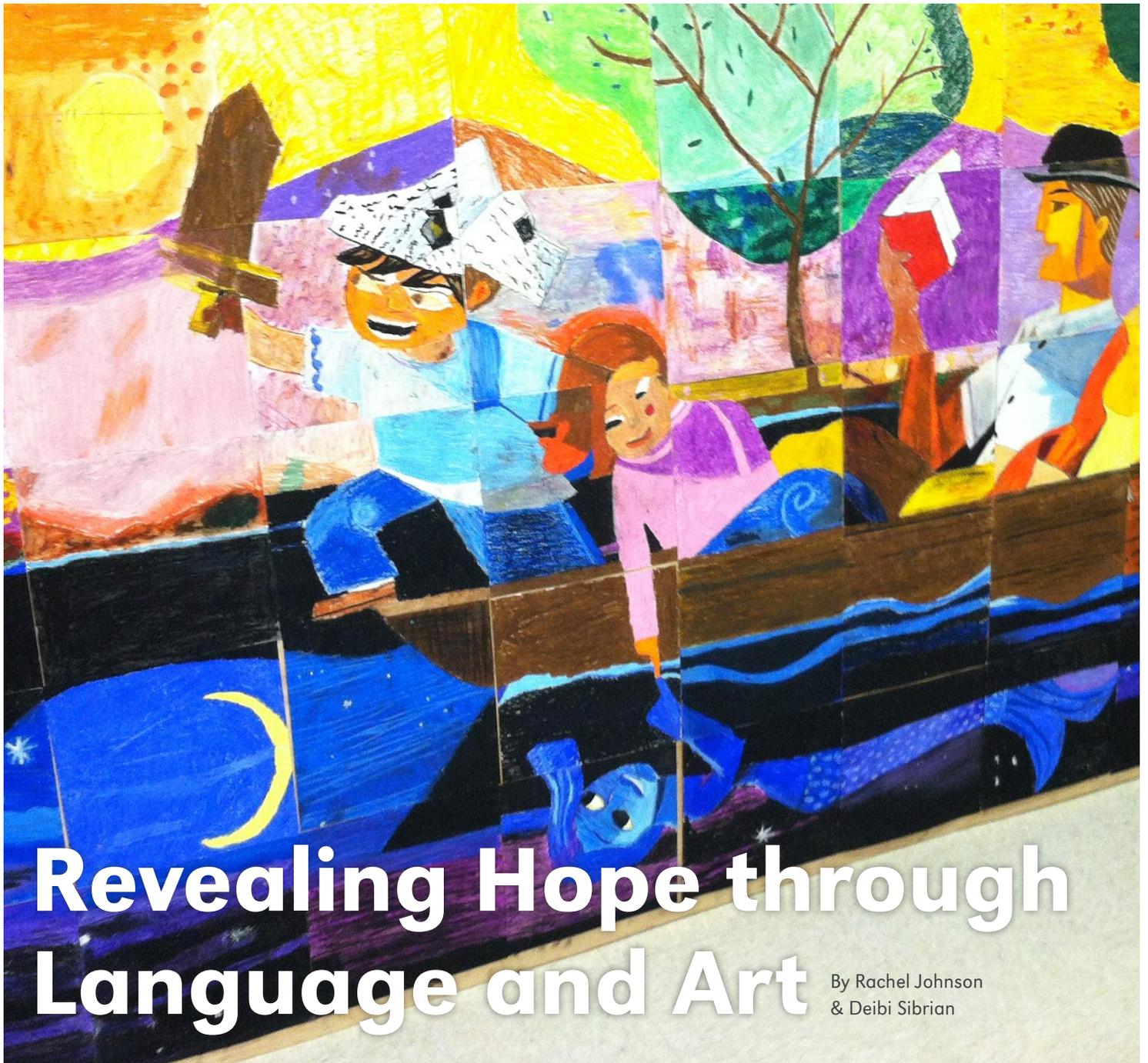
GRADUATE ASSISTANTS:

