

Spring 2021

SLA Newsletter, Volume 11, Issue 2, Spring 2021

UNO Service Learning Academy

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

SERVICE LEARNING ACADEMY

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 11 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2021



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WITH COMMUNITY**

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha



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ANTI-POVERTY WEBSITE

A new SLA webpage provides resources and support for anti-poverty service learning projects.

SUMMER SEMINAR

July 2021

Don't forget to register for the Service Learning Seminar. During the seminar, participants have a front row experience to learn all about service learning.

Typically a 4.5 day professional development experience held at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, the Service Learning Seminar will be held in a virtual format during the week of July 12-16, 2021. It will provide an opportunity for P-12 and after-school teachers, administrators, and UNO full- and part-time faculty members to understand the fundamentals of service learning and develop a service learning project. Register at sla.unomaha.edu to reserve your spot.

SLA APPROACHES

Traditional and P-16 service learning courses are taught at UNO. The traditional service learning projects are collaborations between community partners and a UNO class. P-16 service learning courses include collaboration between a UNO class, a P-12 class, and a community partner. Throughout the newsletter, projects are identified as traditional or P-16 based on their project structure.

TRADITIONAL MODEL



P-16 MODEL



MAVERICK PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE

The student philanthropy model is another form of service learning which incorporates charitable giving. Students in this type of class practice philanthropic giving and learn how it affects community partners. Projects using this model are identified as MPI throughout the newsletter.

MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Not only do service learning projects provide connections to curriculum, but many also align directly with the 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.



**EDUCATIONAL
SUPPORT**



**SOCIAL
JUSTICE**



**ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP**



**HEALTH AND
WELLNESS**



**INTERNATIONAL
SERVICE**



**ECONOMIC
SUFFICIENCY**

LETTER FROM THE PAUL SATHER DISTINGUISHED DIRECTOR



Serving "in concert with community" is an important value in the Service Learning Academy. We know service learning courses require the trust of our partners to co-teach with our faculty members. Never have we been more thankful for that collaboration than the past year. Our partners continued to show up and co-teach with us online in the middle of a global pandemic. *Together they achieved the unthinkable and collaborated on the highest number of service learning courses taught in the history of UNO.*

To our faculty members, students, and community partners, please accept my sincerest thanks and most humble admiration for what you have accomplished together. What you have been able to achieve in the past year is astonishing. As our friend Barbara Holland reminded us at the Service Learning Showcase, you "didn't put it in the 'too hard' pile."

The stories in this newsletter represent the culmination of countless hours on Zoom figuring out how to live our leadership and metropolitan mission through teaching. The barriers were innumerable, but we learned from them and grew together as a result.

A special thank you to the Service Learning Academy team, who have gone above and beyond to support the outstanding service learning collaborations you will read about in this newsletter. We all stand with our partners and show the world what Maverick Strong looks like. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Julie Dierberger, Paul Sather Distinguished Director

CELEBRATING NORTH OMAHA CULTURE

By: Mazin Al Rahbi



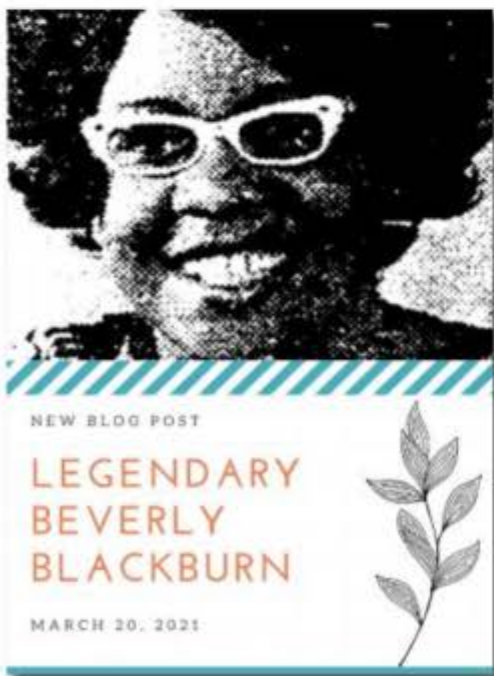
Traditional

UNO students from Heather Nelson's *Principles of Marketing* course worked with [Freedomtainment](#), a community partner from North Omaha whose mission is to empower, educate, and entertain the Omaha community, on a project focused on North Omaha culture. Freedomtainment launched the Omaha Freedom Festival on June 19, 2021, to celebrate the Juneteenth holiday, which commemorates the emancipation of African Americans who had been enslaved in the United States. In their service learning project, UNO students helped support the event planning process using marketing concepts learned in their class.

