

2016

UNO Website: UNO President's Community Service Honor Roll

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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President's Community Service Honor Roll

Engagement Awards

Campus Commitment

- **President's Community Service Honor Roll**

Carnegie Community Engagement Classification



The power of place. The power of partnership.

With the opening of the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC) in Spring 2014, the University of Nebraska at Omaha has been strengthening its commitment to meaningful and reciprocal community engagement through academic service learning and student-led volunteerism.

The university continues to pursue funding opportunities to expand and better support community engagement programming through internships, capstones, field experiences, and thematic service and volunteer opportunities.

Learn more about the CEC.



Additional Resources

[Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center](#)

UNO / [Campus Commitment to Community Engagement](#) / [Engagement Awards](#)
/ [President's Community Service Honor Roll](#)

UNO Wins Presidential Engagement Award

The University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) is the recipient of the Presidential Award for the Economic Opportunity category of the 2014 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This award recognizes institutions with service programs that build economic independence, increase family stability, and create more sustainable and resilient communities. Institutions in this category are engaged in service that improves the financial well-being and security of economically disadvantaged individuals.

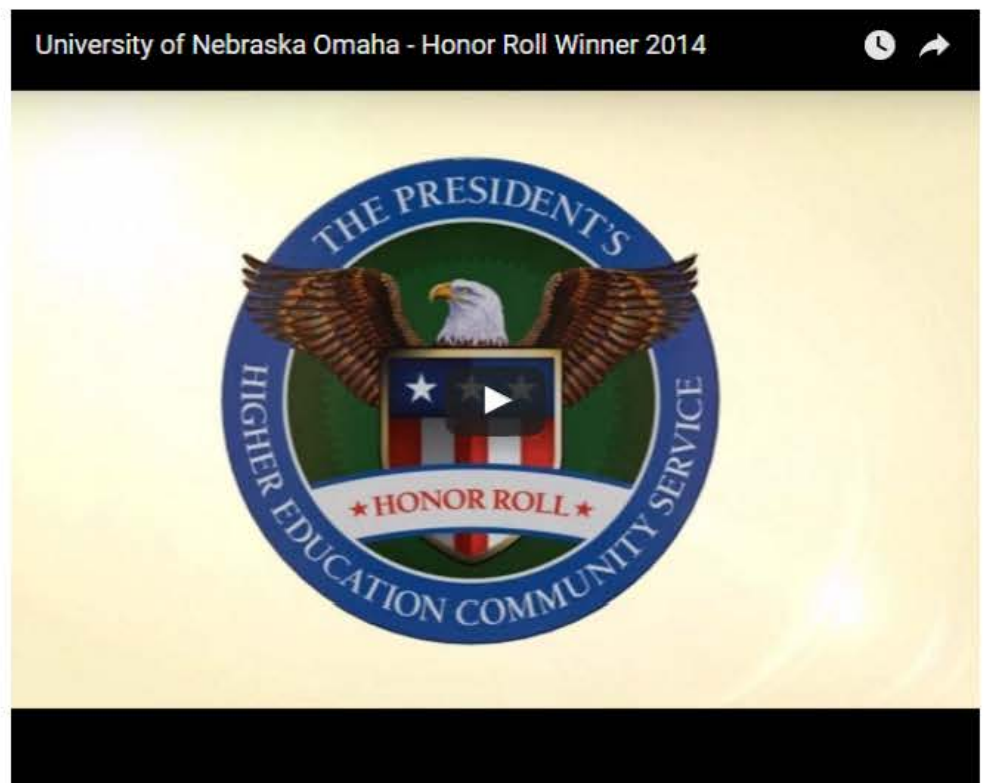
Learn more:

[About the Presidential Award for Economic Opportunity](#)

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About the Presidential Award for Economic Opportunity

As the only Nebraska institution with seven straight inclusions on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, UNO is the most decorated higher education institution for service and service learning in the state. The university is committed to maintaining and expanding meaningful, sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships that improve the broader community and the university.

