TRANSFORMATION through COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS ANNUAL REPORT

2020

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To Members of The University of Alabama Family:

My appreciation goes out to Dr. Samory Pruitt and the Division of Community Affairs for showing all of us how to stay the course during difficult times with an Annual Report of outstanding accomplishments in our first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. As your President, I am very proud of what you have done.

As you read through this issue of the Division's Annual Report, you will be struck as I was by the variety of the accomplishments: the continued success of the leading research journal, JCES; international work through the Global Café; community partnerships such as Tuscaloosa’s One Place and the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy; and opportunities for students throughout the Division.

In 2020, without a doubt, our Division of Community Affairs proves that “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” My congratulations to all of you—faculty, staff, students and community partners.

Stuart R. Bell
President
Relevance. Reciprocity. Research. Resilience. These four concepts best summarize how our University uses its resources and personnel to address issues and solve problems of critical importance in our state and in the larger society.
Despite COVID–19, it was another very productive year for the Division of Community Affairs as you will see in this 2020 Annual Report. Although most of our events were carried out virtually, we still managed to get the main events in on schedule and with great enthusiasm.

For example, the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy (PTLA) — which provides parents and teachers opportunities to develop their community leadership in elementary, middle and high schools — held its graduation ceremony via a virtual celebration. PTLA grant winners were announced in a news-style program, and the celebration itself was hosted on Facebook. PTLA awarded 23 project grants to schools, 15 of which were competitively funded.

Having to wear masks also didn’t keep Crossroads Civic Engagement Center silent during the 2020 presidential election. The Get Out the Vote Collaborative presented the issues that kept students informed and voting in high numbers.

Global Café kept up its Language Partner Program intensity, with native English speakers and international community members getting the chance to brush up on other languages. Our Dr. Beverly Hawk recruited and helped UA for the fifth time in six years become a national leader in the annual Fulbright Awards program.

The *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, or *JCES* for short, completed its 12th year in publication, wrapping up 2020 with 29 published articles. Also impressive is the number of “hits” *JCES* is getting on the Web — 12,601 downloads from 134 countries! Also, this year we published our first special edition, *Community Engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*.

Finally, in August 2020, the Council on Community-Based Partnerships (CCBP) recognized individuals who demonstrated outstanding achievements in community-engaged scholarship during the 14th Annual Excellence in Community Engagement Awards presentation. This year’s Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar winners were Dr. Michael J. Daria (community partner), Dr. Jeff Gray (faculty/staff) and Xiangyan “Sophia” Xiong (student). Katie Johnson (student) received the Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed Scholarship.

Congratulations to all the faculty, staff, students and community partners who made all of this happen!

Samory T. Pruitt
Vice President
Division of Community Affairs
spotlight on STUDI
Get Out the Vote: UA students Alli Swann and Meredith Saylor Reflect on Civic Engagement

Elisabetta Zengaro, Communications Specialist, Division of Community Affairs

A global pandemic did not stop voters from turning out in record numbers for the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Data from the Pew Research Center shows that nearly 158.4 million Americans voted, and the UA community did its part to empower civic engagement through the newly formed Get Out the Vote Collaborative, hosted by Vote Everywhere UA and the Crossroads Civic Engagement Center to leverage student voting resources and expand voter education ahead of the 2020 election.

An ambassador with Vote Everywhere UA, Alli Swann is a junior double majoring in political science and English, minoring in social innovation and leadership. She is part of the University Fellows Experience, Honors College Ambassadors, a student recruitment intern in the Honors College and communications director for the Blackburn Institute. Meredith Saylor, former Vote Everywhere ambassador, was involved in multiple initiatives to increase civic engagement during the 2020 Get Out the Vote campaign on campus. Saylor graduated with a bachelor’s in economics from UA and is pursuing her master’s in economics at UA. They reflect on the impact of the Get Out the Vote Collaborative and civic engagement initiatives leading up to the 2020 election.

What was the reason for starting the Get Out the Vote Collaborative?

Swann: The goal was to host an opportunity for students, faculty and staff to meet and discuss ways to collaborate in our efforts to provide timely and clear voting information for our students and to get out the vote.

What resources did the Get Out the Vote Collaborative provide to increase voter turnout?

Saylor: The University of Alabama subscribes to a software called TurboVote. TurboVote combines voter registration, election reminders, updated polling place information and resources for voting by mail. I used TurboVote for voting absentee in Ohio, and it made the process much easier. We heavily utilized TurboVote with QR codes, links in GroupMe and e-mail lists. Along with introducing us to campus partners who could expand the awareness of TurboVote resources, the Get Out the Vote Collaborative connected Vote Everywhere UA with staff in Housing and Residential Communities (HRC), enabling us to make printed voter registration forms and absentee ballot request forms available in all the residence halls on campus. Vote Everywhere UA also made transportation available to the campus polling place at the UA...
Rec Center, with help from an organization called Roll to the Polls. Our team ran a texting service with periodic election reminders and information being sent out, as well as the opportunity for students to receive real time answers to questions.