This project began with UNO alum and Freedomtainment founder Calvin Williams and his passion for sharing the rich history and culture of North Omaha with the larger Omaha community. Throughout the three-month service learning project, students worked with Freedomtainment, the [NAACP Omaha Chapter](#), and the [Malcolm X Foundation](#) to develop useful marketing solutions and materials. The majority of the work focused on the upcoming Omaha Freedom Festival. Students created marketing and social media materials, wrote [guest blog posts on the Freedomtainment website](#), and helped with advertising and press appearances.

Students practiced applying classroom skills in the real world by working on a project that impacts the Omaha community. UNO student William Scheopner said, "I love the service component of this class because it connects concepts with the application and allows UNO to make a difference in the community." This project incorporated the concept of social justice by supporting Freedomtainment in uncovering North Omaha's history, which has not always been widely known, and celebrating the area's rich culture.

Students created marketing materials, such as infographics, blog posts, and flyers, for Freedomtainment's website.



ADVOCACY THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS

By: Bri Full



Traditional

A revamped version of one existing service learning project launched this spring to support Omaha community organizations with their public relations needs. In past years, Roma Subramanian's students were assigned in small groups to work with one community organization for their project. This semester, over twenty students in her *Principles of Public Relations* class were each paired one-to-one with an organization. The students assisted their partner organizations in the creation of public relations projects such as campaign models, website updates, and social media plans.

One of the community organizations that students worked with was Budget to Success, an organization dedicated to improving financial literacy by assisting people with the knowledge to build credit, pay off debt, and accumulate savings. Another partner was [Mode Shift Omaha](#), an organization which advocates for better public transportation options to enhance opportunities for everyone.

Through this service learning project, partner organizations such as these gained new public relations tactics which will improve their

visibility and outreach efforts. The UNO students were able to apply their curriculum in a real-world experience working with a partner to build stronger professional collaboration skills.

SPRING 2021
IN REVIEW



110 UNO courses used
service learning as a
method of teaching

PEN PAL CONNECTIONS

By: Maria Jimenez



P-16

As schools continue to navigate remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to take into consideration the social and emotional well-being of students. In Lisa Kelly-Vance's remote graduate course, *Psychology of Exceptional Children*, school psychology students partnered with school counselor Socorrito Salcido and teacher Aida Amoura's third grade class at Conestoga Elementary School to help provide that social-emotional support to students.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning as "how children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." Pre-pandemic, the UNO and Conestoga students would have been able to have in-person interactions with each other to establish these positive relationships, but this semester, the project was adapted to take place remotely through a video exchange.

UNO students created bi-weekly videos for the elementary students to watch and respond to in order to work on social-emotional wellbeing. The students used Zoom as their recording platform and worked in small groups to create the videos. They started with icebreakers to introduce themselves and get to know the younger students. The third graders especially enjoyed playing "Would You Rather," and they responded both by answering and asking more of the "Would You Rather" questions.

The third graders also asked the UNO students about their college experiences, including what classes they take, how much writing they do, and the amount of math required in college. These questions not only helped to build relationships, but they also helped the elementary students learn about the college experience.

Throughout the semester, this project became the highlight of each students' week, and each partner shared how much they looked forward to watching and recording videos every week. This project helped teachers and students focus on social and emotional connections that sometimes can be overlooked. Especially in a remote environment, this project emphasized the importance of promoting the social emotional wellbeing of students through connection, community, and relationships.



UNO students used Zoom to record videos for their elementary school partners.

MAKING THE CASE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

By: Claire Fischer



Graduate students from UNO faculty member Connie Schaffer's *Human Rights and Education* class partnered with the [Education Rights Counsel \(ERC\)](#) for their service learning project this semester. Founded in 2017, the ERC advocates for under-resourced children who need assistance accessing educational services such as special education support.

Schaffer said that a goal of the project was for her students to gain "a deeper understanding of human rights issues and their systemic manifestations in educational environments as well as a confidence to advocate for the protection and advancement of human rights in educational settings." Overall, the UNO students gained valuable experience working with the Education Rights Counsel while addressing issues of human rights in education.

In Schaffer's class, the students learned about human rights in education, ways to teach about human rights, and how to advocate for social change. For the service learning component, Schaffer and ERC co-founder Elizabeth Eynon-Kokorda partnered to provide the students with an actual scenario related to rights in P-12 education. The case included relevant national and local statistics as well as a series of questions and prompts to guide the students' research. Using their knowledge from the course curriculum, the students then investigated the scenario to develop a case study.