Our curricular and co-curricular service programs provide millions of dollars of direct service each year as well as organizational capacity building to a broad range of community agencies, organizations, and nonprofits. Through these partnerships, students, faculty, and staff teach and learn in real life settings. More than 14 years of academic service-learning has grown from seven courses with 100 students, to more than 160 courses with over 2,600 students each year.

Service is at the core of all that we do.

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About the Honor Roll

UNO is the first college or university in Nebraska to be named a Presidential Award winner as part of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

The Honor Roll has been annually released since it was launched in 2006 (except for in 2011); in that time, UNO is the only Nebraska institution to be included every year. The 2014 Presidential Award for Economic Opportunity given to UNO builds upon this momentum.

The Honor Roll includes four levels of recognition: Presidential Award Winners, Presidential Award Finalists, Honor Roll With Distinction and Honor Roll Inclusion.

Presidential Award Winner (UNO 2014)

Presented to four institutions—one each in general community service, economic opportunity, education, and interfaith community service. These schools reflect the best practices in the specified category for community service and service-learning, including long-term campus-community partnerships and measurable community outcomes as a result of their service.

Presidential Award Finalist (UNO 2010)

Designated to the small group of institutions that are considered for, but do not receive the Presidential Award. These institutions demonstrate high standards of community service, measurable outcomes, and success within its specified service programs.

Honor Roll with Distinction (UNO 2009, 2012, 2013)

Given to those applicants that display strong levels of institutional commitment, provide a compelling case for partnerships that produce measurable impact in the community, and have a Federal Work-Study community service percentage of 15 percent or above.

Honor Roll (UNO 2006, 2007, 2008)

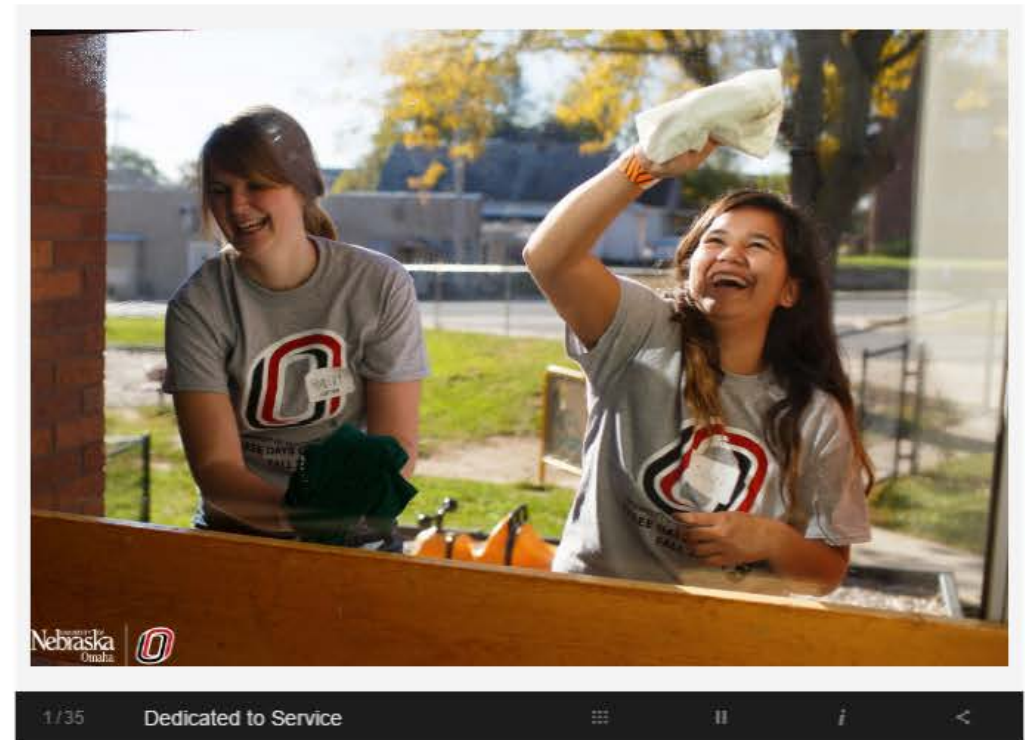
Given to institutions that demonstrate relevant and meaningful service and achieve measurable impacts in the community. Institutions participating in the Federal Work Study program must meet the statutory 7 percent minimum FWS community service requirement

to be admitted to the Honor Roll.