What were some of the challenges in providing these resources during the 2020 election?

Saylor: The pandemic was obviously a massive challenge to work around. We would typically plan a lot of in-person engagement, especially for freshmen in residence halls, since many freshmen are first-time voters. For most of the year, in-person engagement was not possible. We shifted to an entirely virtual engagement strategy. We hosted and collaborated on several virtual events, including voting office hours, panel discussions, and a virtual student voter summit for colleges and universities across Alabama. There were also logistical challenges with students in quarantine. Through conversations with UA employees in HRC and the Campus Mail Service Center, we were able to ensure students could vote by mail even if they were quarantined. Much of our work was about making as many members of the UA community aware of potential issues as possible. Another difficulty for The University of Alabama is the high population of out-of-state students. Students deciding to vote absentee often face confusion without an easy way to get answers. This makes it incredibly important to inform students and allow them to ask questions, not just push voter registration forms.
How did the Get Out the Vote Collaborative increase voter turnout and improve civic engagement?

**Swann:** The GOTV Collaborative worked to transform civic attitudes into civic action. The GOTV Collaborative provided a space where campus leaders could engage with one another and brainstorm the best ways to prepare their respective parts of campus for the 2020 election. The true power of the GOTV Collaborative was that it facilitated relationships that led to widespread and impactful voter preparedness. For instance, as a result of the Collaborative, Vote Everywhere UA partnered with Alabama Athletics to help student-athletes fill out their absentee ballot request forms. The Collaborative raised awareness to concerns that we may not have been aware of otherwise, including ensuring free and easy access to stamps and envelopes for students living in dorms and making sure students in quarantine housing had the resources they needed to vote.

How would you say UA’s Get Out the Vote initiatives have benefited not just the campus community, but the Tuscaloosa community?

**Swann:** As a local to Tuscaloosa, I feel like UA’s commitment to civic engagement goes beyond the borders of campus. While the GOTV Collaborative focused mainly on on-campus resources, it also fostered a spirit of celebrating democracy and empowering civic engagement, which I think encourages people to get civically involved in other ways aside from voting. Hopefully in the future, the GOTV Collaborative can expand to include local organizations working toward the same goal.

As a student, what do you think were the personal benefits of being involved with Get Out the Vote?

**Saylor:** The various Get Out the Vote initiatives and my time with Vote Everywhere was the most fulfilling part of my undergraduate experience. I felt like I was making a difference for my peers and UA community. Educating and assisting voters is incredibly rewarding, along with the fact that I learned so much about voting laws and the election process. Civic engagement volunteering will always be a part of my life. I am already researching ways to get involved in the city I will be moving to post-grad.

How do you and other students work alongside community members to sustain these efforts and reach goals long after you have graduated?

**Swann:** Vote Everywhere UA is lucky enough to have established strong relationships with on-campus partners like the Department of Political Science and Crossroads Civic Engagement Center. We have also begun to establish relationships with community partners, including the Tuscaloosa County Board of Registrars. Our national organization, The Andrew Goodman Foundation, works to train student leaders to continue this ever-important work in years to come. Although it is my last year at UA, I envision a future where UA students are not just encouraged but are empowered to participate in democracy. This organization has cultivated my passion for creating sustainable solutions to voting barriers. With the incredible civically minded students that UA has, I am confident that the opportunity to make UA a leader in the civic engagement space will only grow.
Tucked inside UA’s Capital Hall, Global Café, an initiative of the Center for Community-Based Partnerships (CCBP), is the hub for local and international community members, encouraging cross-cultural relationships through activities, seminars with community leaders and one-on-one conversations.

For UA students like Katie Johnson and Chris Brewster, Global Café is a rewarding experience because of its reciprocity. Both were recipients of the Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed Scholarship as a result of their involvement with Global Café.

“Participating with Global Café has allowed me to build communication skills, which is essential no matter what career you have, and feel more comfortable initiating conversations,” said Johnson, a graduate student in religion in culture.

“You get to create friendships with people from various countries that have unique experiences and stories,” added Brewster, a junior accounting major.

Engagement

Global Café hosts events for easing transitioning to American culture, with topics from purchasing a car to American holiday traditions. These events create an environment for U.S. locals to learn from their international counterparts, especially through Language Partners. Through Language Partners, native English speakers are paired with international community members.
to help them improve English and provide peer support for adjusting to American culture.

“I believe Global Café improves cross-cultural communication and international engagement through the Language Partner Program and events because it allows an exchange of knowledge between two or more cultures due to the interactions of Global Café staff and learners,” said Jordan Alexander, a secondary education and history major. “I wanted to get involved with Global Café because I saw it as an opportunity to branch out into global cultures and help those who have the desire to learn English and have a positive welcome to the United States.”