Working on the case study provided an opportunity for the students to enhance their educational experience with a real-world example of human rights in education. The students met with the Education Rights Counsel to learn about the organization and ask questions about their given scenario. Using the information from their course curriculum and guidance from the ERC, the students came up with a potential resolution to the scenario as well as alternative solutions and lessons learned. They also reflected on these lessons as they jointly edited and revised the case study with the ERC.

SPRING 2021
IN REVIEW



91 community organizations
served as co-teachers in
service learning courses

CULTUREFEST 2021

By: Talia Smith

CultureFest is an annual collaborative event hosted by the UNO Service Learning Academy, South High Magnet School, and Beveridge Magnet Middle School. Usually held on the UNO campus, CultureFest celebrates the rich diversity of the Omaha community through cultural performances and demonstrations.

This year's 11th annual CultureFest was held in a virtual format and featured video submissions from school and community groups. Submissions included art demonstrations, musical performances, poetry writing exercises, student presentations, and more. The videos, along with an opening message from South High School, were shared with UNO, P-12 schools, and the Omaha community during the three-day CultureFest event.

View the videos on the [CultureFest website!](#)

Above: Opera Omaha submitted a video of an art demonstration for viewers to follow along at home.
Below: Flamenco Omaha shared a video of a dance performance.



MAVERICK PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE IN THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

By: Grace Nelson



This spring, Kelly Gomez Johnson's *Plan for Effective Teaching* course partnered with Alana Shriver from [Refugee Empowerment Center](#) to engage in a new Maverick Philanthropy Initiative (MPI) service learning course. The MPI adds a layer of philanthropy to service learning projects at UNO, creating an opportunity for students to share their time, talent, and treasure through their coursework and through grant funding that classes allocate to a community organization.

Students in this course learned about immigrant and refugee experiences in Omaha. At the project launch in February, the community partners introduced themselves and gave "project pitches" on five different community programs designed to support the immigrant and refugee population in Omaha:

- Food Processing Plant Advocacy with the [Heartland Workers Center](#)
- Cleaning Education Program with [Restoring Dignity](#)
- Translated Homeowner Educational Video with the [Omaha Refugee Task Force](#)
- Global Roots with [Lutheran Family Services](#) and Refugee Empowerment Center
- B.I.O. Project with [Nebraska Appleseed](#), [Culr House](#), and Refugee Empowerment Center

Following these pitches, UNO students were divided into groups to engage in research on each program, the issue it addressed, and how it affected the given population. Then, each group developed and presented a lesson plan to the class which would be shared with each partnering organization. The presentations drew on personal connections to issues

and utilized various teaching modalities to promote understanding. UNO students also connected their presentations to the larger context of how cultural humility would inform their future work as instructors. One student, Alexandra Espinoza, said, "As a future teacher, I now understand the importance of researching the cultures of the students that will be in my classes as well as talking with people from these cultures in order to get a foundation of what their culture is like."

"[MPI] equips students with real money to make a real impact on real programs. MPI goes beyond simply teaching the principles of giving in service to others; students are given the chance to take those principles out for a spin. The positive ripple effects of our organization partnering with MPI will be felt far and wide by the people we serve."

— Alana Shriver, Refugee Empowerment Center

Using what they had learned about the Omaha immigrant and refugee community, students decided where to allocate their \$1,000 Maverick Philanthropy Initiative grant funds. In March, community partners joined the class for a socially distanced final celebration in UNO's Community Engagement Center, where UNO student Jake Garrett announced Heartland Workers Center as the grant recipient. Together, students and community partners reflected on the experience and broader impact of this project, and celebrated their meaningful civic engagement.



Above: Micky Devitt from Heartland Workers Center (left) and Kelly Gomez Johnson (right) pose for a photo after the final project celebration.
Right: An envelope was used to announce the grant recipient.



Learn more on the
Service Learning Academy's
[Maverick Philanthropy Initiative webpage!](#)

BROUGHT TOGETHER BY A MELODY

By: Kelsey Wagner



P-16

The late American jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald once said, "Music is a universal language; it brings people closer together." UNO instructor Shelby VanNordstrand found this idea to be a driving force for her collaboration with Omaha Central High School choral directors Sara Cowan and Lynn Bouma. Through the project, choral students from both schools worked together to learn and perform music by composers from marginalized communities.

