Service-Learning Annual Report 2015-2016

DEEPENING LEARNING. APPLYING KNOWLEDGE. IMPROVING COMMUNITIES.
Service-learning is flourishing at Virginia Commonwealth University! In 2015-2016 alone, more than 3,600 VCU students took at least one service-learning class as a part of their undergraduate or graduate degree program.

Each of these 3,600 students worked together with classmates, faculty instructors and community members for a minimum of 20 hours, applying what they have learned in the classroom to address critical problems in our communities.

The stories we feature in this year’s annual report attest to the transformative power of service-learning. But the power of service-learning is also borne out in a growing body of research evidence.

This past year, I had the privilege of collaborating with colleagues from the VCU Office of Planning and Decision Support to study the impacts of service-learning class participation on student success outcomes. Institutional data clearly demonstrated that service-learning at VCU is a high-impact educational practice.

Underrepresented and diverse student groups are well represented in VCU service-learning classes, students who participate in service-learning are retained and graduated at higher rates than students who do not take service-learning classes, and service-learning students report significantly higher levels of faculty-student interaction and integrative learning than do students who have not taken service-learning.

It has been my great privilege this past year to support the work of VCU’s amazing service-learning faculty instructors and their students.

For more information about service-learning, contact Lynn Pelco at lepelco@vcu.edu or (804) 827-8215.

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3,635 students were enrolled in service-learning courses (approximately).

106 instructors taught designated service-learning courses.

105 distinct courses and 200 sections provided students with diverse selection of service-learning courses.

12 community partners were supported through Service-Learning Office funding avenues.

More than 113 community partnerships were strengthened and sustained through service-learning courses.

12 service-learning projects

42 service-learning teaching assistants supported service-learning courses.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT
Dr. Allie Reckendorf, assistant professor, Political Science

During 2015-2016, the Service-Learning Office provided $2,000 in funding to support Reckendorf’s intersession and spring semester service-learning courses, which provided students from across VCU the opportunity to learn about strategy and modern campaigning from national political leaders and insiders.

In January, 27 VCU students traveled to New Hampshire during winter break to get a firsthand look at the presidential primary. Funding from the Service-Learning Office was used to offset transportation costs and to purchase Slidermetrix software that allows students to track public reaction to political ads and debates in real-time.

Read more about service-learning funding opportunities and Reckendorf’s work at http://bit.ly/2aGwN6B.

“This project is designed to combat the low-voter turnout of students at VCU by holding a series of events aimed at educating and mobilizing students during the upcoming presidential primary season.”

COURSE SPOTLIGHT
TEDU 311: Teacher Education Secondary Practicum

VCU service-learning students in the VCU School of Education’s TEDU 311: Teacher Education Secondary Practicum participate in a “nested” service-learning program with three Richmond City and Henrico County middle schools — Albert Hill Middle School, Lucille Brown Middle School and Fairfield Middle School.

The “model within a model” allows VCU education students to participate in service-learning by guiding middle school students through service-learning projects. Projects have included school gardens; student government elections; school beautification; science lab renovations; book development and communications to the school board; veterans service projects; a map mural project; homelessness awareness; and schoolwide recycling.

Originally conceived by Professor Kurt Stemhagen, associate professor in the VCU School of Education, the course is now taught by VCU education Ph.D. candidate Amanda Hall and has gained funding through an external donor to add another graduate assistant.

View the video at https://youtu.be/1YDZPP_EySw.
COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT
MoB+Storefront

From transforming an underused parking lot into a bike-in outdoor movie theater to developing a wrap to protect a water tower near Broad Street and the Boulevard, students in VCUArts faculty Kristin Caskey, John Malinoski and Camden Whitehead’s service-learning courses hosted at the MoB design lab help realize the potential of design to shape the City of Richmond.

Working with community partner the Storefront for Community Design, Richmond’s non-profit design assistance center, VCU students, fellows and faculty improve the quality of design in the city by facilitating access to design and planning resources.

“This is a class that runs like a design studio in the real world,” Caskey said. “I think as far as a big dream, we would love to have this become a place where students graduate from the nation’s top school of arts and design and stay in Richmond to become designers by having fellowships where they really serve the city.”

Learn more at middleofbroad.com and storefrontrichmond.org. Photo credit: Style Weekly.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
Maya Chesley ’15

Maya Chesley, ’15, a biology and Spanish major from Chesapeake, Virginia, was awarded a 2016 Fulbright Scholarship. Chesley was the first Service-Learning Teaching Assistant placed with an international course.

As a student, Chesley took two service-learning courses in Córdoba, Spain, with Anita Nadal, assistant professor of Spanish in the VCU School of World Studies. The courses, “Hispanic Immigrants in the U.S.” and “Immigration in Spain,” allowed Chesley to work with Gypsies and African immigrant populations in local hospitals and community farms.

For her Fulbright studies, Chesley will travel to Panama to teach English and will work on a journal to chronicle the relationship between city residents and nature. Sponsored by the United States Department of State, the Fulbright Program aims to increase mutual understanding between the U.S. and other countries, through the exchange of persons, knowledge and skills.


“My experience as an SLTA was crucial to my Fulbright application. I learned how to become better integrated in a different community and to address the cultural needs of a group, become comfortable in a foreign country and be serious about the work that I do.”

72,320 service hours were provided by service-learning students.

$11,678 was granted to 12 project awards.

$7,985 in travel grants supported six faculty members’ conference presentations on their service-learning research.