Language Partners learn about each other’s culture and language, as Channler Smith, a senior majoring in electrical engineering and minoring in math, highlighted.

“My confidence level and ability to communicate has definitely improved over the past four years,” said Smith. “I have also gained a lot of experience in adapting to different people’s needs. I have met many interesting people and have learned so many unique personal stories. Also, the people involved have inspired me to continue learning more about language and culture. My time at CCBP has inspired me to learn Mandarin and Japanese, as well as apply for opportunities abroad after graduation, such as Fulbright.”

These relationships strengthen students’ interests in cultural engagement, correlating to UA’s growth as a top Fulbright scholars’ producer.

Resilience

While UA’s Fulbright program highlights Global Café’s success in fostering cultural engagement among U.S. volunteers, overcoming obstacles is key to learning a new language and culture. Students acknowledged their most challenging obstacle was COVID-19.

“The biggest challenge of course at this time is the Coronavirus pandemic,” Smith explained. “The pandemic has caused a sharp decrease in attendees to Global Café events as well as the Language Partner Program.”

With limitations on in-person activity, students developed creative solutions, like virtual sessions, to sustain relationships with their language partners.

“Well, when COVID first spread, we had to talk to our language partners virtually instead of in person, so it was a big change,” said Shabari Patterson, a senior majoring in criminal justice who has been part of the program since her sophomore year. “My language partners and I
Volunteers’ commitment to their language partners strengthens the program’s resilience. “Personally, I look at it as a mix between being that person’s mentor, as well as being their friend,” said Ashton Fisher, a junior majoring in criminal justice, minoring in cyber criminology and psychology. “It can be really hard to move to another country and not knowing anyone there, so we are here to help them with that transition and anything that they could possibly need. Not only have I gained so much knowledge from my partners, I also have made lifelong friends with my partners. I always check up on my partners, even if they are not in the States.”

**Community**

While Global Café representatives include many UA students, faculty and staff, the program also relies on community support. There are language partners from the Tuscaloosa community, and representatives often collaborate with Shelton State Community College.

“Two of our events are related to talking with your child’s teacher and cars,” said Brewster, explaining the role of community support. “For our teacher event we had a representative from the Tuscaloosa City Schools system come and talk about the resources available to parents. For our car event, we will have a representative of the Law School come and talk about legal issues regarding cars and resources for here in Tuscaloosa.”

Consequently, the café becomes a community for those new to the U.S.

“There are a lot of international students and people that are in the Tuscaloosa community that also struggle with the English language,” said Patterson. “Our program allows a safe place for them to also meet and connect with others in the program, so that they don’t feel alone.”

This environment also attracts student volunteers.

“I wanted to get involved with Global Café and the Language Partner Program because of the friendly working environment and positive experiences from students who were in the program,” said Audrey Bumpus, a junior majoring in finance and economics.

Global Café’s goal is strengthening interpersonal relationships through community engagement, which ultimately keeps the program going long after students graduate.

“Above all, Global Café seeks to encourage community engagement,” said Johnson. “That means going out into the community and listening to people’s needs. Partners who’ve had great experiences usually spread information about the program to their friends. Therefore, most importantly, we aim to make the program as great an experience as possible, so people feel comfortable coming back again and again and bringing others with them. Some of our language partners have been participating in the program for several years now. Celebrating these relationships allows us to not only strengthen them but foster new ones.”
spotlight on

CAMPUS &
Council Celebrates Excellence in Community-Engaged Scholarship

Elisabetta Zengaro, Communications Specialist, Division of Community Affairs

A key element of successful community-engaged scholarship is reciprocity among university personnel and community members. At UA, the Council on Community-Based Partnerships provides a community-engaged scholarship intersection for faculty, staff, community partners and students, connecting them in research-based projects designed to solve critical problems identified collaboratively by community and university members. Each year, the Council meets bi-semesterly to address challenges in community-engaged scholarship and discuss initiatives to further university-community partnerships.

The Council has supported years of successful reciprocity between the university and community. This year, the Council discussed updates from the following community-engaged scholarship initiatives during its spring meetings:

**Trafficking Hope** — an organization that raises awareness of sex trafficking and provides services to survivors. Its mission is to eliminate sex trafficking through funding services for survivors and empowering local churches and organizations. Since 2018, Trafficking Hope has partnered with The Wellhouse, which led to a new transitional apartment complex for survivors.

**Schoolyard Roots** — an organization that uses a school-garden curriculum in several Tuscaloosa city and county schools to establish a network of school gardens that builds and sustains healthy eating habits. Since 2010, UA students have participated through The University of Alabama Partnership, which educates UA students on how to grow vegetables, teach project-based lessons and build community through food.

**PRIDE (Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education) of Tuscaloosa** — a non-profit organization that informs and educates parents, students and community members about drug and alcohol use and abuse in efforts to reduce drug addiction and substance abuse in West Alabama.

