



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY

# P-16 INITIATIVE

VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 1 | FALL 2016



# PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

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 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.



## SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT

**By John Matthews**

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is Nebraska's metropolitan university, with strong academic values and significant relationships with our community that transform and improve life. As such, our university looks to continually adapt and create innovative ways to meet the academic and social challenges of today.

The Service Learning Academy was designed to continue the mission of our university to pursue new and creative ways to engage with our community. Through meeting with other colleges and universities across the country, the UNO Service

Learning Academy participates in the academic pursuit of scholarship in community service. A great example of this scholarship occurred recently through participation at the annual Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) conference and the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) conference.

At these conferences, leaders in the field of community engagement and academic excellence met to share and discuss new ideas that help to push our universities, in deep partnership with the community, forward to confront academic and social challenges.

“Through meeting with other colleges and universities across the country, the UNO Service Learning academy participates in the academic pursuit of scholarship in community service.”





This year, four Service Learning Academy members and UNO faculty member Steve Rodie presented their innovative work in subjects that included environmental sustainability, stewarding meaningful university-community

partnerships, and measuring service-learning outcomes at CUMU in Washington, D.C. Additionally, a team representing Our Lady of Lourdes school (Shelley Brown), UNO faculty (Harmon Maher), Joslyn Art Museum (Laura

Huntimer) and the UNO Service Learning Academy presented a preconference session to educators and students from around the globe at the Engagement Scholarship Consortium conference in Omaha. The

UNO Service Learning Academy looks forward to continuing its support of engaged scholarship at UNO in partnership with the many community partner co-teachers with whom we do this work.



# ENGAGING IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT VOTING IN NORTH OMAHA

**By Meghan Perrin**

Students boarded a bus destined for a residential neighborhood in Benson on a crisp fall morning in October. They stepped off the bus near the corner of 42nd and Bancroft ready with clipboards, surveys, and canvassing rules to knock on doors to learn about residents' voting habits in North Omaha.

Professor Preston Love's *Black Experience in American Politics* and Ms. Rebekah Sidzyk's *AP Government & African-American History* classes partnered with Nebraskans for Civic Reform to gather important information about barriers to voting in their precinct. According to the Douglas County Electoral Commission, the voting precincts in North Omaha vote at an average of 12% lower than the rest of the county.

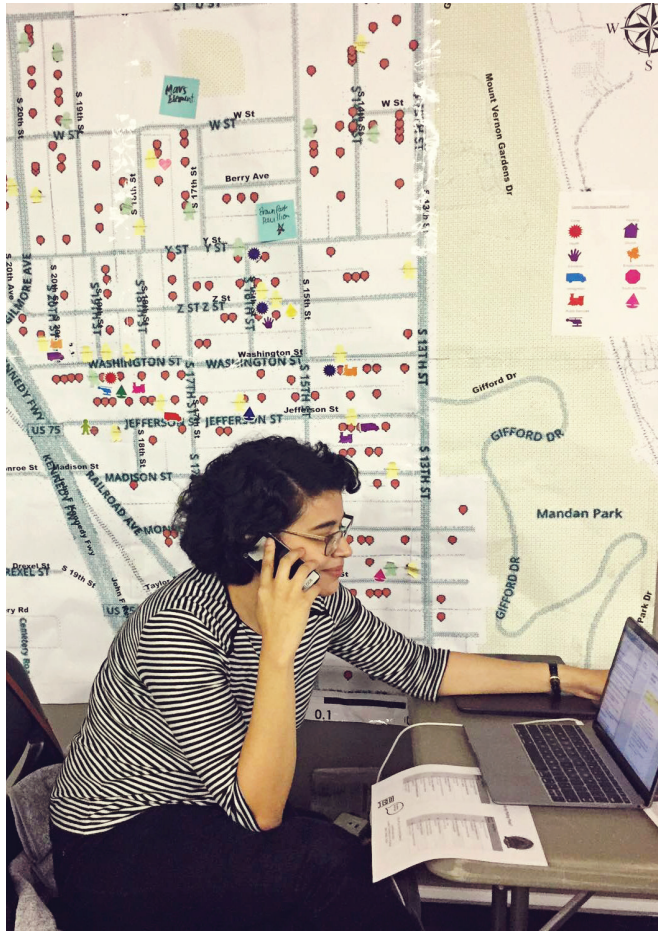
After further discussions about civic engagement and voting

within their communities, students returned to Benson High School to analyze, discuss, and reflect on the data and experiences from the canvassing day. From the small sample size, results indicated that the biggest barrier to voting was voter apathy. A UNO international student from

“ I’ve not seen anything like this before... in my country, you fight to vote, you don’t talk about voting.”