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About Our Award-Winning Programs:

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Aquaponics

UNO Students are dedicated to relieving chronic food insecurity in the local Omaha area.

According to Feed America, 34,570 children in Omaha are considered to be food insecure, including 40 percent of North Omaha's families.

The university's Aquaponics project (cultivating plants in water with aquatic animals) is just one example of their focus on food drives, community gardens, service in food pantries, expert support for nonprofits focused on hunger issues, and awareness campaigns around food/hunger issues.

About the Program

The UNO Aquaponics service learning program brings together elementary, middle school

and college students to work collaboratively with Whispering Roots, an urban-farming nonprofit, to provide locally grown food for socially/economically disadvantaged communities. Live Well Omaha reports over half of all children in food insecure areas of Omaha “rarely” eat fresh fruits and vegetables.

By combining aquaculture (raising fish) and hydroponics (growing plants in liquid), the Whispering Roots re-circulating farming systems use less water than traditional farming to grow pesticide free, naturally grown produce. Water (effluent) is pumped from the fish tanks into the plant grow beds. The fish effluent becomes the natural fertilizer for the plants. The roots from the plants remove the nutrients from the water and grow big, green and healthy. The clean water is then returned to the fish tanks for reuse. This process allows us to grow up to 30% more crops while using 90% less water than traditional growing methods!

In their schools, the K-12 students build and maintain classroom aquaponics systems and then harvest produce for donations to food pantries and homeless shelters. They also serve their own school’s afterschool community by providing fresh produce for them to eat each day. This year the students are also creating lessons on video to show other schools how to maintain the aquaponics systems. In doing so, they are using their presentation and technical skills as well as their gardening, engineering and science knowledge.

The Omaha Public School partner groups have focused on teaching STEM principles in science and service learning classes as well as after-school programs, while the UNO partner courses have spanned across social work, chemistry, environmental geology, biology, and teacher education-science. Together the K-12 and college students have explored food deserts, poverty, environmental challenges and sustainable solutions. They did so during 13 scheduled project visits and two campus visits by groups of middle school students.

While the health and productivity of the aquaponics systems provide an on-going assessment of the success of the project, the service learning team stays in close contact to coordinate future activities and review implementation. An assigned graduate assistant from the Service Learning Academy (SLA) coordinates the logistics of the projects and collects critical tracking data.

The SLA maintains a project database of P-16 projects which includes information about the project partners (P-12 educators and their schools, UNO faculty, and community non-profits), project focus and activity (students, hours of service, visits to UNO campus, visits to community non-profits) and impact (service provided). In addition, graduate assistants assigned to each project support and monitor quality implementation of the project plan. They rate the eight service learning quality standards for the project implementation using the GSN Self-Assessment Guide for Service-Learning Projects developed by the National Youth Leadership Council. This assessment of project quality is used to focus the discussion with project partners to improve the next implementation of the project.

A pre-/post-project Service Learning Survey is administered to students in participating courses. Along with the standard course evaluation data, this survey data is available to improve project implementation and document the impact of service learning experiences on students.

By the Numbers

Students Participating in Curricular Projects: 253

Number of Student Hours Served: 1408

Number of Participating Faculty/Staff: 12

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served Participating in Curricular Projects: 267

Estimated Number of Individuals Served: 302



Students exploring aquaponics

Computer Basics for Inmates

In an effort to increase inmate confidence with technology and to prepare them for reentry into society, UNO students serve the Douglas County Department of Corrections by teaching essential computer skills to inmates.

About the Program

Teaching computer basics to inmates provides the following financial and social benefits: providing incarcerated individuals with future earning power, creating future taxpayers and saving current taxpayers' dollars by minimizing recidivism.