**Alabama Life Research Institute** — an interdisciplinary bio-psychosocial research initiative whose goal is to improve quality of life through research efforts of the human condition at all levels.

**Hands in Health** — a student organization in the College of Human Environmental Sciences whose initiative is to advance members’ professional competency and dedication to health and wellness through opportunities in health-related service, teaching, advocacy and research.
MATHCOUNTS — a nationwide middle school math competition consisting of a three-part series of written tests: Sprint, Target, and Team Rounds. Students who advance in the Sprint and Target rounds can compete in a Jeopardy-style oral Countdown Round.

The Council also acknowledged significant achievements by faculty, staff and students in the field of engaged scholarship during its 14th Excellence in Community Engagement Awards. Winners were announced in April, and a socially distanced, come-and-go recognition event took place on August 21. The purpose of the annual awards is to recognize advancements in engagement scholarship through initiatives that represent the mission of the Council in connecting university resources to community needs.

The 2020 Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar Excellence Award winners included:

- **Dr. Jeff Gray**, faculty recipient of the Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar Award
- **Xiangyan “Sophia” Xiong**, student recipient of the Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar Award
- **Dr. Michael J. Daria**, community partner recipient of the Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar Award
- **Katie Johnson** received the Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed Scholarship.

Learn more about the above individuals on page 28.

To further support community engagement research and scholarship, the Council annually awards up to $5,000 in SEED funding for community-based/community-engaged research projects designed to enhance the quality of life for Alabamians.

The 2020 Seed Fund Award recipients included:

- **Dr. Betty Key** (community partner Lovie Parks, Panola Outreach Program), “Panola Munch and Learn”
- **Dr. Carol Donovan** (partners Dr. Tracey Hodges and Dr. Julianne Coleman, College of Education; Debbie Crawford, Holt Elementary School; and Gladys Wright and Chenalle Taylor, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School), “Young Authors Program and Extravaganza for Improved Writing Achievement for Community Engagement”
- **Dr. Holly Horan** (community partners Dr. Lydia Thurston, Samford University, and Dalia Abrams, Birthwell Partners Community Doula Project), “Measuring the Impact of Community Doula Care in Central Alabama”
- **Dr. Joy Douglas** (partners Scott Powell, Alabama Head Injury Foundation; Dr. Rachel Mumbower and Dr. Mercy Mumba, Capstone College of Nursing; Mary Ray Allen, Communicative Disorders), “Students Serving Brain Injury Survivors and their Caregivers: A Community Engagement Project”

The Council also awards graduate fellowships to support student research and initiatives in community engagement.
The 2020 Graduate Fellowship recipients included:

**Jillian Maxcy-Brown**, graduate student in civil construction and environmental engineering, for leading UA’s engagement with the consortium and community partners in the project, “In Our Backyard: Engaging with Stakeholders to Address Rural Wastewater Management in the Black Belt of Alabama”

**Kefentse Kubanga**, doctoral student in the School of Social Work, for training and experience in community-based participatory research through the project, “Rural-WORTH: Adapting WORTH, an HIV Evidence-based Intervention, to Address Southern-specific Risk Factors Faced by Black, Substance-using, Court-involved Women in Rural Alabama”

**Jasmine Nguyen**, graduate student in the College of Community Health Sciences, for involvement in the research project, “The Virtual Promotoras Program: Development and Feasibility of an mHealth Intervention to Promote Sexual Healthcare Access Among Young Latina Women in the U.S. South”

**Yan Lou**, doctoral student in the School of Social Work, for assisting with the research project, “Planning Live, Sustainable Community Asset Mapping for a Dementia e-Friendly Alabama”

As Dr. George Daniels, associate professor of journalism and creative media, noted in his presentation on the importance of the Excellence in Community Engagement Awards during the Council’s September 2020 meeting, the awards ceremony continues to serve as an important opportunity to position community partnerships as a priority for the university, even amidst a pandemic through sharing the stories of award recipients and their partnerships or programs.

Through the Council’s ongoing support of community-engaged scholarship based on project funding, its awards program and commitment to integrating teaching and research, the Council furthers the mission of the Division of Community Affairs, “Engaging Communities and Changing Lives,” providing a model of sustaining community-engaged scholarship for years to come.
For Dr. Marybeth Lima, storytelling through community-engaged scholarship is a partnership between university and community partners where both work together in harmony to create a product that embodies the meaning of a community, a philosophy that guides her research in community engagement.

Professor and chair of the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering at Louisiana State University, Lima began her career in engaged scholarship researching children’s access to play.

