



SCEC, SCOPE Connect Students to Community Engagement 9

TRANSFORMATION *through* COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS ANNUAL REPORT

Division of Community Affairs

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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From the **PRESIDENT**

The 2021 issue of the Annual Report of the Division of Community Affairs demonstrates the importance of incorporating community voice in research, teaching, and learning.

I am continually inspired by the work of our faculty in addressing social inequality and economic challenges facing Alabamians. From their participation in the Community-Engaged Learning Fellows and Emerging Community Engagement Scholars programs, faculty have taken on challenges facing their communities, whether in education or voting rights, by combining elements in the teaching/research/service mission of this University.

Of course, we want to create opportunities to elevate future generations, and with that I applaud the success of our youth initiatives in STEM Showcase and the Realizing the Dream Essay and Art Contest, which encourage young students' participation in STEM and the arts. We hope they will become a part of the UA family. Additionally, I extend congratulations to the many student leadership programs you will read about for our current students who are striving to become leaders in their communities.

For these groups, and for those who support them, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

Stuart R. Bell
President



From the
VICE PRESIDENT *for*
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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.



Throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we have all learned the importance of supporting one another. In engagement scholarship, we often look to lift the voices of our community partners alongside the students, faculty and staff who are research partners. Therefore, as you will see in these pages of our 2021 Annual Report, elevating community voice is integral to The 4 Rs — Relevance, Reciprocity, Research and Resilience.

As you read from faculty who have participated in professional development programs our office sponsors, community-engaged initiatives allow us as a University to ask what impact we have on others and how we can use our resources to improve the lives of those in our communities. Many faculty, like Dr. Richard Fording, are taking these principles to examine issues of social inequality and involving students in the process. Community engagement also elevates students' voices, whether empowering them to seek involvement in the arts and STEM at a young age, or to network with field practitioners and fellow colleagues through the SCEC Leadership Academy and SCOPE.

As I reflect with fellow past Engagement Scholarship Consortium President Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald later in this issue, engaged scholarship, along with the programs you will read about, represents the resilience of working together to create change for the better.

Samory T. Pruitt
Vice President
Division of Community Affairs



spotlight on

STUDI



ENTENTS

Vision Days Legacy Program Enhances College Experience

Vision Days is a college readiness program that invites students from underrepresented areas to The University of Alabama (UA). High school students who attend Vision Days have the option to visit campus in person or virtually. During these visits, they receive detailed academic information and learn about postsecondary education.

Jaila Brooks from Greene County expressed her experience with Vision Days as a high school student. “It was very insightful for me because for the first time I got to witness what it is like to major in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics),” Brooks said. “It helped solidify my decision to become an engineer one day.”

To support high school students, Vision Days Legacy was developed and is made up of University of Alabama undergraduate students who are alumni of Vision Days high schools. The main goal of the Legacy program is to assist incoming UA freshmen in a smooth transition into college life and create a support system for a better college experience.

Growing out of a response to the large number of students from underrepresented communities enrolled at UA, Vision Days Legacy began in October 2020 with the purpose of providing academic and social support for

underrepresented undergraduate students and Alabama high school students. The Legacy program is a branch of Vision Days that supports opportunities at UA for Vision Days alumni who choose to attend UA. The Legacy program strives to connect its students with academic and support resources at the University while also providing them with the opportunity to develop as leaders on campus.

“Being a first-generation college student, I always found the college process more challenging than other students,” said Saniah Dawson, UA class of 2024. “From the financial aid process to just understanding the standard college life, I always felt a bit clueless. Participating in Vision Days has helped me become connected to students and faculty that understand my struggles and are willing to help me with anything, even the basics.”

“This mentoring program is so important because there are so many students who want to go to college but feel unprepared, unheard and unmotivated. This program gives hope and will drive many to success.”



Vision Days Legacy is led by Legacy Ambassadors — undergraduates responsible for developing and coordinating the Legacy program, its mentorship initiative and the group's goals. Legacy Ambassadors also help high school students with the admissions process, scholarship applications and keeping up with important deadlines. By starting the mentoring process early, the program allows mentors to create a relationship with prospective students and give students support as they begin their college process.

Vision Days Legacy gives high school students an insight into the challenges of an everyday college student to prepare them academically as they continue their education. Tameah Cameron, a prospective UA class of 2024

student, discussed the importance of Vision Days Legacy in preparing students for this transition.

“Coming in I wish I had someone to mentor me and be by my side through my transition from high school to college,” Cameron said of her experience. Being close to their age and already having witnessed many things that they have, she believes Vision Days Legacy will have a great impact on the students.

Success for Vision Days Legacy is defined by having underrepresented high school students prepare for college life and obtain mental growth. This program is student-led, where the leaders use their own experiences and obstacles to implement a solid foundation for the next cohort of students.

The program has already allowed students to achieve immediate goals, including helping incoming freshmen obtain mentorship and academic assistance from upperclassmen and allowing UA undergraduates to present new ideas to the Council on Community-Based Partnerships.

Through these immediate goals, the Vision Days Legacy program will help close the educational gap in Alabama. An extended goal is to make the ambassadors program an official program on The SOURCE. Part of the Division of Student Life, The SOURCE connects UA students to opportunities for involvement and collaboration among student organizations. Other future goals include securing more financial assistance to pay ambassadors, give higher scholarship amounts and fund travel expenses. Since most of the students who lead Vision Days Legacy come from the Black Belt region of Alabama, they can bring their own experiences to bring modern solutions to modern problems.

This is just the beginning of a revolutionary change toward bridging the educational gap between students from high- and low-income schools. As Vision Days Legacy continues to grow, future goals will be to increase the number of UA faculty members who are leaders and mentors to the Legacy Ambassadors, to increase financial support to pay for more ambassadors through stipends and scholarships and to increase academic support to cover all tutoring for the ambassadors.



