

Way Forward

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Revisions

UNI Nonprofit Students Find a Way Forward

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While we were all being encouraged to stay home to stop the spread of Covid-19, many nonprofit organizations continued their operations, and some even ramped up to serve their community. Nonprofit organizations provide essential services to individuals in need and at this time the demand for some services are higher than ever. In addition to the increase in demand for many nonprofit organization's services, organizations are having to change their operating systems.

In parallel with the nonprofit sector, institutions of higher education also scrambled to make changes. All classes were moved online and life on campus was halted, impacting student services, dining, resident halls, and student organizations. Among those changes include the work of service-learning and community engagement.

A service-learning class is a class-based experience, co-created with community partners, intended to expand and deepen discipline-specific knowledge and skills, strengthen the community, and develop a student's sense of civic responsibility. While some partnerships between UNI students and the community were affected, other partnerships continued.

Students in the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (NLA) at UNI were able to continue some of their service-learning work. The Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, headquartered out of Kansas City has a mission to strengthen the social sector with a talented and prepared workforce. This is achieved by students earning their Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) credential. The CNP credential is the only national credential that combines critical skills and knowledge, practical experience and a national perspective. It is available through the Alliance's network of 40 universities and colleges. These educational institutions, in conjunction with the Alliance's national nonprofit partners and CNPs, represent the largest network in the country working to strengthen the social sector with a talented and prepared workforce.

At UNI, students in NLA are trained to be the next leaders of the nonprofit sector. Students earn their CNP at UNI through their participation in a student association, specific course work, and service learning. In the spring semester of each year students participate in service projects with local nonprofit organizations and this semester was no exception. Before spring break students were planning events and collaborating with nonprofit organizations throughout the Cedar Valley,

including the Jesse Cosby Neighborhood Center, an organization in Waterloo dedicated to keeping and enhancing the quality of life for our neighborhood families---through stewardship of resources and shared responsibility.

When spring break ended with the announcement of campus closing and classes going online, the students in NLA had to adjust expectations for their service projects. Students were able to find ways to support the Cedar Valley community in more ways than just staying home. One of these projects included working with the Jesse Cosby Neighborhood Center. Students had originally planned to work with volunteers at the Jesse Cosby Center in person. They planned to share best practices for social media use, visiting the center to work on marketing and promotional materials and helping them to update their social media and website presence. After coming back from spring break, students had to take a step back from their plans for in-person meetings and volunteer work to figure out how they could still help the center.

Through the leadership of the Community Service Committee's director, Piper Fox, and team lead, Sara Hoy, in consultation with Dianne Bedore from the center, the group was able to come up with a new plan in order to still provide assistance to the center. Students were able to create posters, pamphlets, and fliers for the organization to use for their social media and marketing efforts. While the students hit roadblocks on their way to completing their service project they were able to, in part, get things done. Sara Hoy stated "This project wasn't anything like what we anticipated at the start of the semester, but I would argue I had more of a learning opportunity because of the way it panned out in the end".

While students were unable to visit the center in person it still made an impact. Alisha Reynolds stated "I really appreciate the work that the Jesse Cosby Neighborhood Center is doing, and I hope that one day I would be able to work at a place similar to this. I love their mission and the different programs that they offer, and I respect that!".

While we are all working to learn what our new normal will look like, it is important to remember the need to support the nonprofit sector.

Traditional methods of volunteering may be interrupted, but that doesn't mean we can't help. Take time to reach out to organizations to find out what kinds of distance volunteer efforts they may need assistance with.

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