“I teach a first-year design class in biological engineering, and we chose playgrounds as a really cool idea as far as design, because it was something my students could all relate to,” said Lima. “And I wanted my students’ first design experience to involve something that they knew something about and cared about, so it was really sort of accidental that playground design turned into a career focus. I was thinking at first that it would be a great experience for my students, but as I started into the process of design, over time I actually realized that lack of access to play is a critical community issue, not just in Baton Rouge, but all over the world, so as I learned more, that lack of access moved its way into my research agenda, and honestly at this point it’s pretty centered on that. The whole idea, at least in engineering with community engagement and community-based design, is how you work together through every step of the engineering design process to create an artifact that expresses the soul of the community.”

Those questions of what the best methods and practices are to tell stories of community-engaged research have guided Lima’s tenure as the editor of the Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (JCES), a peer-reviewed international journal where faculty, staff, students and community partners publish academic work on community engagement scholarship.

“I’m always really excited to review for JCES because I love that the focus is really on partnership and good engagement, and I think that partnership in and best practices in engagement cut across any discipline, and so I learn a lot from reviewing the papers and try to do my best to help contribute to that work by reviewing,” said Lima.

JCES incorporates teaching, research and community engagement to address critical problems identified through a community-participatory process. However, that participatory process sometimes gets overlooked in academics’ push to publish the results of their research, leaving community voices out of authorship, something Lima
wanted to address. Lima recently co-authored a paper, “Telling Our Stories Together: How Universities and Community Partners Co-create Engaged Scholarship,” which was published in Volume 13 of *JCES*. The paper highlights the importance of faculty involving their community partners in engaged scholarship through co-authorship.

“Everyone had a commitment to making sure that community voice was central to the writing process, but how each scholar engaged with their community partners was entirely different,” said Lima. “We really were looking at trying to make sure that equity found its way into dissemination. I think that’s why it’s so important because we’re all equal partners.” The decision on *JCES* as the publication outlet was based in part on the journal’s commitment to research as a partnership and providing a space for multivocality.

“One of the things that we looked at in our paper was an analysis about journals of engagement and what percentage have research articles that are co-authored by community partners and faculty members, and when we looked at that, *JCES* had the highest percentage of co-authored articles, so we felt like both the philosophy of the journal and the readership were perfect for this particular paper,” said Lima.

Now marking the end of its 12th year in publication, *JCES* continues to be a leading publication outlet for community-engaged scholarship, wrapping up 2020 with 29 published articles (15 manuscripts, four research from the field articles, four student voices articles, and six book reviews) and 12,601 downloads from 134 countries. In 2020, the journal also published its first special edition, *Community Engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, highlighting transformative research at HBCUs. By the end of 2020, the editorial board expanded to 47 members and five editors/associate editors, including a student editor.

“We encourage submissions that have community partner and student authors,” said Lima. “In addition, we have specific sections in our journal just for community partner and student voices. I really feel like we make a pretty strong effort to encourage scholars who are fairly new to the field to publish. I know for me, there were a lot of things that I sure didn't know when I started turning in journal articles, so trying to facilitate those brand-new voices who have the work that need a little extra support to get to publishable mode, we really make an effort to try to work with scholars to get their stories out.”

For more information about how to submit to *JCES*, or to read prior issues, visit jces.ua.edu.
COMMUNITY
spotlight on
PTLA Delivers Educational Leadership Through Community Engagement Despite COVID

By Elisabetta Zengaro, Communications Specialist, Division of Community Affairs

While COVID-19 brought many challenges for K–12 schools across the country during 2020, the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy (PTLA) continued to serve as a resource for parents and educators across Alabama with the help of its facilitators and by adapting to the virtual learning environment.

“As an educator and parent, I saw the importance of PTLA and wanted to be a change agent,” said Dr. Liza Wilson, senior associate dean and professor in the UA College of Education. “One goal is for families to understand their importance in the educational process. Another goal is to build respect and trust and an understanding that each person is important to supporting student success.”

Wilson has been part of PTLA since its beginning, helping support the educational goals and leadership between parents and educators.

As an instructional coach for mathematics in Tuscaloosa City Schools, Rachel Hill has worked in elementary education for more than 10 years and partnered with PTLA for the past five years. “My primary goal as a facilitator with PTLA is to help build capacity within both parents and teachers to be leaders within their school communities,” Hill said. “I support teams in developing their ideas and ensuring alignment with desired student outcomes.”

As PTLA facilitators, Wilson and Hill work alongside educators and parents to support student success by connecting school teams with the appropriate community groups.

“We have had on-campus partners from BAMA by Distance and Early College share resources,” Hill said. “Some of our off-campus partners include the YMCA, Chamber of Commerce, and United Way, who have shared resources with participants. By collaborating with both on-campus and off-campus partners, it spreads awareness of the work the PTLA teams aim to do, and it spreads the message that there is a place and need for community partnerships in our local schools.”

Most importantly, PTLA works to support K–12 education through reciprocity between educators and parents, and Wilson said engaging with the community is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a facilitator. Additionally, facilitators aid in sustaining PTLA’s short- and long-term goals.