This service learning course takes University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) students into the Douglas County Department of Corrections (DCDC aka the Jail) to assist in teaching computer basics to inmates using Windows XP and Office 2010. Each UNO student is assigned to work with and tutor an inmate.

The learning objectives for the college students are to learn a customer service orientation and to experience service to a marginalized segment of the community. Each class (one for male inmates and one for female inmates) at the jail consists of approximately ten inmates who have had little or no training in using a computer. The learning objectives for the attending inmates are to learn essential computer skills as well as to increase their confidence with technology and people from outside of the jail. Knowledge of technology and social networks assist inmates in making a successful reentry into society.

Inmates are encouraged to write letters to their families and to make cards to send to their loved ones in order to maintain their existing social networks outside of jail. Inmates enjoy creating cards for friends and family. For example, one DCDC inmate explained, "My wife told me my son brought his birthday card to school and showed it to his teacher. I had no idea he would enjoy it so much."

To prepare for the service learning experience the university students attend a mandatory training covering jail operations and volunteer responsibilities provided by Douglas County Department of Corrections. Before spending time with the DCDC inmates, UNO students conduct research on inmates and education. Each of them then presents their findings to their classmates. For thirteen (13) weeks of the semester students work directly with inmates. As part of the project reflection process, the members of the UNO class compile photos and notes on team discussions and create a presentation (e.g. videos, posters,

photos and notes on team discussions and create a presentation (e.g., videos, posters, PowerPoint presentations, photo journals) to reflect on their experience at the jail and the material being learned in class.

In addition to the hands on computer training that takes place in this project, inmates and UNO students read *How Full is Your Bucket: Positive Strategies for Work and Life* (Rath and Clifton, 2009) and each class period all participants are encouraged to create a construction paper "raindrop" of praise for each other. The raindrops are a tangible representation of positive reinforcement towards others. As a result the inmates report enjoying reading the "Bucket Book" and see themselves applying the principles of caring about themselves and others.

According to a UNO student, "Tutoring inmates provided me with an alternative view of the criminal justice system. I started the process with a preconceived notion of an inmate, but after tutoring inmates for the last three months my stereotypes have been squashed. They are enthusiastic learners."

By the Numbers

Students Participating in Curricular Projects: 15

Number of Student Hours Served: 900

Number of Participating Faculty/Staff: 1

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served in Participating Curricular Projects: 150

Estimated Number of Individuals Served: 20

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Students working with inmates

P-16 Initiative

The P-16 Initiative partners P-12 educators, higher education faculty, and local non-profits to meet community needs and enhance course relevance for their students. In the P-12 arena, the schools targeted for involvement have high levels of reduced/free lunch and low standardized test scores.

About the Program

Projects are designed to encourage school attendance and completion, engage students with the curriculum, and prepare them for college. To support current educators in utilizing

the service learning pedagogy in their classrooms, the P-16 Initiative in the Service Learning Academy (SLA) offers week-long Service Learning Seminars for P-12 teachers and UNO faculty members annually.

These sessions provide training in research-based standards of quality service learning, non-profit partner fair, service experiences in the community as well as the formation of "teacher teams" to begin the process of developing collaborative projects across the P-16 continuum. Seminar gains are awareness of community needs and organizations increased from 45% pre-seminar to 99% post-seminar and preparedness to implement service learning projects increased from 48% pre-seminar to 98% post-seminar.

Throughout the 2012-13 academic year, the P-16 Initiative supported educators in engaging their students in quality service learning in the Omaha community. The students' academic engagement and achievement, civic engagement, and personal growth are the targeted outcomes. The partnering organizations - including social service organizations, cultural programs and museums, environmental sites, wellness and health programs, and civic entities - provide a real-life lab for students to apply what they learn in class.

The P-16 Initiative also strives to support P-16 students in being college and career ready. The P-12 students spend time with UNO students and visit the campus. During the 2012-13 academic year, the P-16 projects averaged four visits between student partners, while two-thirds of the P-12 students made a trip to UNO's campus.

