One-year fellowship provides service-learning training, support to faculty members

BY MIRANDA BARRETT

Launched in 2007, the Faculty Fellows in Service Learning Program is The University of Alabama’s campus-wide initiative dedicated to helping faculty develop and launch service-learning courses. Approximately 10 faculty members per year participate in the program, which includes a series of workshops and has become a place for academic innovators.

“The program gives faculty ideas and resources on how to have a successful serving-learning course and many tips on working within the community with their students,” says Lori Greene, a 2013-2014 Faculty Fellow alumna and humanities instructor. “It’s about what has worked or hasn’t worked in the past.”

The Faculty Fellows in Service Learning Program has 80 alumni members. Housed at the UA Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility, the program is designed to accelerate the work of faculty members who are eager to foster the principles of ethical citizenship, social responsibility and engagement within their students. Workshops cover how to integrate service-learning methodology into courses across disciplines. Fellows receive a modest service-learning enhancement grant to support course development or the addition of service learning to an existing course, as well as one-on-one assistance during the process. Faculty members emerge from the program with a completed syllabus and plan of action for their new or enhanced course.

Elizabeth Woodruff, a 2009-2010 Faculty Fellow and clinical instructor of sport pedagogy, says she discovered how to implement service learning in the most meaningful ways. “I learned about the importance of not only the connection of academia and community service, but critical reflection by the students — a key component of true service learning,” Woodruff says. “I’ve seen growth in character and commitment to serving others when students are given service-learning opportunities and then critically reflect on their experiences.”

The Faculty Fellows in Service Learning Program has led to an increase in course opportunities for students, a greater number of partnerships between the University and communities throughout Alabama and a more entrenched institutional presence for service learning as a vital component of the University of Alabama experience.

During the past two academic years, Faculty Fellows have developed the following courses:

Robert Alley
Instructor, Jazz Studies/Music
MUA 167 "The Jazz Mindset and its Application to Improvisation" brings the creative, innovative, cooperative and collaborative spirit found in jazz music to new areas of study and life. "Through lectures, demonstrations by professional jazz performers (student and professional ensembles) as well as audio and video recordings, this course focuses on the inner workings of small jazz ensembles, the philosophy of the players as they make music, and how these concepts can be applied to areas ranging from leadership and management training to family dynamics and functionality. Alley piloted MUA 167 in Spring 2015 and is developing two other service-learning courses: UH 210 Improv in Life (and Work) and UH 210 Leadership Lessons from Jazz."

Alvaro Baquero-Pecino
Assistant Professor, Modern Languages & Classics
SP 488 Immigration in Contemporary Film explores the relationship between immigration, film, culture and society in Spanish-speaking communities through in-depth discussion of representative texts and films and their historical and political backgrounds. Via screenings, lectures and readings about Latin American and Spanish contemporary films, this class is taught as an analytical and interdisciplinary survey of motion pictures as art, entertainment and vehicles for communication. Students learn to watch, interpret and compare films portraying and recreating historical, social and political issues and challenges related to immigration in Spanish-speaking communities."

Diane Bragg
Instructor, Journalism
Through two existing courses, Digital Media Workshop and Digital Community Journalism, the First Amendment Education Service Learning Project expands students’ understanding of the First Amendment and its impact on democratic government. Students examine the historical development of the idea of free expression, explore the legal limitations on expression and examine the relationship between the First Amendment and Alabama governance. Students work with the Alabama Press Association and the Alabama Broadcasters Association to cover issues such as Alabama’s Sunshine law, free speech legislation and the Freedom of Information Act. The course gives students a “road map” for understanding the First Amendment and its foundation in our country’s history.

Chip Brantley
Lecturer, Journalism
Anatomy of a Trial is a year-long course taught with Andy Grace, director of the Digitalizing Justice program, that explores the Alabama justice system, which sentences more people to death per capita than any other state in the country. Each academic year, students immerse themselves in one death-penalty or unsolved case, investigating the circumstances and context surrounding it. They then use film, audio, photographs and other media to present their findings in a Web-based narrative.

Nitin Chopra
Associate Professor, Metallurgical & Materials Engineering
MTE 491/591 Materials and Technologies for Advanced Energy Systems/ Applications brings together important concepts in materials science, chemistry, physics and other engineering fields to help students understand current as well as future energy systems, demands and technologies. The course facilitates information sharing as a way to enable widespread global use of renewable and alternative energy. Students explore the possibility of using wind, photovoltaics/solar power, supercapacitors, fuel cells, geothermal, nuclear, hydro, biomass, bioreactors, hydrogen and advanced batteries to meet the power needs of today’s world. The service-learning component of the course requires students to develop novel and low-cost alternative energy systems for use in real-life situations.

Ann Graves & Marilyn Handle
Associate Professors, Nursing
NUR 317/517 UA Nursing in Tanzania (Clinical Practicum) is a contemporary, developed through a collaboration among the Capstone College of Nursing, eXpeditions and UA StudyAbroad, provides nursing students the opportunity to explore...
the physical and emotional health of individuals and communities outside the United States. In 2014, students worked in rural communities in Tanzania, China and Costa Rica. Through the course, students explore the role of cultural beliefs and values in health-seeking behaviors. Students participate in an immersive learning program in which they live and provide health care in a culture different from their own. Associations among poverty, community resources and citizens’ health are central to the learning experience.