Vision Days Legacy could become a deeper support system for the incoming freshmen and other underclassmen to make sure they are successful at UA by working closely with Vision Days Legacy to encourage high school students to attend and graduate from UA.

This story was written by Malika Freeman, Kayla Seals, and Jazz Thomas, members of the Vision Days Legacy program. To learn more about the Vision Days Legacy program, visit ccbp.ua.edu/vision-days-legacy.

SCEC, SCOPE Connect Students to Community Engagement

Social networks become increasingly important for students navigating college. From intramural sport teams to academic clubs to Greek life, the college “network” connects students to their campus community by creating meaningful relationships with fellow students, faculty and staff. In the Division of Community Affairs, the Student Community Engagement Center (SCEC) Leadership Academy and Scholars for Community Outreach, Partnership and Engagement (SCOPE) extends students’ “network” to community-engaged scholarship.

“Being a part of SCOPE and SCEC has contributed to my academic and professional goals of being a community organizer,” Alexis Cumbie said. “My work is centered in connecting and mobilizing communities for social advocacy organizations, and my work with SCOPE has taught me how to ethically engage communities.”

Cumbie, a graduate student in communication studies, was a graduate fellow for the Center for Community-Based Partnerships in 2020 before being awarded the McNair Fellowship as a first-generation student. She helped design the SCEC and programming, answering the question of what would engage students.

The SCEC Leadership Academy involves students in community scholarship by developing student leaders. Each year, a group of undergraduate and graduate students meet monthly to discuss the fundamentals of community engagement, strategies for leading community-engaged scholarship and emerging trends. The monthly meetings connect students with faculty and staff involved in community engagement, giving students an inside look into the process.



“These connections allow me to ask them questions, read their work and apply their knowledge to me as a scholar who is early in her research career,” Cumbie said. “It is one of the best, most useful networks to have on campus.”

The SCEC Leadership Academy members serve as campus and community leaders to advance community-engaged scholarship, provide leadership for SCOPE, and act as liaisons between the SCEC and other university organizations and networks.

Ian Noonan, president of UASpace and a member of the SCEC Leadership Academy, described the importance of the SCEC Leadership Academy in creating meaningful

connections for students to engage in community outreach: “I think it has helped train me first how to identify community problems and what solutions I could use to solve those problems and how to best implement them. Having had the chance to work with Dr. (Drew) Pearl has been fantastic, and he has been very helpful whenever we’ve needed any sort of help.”

UASpace, a multidisciplinary student organization open not only to science and engineering students but to all students at the University, received a 2020 Outstanding Student-Initiated Engagement Effort from the Council on Community-Based Partnerships for their goal of making UA a space-faring university by successfully launching and placing a very



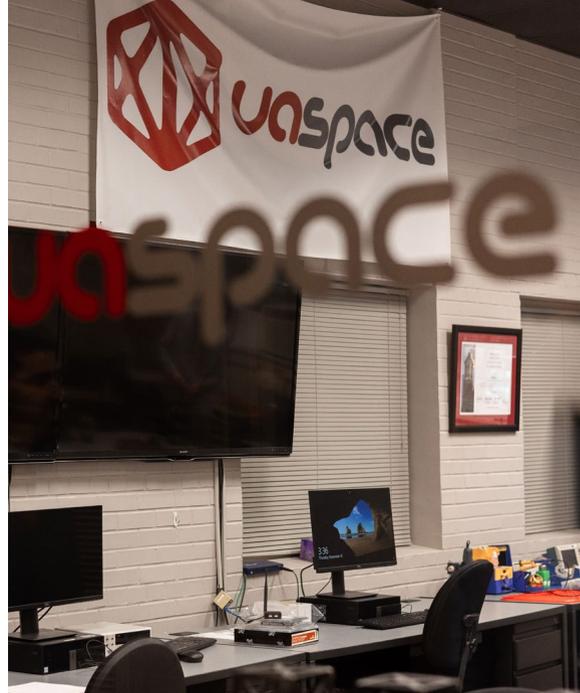
small satellite — called a CubeSat — in orbit around the Earth. As Noonan discussed, the organization also shares its knowledge and passion for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with students in Alabama’s Black Belt communities in hopes of inspiring the next generation of students to pursue STEM fields.

“Because of my connections to the Student Community Engagement Center, I’ve been able to work UASpace into some better connections to help facilitate that vision,” he said.

Students have additional opportunities to connect with other students and faculty interested in community-engaged research through undergraduate and graduate planned activities, workshops, events and conferences, which Cumbie said is “one of the best parts.”

For Noonan, his connections to SCEC introduced him to the STEM Showcase and other faculty interested in increasing STEM education in Alabama schools to further UASpace’s goals.

Students may develop their own community-based programs and/or collaborate with faculty and community members in conducting community-based research programs. As a new board member for the nonprofit, The Tuscaloosa House, Cumbie explained how SCOPE helps students create these partnerships: “We are opening one of the only bookstores and literacy centers serving the West side of Tuscaloosa. SCOPE invited members of the board to meet



with students who are interested in nonprofit leadership and community advocacy. Since then, we have had several members of SCOPE volunteer and connect with our leadership to ask questions about how they can start their own community engagement student organizations and further partner with community members.”

SCEC anchor organizations for 2020–2021 included Tuscaloosa Rocketry Challenge, Design for America, Patterson Scholars Literacy Organization, Public Relations Student Society of America, Hands in Health and Eta Sigma Gamma. In addition to Noonan, 2020–2021 members of the SCEC Leadership Academy included Tyler Nicole Fowler, Meredith Prescott, Abigail Slusser, Claire Weiss, Whitney Zeigler and Sara York.