- Katie D'Agosto, 554-4462
Sandra Espinosa, 554-4463
Erika Jacobson, 554-4465
Rachel Johnson, 554-4464
Tiffany Kelly, 554-4466
Anastasia Most, 554-4467
Deibi Sibrian, 554-4470
Daniel Walsh, 554-4468
Olga Zeisler, 554-4469

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servicelearning](http://unomaha.edu/servicelearning)



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Revealing Hope through Language and Art

By Rachel Johnson
& Deibi Sibrian

“Looking across the room and seeing a basement full of people—middle school students, college students, teachers and community members—working diligently together on one project was breathtaking!” reflected Peter Kiewit Middle School teacher Melissa Frans. Ms. Frans was referring to the culmination of the service learning project her seventh grade students worked on with UNO professor Dr. Imafedia Okhamafe’s *Autobiographical Reading and Writing* students and parents

from the Learning Community Center of South Omaha.

The lead-up to such a successful project conclusion was just as powerful. Throughout the fall semester, the three partners participated in a book club in which all of the students and parents read *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* by Francisco Jiménez. Next, everyone met on UNO’s campus for a book talk, which focused on key struggles the main character faced on his grueling journey

from Mexico to the United States. Following the discussion, both the middle school students and the parents from the Learning Community participated in a campus tour where the prospects of college began to seem very real and attainable.

The next time they gathered together, the three partners created two murals for the Learning Community Center. Through the compilation of individually sketched and then oil-pasteled sections of Latin

American artist Rafael López’s artwork, the students and parents worked together to create the murals as a way to signify the importance of literacy and the presence of hope among us all.

The Learning Community Center of South Omaha’s Director Anne O’Hara concluded that this unique partnership between community members was both “amazing” and “inspirational,” and one that will not quickly be forgotten.

Monkey Business: Studying Animal Behaviors at the Zoo

By Tiffany Kelly



Over the course of the Fall 2013 semester, Dr. Rosemary Strasser's *Animal Behavior Laboratory* students and the 8th grade science students from Our Lady of Lourdes School (OLL) worked collaboratively with the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo. Students participating in this P-16 Service Learning project worked in groups focused on four animal species exhibiting behaviors that concerned zoo staff.

The students did background research, made behavioral observations, and formulated testable hypotheses in order to provide zookeepers and zoo behaviorists with insights into the undesired behaviors taking place between species kept in close proximity at the zoo, but

not "neighbors" in the wild. One of the OLL 8th grade students focused on the zoo's Howler and Saki monkeys who were stealing food from each other. Through his observations and research, the student was able to identify that the monkeys were related and proposed solutions for the problem behavior.

The 8th grade students visited with Dr. Strasser's psychology students on UNO's campus to conclude the project. During their time together, the students participated in group reflections and displayed their final presentations. An OLL 8th grader enthusiastically stated during reflection, "service learning helped me learn while still being able to have fun and help the zoo."

Community Literacy: Cross-Generational Contributions

By Rachel Johnson & Deibi Sibrian

This fall, students from Molly Blackburn's 7th grade Language Arts class at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School and Professor Tanya Seina's *Social Work and Civic Engagement* course partnered with The Literacy Center of the Midlands to examine the importance of literacy in the community today.

With the guidance and support of the UNO students, the 7th graders exchanged journal entries with adults from the Literacy Center as a way to bridge the communication gap between different demographics while practicing their reading and writing. This unique collaboration has also helped all three partners

to further understand what each other's lives are like on a daily basis. After spending time journaling, learning about the Literacy Center, and doing research on issues surrounding adult literacy, the middle school students developed project proposals aimed at helping the Center with fundraising, community awareness, and program enhancements. These proposals were presented to the Literacy Center's staff and board

members. The top proposals will be selected and implemented in the spring.

"This service learning partnership is a great example of learning and giving in action" says the Literacy Center's executive director Kirsten Case. While the middle school students enhanced their Language Arts skills, the Literacy Center was supported in serving the adult literacy needs of the community.