While many of them have never been on a college campus before, the end of the semester often finds them feeling comfortable with the college students and in the higher education environment. They can now envision college as a possibility in their future. In working with their project community partners, the UNO students get the opportunity to understand the skills that professionals use in various career settings.

During the 2012-13 academic year, the P-16 Initiative included 88 different service learning projects. In addition to UNO students, 2,556 K-12 students participated and provided over 75,000 service hours. The P-16 initiative had a 22% increase in projects and students (25%). Each project's service learning team stays in contact to plan, implement, and assess project activities. An assigned graduate assistant coordinates the logistics of the projects and collects critical tracking data.

The SLA maintains a project database of P-16 projects which includes information about the project partners (P-12 educators and their schools, UNO faculty, and community non-profits), project focus and activity (students, hours of service, visits to UNO campus, visits to community non-profits) and impact (service provided).

In addition, graduate assistants assigned to each project support and monitor quality implementation of the project plan. They rate the eight service learning quality standards for the project implementation using the GSN Self-Assessment Guide for Service-Learning Projects developed by the National Youth Leadership Council. This assessment of project quality is used to focus the discussion with project partners to improve the next project implementation.

A pre-/post-project Service Learning Survey is administered to students in participating courses. Along with the standard course evaluation data, the survey data is available to improve project implementation and document the impact of service learning experiences on students.

By the Numbers

Students Participating in Curricular Projects: 1079

Number of Student Hours Served: 65,820

Number of Participating Faculty/Staff: 112

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served in Participating Curricular Projects: 6,720

Estimated Number of Individuals Served: 4,400



Students participating in a metro area P-16 activity

Signature Service Days

Each year, as part of the university's "Signature Service Days" initiative, hundreds of university students partner with local high school students and community volunteers, dedicating part or all of their fall or spring breaks to service throughout the city of Omaha. Other service days are held throughout the year to give back to our community.

About the Program

UNO's Office of Civic and Social Responsibility organizes Signature Service Days throughout the academic year. These university-wide service days began in 2003 with the Seven Days of Service project. Starting with just 70 volunteers, the program has expanded to 6,800 volunteers participating in one or more of 16 Signature Service Days.

These days include Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Day of Service Day; Seven Days of Service; Global Youth Service Day; Three Days of Service; Veterans Day of Service and World AIDS Day. Service Days participants include UNO students, faculty, staff, high school students, and community volunteers. Signature Service Days exemplify the university's commitment to "actively seek partnerships and stand ready to collaborate with all sectors of the city ... creating wins for all."

Signature Service Days projects address a broad range of critical community needs such as homelessness, poverty, conservation, refugee resettlement, elder care, as well as international issues such as Madagascar reforestation projects. Specific impacts included partnering with Habitat for Humanity for construction and renovation of homes, building community garden beds, cleaning and maintain city parks and preserves, food collection for the food bank and pantries.

The 6,800 volunteers contributed over 97,000 hours of service, equal to over two million dollars of volunteer labor contributions to the community.

For Fall Three Days of Service, MLK Day of Service, and Seven Days of Service, students participated on school holidays or breaks. For these days, each student provided a minimum of six hours of service a day with many students participating on multiple days.

Other Signature Service Days events occurred during scheduled days with student providing a minimum of 2-4 hours of service each day.

All Service Days involve collaborative relationships with high schools in the metropolitan area as well as community agencies such as Habitat for Humanity, the City of Omaha, the Botanical Garden, and multiple food pantries. Service Days are supported by the CNCS AmeriCorps program as well as by grants such as Youth Service America and local philanthropists. Continuous improvements of the programs and experiences are done through a computerized feedback system including reflections and evaluations from both the participants and nonprofit partners. Concentrated training sessions and data collection were conducted with the nonprofit partners to assess the positive impact of the program at all levels including participants, providers, and community.

In 2012-2013, 97% of participants said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service day activities and 96% said they would do it again. Volunteers indicated that they were most satisfied with opportunities to contribute to the community, learn about community organizations, meet new people, and learn new skills.