For more information about the SCEC Leadership Academy and SCOPE, contact Dr. Drew Pearl at apearl@ua.edu or 205-348-2148.



spotlight on

CAMPUS &



FACULTY

Richard Fording: Encouraging Civic Engagement Through Voting Research

Each election, pollsters are quick to ask which candidate people prefer at the ballot box, but the greater question of why people did or did not vote for their candidate is often left for political scientists like Dr. Richard Fording to answer.

“My research and teaching have always focused on inequality, especially poverty, the inadequacy of our social safety net, and the way that our political and economic systems reinforce and reproduce inequality, especially racial inequality,” said Fording. “I have come to view political equality as the most fundamental driver of these societal problems. Therefore, it seems straightforward to me that focusing on voting rights reforms that increase political equality is a potentially important mechanism for achieving social justice.”

Fording, who began his career as a journalist, received his BA in political science from the University of Florida and PhD in political science from Florida State University.

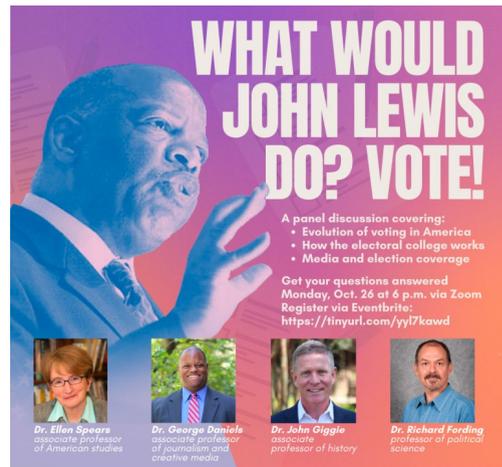
“I have always been interested in social justice, and I thought that as a journalist I could help shine a light on the many sources of inequality we have in our country,” he recalled. “I eventually grew frustrated with journalism and the way my editors cut what they felt was editorial content

out of my stories. I eventually realized that I was much better suited for an academic career.”

He joined The University of Alabama political science department in 2011 and currently serves as the department’s Marilyn Williams Elmore and John Durr Elmore Endowed Professor and as the faculty adviser for Vote Everywhere UA, which was established in 2015 and which focuses on increasing voter turnout by registering students to vote and making absentee ballots more accessible.

“I have really enjoyed watching our students use this opportunity to grow both personally and professionally,” Fording said of his role with Vote Everywhere UA. “They have really inspired me to develop research and teaching interests in the area of voting rights and to find ways to connect my work as a faculty member to the community.”

Fording’s research on voting rights focuses on election laws and practices that undermine democracy and lead to greater political inequality. His work in civic engagement led him to the Crossroads Civic Engagement Center, and he has collaborated with Crossroads for the past two years, including the 2020 Get Out the Vote Collaborative.



“Dr. [Lane] McLelland has been very supportive of Vote Everywhere, and she has provided a space to help Vote Everywhere connect with other organizations on campus to coordinate and centralize our student-led voter registration efforts on campus,” Fording said. “Our students now have some office space and really feel appreciated.”

According to a report by Inside Higher Ed, college students voted in record turnout for the 2020 presidential election. Fording noted his collaboration with Crossroads centralized communication on voter registration for students across UA to encourage civic engagement.

“One thing that I discovered a few years ago is that there is more interest than ever around campus in helping people to get registered and vote. Unfortunately, there wasn’t much communication across the different organizations doing this work, mostly because we weren’t aware of one another,” he recalled. “Crossroads has been instrumental in helping to centralize these efforts, and I think this led to an extremely successful registration and mobilization campaign during the 2020 election season.”

His work did not stop after the 2020 election, though, as voting behavior research continues well beyond election cycles. For example, he helped Vote Everywhere UA students implement a campus-wide survey in spring 2021 on UA students' experiences voting during the 2020 election. These students hope to use the data to further improve voter turnout.

Fording's latest project, "Return My Vote," examines the impact of restoration on voting habits of formerly incarcerated individuals and whether increased civic engagement correlates to lower rates of recidivism. In what resulted from a partnership between UA and Greater Birmingham Ministries, Fording and his students plan to launch the Alabama Virtual Voting Rights Restoration Clinic, a virtual platform to communicate with formerly incarcerated individuals throughout the state, in 2022.

"Much of the time spent on this research at the moment is focused on state laws that disenfranchise formerly incarcerated people

even after they have completed their sentence," Fording explained. "Alabama has one of the toughest felony disenfranchisement laws in the country because the state requires that people who have had a disqualifying felony conviction apply for restoration of their voting rights from the state, and most people don't know how to do that."

While his research agenda "can sometimes ruffle some feathers," support and collaboration with others are key factors in researching and overcoming barriers.

"It turns out that there are a lot of people who share the goals of making the world a better place and are eager to contribute in some way," Fording said. "We are all motivated by the same goals, so it has been a very enjoyable experience to work together, but it wouldn't be nearly as easy without the support and guidance provided by Crossroads and the folks at the Center for Community-Based Partnerships."

RETURN MY VOTE
ALABAMA'S VIRTUAL VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION CLINIC

[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Voting In Alabama](#) [Research](#) [Advocacy](#) [Request A Consultation](#)

Alabama's Virtual Voting Rights Restoration Clinic

We provide free consultations to Alabama citizens who are seeking to determine whether they are eligible to vote and those who may need assistance registering or restoring their voting rights.

CELF, ECES Combine Community Perspectives in Teaching and Research

Part of ethics in research is determining the value of a research study. At UA, the Community-Engaged Learning Fellows (CELF) and Emerging Community Engagement Scholars (ECES) Programs encourage faculty and staff to think beyond the number of publications and shift their focus toward how research impacts the community.

Open to faculty and staff members with teaching/administrative responsibilities, CELF began as a virtual pilot during 2020–2021 in response to the growing interest in community-engaged teaching and learning and the field’s shift from “service” to “community-based” learning.

