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## SLA P-16 Initiative, Volume 3, Issue 1, Fall 2012

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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## Physics in a Box

By Tess Larson

**E**ighth grade Physical Science students from Lewis and Clark Middle School and students from Dr. Podariu's Physics class spent the semester collaborating on a "Physics in a Box" project. Groups of middle school students, in partnership with the UNO students, created boxes that contain materials to conduct a hands-on physics experiment based on one of Newton's Laws of Physics. Throughout the semester students worked together to better understand physics concepts and to solve mathematical problems related to their demonstration boxes.

At the conclusion of the semester, the students came together and celebrated their project at UNO. The gathering was held to recognize their hard work and was also an opportunity for the younger students to share their newly enhanced knowledge of

physics by demonstrating their experiments for friends and family. Representatives from the Boys and Girls Club of Omaha were present to receive the completed boxes. Using the student-designed instructions included in each box, Club employees can recreate the physics experiments with the youth they serve.

"The UNO students really made Newton's laws fun and easy to understand. They connected with us and talked to us about our interests to make the project more unique. We made the project ours."

- Maggie W. 8<sup>th</sup> grade student

The project gave all of the students, both those from Lewis and Clark and those from UNO, the opportunity to make physics fun. Using Newton's Laws, they wanted to show that learning about physics can be hands-on, educational and entertaining.

## Latino Politics

By Sandra Espinosa

**T**his fall Dr. Benjamin-Alvarado's Latino Politics and Dr. Gouveia's Immigration classes participated in a collaborative service learning project to promote Latino voter participation in South Omaha. Joining the collaboration were students from South High School's "Characters in Action" group and Omaha's "I Vote for My Family" campaign. Everyone participated in a series of voter education and outreach activities to increase the knowledge and participation of Nebraska's rapidly growing Latino population.

The results were impressive – over 10,000

"Unlike simple volunteer activities, these students see a tangible link of their efforts empowering individuals directly, and in turn, they themselves have become more attuned and informed by the engagement."

Dr. Benjamin-Alvarado, UNO Professor

telephone calls were placed and over 1,000 homes of registered voters were visited by students and volunteers from the community to "get out the vote" in this non-partisan campaign. This was the fourth election cycle in which UNO students have engaged the community with this project, and the second cycle in which the Omaha South High students have partnered with UNO through the Service Learning Academy.

# Redbird 108

By Danny Walsh

Students in the Completely KIDS (CK) program at Norris Middle School and students from Dr. Jonathan Santo's Developmental Psychology Lab collaborated with community partners Hanscom Park Methodist Church and HyVee to respond to the needs of the Norris Middle School community. Students worked together to design a classroom to be their own space for completing homework, meeting with their mentors, holding CK youth development groups, and most importantly, for providing family resources. The new design also includes a wall of quotations to inspire the students to be leaders. "Redbird 108 gives the kids a sense of helping their school and the community. It's awesome to see them involved like that... and making such a difference," stated Ms. Blount, Site Director for CK. UNO Psychology students provided over 175 hours of service to Norris Middle School by serving as academic mentors, providing positive youth engagement, and conducting an Adolescent Self-Worth Study. "It has been refreshing to see the ownership our students have taken in the creation of Redbird 108," said Mr. Cano, Norris Middle School Principal.

# HIV/AIDS Awareness

By Tiffany Kelly

UNO's Black Studies students and students from Completely KIDS Teen Outreach Program (TOP®) hosted an HIV/AIDS Awareness Gallery Walk at the South Omaha Library marking the finale of a semester long project. With the alarmingly high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS affecting individuals in the Heartland, the Gallery Walk served as a perfect platform to accomplish students' learning goals. Prior to putting on the event, the students met weekly on Wednesday afternoons to discuss issues surrounding STIs and the HIV/AIDS epidemic internationally, nationally, and locally.

This student-led project sought to make an impact on Omaha's youth and



## Sign of Community Pride

By Erika Jacobson

At the corner of 37th Street and Crown Point Avenue there stood a rundown and forgotten sign. This sign, once a symbol of community pride, was a ghost of its former self until students from Belvedere Elementary School's Resource Program and The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Grace Abbott School of Social Work decided to do something about it. They wanted to restore the

sign to its former glory and bring pride back to the Belvedere/Fontenelle community.

Dr. Karen Rolf's Human Behavior in the Social Environment Social

"When I saw that tree go into the ground, I just got goose bumps."

Mrs. Ellen Keenan  
Belvedere Elementary School

Work class partnered with Mrs. Ellen Keenan's Belvedere Elementary School students to restore the sign and learn about the process of planting and landscaping. Two local landscaping companies, Jay Moore Landscaping and Mulhalls, agreed to donate their services to the project, which included a landscaping plan and a variety of

planting materials. There were also two local community partners who agreed to help maintain the landscaping around the sign, Nared's PeeWee Palace and TRI-Community Church.