SPRING 2021
IN REVIEW



1,876 UNO students
participated in service
learning projects

This service learning project was the first between these instructors. VanNordstrand's *Applied Voice* students were paired with Omaha Central High School choral students according to their voice types. Pairs of students were each assigned a song from composers Yoshinaka Nakada and Gena Branscombe, who were chosen because of their impact in the music industry as marginalized composers.

The UNO and Central High students began their work together with a discussion of the history of Nakada's and Branscombe's music careers. Then, the UNO students continued by teaching their partners songs by each composer. At the end of the project, the Central High School students shared their video performances with UNO students through a collaborative online platform, FlipGrid.

The project not only provided the UNO students hands-on teaching experience, but it also introduced all participants to the careers and works of marginalized composers. "One of the best things about this project is that everyone involved is receiving and giving," said VanNordstrand. "I hope to introduce and promote the music of song composers of varied lived experiences to more students and teachers. I hope that this project will expand in future semesters to include more UNO students, UNO faculty, and area high schools."

The efforts of UNO and Central High School faculty and students through service learning collaboration show how music continues to bring people closer together even during socially distanced times.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH MUSIC

By: Ali Al-Ghaithi



Traditional

UNO faculty member Katrina Cox's *Music Education Core* course aims to explore aspects of administering high school music programs to prepare students for teaching. This semester, students in the course took part in a service learning project to learn those teaching skills through experience. The students partnered with veterans from the *American Legion* to teach basic guitar lessons.

Each student was paired with a veteran, and the pairs met two to three times a week for 30 to 40 minutes. Over the six week project, the UNO students taught four to six foundational chords that would allow veterans to play a wide range of pieces. At the end of the project, participants celebrated at a final event where pairs each recorded a song together. During this event, the American Legion also surprised veterans with new guitars.

The partnership between UNO and the American Legion helped students become more engaged with the community. Over the course

of the project, students not only gained valuable teaching skills, but they also built meaningful relationships with their veteran partners and learned how music can be used to connect different groups of people.

"This service learning project is extremely reciprocal in its benefits. Veterans in our community learn basic guitar skills, but equally valuable is their service to our music education students."

— Katrina Cox, UNO Faculty Member

"I am thankful for this opportunity to help our local veterans and the students of UNO," said Commander Sharlene Anderson from the American Legion. "I wish us all success and hope that we build a stronger community through this program."



UNO students watched recordings of their lessons and reflected on their experiences during the final project meeting for Giving Benson Voice.

GIVING BENSON VOICE

By: Talia Smith



P-16

Vocal music students from UNO and Benson High School worked together in a new service learning partnership this semester. Students in Zac Colby's *Voice Pedagogy* course provided one-on-one, virtual voice lessons to Susanna Kearney's high school choir students in preparation for the high schoolers' solo competitions this spring.

Even in a virtual setting, the service learning project gave UNO students a chance to practice the skills they are learning in their class. "My vocal pedagogy course is designed around the practical application of the teaching of singing," explained Colby. "Voice lessons are all about being in the moment and reacting to the live human in front of you, and so it was clear to me they needed to have a singer to work with in order to apply the concepts we are learning in class together."

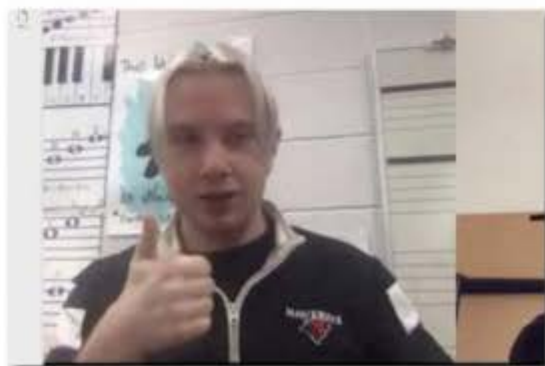
"Because every body is different, my students are getting real-life experience reacting to the person in the room and being challenged to vary their instruction for diverse learners. This is something that just can't be replicated talking in theory."

— Zac Colby, UNO Faculty Member

At the beginning of the project, Colby and Kearney assigned their students into pairs so that each Benson student would have lessons with the same UNO mentor each week. In the first lessons, which were held via Microsoft Teams, the UNO students conducted basic vocal exercises that helped them become familiar with their Benson partner's voice and singing style. As the lessons continued, they started introducing and

working on the Benson students' solo repertoire pieces. Over the span of six lessons, the pairs worked together to perfect the performances.

The weekly lessons not only allowed the UNO students to apply their classroom curriculum, but they also helped the Benson students prepare for their spring music competitions. Colby said, "Many of my students have studied voice for years and are preparing to be teachers themselves, so it felt like an ideal situation to offer lessons to students that maybe haven't studied private voice before or for those who wanted to but didn't have access to a teacher." The service learning partnership between UNO and Benson High School enhanced the educational and musical experiences of all the participating students.