Dr. Tracey Hodges, associate director of the Belser-Parton Literacy Center and assistant professor of elementary education and literacy at UA, joined CELF in 2020 after previously attending a New Faculty Community Engagement Tour, which connected her to local schools in Alabama’s Black Belt region.

“As a junior faculty, one area of tension that has been present is finding where my community-engaged work fits into the typical norms of academia — research, teaching, and service,” she said. “For me, my community-engaged work is all three wrapped into one.



I spend at least one day per week in local schools conducting this work, so I want to make sure I’m able to represent that time and effort in ways the academy can understand, but allows me to continue doing this work that is most fulfilling to me as a scholar.”

Dr. Chapman Greer, instructor of management and UA Faculty Senate president, has been involved in community-engaged teaching and research throughout her career, but credits the CELF and ECES programs for giving “a pedagogical foundation” to justify community-engaged scholarship and teaching within the academy. Since joining CELF and ECES, Greer has expanded partnerships with both non-profit and for-profit organizations, offering them feedback for growth.

"I got to go on one of the tours where we went around the state and looked at different business issues and how people were solving them," Greer said. "So I met Mrs. Frances Ford (health care coordinator for Sowing Seeds of Hope) in Marion, Alabama, and we did a feasibility study for [a] critical access hospital there for her."

Collaboration is an important part of ECES, as participants are paired with a mentor to aid them in mapping out their research agenda.

"It causes you to slow down and ask, 'What is the greater impact of my work?'" said Dr. Holly Horan, assistant professor of anthropology at UA. "Slowing down to recognize the multiple areas of wisdom and knowledge from the community, academics and others can de-center the 'power' of the academy and create more robust and meaningful research and partnerships that include people from across the community."

Because of her involvement with CELF and ECES, Horan has collaborated with several organizations including Birthwell Community Doula Project, Schoolyard Roots, the West Alabama Food Bank, and perinatal health professionals and leaders in West Alabama, allowing her to answer the "so what" question of research through decentralizing the professor's role as a principal investigator.

"Recognizing that there is not one way to do this work is not only reassuring but inspiring in terms of going against the grain of traditional, academic research," Horan added. "The community building aspect of these opportunities has been critical for personally and professionally supporting my career goals."

CELF participants learn how to incorporate community-engaged methods in teaching and research. One goal is to develop a new syllabus or reconfigure an old one to include a community-engaged element. Highlighting its reciprocity, Greer shared how CELF encourages faculty to collaborate with their students.

"This semester, in my data visualization class, we're doing a continuation project for Dr. [Drew] Pearl where we are working to create a set of dynamic dashboards that showcase all of the engaged learning across campus," Greer said. "It's just phenomenal, and my students from last spring who initiated this project actually just submitted an article for publication."

Open to UA graduate students, postdocs and early career faculty/staff members, ECES is a group of professional cohorts in engagement scholarship. It is inspired by the Emerging Engagement Scholars Workshop, an annual pre-conference event of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium.





“The ECES program really highlighted ways this work is important and gave us (the fellows) language to be able to talk about this work,” Hodges said.

In fact, with this knowledge, Hodges has been able to seek more grant funding, making her community-based work more visible in her annual merit and tenure and promotion review. She also expanded her partnerships in educational research to Hale County Middle School, Jacksonville City Schools, Tuscaloosa City Schools and the Tuscaloosa County School System.

Most importantly, these programs strengthen bonds between the community and university by blurring the boundaries between the academy and community.

“The CCBP (Center for Community-Based Partnerships) programs, and namely the ECES program, provide support, resources and knowledge to conduct community-based scholarship more effectively and more joyfully,” Hodges said.

“This is an unparalleled opportunity for those of us who are interested in community-engaged learning and experiential learning,” Greer added. “There is absolutely no other entity that exists on campus that facilitates this in such a beautiful way.”

CELf and ECES typically meet monthly to discuss trends, issues and options within engaged learning. Members receive one-on-one mentoring from professionals in the field and financial support toward their research. For more information, contact Dr. Drew Pearl at apearl@ua.edu.



spotlight on

COMM

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LOOSA
SCHOOLS - MIDDLE

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UNITY

Essay and Art Contest Elevates Students' Voices

The saying goes that a picture is worth a thousand words, and for Alabama middle and high school students, the Realizing the Dream Essay and Art Contest was just the right medium to participate in the nationwide conversation of social justice during the ongoing pandemic.

"All the kids came together and united around a core human principle of generating meaning—that is what art and writing do," said Carson Grubaugh, one of the contest's judges. "I found that there were pieces in there that people probably had kind of conflicting political opinions potentially about, and they were all accepted, which I think is exactly the core of the show."