Togo commented about American civil discourse: “I’ve not seen anything like this before... in my country, you fight to vote, you don’t talk about voting.” Her remarks prompted students to recognize the importance of voter engagement.





## I VOTE FOR MY FAMILY

**By Alexandra Bauer**

UNO professor Dr. Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado partnered with UNO adjunct professor and South High Magnet School faculty Mrs. Melissa Peterson to assist the Heartland Worker’s Center in their “I Vote for My Family” campaign that worked to increase voter turnout of South Omaha residents for this presidential election. UNO’s *Latino Politics* and *Introduction to Political Science* classes worked with students in Peterson’s *AP American Government* course at South High Magnet School. Students learned about issues that affect Latino voters and barriers the Latino population face in America’s political system while they partnered with the staff at the Heartland Worker’s Center (HWC).

UNO and South students assisted the HWC in canvassing South Omaha neighborhoods, registering residents to vote, and phone banking in an effort to increase voter turnout. “Community members get happy when they see youth knock on their doors,” said Stephanie Zambrano, UNO student and staff member at the Heartland Worker’s Center. UNO and South students put more than 150 hours into the “I Vote for My Family” campaign during the Fall 2016 semester. The students, faculty, HWC staff, and community members celebrated their efforts while sharing pupusas and pan dulce, and data indicating some South Omaha precincts increased voter turnout by 25%!

## PAVING THE ROAD TO COLLEGE, ONE FAMILY AT A TIME

**By Socorrito Salcido**



The College Prep and Family Learning service-learning project brought together families from the Learning Community Center of South Omaha (LCC) and UNO students from Dr. Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo’s *Introduction to Teaching English as a Second Language* class. For many of the LCC families,

Spanish is their primary language and successfully preparing their children for college in English can be an intimidating prospect.

This semester, the UNO students educated LCC families about college preparedness. Students used techniques learned in

class to teach the families about college readiness. While at UNO, families received tours that gave the parents and children a taste of real college life.

UNO student Alissa Gooding shared about her experience: “I learned that a language barrier does not have to

be a barrier to building positive relationships. You may not be able to have long conversations, but taking the time to be together and communicate nonverbally as well as verbally is amazing as it shows that you value each other and respect each other. I truly enjoyed and cared for the families I worked with.”





## THE LITTLE COOKBOOK THAT COULD

**By Rosa Najera**

Ms. McKenna Methe's Montessori Co-Op class, Professor Don Bowen's UNO *Photography* class, and local nonprofit City Sprouts collaborated on a P-16 service-learning project this year.

The team identified ingredients that can be found at City Sprouts' North and South Omaha community gardens

to create a cookbook using these ingredients to empower residents to sustainably grow, eat, provide, and promote healthy, local foods.

The Montessori Co-Op class of 6-7 year olds each wrote a recipe with the help of their teacher, Ms. Methe. The Montessori Co-Op and UNO students visited City Sprouts

twice to tour the nonprofit, learn about the different produce that is grown at the garden, and prepare recipes while taking photographs of the process. Bowen said about his class, "I'm not sure any of them realized when we started how much fun this would be, but they've found out."

The finished product of "The

Little Cookbook that Could" was given to City Sprouts at the end of the semester where the students' creativity and recipes will fill the bellies of families for years to come.

"The cookbook will be a great resource to share with the community!" said Roxanne Draper, Executive Director of City Sprouts.