UNO voice students used Microsoft Teams to connect with their Benson partners for the weekly lessons.



SLA Graduate Assistant Claire Fischer recorded an introduction video to kick off the virtual Showcase events.

VIRTUAL SERVICE LEARNING SHOWCASE

By: Madeline Hagar

Over the past year, service learning played a critical role in sustaining community by promoting interconnectedness in a physically distanced world, building upon the work of local organizations, and supporting innovative approaches to meet the changing needs of Omaha. The Service Learning Academy (SLA) celebrated the contributions to these efforts by students, educators, and community partners in April during the annual Service Learning Showcase event.

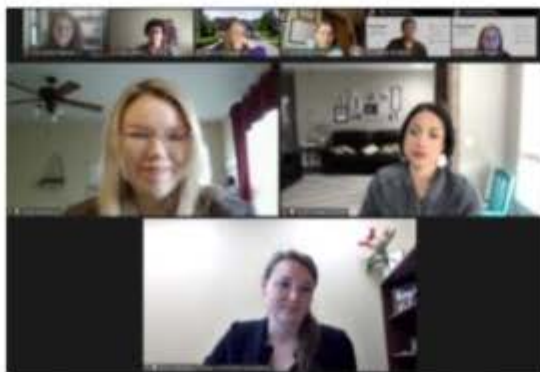
The theme of this year's event was *Maverick Strong: The Impact of Innovation, Collaboration, and Meaningful Service*. The three-day virtual event reflected on the ways service learning took place this year as well as its impacts. The event kicked off with a keynote address by Barbara Holland, a distinguished civic engagement scholar and champion of UNO's mission to "transform and improve the quality of life locally, nationally, and globally." During the conversation, Dr. Holland expressed her hope for the future, noting that a combination of a focused agenda and emphasis on equity can empower our institution to be a positive catalyst for community-driven change. In closing, she reminded us all "to be audacious" in our efforts, working together to effect change.

The second day of events focused on the contributions of students. Students submitted posters, essays, and videos they made in their courses to a [virtual gallery](#). The digital platform enabled UNO and P-12 students to share their work as well as reflect on the impact of their service learning experience. Through their service learning work, students expanded the capacity of local organizations and collaborated with community partners to create longer lasting resources that can live on even after the end of a project.

The final day highlighted SLA's Maverick Philanthropy Initiative. Several students, faculty, and partner organizations that have been involved in the initiative shared how the program empowers student advocacy and philanthropic giving, as well as the ways in which philanthropy is deepening service learning's community impact. UNO faculty member

Kelly Gomez Johnson reflected on the moment when one of her students explained that she had selected a particular organization for her persuasive speech because of her family's direct experience as members of the community served by the organization. Gomez Johnson said, "I just was overwhelmed when our class voted then for that [organization] because it was kind of this moment where we said [we] hear you, how can we support you, and how we can support this community. It was just overwhelmingly powerful...because it was an opportunity for our students to be heard."

Overall, events served as a moment of celebratory reflection. Over the course of this year, new ways of conducting service learning and engaging with the community emerged, and it is through these collaborative efforts that our community persevered, staying Maverick strong as well as Omaha strong.



UNO faculty, students, and community partners shared about their MPI project experiences on the final day of Showcase.

RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

By: Claire Fischer

In 2017, UNO faculty member Ashlee Dere and Lee Stover of Burke High School initiated the UNO-OPS Joint Research Symposium. Over the years, the event has expanded and now occurs annually to showcase research projects from various OPS schools and UNO departments. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's event was held virtually in combination with the Service Learning Academy Showcase.

Traditionally, students present posters to Research Symposium attendees, but this year, the nine submissions also included oral presentations, papers, and recordings. Participants showcased posters about children's

motivation for physical education, videos about self esteem, research about organizational training, and more, all related to service learning courses and projects. The submissions were viewable on an online education platform called Padlet, which allowed the public to comment on and interact with the projects.

The Research Symposium provides an opportunity for service learning students to take their work to the next level. Participant Karoline Ford submitted a paper about the history of the Joslyn Castle, and when asked about the Showcase she said, "Being able to participate in Showcase Week is a way for me to celebrate my efforts. Taking a service learning course, while it is rewarding and lovely to participate in, also requires an extra level of work and commitment because of the service efforts. The opportunity to showcase my work allows me to share my accomplishments with the UNO community and hopefully inspire others to undertake service learning work of their own."