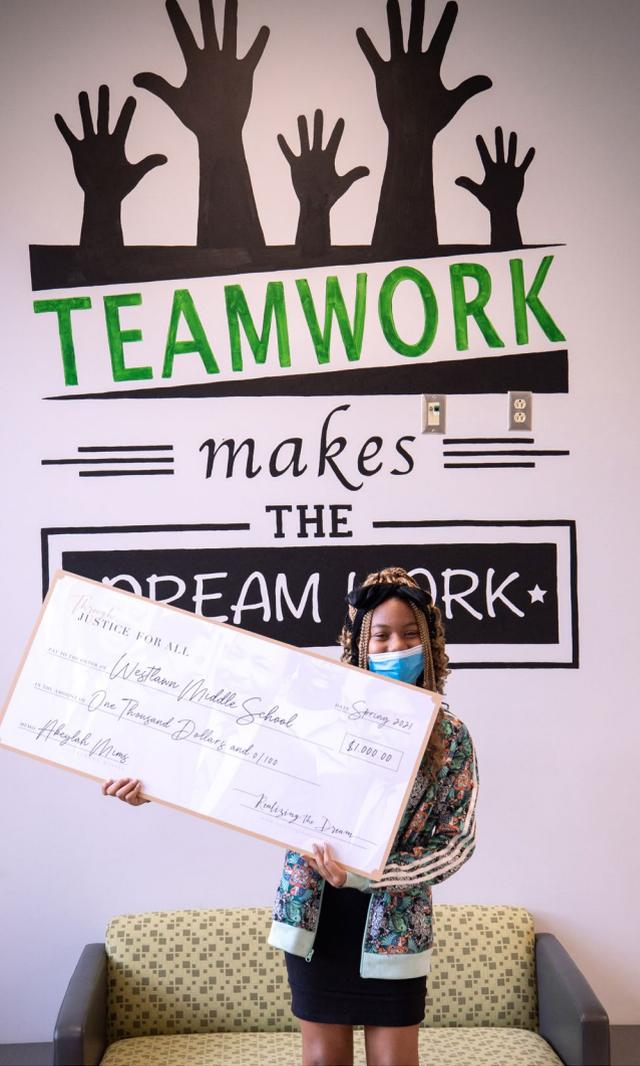
Grubaugh, who is also a visual arts instructor at Shelton State Community College, recalled from his own experience as a young artist the importance of community support for sustaining art education.

"There's nothing more important for a young artist than getting the experience of having their work out in the public," said Grubaugh. "I've seen student shows we do. They come in and they're like, 'My art's on a wall. It's not on mom's fridge. It's not in a Rubbermaid® bin. It's on a wall, and there's a light pointing at it.' And that will give you so much momentum to keep making art. It's

the same with the essay contest. They all got to read their essays. People listened to what they had to say. So, when you support your youth like that, that's going to be good for the community."

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affected many in-person gatherings, leading the Realizing the Dream Committee to establish the Essay and Art Contest as one of the virtual events for 2021. The event was designed to showcase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy from the perspective of the next generation. Students competed at the high school and middle school level with a work of art or essay they believed best captured King's vision of unity around the 2021 theme, Realizing the Dream Through Justice for All.

The committee created a website with essay and artwork rubrics to assist with the judging process, as well as an online submission portal. The panel of judges included faculty and staff from Shelton State Community College, Stillman College and The University of Alabama. To participate, students in grades 6–12 submitted a work of art or 500-word essay reflecting the 2021 theme. The student authors of winning submissions discussed the meaning of their work in a virtual format on April 8, just eight days before the date Dr. King wrote his April 16, 1963 Letter from the Birmingham Jail.



Essay Winners

Jai Carter

12th grade, Ramsay High School

Jasper Champion

7th grade, Tuscaloosa Magnet School – Middle

Ashton Javine

9th grade, Paul W. Bryant High School

Sunny Shen

7th grade, Tuscaloosa Magnet School – Middle

Asya Wright

12th grade, Smiths Station High School

Artwork Winners

Lillian Champion

9th grade, Central High School

Rebecca DeCaro

11th grade, Paul W. Bryant High School

Ka'Raya Edwards

8th grade, Westlawn Middle School

Emeril Leatherwood

6th grade, Westlawn Middle School

Cameron Lewis

9th grade, Central High School

Ahman Mills

7th grade, The Alberta School of Performing Arts

Akeylah Mims

6th grade, Westlawn Middle School

“I think the importance [of the Essay and Art Contest] is in keeping the dream alive, relevant and showing it through a different medium,” said Rebecca DeCaro, one of the artwork category winners. “It’s just a creative way of looking at it and keeping people engaged.”



“Well, I know that it meant a lot to Rebecca for the recognition of her art and the feeling that she puts behind her work,” added her mother, Erin DeCaro. “And I think that it got the kids to think more about the legacy of Dr. King and how they could express their feelings on it.”

Winning students received a Chromebook, and their respective schools received up to \$1,000 in the form of programming/educational resources reimbursement for their schools. The winning submissions were featured on the Realizing the Dream website.

Ahman Mills, from The Alberta School of Performing Arts (TASPA), won for his artwork, “Angel In Disguise,” which symbolizes unity and the importance of the health care system during the time of the pandemic.

“Dr. King’s legacy shows that there are creative minds all over,” he said. “All they need is a way to show their talent and to be bold.”

In what was mostly Mills’ idea, TASPA hosted a contest for middle schoolers to design a mural symbolizing unity to cover a blank wall inside the school, so all students could show their creative voice. Students voted for the winning design, and the funds his school received paid for the supplies needed.

“As a principal of a performing arts school, I believe the arts are a great way for students to express not only their creativity, but their voice, and so what we saw in this contest is student voice coming out, whether through visual arts or through creative writing,” said Amy Tilford, principal of TASPA.

A partnership among Stillman College, Shelton State Community College, The University of Alabama and the Tuscaloosa Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Realizing the Dream celebration honors King’s life and legacy. The Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend marks the start of the annual events and includes the Realizing the Dream Legacy Banquet, the Realizing the Dream Concert and the SCLC-organized Unity Day activities. In 2021, as a result of the ongoing pandemic, the banquet and concert were canceled, as were the Unity Day prayer breakfast and mass rally. The unity march took the form of a car parade, during which participants placed signs on their cars to spread awareness, call for unity and inspire hope.

For more information, visit realizingthedream.ua.edu.

STEM Showcase Encourages Students' Scientific Discoveries

While undergoing temperature checks became common during COVID-19, middle schooler Maddie Tilford, from The Alberta School of Performing Arts, went a step further by researching temperature monitoring for COVID-19 vaccines for her science project, "Moderna Vaccine Temperatures & Security," during the inaugural STEM Showcase.

Tilford's project consisted of two micro:bits (small programable computers) that she used to monitor the temperature in various rooms. An "alarm" sounded to notify when they dropped below or rose above the desired point.