By the Numbers

Students Participating in Curricular Projects: 75

Students Participating in Extra-Curricular Projects: 2,750

Number of Student Hours Served: 44,000

Number of Participating Faculty/Staff: 155

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served in Participating Curricular Projects: 460

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served in Extra-Curricular Projects: 2170

Estimated Number of Individuals Served: 160,000

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Students participating in service days

SummerWorks

University programs such as the Service Learning P-16 Initiative, the Signature Days of Service, and SummerWorks are dedicated to increasing the academic success of both K-12 and university students through collaborative service learning and volunteer projects emphasizing employment and college preparation. These programs focus especially on those who are at risk to not finish high school or successfully graduate from college.

SummerWorks is the result of the collaboration and financial support of a consortium of civic-minded private donors who seek to address the lack of employment opportunities for youth in the Omaha area.

About the Program

The program addresses youth employment needs within Douglas County zip codes where family income falls well below the median. Youth in these areas face many barriers accessing employment, including inconsistent access to transportation to locate and maintain employment, lack of access to technology to complete job applications, a limited number of job opportunities, and limited connections with mentors and advocates.

SummerWorks Omaha offers a nine-week summer work program from June through August. Each summer, SummerWorks employs 150 high school youth as Program Participants; who work from 9:00a.m.–3:00p.m., Monday through Friday. The youth work in teams of seven participants and are supervised, coached, mentored, and advised throughout the nine weeks by a trained Team Leader.

The program is based on a comprehensive instructional model called The Blueprint for Workplace Success, which was developed by the SummerWorks Omaha leadership team to define the characteristics of a successful employee. Team Leaders are typically UNO students working in this summer program. SummerWorks is also supported by UNO staff including a Director and office assistant as well as an AmeriCorps volunteer.

On Monday through Thursday, Program Participants work at sites inside and outside of the city's public parks system and at other work sites throughout the community. Each Friday, Program Participants engage in activities designed to develop their skills and knowledge including resume building, writing a cover letter, identifying personal strengths, and goal setting. In addition, they work to increase their financial literacy, such as opening a bank account and setting financial goals. They also are exposed to community and cultural leaders and events that help expand their awareness of the broader community and their post-high-school educational and career options.

- In 2013, participants worked with 59 parks spread throughout the Omaha area as well as 13 nonprofits. This partnership strengthened the Omaha community and aided the nonprofits in carrying out their missions. The 150 high school student SummerWorks participants provided over 40,500 hours of direct service to the Omaha area. The SummerWorks projects benefited the general Omaha population of over 700,000 people.
- With the 2013 program, 150 youth earned a gross wage totaling \$273,825. Their individual earned wage empowered each youth to establish short and/or long term financial goals. The financial literacy education activities enabled them to make sound financial decisions with this new earned wage while gaining basic knowledge about banking and exemptions related to their wage.
- In a survey conducted at the beginning and end of the 2013 program, more participants defined an educational goal for themselves and many more reported a desire to achieve a graduate degree.
- Participants develop their skills as an employee with staff and professionals from various career fields. Participants leave the program with a professional resume developed with their team leader; in addition, they have practiced interviewing, have completed assessments to identify their strengths and weaknesses, have established weekly goals, have completed job searching and applications, and have a recommendation letter to help secure future employment.
- Qualitative feedback from Program Participants, parents, team leaders, and community partners, is another indicator of success. In the words of one Program Participant, "I learned being a good, solid leader and having good morale can have a positive, lasting effect that can boost productivity." And, from a member of the Omaha community, "Seeing young people work is uplifting to our community; it shows a light of hope."

By the Numbers

Students Participating in Curricular Projects: 5

Students Participating in Extra-Curricular Projects: 23

Number of Student Hours Served: 11,200

Number of Participating Faculty/Staff: 10

Number of Faculty/Staff Hours Served in Extra-Curricular Projects: 4,000

Estimated Number of Individuals Served: 150

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A mural created by Summer Works students at Hanscom Park

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