Students submitted examples of project materials, presentations, and videos for the Research Symposium.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

Assignment Overview

- Our role was very heavily focused on advocacy for the profession of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology
- This experience offered a huge opportunity for us as students and future professionals to recruit underrepresented groups of individuals
- We were able to strengthen our ties to the Omaha community, specifically to future college students, by introducing to them a new field of study and engaging in an interactive learning experience
- As future SL Pathologists, advocacy will be a huge part of our future professional careers, so this was a great opportunity to put our foot in the door and begin advocating for our clients and profession



SERVICE LEARNING RESEARCH

By: Sanaa Ahmed

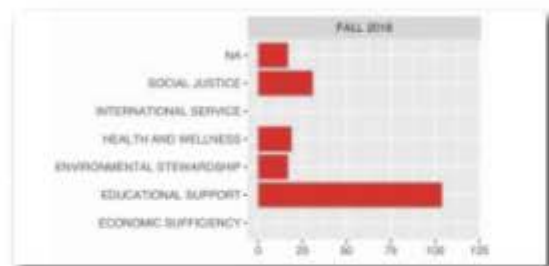
Each year, the Service Learning Academy (SLA) collects survey data from students enrolled in service learning courses. These surveys gauge how service learning impacts students' perceptions of the importance of civic engagement, as well as their attitudes and behaviors related to civic engagement.

In order to analyze the data collected from these surveys, SLA team members joined together to create a Data Committee. Members of the Data Committee include graduate assistants Sanaa Ahmed, Ali Al-Ghaithi, and Grace Nelson, and undergraduate assistant Haley Timmermans. Each team member comes from a different background, including data science, industrial/organizational psychology, social work, and gerontology, which allows the committee to bring in different perspectives when working on a project together.

This year, the Data Committee decided to investigate the relationship between service learning project issue areas and the skills students develop throughout the course of the project. The SLA highlights [six issue areas](#) in partnerships with the community: educational support, economic sufficiency, environmental stewardship, health and wellness, international service, and social justice. The purpose of these issue areas is to communicate the mission of a service learning project as well as to understand how UNO courses work with the community.

The Data Committee also examined the significance of identifying issue areas in service learning projects. Through data analysis, the committee was able to identify ways to strengthen the methodology used to identify project issue areas, which will allow for more meaningful interpretation of the data in future research projects.

The Data Committee's findings were presented at the Annual Service Learning Showcase in April, and were submitted for presentation at the national Engagement Scholarship Consortium, which will take place in September 2021.



The research shows the distribution of project issue areas in Fall 2018.

STEPHENSON-HARRINGTON INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

By: Madeline Hagar

Every year, the Service Learning Academy facilitates the Stephenson-Harrington Internship (SHI) in partnership with the Goodrich Scholarship Program. Through the SHI program, students serve as interns at local non-profits where they gain hands-on experience in a field of their interest. This year, five Goodrich Scholars participated in the program and served at the Charles Drew Health Center, Nebraska Enterprise Fund, Learning for ALL, UNO's School of Gerontology, and UNO's Office of Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion.

UNO junior Nyamar Odol, a public health major who interned at Charles Drew Health Center, assisted with the organization's refugee program, which included developing a database with resources for refugees in Omaha. Another student, Eh Htoo Gay, a senior business administration major placed at Nebraska Enterprise Fund, connected with owners of local businesses to identify opportunities for the organization to collaborate with the businesses to meet their needs. "These past few months working on the assigned task helped me build my confidence tremendously," said Gay. "I was able to overcome my fears and come out of my shell."

In addition to the internships, SHI participants also took part in a weekly seminar where they learned about intersectional leadership, resume

writing, and other professional development topics. These seminars also provided space for reflection and discussion as this year's cohort participated in the program virtually. UNO junior Akanishya Chataut, a molecular and biomedical biology major working in UNO's School of Gerontology, reflected on the program's ability to let her try something new despite the challenges COVID-19 created. "Getting an opportunity to work on this project was a dream come true," she said. "I got to read research articles, do my own research, and share my views on topics related to the impact of technology on people at different stages of life.... Not only was I included in discussions, but my voice and ideas were heard." Although the program had to transition to an online format this year, students persevered and built their confidence as they explored new opportunities.

Since the program's inception in 1992, the Stephenson-Harrington Internship has provided Goodrich Scholars with unique opportunities to serve with organizations that align with their major and interests, allowing them to develop as professionals as well as learn more about who they are as leaders within the Omaha community.