"At the time, the Moderna vaccine had just been released and needed to be set at a certain temperature, or else the vaccines would expire," said Tilford, winner of the math and computer science category. "It helped me a lot with presenting in general, and the STEM Showcase as a whole was very fun to participate in. Even at times when the project seemed too difficult, the encouragement from everyone I was working with was the thing that kept me from giving up entirely."

Tilford was one of many middle schoolers who participated in STEM Showcase, a collaborative science fair for middle school students in the Tuscaloosa area designed to increase students'

involvement with STEM. UA campus partners, Dr. Jeff Gray, Dr. Qiaoli Liang and Dr. Yuping Bao, were instrumental in the planning process. Additionally, Anna Daly, of The Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative, served on the planning committee, along with school district representatives.

"The idea of a collaborative science fair project caught the interest of [Samory T.] Dr. Pruitt and Dr. [Michael J.] Daria at a partner meeting related to the NSF STEM proposal that Dr. Bao, Dr. Gray and I worked on in 2019," said Liang, who manages the Mass Spectrometry Facility in the UA department of chemistry and biochemistry. "Dr. Gray made the connection with the UAB science fair staff and called the initial planning meeting among UA and school district partners. After a short pause due to the early pandemic shutdown, the project was resumed with staff support from Community Affairs under the name of STEM Showcase."

Gray, director of the Randall Research Scholars Program and professor of computer science, explained how the idea for STEM Showcase grew from a "grassroots community effort" to provide middle school students an opportunity to engage in STEM education, with the goal of leading to a large science fair in West Central Alabama.

"I was at the original meeting that led to the formation of the STEM Showcase and offered some of the early input into the ideas," Gray said. "... as a first-generation college student [who] benefited much from my own early science fair experiences, I understand how such opportunities can encourage and develop the youth in our community with interests across STEM topics."

To participate, students in grades 6 through 8 submitted an individual project or worked with up to three team members. Projects represented the following STEM fields: biology, chemistry, engineering, environmental and Earth sciences, mathematics and computer science, medicine and health science, physical sciences (including space), behavioral and social sciences, and energy and transportation. Faculty, staff and graduate students from The University of Alabama STEM disciplines mentored participants and helped guide project ideas. Submissions were judged based on the quality of the research question, design and methodology, execution of the project, creativity and overall presentation.

Sam Siomko, a master's student in the UA department of biological sciences, recalled how her experience participating in science projects when she was younger motivated her to pursue a STEM career and to participate as a mentor in STEM Showcase. "As a mentor, it's rewarding to help students realize their own projects inspired by their own experiences and passions," Siomko said.

Adapting to the pandemic also allowed students to find creative solutions to problem-solving. Siomko talked about one student she mentored whose methodology was an online survey to encourage remote participation. The pandemic also inspired some students' projects, which Siomko said helped students see the applications of their discoveries. Nathan Lee was one of those inspired by the effects of the pandemic for his project, "Pets and Older Adult Mental Health During Covid."

Pets and Older Adults' Mental Health During Covid-19

NATHAN LEE (7TH GRADE)
NORTHRIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

MENTORS:
DR. LEWIS LEE (UA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK)



“STEM Showcase is a great way for students passionate about math and science to gain real experience conducting and presenting a research experiment,” said Lee, a student from Northridge Middle School and winner of the biological and social sciences category. “STEM Showcase allowed me to turn my research question into a tangible presentation.”

While the pandemic affected students’ abilities to conduct research face-to-face, students still had the opportunity to present and learn about their peers’ projects in the virtual showcase implemented through UA’s Center for Community-Based Partnerships. Because the STEM Showcase was hosted virtually, students were still able to explore STEM fields in the middle of the pandemic, which offset the limits of in-person learning and hands-on activities.

“The main benefit of the STEM Showcase is getting kids excited about STEM topics and exposing them to a real-world example of the scientific method that they themselves can journey through,” said Luke Walker, director of Pre-Engineering QA/QC at Bernhard, a national engineering and contracting firm.

Walker learned about the need for STEM Showcase volunteers through his team’s director and volunteered as a judge to encourage youth to explore STEM fields. STEM Showcase was also supported with a financial contribution from Bernhard.

“I think the most important part of the judging process, though, is seeing what the students learned,” Walker said. “Having a successful project is clearly an important part of the



judging process, but just as important is making sure the students learned from any mistakes. The STEM field is built on making mistakes and learning from them. The earlier students can learn that mistakes are a part of the process, the quicker they learn to take technological ‘chances’ which lead to significant breakthroughs.”

“To me, the main benefit is that the STEM Showcase is raising the whole community’s interest in STEM and developing a culture that will grow and provide new opportunities to Tuscaloosa youth with a foundation that has been missing for a long time,” echoed Gray.

This year, there were 10 projects from 14 students across five schools. These projects included three schools in the Tuscaloosa City School system: Northridge Middle School, Tuscaloosa Magnet School-Middle, and The Alberta School of Performing Arts. Two private schools, The Capitol School and Tuscaloosa Academy, also participated. Seven of the projects at STEM Showcase were selected to compete at UAB’s regional fair.

For more information about STEM Showcase, visit ccbp.ua.edu/stem-showcase.

FROM THE DIVISION

Making Space for Community Engagement: Reflecting on ESC

Formerly known as the National Outreach Scholarship Conference (NOSC), the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) created space for community-engaged scholarship to thrive, emphasizing the partnership between a university and community. Approaching the 10-year anniversary since NOSC was reimagined as ESC, ESC's only two past presidents, Dr. Samory Pruitt and Dr. Hiram "Hi" Fitzgerald, reflect on the growth of the organization engagement scholars call home.

ESC evolved from a 1999 meeting with Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University and the University of Wisconsin-

Extension. These institutions discussed their community-based programs, which became the foundation for NOSC.