“Our short-term goal is for each PTLA team to implement a project that impacts students for the better in regards to literacy, mathematics, or social emotional learning,” said Hill. “Our long-term goal is to embody the Dr. Karen Mapp’s Dual-Capacity Framework, in which
former and current PTLA participants sustain their projects and the development of other stakeholders to take on active roles as leaders, monitors, encouragers and decision-makers within our school communities.”

While COVID-19 threw a curveball to many school districts around the country, PTLA adapted sessions to a virtual format to continue providing support to parents and educators during the switch to online learning. The shorter sessions also allowed for increased collaboration as more participants could attend the virtual meetings, compared to previous face-to-face sessions. One of the initiatives moving forward is to create webinars to support virtual learning and online teaching beginning in the spring 2021 semester.

Despite limitations caused by the pandemic, PTLA was able to hold its graduation ceremony for members via a virtual celebration. In a mock news-style interview, winners were announced via video reveal across UA campus locations to showcase PTLA member schools. The virtual graduation celebration was hosted on Facebook (UA Parent Teacher Leadership Academy page) in May, featuring prizes and PTLA grant winner announcements.

In 2019–2020, PTLA awarded 23 project grants to schools, 15 of which utilized this funding to implement their projects.

PTLA members and Tuscaloosa Magnet School Elementary teachers, Robert Ray and Alice Stallworth, and parents, Jasmine Hoggle and Niki Sealy, were PTLA grant winners for their project, “Math in Motion,” a partnership between Tuscaloosa Magnet School Elementary and the UA Honors College (HC). The goal was to increase math proficiency scores in first–third graders by May 2021 through participating in science experiments designed by UA HC that incorporated the teachers’ standards. Even if the project was in early stages, the partnership with Honors College helped ease the transition to virtual learning during COVID-19.
“We wanted to make sure that not only our face-to-face students had the ability to benefit from this partnership, but also our virtual students,” Stallworth said. “So, our parents came in and got involved, helped making kits that we could send home with students who chose to be virtual.”

“The Honors College, when COVID hit, reached out to us,” said Ray. “They said, ‘We’re missing the kids. We hate this got cut short. Would you mind if we just Zoomed in and maybe shared a slide or a video and just talk to the kids?’ The kids’ faces on Zoom just lit up when they saw that they really do care about me. They really do want to come in and work with me.”

As Stallworth and Ray pointed out, PTLA does indeed serve as a resource for teachers to develop students’ leadership and academic skills. As Chris Romeo, a teacher at Englewood Elementary, noted, PTLA is a platform for teachers to develop leadership skills, too.

“It gave us a good platform to speak to the faculty, so it gave us the platform to make the change,” Romeo said.

“It allowed us to really spend time with parents on a different basis, other than a car line, which was really helpful,” said Tori Windle, teacher at Maxwell Elementary.

University Place parents Kenneth Lee and Tasha Morrow-Nevels recalled that the project helped them develop leadership skills in meeting educational goals for children and also to become more involved with the school, other parents and teachers.
Tuscaloosa’s One Place Blends Family and Community Together

Elisabetta Zengaro, Communications Specialist, Division of Community Affairs

Meeting families' needs is a top priority of Tuscaloosa’s One Place (TOP). Better together is the driving factor behind this family resource center's work, and at no time has that been more apparent than throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 alone, TOP served 11,695 people in 4,002 families.

Executive Director Amanda Lightsey has been with the organization for more than 10 years. Taking her professor's advice, Lightsey completed her undergraduate internship as a volunteer at TOP and loved the experience so much that she returned after completing her master's degree in marriage and family therapy at UA, teaching marriage and family classes at TOP and eventually working her way up to a supervisory position. She became executive director following the retirement of the previous executive director.

“What drew me to the work was that I loved the concept of family,” said Lightsey. “At the agency we do work with individuals, but we're very family-minded. Family comes first.”

For more than two decades, TOP has served families' critical needs with more than 20 programs aimed at promoting self-sufficiency, strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, TOP staff and volunteers continued offering services to community members to keep families together during 2020, including new initiatives such as the Mobile Food Pantry and Baby Pantry.

“We started partnering with the West Alabama Food Bank to provide Mobile Food Pantries across Tuscaloosa,” said Lightsey. “We knew that food insecurity was something that people were experiencing, so we were able to create drive-through experiences where people could come, and they would get 60 to 70 pounds of groceries, and we’d load it right in the trunk of their car.”
TOP provided more than 55 tons of food during its 10 Mobile Food Pantries, serving 1,650 families in need. While the addition of the Mobile Food Pantry was a response to food insecurity needs during the pandemic, TOP also adapted its parenting programs to keep families together.