For more information about the Stephenson-Harrington Internship program, contact Kirsten Case Fuller at kcse2@unomaha.edu.

SUPPORTING ANTI-POVERTY SERVICE LEARNING

By: Allegra Hardin

This spring, the Service Learning Academy (SLA) hosted a Priority Areas Share Out Session to reveal a new addition to the SLA website: an [anti-poverty webpage](#) focused on providing information and support for service learning projects that work to address poverty. The webpage provides definitions, statistics, and project materials related to anti-poverty work which were gathered as part of the SLA's [partnership with the Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA program](#).

Emphasizing the intersection of service learning, education, and poverty, the webpage serves as a hub for the SLA's anti-poverty initiative. By visiting the page, P-12 educators, UNO faculty members, and community partners can gain a better understanding of what anti-poverty service learning is and how to get involved in creating an anti-poverty service learning project. In addition, the webpage includes a comprehensive inventory of project materials to support partners in addressing poverty through service learning.

At the Share Out Session, the SLA's broader priority areas website was also unveiled. In addition to anti-poverty work, the priority areas include redlining, microaggressions, and asset-based community engagement. Together, these priority areas emphasize topics the SLA hopes to address through workshops, research, and service learning projects. For example, UNO faculty member Farrah Grant's *Introduction to*

Sustainability course incorporated an anti-poverty focused service learning project this spring. Grant noted that while the course regularly covers food insecurity, she used anti-poverty service learning to provide more context.

"Throughout the course, we utilize systems thinking to analyze phenomena. By looking at the intersections of environmental justice, food, and transportation, students were able to make connections and understand why we see the patterns that we do," Grant said. "It was very important to me that students reflect on the structural inequalities that created food insecurity and not reinforce an 'us vs. them' dichotomy."

Grant shared that "students had a transformational learning experience," and encouraged other UNO faculty members to get involved with service learning related to the SLA's priority areas. "Go for it! I find that students are more engaged with the curriculum when the content is topical and local," Grant said. "This engagement leads to a more meaningful experience for instructors and students alike."

Want to learn more about anti-poverty service learning? Interested in sharing your own resources to contribute to this initiative? Visit the [SLA Priority Areas website](#) to get involved.

VALUING ASSETS OF SERVICE LEARNING STUDENTS

By: LaTrina Hall

Service learning courses provide students with unique and meaningful experiences, but students might find it challenging to articulate the valuable skills and assets gained through those experiences. To address that challenge, the Service Learning Academy (SLA) partnered with the UNO Academic and Career Development Center (ACDC) to host a series of workshops: Identifying Career Assets Through Service Learning; Communicating Service Learning on Resumes and Interviews; and Networking Through Service Learning.

The workshops focused on uncovering assets and skills gained from service learning experiences that support students' academic and career goals. Students heard from a panel of service learning community partners, including [MSForward](#) and the [Joslyn Art Museum](#), before participating in mock interviews with [Omaha Home for Boys](#), [Lutheran Family Services](#), and [Boystown](#). In addition, students received career development resources from ACDC that focused on articulating skills gained from service learning courses on resumes and in interviews.

During the workshops, students heard from community partners that "soft" or "people" skills are valued just as much as technical skills. One student participant said, "I was surprised to learn that soft skills are so valued by the panelists—not just that the students have them, but they

value these skills in themselves." Throughout the series, participants brainstormed ways to highlight the soft skills gained through service learning on their resumes and during interviews.

First generation students, or students whose parents did not graduate from a four-year university, were especially encouraged to attend the series, as campus research has found that many of these students are not affiliated with a learning community where skill building activities are prevalent. At a First Gen Days student panel last fall, UNO students identified their drive, ambition, and family support as assets they bring with them to the university. A student who attended one of the workshops shared, "I am a first generation college student so I am eager to learn more about how to market myself in the future. I have a fair amount of work and life experience outside of school so I have had to use and market my soft skills before."

The SLA applies an asset-based approach to its engagement with not only faculty and community partners, but also students. The workshop series was created to encourage students to value the assets they bring with them to the university, identify the assets they develop in their service learning experience, and apply an asset-based lens in their service learning and community engagement experiences.

CHANCELLOR'S AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE LEARNING STUDENTS



Rachel Cuvias Nielsen, a graduate student enrolled in the Speech-Language Pathology program at UNO, has participated in several service learning projects as an undergraduate and graduate student at UNO. Her professor, Mitzi Rasmussen, stated that "Rachel's commitment to excellence throughout these experiences speaks to her genuine commitment to serving individuals with communication disorders." Not only is Rachel an exemplary student, but she has demonstrated continued involvement with one of the service learning project partners, the Autism Society of Nebraska, where she enjoys serving as a board member.