Historically, land-grant institutions were tasked with a three-part mission: teaching, research and service. A challenge for Extension universities heading into the millennium was connecting the academy in addressing community needs.

"So my office was given that mission — to get the whole university involved with community-based work from a scholarship orientation, as opposed to a service kind of orientation and extension," Fitzgerald explained.



Fitzgerald is university distinguished professor emeritus of psychology and associate provost emeritus for university outreach and engagement at Michigan State University. He became involved with NOSC as associate provost for university outreach and engagement at Michigan State, networking with administrators and faculty from other land-grant institutions.

"I met some of these people that have academic backgrounds and who were also frustrated by the trend in Extension to not be fully integrated into the broader university faculty," he said. "We started talking, and we decided that the National Outreach Scholarship Conference might be more appealing to other faculty on campus if in fact it focused more on faculty presenting their scholarly work at meetings. The conversations always benefited from having Samory represent the non-land-grant institution perspectives."

The conference established a destination for faculty to share their work, blending extension with community learning and broadening the definition of extension to engagement as more institutions joined. Fitzgerald served as NOSC president from 2009–2012, becoming ESC president in 2013.

At the time of its membership, The University of Alabama (UA) was the only non-land-grant institution belonging to NOSC.

"The best advice I got about this work on our campus was from someone who I consider a mentor, David Matthews, who was UA president in 1969," said Pruitt, vice president for

community affairs at UA and immediate past president of ESC.

"He said to me, 'If you make space for this work, you can't even imagine the impact that it's going to have on your faculty, campus, students, staff and community partners. And if you do that, the other things in terms of traditional research versus engaged scholarship will take care of itself. You just have to create that space and let the work speak for itself.'"

In 2012, UA hosted the final NOSC conference before the switch to ESC.

"We actually had a contest," Fitzgerald said. "To come up with a new name for us. And that's how we came up with the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, with engagement being defined in a way that people in one of my areas of work would call community-based participatory research, so it really emphasized authentic partnerships with community."

ESC embodied the same spirit as NOSC, a place for sharing community-based research, but broadened engagement so more scholars could be included. The focus on authentic partnerships and engagement shaped the strategic plan when Pruitt became ESC president in 2015.

“At that meeting at Penn State, the discussion was what do we want to look like as an organization for the next 20 years, and we were coming up on the 20-year anniversary of NOSC/ESC,” Pruitt said.

Part of that discussion was incorporating scholarship as a focal point for ESC’s growth.

“You couldn’t be the Engagement Scholarship Consortium without scholarship, and that was always something that Hi Fitzgerald talked about,” Pruitt said. “I think one of his phrases used to be ‘partner or perish’ instead of just ‘publish or perish,’ but he was a giant in being able to connect the research to the community.”

ESC contributed to the growth of peer-reviewed journals and publication outlets for faculty, staff, students and community partners, most notably the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. Thanks to ESC, universities also created programs encouraging engagement scholarship on their campuses. For example, UA’s SCOPE (Scholars for Community Outreach, Partnership and Engagement) program developed because of an ESC conference.

“We had three graduate students presenting. I ran into them in the hallway, and they asked me, ‘Why did they have to drive all the way to Penn State to meet each other and know that they were interested in this work?’” Pruitt recalled. “And they were from three very different disciplines. As a result of that, we came back and made sure that was not going to be the case, so we put together SCOPE.”

Like ESC, SCOPE creates a cohort for engaged research, going back to the principle of making space for community engagement. Overall, the success of ESC is its supportive environment that creates a community of engaged learning.

“I think the best stories for me with ESC have to be how welcoming the group was to me and folks from The University of Alabama as we tried to develop a structure here,” Pruitt said. “I think the future of ESC is bright for a couple of reasons. If you track the founding of this work around the early 2000s with the Kellogg Commission Report, you have almost a generation of people who were involved. They’ve embraced this work, and they’re going to take that into their faculty roles or their administrative roles and on their campuses.”

Fitzgerald echoed Pruitt’s comments.

“I had the opportunity to engage with people connected to trying to develop this organization from areas within Extension, but also within the academy,” Fitzgerald said. “We were successful in showing people that what they were already doing fit our concept of what working in a community was all about, and it was not a service. You just want to bring in the community, work together, and come out with good science, good data. And they get good change in their community.”

Succeeding Pruitt as the next ESC president is Dr. Laurie Van Egeren, Michigan State University’s interim associate provost for university outreach and engagement. Van Egeren is the organization’s first female president. The ESC’s 22nd annual conference will take place at the University of Georgia, Sept. 21–22, 2022.

FROM THE DIVISION

Council Names Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholars in Excellence Awards

In April 2021, the Council on Community-Based Partnerships recognized those individuals who demonstrated outstanding achievements in community-engaged scholarship during the 15th Annual Excellence in Community Engagement Awards.



LaKeda Smith

Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Community Partner

Executive director of the Benjamin Barnes YMCA in Tuscaloosa, LaKeda Smith earned her bachelor of science degree from The University of Alabama and has devoted her career in service through her involvement with the Barnes YMCA, having previously served as its outreach director. In her current role, she has supported the Center for Community-Based Partnerships' Swim to the Top program for the last seven years and has formed partnerships with departments across UA in support of the youth served by the Barnes YMCA. As the Barnes YMCA continues to grow, it continues to strive to serve the West End area of Tuscaloosa. This growth, expansion and success are intrinsically linked to Smith's hard work and the foundation that has been laid as a result of it.



Jake Peterson

Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Student

A native of Newnan, Georgia, Jake Peterson is a first-year doctoral student in the College of Education's kinesiology department. Before beginning his PhD, he was a master's student in the same field at The University of Alabama, where he supported the Swim to the Top program as a graduate research assistant and continues to support the program as a doctoral student. In addition to supporting research within the program, Peterson also began his own work in community-engaged scholarship. He has presented at the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, led collaborations with other graduate students to present on the impact of community engagement on undergraduate and graduate students, and has published manuscripts and a book chapter on the topic.



