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SLA P-16 Initiative, Volume 2, Issue 1, Fall 2011

University of Nebraska Omaha, Service Learning Academy

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UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Omaha



SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY P-16 INITIATIVE

a **BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES** Partner

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 needs of the community.



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Oak Park Revitalization

By Kelsey Tourek

This semester, Ms. Barth's 9th Grade biology honors students at Ralston High School and Professor Steve Rodie's Landscape Plants students worked together to inventory plants, to develop learning stations, and propose a design for Oak Park beautification in Ralston. The students toured Allwine Prairie and Lauritzen Gardens to learn about prairie eco-systems and to identify types of prairie plants to incorporate into their proposed improvement design. Using what they had learned at the two sites and from the UNO



students, the Ralston students developed plans for plants they will incorporate into the design of the proposed Oak Park learning stations.

This is the first phase of the proposed 3-year project in partnership with the city of Ralston. The project will transform Oak Park from what was once just a makeshift trail, into a natural setting trail where outdoor learning stations will be placed. UNO and Ralston will use the park as their classroom to determine plants, storm runoff, and landscape design.

Senior Words Of Wisdom

By Mrs. Driessen's Fontenelle 3rd Graders

Our third grade class learned about biographies from our teacher Mrs. Driessen. Mrs. Driessen said that we were going to interview residents at House of Hope Unit & Royale Oaks Assisted Living Center. We were using these interviews to write a biography of the seniors' lives. Our counselor, Ms. Glavic, showed us how to use good manners and listening skills for interviewing our partner. We visited with our partners four times. One student learned many things about her partner, "I was surprised that we had a lot in common. . . we both like to do nails and play dress up". We took three trips to the UNO campus.

We met with students in Dr. Romero's Autobiographical Reading and Writing class.

They helped us edit our biography and make it more interesting. One third grade student said, "Now that I've gone to UNO a few times I want to go to college there. It seems like a nice place to go". We liked talking with our UNO partners. They were very smart and helpful. We enjoyed this entire project.

"Working with the 3rd graders was such a refreshing twist to the normal classroom routine. I learned so much about my own writing skills by helping the kids with their biographies. I would most definitely recommend an opportunity like this to any student." Yesenia Madera, UNO student



We got to make new senior friends and new college friends. We will never forget when we read our biographies to our senior partners. They beamed with happiness. One resident said to us that she felt alive again!

Intergenerational Chorus & Harmonica

By Nvèr Hasratyan

The effective way to connect academic curriculum to community-identified need is through rigorous and meaningful service learning experiences. An inter-generational service learning project was developed in partnership with UNO's Introduction to Gerontology class, Lewis and Clark Middle School's 7th grade Music Exploration class, and a local assisted living home for senior residents. Led by UNO faculty member Dr. Lyn Holley, gerontology students interviewed seniors about their life experiences and challenges of aging in order to gain a broader understanding of the application of gerontology concepts.

The 7th grade music class, lead by Ms.

Adora Greene, practiced songs in front of a large audience of seniors to improve their vocal performance skills and engage in inter-generational dialogue with the seniors.

This semester a valuable addition to the music students' experiences involved harmonicas donated by the Kessinger family as part of the Leslie Earl Kessinger Memorial Service Learning Fund. Instructed by Mr. Danny Sabra, students mastered many harmonica pieces and played them in various locations, including a Christmas concert at the Fontenelle Home where Mr. Kessinger lived the last few years of his life.

"Llama, Llama Red Pajama"

By Tess Larson

UNO Education students partnered with Yates Early Learning Center, the Omaha Family Literacy Partnership and the UNO Service Learning Academy to support Yates preschoolers in developing literacy skills. UNO early childhood teacher candidates visited Yates throughout the fall semester, reading stories and facilitating extension activities. As part of the year-long relationship, UNO students will also lead four family literacy celebrations at Yates Early Learning Center as part of their service learning experiences next semester. In October, UNO early childhood teacher



Reality Bites

By Kelsey Tourek

Dr. Rosemary Strasser's Learning Laboratory students at UNO learned and served with Mrs. Cathy Nelson's English students at Blackburn to clicker train dogs at the Nebraska Humane Society. The students rewarded the dogs when they showed desirable behaviors. By using conditioning techniques taught in the classroom, students were able to train the adoptable dogs to be calm and quiet when potential "families" came through the kennels.

Students also monitored the extinction of undesirable behaviors. Dr. Strasser's course required students to use

"Students are learning that shaping behavior positively has long term positive outcomes while punishment results in negative side effects."

Cathy Nelson,
Teacher Leader at Blackburn

systematic reinforcement to change behaviors and demonstrate the learning process. Mrs. Nelson's course required students to collect data, compile their findings, and present their results. "We learned a way to teach others how to reinforce behavior the right way, such as if you clean your room, you can get a snack," said one of the

Blackburn students about expanding the learning to his personal life; "like with children, if you yell, hit and don't show them how to do things differently, it makes problems such as being afraid of punishment if they make a mistake." Within their service learning project, "Reality Bites", both the high school and university students were able to apply the concepts they were learning in class, and the Humane Society received valuable service—many of the dogs involved in the project were adopted.