Jessica Wooley is working on a Bachelor of Science in biology. During the fall 2020 semester, Jessica completed a service learning project with the Nebraska Forestry Service in connection to her entomology class. Jessica showed leadership and enthusiasm for this project through class participation and encouragement of her peers. Her professor, Karen Murch-Shaffer, shared that "Jessica's achievements are made more impressive considering how adversely the COVID pandemic affected our classwork, especially since entomology is, by nature, a very tactile science." In addition to her schoolwork, Jessica works at Omaha Farmculture to help restore natural habitat to Omaha city space.

2021 NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOW

By University Communications



Once again, a UNO student has been recognized as a national leader in community engagement and civic leadership as one of 290 students recognized as a Newman Civic Fellow for the 2021-2022 academic year. Newman Civic Fellows are selected from among hundreds of nominees by Campus Compact, a non-profit organization working to advance the public purposes of higher education.

The Newman Civic Fellowship is a year-long program for students from Campus Compact member institutions. Vanessa Chavez Jurado, an elementary education major, will join students from 39 states, Washington, D.C., and Mexico to form the 2021 cohort. She is the only Newman Civic Fellow from the state of Nebraska.

The students selected for the fellowship are leaders on their campuses who demonstrate a commitment to finding solutions for challenges facing communities locally, nationally, and internationally. Chavez Jurado's contributions to the UNO campus and larger Omaha community include establishing First Forward, a new student organization that supports first-generation college students, increasing awareness of initiatives relating to Diversity, Equity, Access,

and inclusion through participation in Student Government, and pushing for greater access for all UNO students, particularly students representing marginalized groups.

Chavez Jurado most recently served as UNO Student Body Vice President, helping inform student support needs during the move to remote learning as well as overseeing UNO's Freshman Leadership Council, a collection of first-year student leaders. "Going into college as a first-generation student with strong support systems, I knew I only wanted to continue being an active voice helping elevate social issues," she said. "As I look to further engage in community wide issues, I know these experiences have well prepared me for future advocacy."

The fellowship is named for the late Frank Newman, one of Campus Compact's founders, who was a tireless advocate for civic engagement in higher education. In the spirit of Professor Newman's leadership, Campus Compact member presidents and chancellors nominate student leaders from their campuses to be named Newman Civic Fellows. Through the fellowship, Campus Compact provides fellows with a variety of learning and networking opportunities that emphasize personal, professional, and civic growth. Fellows participate in numerous virtual training and networking opportunities to help provide them with the skills and connections they need to create large-scale positive change. The fellowship also provides fellows with pathways to apply for exclusive scholarship and postgraduate opportunities.

2020-21 WEITZ FELLOWSHIP

By Tella Smith and Madeline Hagar

Madeline Hagar joined the Service Learning Academy (SLA) this past year as the 2020-21 Weitz Fellow. The fellowship is sponsored by the Weitz Family Foundation and supports eight graduates from Carleton College with year-long positions at organizations in Omaha and Lincoln.

During her fellowship at the SLA, Hagar supported traditional service learning courses, helped plan the annual CultureFest and SLA Showcase events, assisted in the development of the new SLA priority areas website, and mentored students in the Stephenson-Harrington Internship (SHI) program.

Originally from California, Hagar graduated from Carleton College in 2020 with a degree in Environmental Studies. "Before starting my fellowship, I had never been to Nebraska," she said. Through the fellowship, Hagar was introduced not only to the Service Learning Academy, but also to the community organizations and UNO faculty members that partner with the SLA on service learning projects, events, and programs.

"My favorite part of this year has definitely been the opportunity to mentor the 2020 SHI cohort," said Hagar. "Through building those connections with the students, I was able to learn and grow alongside them. The ways in which everyone showed up were incredible. Being online did not prevent us from having such amazingly nuanced and authentic conversations about courage, vulnerability, and identity. Our weekly seminar was a highlight of my week every week of the fall semester."

Although Hagar joined the SLA team in a remote setting, the Weitz Fellowship gave her the opportunity to develop as a professional in a supportive environment. "I could not have wished for a more welcoming and supportive team this past year," she said. "The energy, passion, and amount of care that SLA puts into everything it does is remarkable. I am constantly astonished at how innovative and creative this team is. This team helped me better understand myself as a professional and embrace my own unique set of experiences and skills."



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Cover Photo

A UNO student practices conducting music.

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