The students met several times at Belvedere Elementary School to discuss and plan for their semester-long project for beautifying the community sign with plants and trees. The local media also became involved and interviewed the Belvedere students about their project. A final celebration at Belvedere gave the students an opportunity to reflect on the impact they had on their community and what the project had taught them in the process- that they are part of the solution.

"This project helped me understand how the disease was spread and what people did to handle this cause. I learned that HIV doesn't discriminate from anybody, doesn't matter your race or your background. You are still at risk of getting infected. It feels good to help inform my community about something very important that people don't think of it as much."

Monica B. TOP® participant

community through the presentation of artwork created by the TOP® students and open dialogue facilitated by the UNO students. The importance of spreading awareness, dispelling myths, and providing accurate information and resources was very clearly expressed by the students during their presentations. The information will continue to educate the community on display at the South Omaha Library throughout the end of the year.

## Sacred Circle

By Katie D'Agosto

In honor of Native American Heritage month, P-16 higher education partner Dr. Edouardo Zendejas welcomed Olympian Billy Mills on behalf of UNO's Department of Arts and Sciences and Student Organizations & Leadership Programs (SOLP). In 1964, Mills, a member of the Ogallala Lakota tribe, won the 10,000 meter race and became the second Native American to win a gold medal. Dr. Zendejas' Native Studies class partnered with the American Indian students at South High to further explore Native culture and its impact within society today. Sacred Circle facilitated mentor relationships between UNO and South High school students through activities such as native beadwork and speakers that discussed topics like smudging and Native Americans' contributions to the arts through film. Mills visited UNO's campus on November 16<sup>th</sup> to share his story of personal and professional triumph that led him to win the gold medal in the Tokyo games. This event served as a celebration of the Sacred Circle collaboration. South High students walked around the HPER track in a symbolic tribute to Billy Mill's Olympic accomplishments both personally and for Native culture.



## Service on Park Ave.

By Marcia Ghali Bergren

Omaha Street School students and UNO Social Work students teamed up to learn about neighborhood development and participate in inCOMMON Community Development's ongoing Listening Project this semester. The Listening Project aims to identify needs in the Park Avenue neighborhood of Omaha and empower residents to build a stronger, safer and more vibrant community. The UNO social work students used the skills learned in their Social Work and Civic Engagement class to act as mentors for the high school students of the

Omaha Street School. Together, UNO and Omaha Street School students completed a Listening Project training offered by inCOMMON Community

"It feels really good to help out and see people have smiles on their faces when we hand them the food."

Omaha Street School student

Development. They put their skills to work practicing the art of listening and interviewing neighborhood residents using flip cameras. The Omaha Street School students also combined skills learned in their nutrition class with active service by planning and serving a healthy dinner to neighbors in need at inCOMMON Community Development's CommonTable program. On the night of their dinner service, the students proudly served

the meal they had organized. When preparing for this project, students interviewed neighbors at the CommonTable program to gather stories and learn more about the neighborhood.

The partnership between inCOMMON Community Development and the Omaha Street School will continue. The high school students began working on a multimedia public service announcement for inCOMMON Community Development. The students are utilizing the digital camera footage they recorded from the Listening Project and CommonTable to create a video explaining the mission and purpose of inCOMMON to the public.

I am humbled by the extraordinary partnerships articulated in the pictures and articles in this newsletter. Partnerships are an essential component of service learning experiences. Partnerships across the P-16 spectrum are complex, and require thoughtful planning and strong communication. When these components are considered, the outcomes are significant not only in learning and application for students, but also for meeting community needs. In our third year as a Building Bright Futures partner program, the P-16 Initiative in the Service Learning Academy identifies our strongest asset in supporting service learning: partnerships. This season, and always, we thank our partners for their initiative, vision, and unrelenting hope to provide the best teaching and learning environment for students in the community through service learning.

This semester Barbara Holland, an internationally-known service learning expert and scholar, came to campus to discuss the future of service learning. She identified one of the most important components of the next phases of service learning and community engagement: interdisciplinary connections. Dr. Holland posited the future of this work will flourish

when academics from different departments, across the P-16 spectrum, and across disciplines come together to learn, serve, and address community problems. I am pleased to report that 2/3 of the current projects are interdisciplinary.

As we look into 2013, we are thankful for the partnerships that have brought us this far, connecting over 2,000 K-12 and UNO students in service learning just this semester. These relationships strengthen not only our community, but help students to see the community as a classroom, where they are a part of identifying problems, and most importantly, the solutions.

We are excited to offer the 2013 Service Learning Seminars (March 18-22 and July 15-19 ) as a means to partner across the P-16 continuum. Please consider attending or encourage an educator or community nonprofit partner to join us in service learning. Also, Seminar Alumni, please mark your calendars for February 8th from 4-7 PM. We are planning a Seminar Alumni showcase to continue to explore service learning best practices and partnerships in Omaha. Thank you!

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

## 2013 SEMINARS:

MARCH  
18-22  
&  
JULY  
15-19

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