Making Music Every Day, Every Way

By Tiffany Kelly

For one exciting month, Dr. Melissa Berke and her *Music Education Core I* students taught music to preschoolers and their families at Bright Beginnings, Kids Can! Community Center, and Omaha area community outreach centers. Dr. Berke's students provided weekly Beginning Music Instruction sessions as a part of their P-16

service learning project. During these sessions, the UNO students facilitated teacher- and student-created music lessons while emphasizing the importance of music in early childhood development. According to UNO student Becca W., "coming back each week and seeing them remember things, progress, and

enjoy music was really great for me."

As an additional part of their service learning course, the UNO students facilitated a workshop for parents and children entitled "Making Music Every Day, Every Way." This workshop at the Learning Community Center of South Omaha, designed

for children up to 8 years old, focused on the importance of music, literacy, and healthy eating for the families who regularly attend the Center. The project concluded in December with plans to continue educating parents and their children on the importance of music in early childhood development.



Civic Responsibility and Change

By Daniel Walsh

This past October, over 120 students from 5 schools—UNO, Omaha South High Magnet, Millard South High, Norris Middle, and Liberty Elementary—participated in what UNO Political Science Professor Dr. Paul Landow described as “the biggest and most exciting [service learning] project with which I have ever been involved.” Indeed, this project involved

a diverse P-16 partnership, including 6th graders, 7th graders, student council members, US Government classes, the “Characters in Action” student group, and UNO’s *Introduction to American Government* students. The one-day project focused on civic engagement, community needs mapping, and increasing understanding of local governing

systems. The goal of the project was to empower students to make positive changes in their own communities by understanding local governance and recognizing community needs. Students set out in groups, with representatives from each school, and explored locations in the seven Omaha City Council Districts. Students identified issues to be addressed in each neighborhood, such as increasing bike lanes or fixing broken sidewalks.

by these words, the Liberty and Norris students, with mentorship from Millard South, Omaha South, and UNO students, wrote letters addressed to key political stakeholders in the community outlining the issues to be fixed as a result of their needs assessment.

“This project was an eye-opening experience for me. It allowed young students to go out into different parts of the community and become aware of the problems that exist in Omaha’s infrastructure,” reported Anthony C., student at Millard South. Ultimately, the response from the City Council was positive, with the hope that these problems will be turned into strengths in a vibrant Omaha community filled with the next generation of leaders.



At a luncheon following the field work, Garry Gernandt, Omaha South High School graduate and District 4 Council member, and Pete Festerson, City Council President, spoke to students about civic responsibility and ways to create positive change in their communities. Enlivened

Empowering Youth in Cyber Age

By Katie D’Agosto

Members from South Omaha Boys & Girls Club and graduate students from Dr. Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo’s Teacher Education Course, *Language, Culture, and Power*, collaborated for three weeks this past summer on projects that addressed the impact of technology on today’s youth. The Club members, in partnership with the UNO students, spent time collaborating on a presentation of their choice that explored topics such as bullying, education, creative personal expression, and online safety when using technology. Jessica Gall with the Anti-Defamation League of Nebraska spoke to all of the students on the topic

of technology and why it is important to address how the advanced technology of today is affecting younger generations. She encouraged the students to ask for help if they or someone they know is being bullied or harassed.

This partnership was also an opportunity for the UNO students to offer support to the Boys and Girls Club members by encouraging personal talents and interests of each student whether that be through painting, photography, research, or writing. On this most recent collaboration of this long-term partnership, Paco Fuentes, South Omaha Boys and Girls Club

Unit Director reflected, “The UNO and South Omaha Boys and Girls Club service learning partnership is a win, win, win! The Club members learn from the university students, the

university students learn from our Club members, and the UNO faculty and Boys and Girls Club staff learn from the university students and Club members!”





By Olga Zeisler

UNO students from Dr. William Austin's *Human Relations* class and Jackson Elementary students in the Completely KIDS after-school program explored important issues of learning, friendship, and confidence through "Yes I Can!," a P-16 service learning project. The additional focus on understanding the diversity of backgrounds among the two groups helped them to recognize individual differences and identify similarities to build strong relationships.