# ENGAGING OUR ELDERS TO UNDERSTAND CHANGE

By **Lindsey Kreikemeier**

Throughout the fall semester, students from Professor Don Bowen's *Editing Principles* class teamed up with students from Justin Noel's McMillan Magnet Middle School *Service Learning* class. The students also partnered with seniors who attend the Adams Park Senior Center day program to compare and contrast growing up during the Civil Rights Era and today.

The students interviewed the Adams Park seniors about their

“ Seniors described having to work to support their families at a young age as well as their experience living in a segregated community.”

lives with special emphasis on changes they have seen in Omaha compared to other communities. Seniors described having to work to support their families at a young age as well as their experience living in a segregated community. After interviewing the seniors, students created multimedia

presentations and a written report which they presented to the seniors at Adams Park Senior Center. The seniors wanted to remember the rich experiences they shared with the students and pass them on to their families as well.

Professor Don Bowen indicated

how engaging this service-learning course was for his students. “In my editing class, I try to give students a real-life editing experience that gives [students] a different perspective of our city than they may have had.” Ed Martin, an Adams Park member, indicated, “Those students had good questions! I really had to think back and remember it all. I really enjoyed connecting with the students on this project.”







# FAMILY RESOURCE NIGHT AT NELSON MANDELA SCHOOL

**By Amber Smit**

Students from Professor Emilio Herrera’s *Social Work & Civic Engagement* course teamed up with Nelson Mandela Elementary School to support the school’s Family Liaison, Mr. Joe Ogba, to plan and facilitate a family resource night. UNO students surveyed scholars’ parents on potential family night topics and potential barriers to attendance.

While planning for the resource night, UNO students contacted local banks and grocery stores to invite speakers to inform parents of local resources, including financial skills such as budgeting and smart shopping. UNO students also advertised the event through social media and family interaction. Finally, UNO students had the opportunity to interact with the scholars by planning activities to develop social skills.

Mr. Ogba stated that “this project helped engage our families and helped them get over some barriers for seeking help to improve their family situation.”

# PLANTING KNOWLEDGE

**By SaraAnn Staley**

“Seed to Salad” was a P-16 service-learning collaboration between Instructor Stephanie Lynam’s *Intensive English* (ILUNO) students and Ms. Rachael Burn’s Omaha Northwest Magnet High School (ONW) *Horticulture* students. Together, they worked to identify international and medicinal plants for the ONW rain garden. The rain garden at ONW was created in 2015 as part of another UNO P-16 service-learning project. The idea to introduce international plants into the garden came from Northwest High School’s magnet theme, Law, Government and International Diplomacy. This collaboration allowed UNO and ONW international students to highlight plants from their cultures while giving students the opportunity to deeply explore science in an international context. Students joined together four times throughout the semester to learn about international and medicinal plants. This project not only reinforced class curricula around plants and horticulture, but also helped ONW students to learn about other cultures, while ILUNO students learned about American culture and practiced English language skills.

“ This collaboration allowed UNO and ONW international students to highlight plants from their cultures.”

“Service-learning helps me to know the American society and community because it’s difficult to do so by myself,” shared Riho Sato, an ILUNO student from Japan. ILUNO students were interested in hearing about the culture and activities of homecoming week at ONW, as these kinds of festivities are not celebrated in many of their home countries.







## SHAPING POSITIVE OUTCOMES

**By Camtrice Bexten**

This fall, students from Blackburn Alternative Program and UNO teamed up to learn about positive reinforcement and provide training and enrichment for dogs at the Nebraska Humane Society.

This marks the sixth year for the “Reality Bites” P-16 service-learning project where students from Jennifer Noelle’s *Psychology* class and Ali Buttner’s *Laboratory in Psychology: Learning* class worked together to shape behaviors in dogs that would make them more adoptable.

Shaping behaviors like sitting, lying down and holding eye contact allowed students to bring their textbook content to life and gave the dogs positive interactions and much needed enrichment.