“We would have home-visits outside, and we would have PPE (personal protective equipment) for our workers and also have PPE available for the client if they needed it, so that we could continue to visit,” said Lightsey. “If they had people in their home that were sick or had been exposed, we would drop off packages that had different parenting literature and activities they could do with their children during that time. We were just able to adjust and adapt very quickly to the needs of families and still be able to serve them. Some families we do supervised visitation with, and we were still able to provide that supervised visitation with them, so that they could still see their children, and I think that’s so important so that families stay connected.”

Additionally in 2020, TOP collected and donated $2,245 worth of school supplies for the 2020–2021 academic year, doubled enrollment in parenting and relationship classes with the move to virtual classes, and served six schools in Tuscaloosa County through virtual summer academies.

“Another thing I’m really proud of is that we have a newer program that started back in 2018, but it has grown over the past year, and that is our school social work program,” said Lightsey. “That’s where we place social workers in schools to be able to address the social and emotional needs of children, and that was so needed in 2020.”
As part of the program in 2020, TOP positioned five social workers in 10 schools in Tuscaloosa County: Brookwood Elementary, Brookwood Middle, Collins-Riverside Middle, Echols Middle, Englewood Elementary, Lakeview Elementary, Matthews Elementary, Maxwell Elementary, Tuscaloosa County High and Vance Elementary.

With the help of volunteers and local businesses, TOP was able to hold its signature fundraiser, Tinsel Trail, at the Tuscaloosa River Walk from November to January with 170 decorated trees. Local businesses, organizations and community members decorate and sponsor the trees, and this year’s Tinsel Trail was presented by Buffalo Rock and Premier Service Company.

Currently, 188 businesses and organizations are partnered with TOP, but UA continues to be one of TOP’s strongest partnerships. “We could not do what we do without the university,” said Lightsey.

Each semester, Lightsey said TOP takes in six to eight interns, the majority of which are UA students. While students serve as mentors for children in TOP’s after-school programs, Lightsey said UA faculty and staff also lend their expertise. She said several university faculty members sit on the TOP Board of Directors, and university personnel have served as external evaluators for TOP programs and have partnered with TOP on grants.

While the overarching goal of TOP has been to adapt its services to remain relevant to community needs, Lightsey said a future goal is for the agency is to become a trauma-informed agency. “We’re going to try to seek a certification in that, so that everybody is more aware of how to be considerate of the needs of people and work within the best way that they can because most people have gone through trauma at some point, and it affects how they see receiving and asking for help,” said Lightsey.

The compassion at the heart of TOP is reflective of the many community members, volunteers and staff who work together to meet needs across West Alabama.

“We’re better together,” said Lightsey. “We can do more when we work together to help others.”

The UA Division of Community Affairs has enjoyed a collaborative partnership with Lightsey and Tuscaloosa’s One Place for many years. To donate to or volunteer with TOP, visit www.tuscaloosaoneplace.org/get_involved.
In August 2020, the Council on Community-Based Partnerships (CCBP) recognized individuals who demonstrated outstanding achievements in community-engaged scholarship during the 14th Annual Excellence in Community Engagement Awards presentation. This year’s Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar winners were Michael J. Daria (community partner), Jeff Gray (faculty/staff) and Xiangyan “Sophia” Xiong (student). Katie Johnson (student) received the Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed Scholarship.

Dr. Michael J. Daria
Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Community Partner

Known for his strong support of students seeking higher education and leadership and involvement with community-family educational collaborations at UA, Dr. Michael J. Daria has been the visionary superintendent of Tuscaloosa City Schools since 2016. During his 25-year career in education, Daria has served, in addition to superintendent, as an English teacher, principal and assistant superintendent. Daria led the adoption of the Strategic Plan for City Schools, designed to put Tuscaloosa City Schools in the highest ranks by ensuring the success of all students, by attracting, retaining and rewarding the best employees, and by providing facilities for an optimal learning environment. He received his EdD in educational administration from UA and is a strong supporter of many CCBP programs, including the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy, Vision Days and the STEM Entrepreneurship Academy.

Dr. Jeff Gray
Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Faculty/Staff

A first-generation college graduate who grew up in the self-described Mayberry-esque town of Glen Dale, W.Va., Dr. Jeff Gray is a professor of computer science, focused on increasing access to computer science education in public schools. Gray trains high school teachers to teach advanced placement computer science courses and hosts an annual Alabama Robotics Competition for middle and high school students. He saw that few high school students in Alabama were receiving computer science education and sought to change this by offering summer programs at UA. He developed a course with now 120 videos for teachers. After receiving his first Google grant, Gray received an additional $1 million from the National Science Foundation to expand computer science education throughout the state. He is co-chair of the Governor’s Computer Science Advisory Council and works with the College of Education to get teachers certified to teach computer science.
Xiangyan “Sophia” Xiong
Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar Student
Aptly nicknamed Sophia by her classmates (Sophia was derived from sophia, the Greek word for “wisdom”), Xiangyan Xiong has been a multimedia student-journalist in the Center for Community-Based Partnerships (CCBP) for the past three years, mostly as a volunteer. She received her MA in communication studies from UA (2017) and her BA in communication from China Agricultural University in Beijing (2015). At CCBP, Xiong works as a photographer, videographer, video editor, and news and feature writer. While at UA, Xiong has presented academic papers and served on panels at several regional and national conferences. She is pursuing a master’s in women’s studies and is a teaching assistant in the departments of Gender and Race Studies and Communication Studies.