Through structured critical reflection activities and presentations, students shared course-based learning outcomes, learned about a valued community organization, and applied course concepts in other curriculum areas.

"Llama, Llama" continued...

candidates participated in "Jumpstart's Read for the Record Day," an event calling awareness to the importance of reading to young children. They read *Llama, Llama Red Pajama*, by Anna Dewdney, to the preschoolers. After reading the book, UNO students extended the book through a book related craft activity. Every preschooler in the school took home their own personal copy of the book and Professor McWilliams, leading the UNO students, said that teachers are reporting that this is the children's favorite book.

As a culminating event, Anna Dewdney, author and illustrator of the award-winning book lead a presentation at UNO for the teacher candidates and the Native American preschool class at Yates, courtesy of the Omaha Public Library.

Vikings Book Club

By Marcia Ghali Bergren

University of Nebraska at Omaha students who took Autobiographical Reading & Writing with Dr. Okhamafe were reading and thinking with Mrs. Paulson's North High seniors this semester in the UNO and Vikings Book Club. The two classes read and discussed *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* by Wes Moore. The book facilitated important discussions about choices and the future. Dr. Okhamafe challenged the students by saying, "You are not responsible for coming into this world, but at some point in your life you are responsible for accepting that position. At what point do you assume responsibility for your actions and

reactions?" At the end of the class discussions one of the UNO students remarked, "If you don't make your own decisions society will make them for you. Your decisions make you who are. Society alone does not define a person."

The classes created a study guide packet for *The Other Wes Moore* for the Omaha Public Library Book Groupies program. The Book Groupies program makes bags of books available for area book clubs to utilize.

Simultaneously, the project has furthered the students writing, reading, and critical thinking skills while engaging the students in a project that gives back to the community.



Readers are Leaders

By Sarah Hanify

//What do you think of this spaceship?" asked one student. This question was posed by a Nathan Hale Magnet Middle School student during a field trip to UNO on November 17. The Nathan Hale students were in a class named "Readers Are Leaders," which encouraged literacy and works to promote reading as a lifelong activity. UNO Public Relations students created a campaign connected to the Readers Are Leaders class and designed bookmarks and

posters that encouraged students to obtain an Omaha Public Library card. The UNO students created materials using aliens and spaceships as a way

I was the lead/client correspondent for our PR Project this year. Working with the students from the Readers Are Leaders Program has been quite enjoyable. It's great to know that there are such passionate professionals in our community that care about developing childhood literacy. Our group is honored to be apart of such a promising program.

Chad Cunningham,
UNO student

to get middle-school students excited about reading and the Nathan Hale students were able to contribute

designs for the bookmarks and the posters.

The Readers Are Leaders class, taught by Mrs. Rebekah Sidzyik, is an extended learning period class at Nathan Hale. This class is focusing on encouraging other students their age to read more, to obtain their library cards and to use the library available to students at Nathan Hale. The UNO Public Relations students, taught by Dr. David Ogden, used this project as the focus of their public relations campaign planning assignment, which culminated with a presentation during finals week.

The UNO students were able to meet with Mrs. Sidzyik and work with her students to determine needs and to create materials tailored to the Readers Are Leaders program.

A UNO instructor recently was asked about students' learning in a P-16 project and said, "I think that helps them get more out of the experience, synthesizing what they did with what they've learned. Here is a demonstration of learning objectives and a celebration of work of so many students collaborating to meet a need. I think many of them are proud of what they've done, and they want to share it with their class and community." This semester's newsletter outlines how P-16 faculty members are collaborating to achieve their learning goals by utilizing service learning as a method of teaching. From hard sciences to writing courses, students are being exposed to needs and experiential learning through the leadership of dedicated faculty and encouraging administrators.

Each semester over thirty P-16 service learning projects are implemented, bringing together hundreds of students in the Omaha metropolitan area while providing a context for classroom learning in their own community. As articulated by the faculty member above, students are gaining a level of understanding for their coursework that is applicable, contextualized, and important to the community. Quantifying the impacts of these experiences on student learning and

the Omaha community has been a major focus this year. The Service Learning Academy has been working with local school districts and UNO to assess student learning and perceptions at the beginning and end of service learning courses to capture the outcomes of experiential teaching and learning as they relate to attendance, achievement, and civic engagement.

The P-16 Initiative in the Service Learning Academy continues to provide training and support for faculty interested in co-developing academic service learning curriculum. We want to provide the best possible opportunity for you and your students—sign up is available now!

Seminars held **March 19-23 & July 16-20, 2012**, are a great way to bring together P-12, higher education, and non-profit community partners. If your school or community agency is interested in customized service learning training options, please do not hesitate to contact me at jdierberger@unomaha.edu.

Thank you for being a partner in service and learning this year!

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

2012 SEMINARS:

MARCH
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&
JULY
16-20

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