Throughout a series of visits with the elementary students, the UNO class had the opportunity to get to know students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and to examine their own attitudes toward diversity. The UNO students' findings were reflected in their weekly journal entries which became important tools that helped them to better understand their own progress, as well as the success

of the elementary children. These journals revealed an appreciation of the challenges of language fluency, family experiences, and importance of cultural values. Based on their mentoring experiences, UNO students indicated increases in awareness and skills that included: responsibility for active involvement in community issues, helping other students resolve conflict, and leading a group project.

This service learning project offered Jackson and UNO students a chance to explore diversity, responsibility, and community issues – building a pathway to engaged citizenship. One of Dr. Austin's students wrote in her journal, "I now know that there are plenty of differences that I will have to be able to address in the classroom but also many similarities which I will be able to use to bring the classroom together with." Indeed, they can!

IARSLCE a Success

By Anastasia Most

The 13th Annual International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) Conference was hosted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha November 6-8, 2013. IARSLCE is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the development and dissemination of research on service-learning and community engagement internationally and across all levels of the education system. Over 70 UNO-affiliated faculty, P-12 teachers, and community partners represented local service learning efforts by presenting sessions and posters, volunteering, or as one of the nearly 500 conference attendees.

Several P-16 service learning teams shared the research and scholarship around their projects' engaged teaching and student learning. A special thanks to all that presented and/or contributed to P-16 service learning research and scholarship sessions, including:

Community Partners:

Jennifer Kephart, Girls Inc; Alicia Mullarkey, Glacier Creek Preserve; Jason Pratte, Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo; Denise Gurss, Nebraska Humane

Society; Sergio Sosa, Heartland Worker's Center; Laura Huntimer, Joslyn Art Museum; Carolina Padilla, Intercultural Senior Center; Susan Whitfield, No More Empty Pots; Yates Community Center's Early Childhood Center; Isai Peralta, Katie Freemyer & Claudette Samuels-Blount, Completely KIDS.

P-12 Faculty:

Barbara Brimmerman, Lewis & Clark Middle School; Kelly Carver, Mockingbird Elementary; Cathy Nelson, Blackburn Alternative Program; Melissa Peterson, Omaha South High Magnet School; Matthew Rousek, Monroe Middle School

UNO Faculty:

Will Austin, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, Juan Casas, Claudia Garcia, Donald Greer, Susan McWilliams, Jonathan Santo, Karen Murch-Schafer, Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo, Rose Strasser

Sixty UNO students also presented or volunteered, sharing the impact of their service learning experiences. Kathryn Rand, a UNO Anatomy Academic Assistant, said "I am going to be attending pharmacy school in the fall and as a pharmacist I will need to be able to communicate with people of all age groups. Opportunities like this help me develop communication skills that I can use in my future career."





A Letter from P-16

“The future is so bright we need to wear shades.”

As 2013 draws to a close, we reflect on the impacts of service learning on the community, student learning and collaborating teachers. Students in high school have been thinking about their next step after graduation—hopefully filling out college, financial aid, and/or job applications. Some are deciding where they will go to middle or high school next year, and many of our UNO graduates are fine-tuning their resumes for graduate school or job searching.

UNO is looking into 2014 and a major milestone: the opening of the Community Engagement Center (CEC). The CEC will serve as a portal for community partnerships whose goal is to increase collaboration between university faculty, students and non-profit organizations. The Service Learning Academy will be housed in the CEC and looks forward to collaborating with the partners in the building in new and impactful ways.

Many major events in 2014 are already scheduled to be held in the CEC, so please come and see the new space in late Spring and continue the culture of collaboration and community engagement in the building!

The Service Learning Seminar will be held July 14-18, 2014 in the Community Engagement Center. Registration is available at www.unomaha.edu/servicelearning. UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers are encouraged to attend to learn about service learning as a method of instruction, find partners, and develop service learning experiences based on course learning outcomes/standards.

Happy New Year!

Julie Dierberger, P-16 Coordinator
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Service Learning Academy

Milo Bail Student Center 114
6001 Dodge Street
Omaha, NE 68182



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