Lori Greene
Instructor, Human Nutrition & Hospitality Management
NHM 485 Supervised Practice in Dietetic Management and Communications is the culminating rotation in UAs Coordinated Program in Dietetics. In Spring 2014, students worked with five community partners in the Birmingham and Tuscaloosa area: Brown House, Children’s Hands on Museum, Druid City Garden Project, Food Bank of Central Alabama and the Good Samaritan Clinic. Students have planted vegetables and fruit trees in communities, developed cookbooks, led cooking classes for preschoolers and diabetic patients, created social media campaigns and helped children prepare and taste unfamiliar fruits and vegetables. Most importantly, students learn to play an integral role in the operation of community agencies.

Justin Hart
Associate Professor, Geography
GY 494 Forest Measurement and Analysis provides students with a theoretical foundation and practical experiences in quantifying tree-, stand- and forest-level attributes. Students partner with USDA Forest Service personnel to collect and analyze datasets in the Oakmulgee district of the Talladega National Forest and prepare technical reports for the Forest Service. To successfully complete the course, students must demonstrate proficiency in field sampling and analytical methods used in forest science and management. Students also train under the direction of the Talladega National Forest fire management officer to work with prescribed fire.

GY 409/509 Forest History and Restoration provides information on the theoretical foundation of restoration ecology, tools and techniques used to reconstruct prior ecosystem states, methods to develop restoration targets and monitoring plans and silvicultural prescriptions used to achieve desired future conditions. Students in the Fall 2013 class worked with the Freshwater Land Trust to create a restoration plan for one of its properties, and students in the Fall 2015 course partnered with the Talladega National Forest to prepare an environmental assessment for an upcoming restoration project.

Paige Johnson & Michele Montgomery
Assistant Professors, Capstone College of Nursing
NUR 422 Community Health Nursing focuses on the knowledge and skill competencies required for community/public health nursing practice. Educational and clinical experiences are community based, community oriented and population focused. Students operate health-promotion and risk-reduction programs for children in the Tuscaloosa Pre-K initiative and their families. During an intensive clinical experience, students provide health screenings and health education for academically at-risk children and their families. This experience gives nursing students an opportunity to engage in primary prevention while making associations between poverty and scarce resources in communities and the health status of children and their caregivers.

Lisa Klotz
Instructor, English
EN 310 Special Topic in Writing: Legal Writing and Advocacy teaches students about law through reading and writing, but also through engaging in legal advocacy involving social-justice issues. Students work in partnership with organizations such as Alabama Appleseed, contributing to its Payday Lending Reform project, for example.

Caroline Parsons
Instructor, Communication Studies
COM 122 Critical Decision Making explores the theory and practice of basic principles of the decision-making process, providing a general introduction to persuasion, argument and small-group communication. Students utilize group problem-solving skills and roundtable deliberation to help improve environmental conditions in the Black Warrior River. In Fall 2014, students worked with the Black Warrior Riverkeeper and hosted a roundtable discussion on the state of the river and its water quality. To prepare for the discussion, students visited the Black Warrior River, researched other states’ efforts to protect rivers and wrote about their findings.

Xiao “Michelle” Tong
Assistant Professor, Clothing, Textiles & Interior Design
CTD 387 Fashion Marketing seeks to increase students’ knowledge and understanding of marketing activities such as pricing, promoting, branding, packaging and distributing goods and services used in the fashion industry. Through a service-learning team project, students do fieldwork with a non-profit organization, applying marketing theories and concepts learned in the classroom to real-world issues.

Karina Vazquez
Assistant Professor, Modern Languages & Classics
In SP 353 Spanish Conversation, students acquire communicative skills in Spanish while confronting conflicts and finding responsible paths to solve them. Students discuss different topics (the impact of Alabama’s immigration law, education among the Hispanic community, cultural perspectives on work, marriage and religion, etc.) in order to identify possible cultural and social conflicts. They then reflect on these topics by proposing performances of short, interactive plays in Spanish for Hispanic children and their families at an elementary school in Tuscaloosa County. They then play interactive games with the children and lead small-group discussions in which kids talk about their education and career goals. Students also have designed and led tours of the Alabama Museum of Natural History for the Spanish-speaking community.

Mary Wallace-Pitts
Instructor, Geography
GY 370 Watershed Management Plan
Development is an intensive, three-week interim class that requires students to draft a watershed management plan and/or a source water protection plan for a rural water supply or sub-watershed. Students participate in field programs led by professionals from local and state government agencies and nonprofits. These field programs ensure students collect and compile the data necessary to draft working plans. The preparation of watershed management plans is the first step in managing water resources. Many rural communities lack the necessary funding and expertise to prepare these documents. Water is humanity’s most critical resource, and students perform essential service by assisting communities in protecting their water supplies.

Ben Woodruff 
Instructor, New College 
EC 480 Economics of the Environment and Natural Resources 

Students participate in field plans and/or a source water protection plan for a rural water supply or sub-watershed. The end result is a proposal on how local restaurants can use local food to minimize food miles from farm to table and maximize income for local farms.