Martha Crowther

Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Faculty

Dr. Martha Crowther is a professor and associate dean for research and health policy in the College of Community Health Sciences. Her extensive research portfolio is on aging and racial diversity in urban and rural populations with a focus on eliminating mental and physical health disparities in older adults and assessing caregiving-related stressors and outcomes. She is a member of the Gerontological Society of America and the American Psychological Association, faculty scholar in the UA Center for Mental Health and Aging, investigator in the Institute for Rural Health Research, scientist in the UAB Center for Aging, and an associate research scientist in the UAB Center for Health Resource Development Promotion. She received funding for her research at the federal, state, and university levels and from foundations and industries, including the NIH/NCI and CDC. She served the Council on Community-Based Partnerships in several roles, including chair of the Proposal and Seed Funding Committee.



Pamela Young

**Distinguished Community-Engaged Scholar
Staff**

Dr. Pamela Young serves as director of community engagement and economic development in the College of Arts and Sciences, in which she supports student retention and success by facilitating community engagement and economic development initiatives for faculty, staff and students. An education specialist and crisis manager, Young has assisted international nonprofit organizations across the globe in collaborating on socioeconomic development programs. Additionally, she is the communications coordinator for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Orientation, Transition and Retention Knowledge Community, advisor to the A&S Student Ambassadors program, and received a government grant to develop a learning community for UA academic advisors to increase their knowledge of education abroad. She has written several research articles, book chapters and papers, and has managed numerous research projects.



Chris Brewster

**Zachary David Dodson Memorial Endowed
Scholarship Recipient**

A Pinson, Alabama native, Brewster is a sophomore majoring in accounting. He began working in the Center for Community-Based Partnerships as a freshman, where he worked at the front desk greeting and assisting visitors, and with the Center's Global Café initiative as a language tutor for international scholars, helping them learn conversational English and understand American language and culture. Additionally, Brewster volunteered with Vision Days, a campus-wide effort focusing on early recruitment of high school students from selected schools. For Vision Days, Brewster takes responsibility for groups of students as he leads them on curated campus tours and participates in student-led panels that are an essential part of the program.

FROM THE DIVISION

Annual Report Exemplifies Community Voice in Engagement

Community-engaged scholarship is founded on a sense of reciprocity between a university and its community (Boyer, 1996) where the two work in tandem to address societal needs. Consequently, our approach to community engagement is built on authentic partnerships that channel our mission of teaching, research and service toward improving quality of life for individuals and communities in Alabama and beyond.

In the Division of Community Affairs, we refer to this approach as the 4Rs — Relevance, Reciprocity, Research and Resilience — which guides our philosophy of sustaining and building community partnerships exemplified in this report. Therefore, in this Annual Report, you have read the “voices” of the many stakeholders involved in community-engaged scholarship, with a focus on our community partnerships and collaborations.

Engagement traces its roots to the 1999 Kellogg Commission report, which served as a catalyst for universities to engage the public in teaching, research and service (Kellogg Commission on the Future and State of Land-Grant Universities, 1999). As you read on page 28, conversations among land-grant institutions on the ethics of community-based learning led to what would become the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) and the field’s switch from

service to engagement. Dr. Samory Pruitt and Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald reflected on the foundation of engaged scholarship through their roles as past ESC presidents. Several programs you read about in this report developed from these discussions and workshops at ESC, including our Community Engaged Learning Fellows (CELf) program (page 17) and Scholars for Community Outreach, Partnership and Engagement (SCOPE) for students (page 9).

Placing the community as the focus of research and teaching initiatives decentralizes the power of the academy and creates meaningful relationships between faculty and community members (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 2012), which faculty and staff learn in CELf and the Emerging Community Engagement Scholars (ECES) programs. These programs create a “two-way street” between the university and community by showing faculty how to incorporate community-engaged methods of teaching and research lacking in traditional constructivist approaches to engagement (e.g., Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). These programs also emphasize the importance of co-creation with community partners, where “the distinctions between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers” are broken down (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 10). Faculty members, such as Dr. Richard Fording (page 14), also use these

initiatives to blend their research agenda with issues of civic engagement, encouraging community members to also be active participants in their governments with university resources for voter registration.

According to Mondloch (2009), for students to engage in community-based learning, they must learn what is needed to foster and sustain relationships with organizations they partner with and have resources to assist them in this learning process. In the Division of Community Affairs, we believe these principles are nurtured through the Student Community Engagement Center (SCEC) and SCOPE, which you read about on page 9. From these students' experiences, you will see how students utilize community-engaged methods through the shared space of the SCEC and mentoring offered in SCOPE; both provide students with the "connection" (Mondloch, 2009, p. 144) to build partnerships.

In terms of reciprocity, campus-community partnerships are rooted within the broader concept of engagement (Buys & Bursnall, 2007) in the sense that they represent a shared vision

between university and community members as the equal partners in a relationship (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Programs like STEM Showcase (page 25) represent a collaboration between UA faculty, staff and graduate students and the Tuscaloosa city and county school systems to address STEM education in Alabama schools. As you read from middle school students who participated in the STEM Showcase, the program is designed to connect Tuscaloosa middle schoolers with resources and support to further their interests in STEM. Additionally, the Realizing the Dream Essay and Art Contest (page 22) furthers Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy in giving Alabama youth an opportunity to express their views on issues of social justice through art and writing. With the funds winning students' schools received, schools like The Alberta School of Performing Arts were able to provide additional opportunities to engage students in the arts, illustrating the reciprocal benefits of these partnerships.

We hope these stories illustrate just how influential the community is with regard to our programs and the merits of community-engaged scholarship.

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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.

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