Ms. Noelle was particularly pleased with this year’s results: “Students took readily to the concepts of shaping and positive

reinforcement. During the first week alone, seeing the positive changes in the dogs motivated the students to think about ways in which they could incorporate these concepts into their own lives. We were thrilled that students so quickly generalized their new learning. The UNO students were a big part of that success by making their high school partners equals in the process. It is tremendously gratifying to see dogs find homes and to see students find ways to positively take control of their interactions. Reality Bites succeeded on all fronts this year!”



Seeing the positive changes in the dogs motivated the students to think about ways in which they could incorporate these concepts into their own lives.”

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## LETTER FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Developing civically-engaged young people is one of our most fundamental responsibilities. This election year has affirmed how important developing civic competencies is to our civic health. Service-learning as a method of teaching embeds civic dimensions into classroom experiences across the disciplines. For example, students enrolled in courses highlighted in this newsletter are learning about voter engagement strategies, barriers to voting, and hearing from community elders about their perceptions of social climates over the years. Service-learning courses are an excellent way to develop civic skills while bringing classroom learning to life.

The Service Learning Academy has been collecting data on student attitudes toward civic engagement resulting in some important findings from both UNO and secondary (middle and high school) students. Students in service-learning courses were given a pre and post assessment to better understand how service-learning is affecting student perceptions of the community and how they intend to interact with community organizations in the future. To measure this, a paired t-test was conducted to measure student responses before and after the service-learning experiences. For both UNO and secondary students, results of the assessment indicated their service-learning experiences had a significant impact on how students responded to questions regarding their civic engagement practices, including:

- It is my responsibility to be actively involved in community issues.
- I understand which organizations are working to address community needs.

I hope you found the articles in this newsletter inspiring—from the teachers that make learning real by using service-learning as a method of instruction to the community partners that serve as co-teachers to guide students through real-world applications of learning and making real change in Omaha. I hope that the loudest are those voices of the students and our future leaders as they develop knowledge, skills, and abilities along with the courage to support our democracy.

If you are interested in learning more about service-learning, please reach out: [jdierberger@unomaha.edu](mailto:jdierberger@unomaha.edu). We look forward to learning and serving with you.

Sincerely,



Julie Dierberger, P-16 Coordinator



## MEET SLA'S NEWEST STAFF MEMBERS



### ***Kirsten Case***

Kirsten Case joined the Service Learning Academy in July of 2016 as the Community Liaison. In this role she works with both faculty and community partners to develop service-learning projects across campus that help meet community needs while enhancing classroom learning. Kirsten brings a unique blend of nonprofit experience as well as an understanding of service-learning with over 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector. She was formerly the Executive Director of the Literacy Center for the Midlands, Chief Service Officer at the City of Omaha and a founding member and Director of the Greater Omaha Young Professionals at the Greater Omaha Chamber.

Kirsten has her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Northern Colorado and Master of Organizational Leadership from the College of Saint Mary. Kirsten is a 2002 TOYO (Ten Outstanding Young Omahans) recipient, graduate of Leadership Omaha and has been named as one of Omaha's "40 Under 40" by the Midlands Business Journal.

She is the mother of an 18-year-old, Hannah, and enjoys sharing her time and talents with organizations serving youth and families. Kirsten is a collector of books and enjoys a variety of outdoor activities. A native of Colorado, she travels back home regularly and loves to use her passport as much as possible.

### ***Libby Ferris***

Libby Ferris joined the Service Learning Academy in mid-August as the Weitz Fellow for this year. She graduated from Carleton College in June with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Anthropology and a minor in Educational Studies.

Libby's thesis examined philanthropic giving practices by generation before and after the Great Recession; skills she developed doing this work at Carleton have supported the SLA in significant ways. She has continued her love for quantitative research by co-presenting a poster at the CUMU conference, as well as helping with feedback for a community impact survey.

Libby has a passion for being involved in the community, and was a Program Director for the Red Cross Blood Drive at Carleton College for two years, and a volunteer with the drive for the two years before that. She grew up in St. Louis, MO, and while her parents moved to Scottsdale, AZ in 2013, she has essentially lived in the Midwest her entire life.

Libby loves hiking and being outside, as well as swimming and playing with dogs. She also enjoys reading, cooking, and baking, especially since she now has time after finishing her undergrad!



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