Katie Johnson
Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed Scholarship Recipient
A Rainsville native, Kaitlyn “Katie” Johnson is a junior majoring in anthropology with minors in Latin and Ancient Greek. Katie serves as a tutor for international scholars in CCBP’s Global Café, helping them learn conversational English and understand American language and culture. Previously nominated as the Federal Work-Study Employee of the Year, Johnson maintains a 3.839 grade point average and has been named to the President’s and Dean’s Lists. In addition to her work with Global Café, Johnson has served as a student assistant with the Alabama Blues Project, where she provides clerical services, assists with fundraising events and plans and carries out art-related activities with children in Tuscaloosa schools. She is a member of Eta Sigma Phi honor society and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars.
As this year’s Annual Report clearly demonstrates, The University of Alabama’s Division of Community Affairs supports a wide range of programs that are positively impacting the quality of life for individuals and communities in Alabama and beyond. Consistent with our elective Community Engagement Classification from the Carnegie Foundation, we are dedicated to building authentic, mutually beneficial community-university partnerships. When we think about these partnerships, it is clear how they “strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (Carnegie CE website). However, we firmly believe that community engagement also serves to “enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity” and “enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning” (Carnegie CE website). In other words, community engagement provides us (and other colleges and universities with similar values) the ability to fulfill our academic missions. As the field of community engagement continues to develop, we are able to draw on the growing empirical evidence in the extant literature and base our programs on solid theoretical and conceptual foundations.

Fundamentally, community engagement is participatory by nature, which means that for community-engaged scholars, there is an essential recognition that our academic pursuits are strengthened by the knowledge, wisdom, experiences and perspectives of our community partners. As you read on page 18, the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (JCES)* is among the scholarly journals in the field that celebrates how stories of community engagement are told together with community partners. *JCES*, which is one of two journals sponsored by the Engagement Scholarship Consortium and which is produced at The University of Alabama, serves an important role in the institutionalization of community engagement in higher education by providing a rigorous, peer-reviewed publication outlet for faculty members who are putting together their promotion and tenure dossiers (Franz, 2011). *JCES* also embraces the central involvement of students and community partners, whether as co-authors of traditional research manuscripts or through Student Voices or Community Perspectives articles.

All of the programs supported through the Division of Community Affairs have great potential to contribute to the growing body of knowledge related to community engagement. For example, as you read about the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy (PTLA) on page
22, not only does this program have a long track record of success for K–12 education in Alabama, but it has also led to several scholarly publications (see Berryhill & Morgan, 2018; Berryhill et al., 2020) and presentations at international convenings.

Programs like PTLA provide multiple opportunities for faculty members. In addition to lending their disciplinary expertise to important issues in the community through engagement initiatives with long track records of success, they also gain new insight into how they ask their scholarly questions, new connections to valuable research data and the ability to work with communities through partnerships.

Through programs like PTLA, faculty members like Dr. Blake Berryhill, an associate professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, have found ways to place community-engaged scholarship at the center of their scholarly agenda. Too often in higher education, we hear from faculty members who say, “I want to be of service and connect with community partners and community problems, but I do so ‘off the side of my desk.’” (Sandmann, 2009, p. 1). Through our programs in Community Affairs, we look to build mutually beneficial collaborations with our on-campus partners and serve as a model for how community engagement can be woven into scholars’ teaching, research and service.

We recognize that there are often a variety of hurdles that may discourage some faculty members from participating in community engagement as they navigate their academic careers. One of the ways that we work to break down these barriers is through seed funding available through the Council on Community-Based Partnerships, which you read about on pages 15–17. The seed funds not only provide the initial funding to improve the quality of life for Alabamians, but they can also serve as the initial start-up funding support to demonstrate to community-engaged scholars that their work is valued at UA. Research has shown that when institutions invest in community engagement projects, the faculty members involved benefit from that investment (Leisey et al., 2012; Zuiches, 2013). For community engagement to be pervasive in colleges and universities, it must cut across all elements of the institution’s mission and demonstrate its centrality to the work of higher education (Fitzgerald et al., 2012).

References


GET PLUGGED IN

For more information about engagement scholarship or to learn how you can become involved, visit us online at communityaffairs.ua.edu or contact the following offices or individuals.

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The stories throughout this publication are but a sampling of the Division’s efforts. To learn more about the work of the Division of Community Affairs and its initiatives, visit us online at communityaffairs.ua.edu.