**Otterbein University Responds to Community Needs**

In response to increasing needs in our community, Otterbein University has established the Center for Community Engagement (CCE). The CCE builds community partnerships and enhances our historical relationships with neighboring communities. The CCE brings together campus volunteerism, service-learning, and community-based action research. Students, faculty, and staff currently support community engagement in five key areas: (1) Civic Responsibility, (2) Environmental Awareness and Protection, (3) Youth Literacy, Education, and Development, (4) Health, and (5) Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness.

The Center supports 96 service-learning courses in 19 different disciplines to provide opportunities for our students to apply their academic skills to community issues. Students also help to strengthen our local community through undergraduate research programs in the sciences, social sciences and communication fields. Each year the CCE hosts one-time service events to introduce students to our local communities. These events include the Fall and Spring Community Plunges, October’s Make-a-Difference Day and our Martin Luther King Day of Service. Partners are also invited to reserve a table in February for our annual Take Your Conscience to Work Non-Profit Job and Internship Fair, a sponsorship with the Center for Career and Professional Development and the Center for Community Engagement.

“Seeing all these smiling faces was a Godsend. I had no idea how I would get it all done. The students were wonderful. They did as much as 20 people. They did what would be a full week’s worth of work.”

- Community Partner

*Otterbein students serve over 70,000 hours a year in our neighboring communities.*
Public school systems in central Ohio have struggled under recent budget cuts with low teacher retention, curriculum revisions, course depletions, and increasing demands for higher levels of academic achievement. To meet the needs of our local public schools, Otterbein has partnered with Columbus City Schools, Newark City Schools, and Westerville City Schools. We involve parents through Family Fun Nights and Family Literacy Nights, including programs for parents on the Pathways to College. We have programs in place at over fifteen schools to meet the following goals:

**Increasing Aspirations toward Higher Education and Leadership**

Our Ubuntu initiative in Columbus City Schools enhances student achievement and aspirations toward college by inviting students to learn about the opportunities Higher Education offers, share financial aid information, career choices, and social activities. Ubuntu is a multi-tiered mentoring program that provides college students and high school students the opportunity to share the college classroom, learning new mentoring strategies to become mentors for middle school youth. Campus Girl Scouts is a partnership between Otterbein and the Girl Scouts of Ohio’s Heartland program to establish nurturing relationships between college students and girls in the Westerville community. Additionally, the Girls Scouts’ Power-Up program partners with Robert Frost Elementary to mentor girls on anti-bullying. A Call to College is a partnership with Newark City Schools where 6th grade students visit Otterbein to experience “A day in the life of a college student.” Our Girls Clubs partner with Walnut Springs Middle School, mentoring 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls. These programs strive to increase the girls’ self-esteem, self-confidence, and teach anti-bullying techniques. Girls are also taught the art of journaling. Each semester the girls visit Otterbein for a day to experience life as a college student and to learn that higher education is truly within their reach. Boyz2MENtors also mentors Walnut Springs middle school boys with the use of games and discussion.

**Enhancing Academic Achievement**

Our service-learning students and community service volunteers provide tutoring and mentoring programs throughout local school systems. We partner with the nationally recognized program America Reads at Avalon Elementary School tutoring at-risk elementary school students in an after-school program. Education majors serve the needs of Head Start programs at CPS feeder elementary schools. Club Whittier, an after school enrichment program at Whittier Elementary School in Westerville, offers tutoring and educational learning opportunities for elementary age children.

**Enriching Functional Literacy**

Both of our partner school systems are serving increasing numbers of ESL students. We are helping to meet these needs through service-learning programs that pair Otterbein students with limited English proficient children at local schools. Otterbein students in a service-learning course hosted a Visit Day and Immigration Simulation for ESL students from a partner class at a Westerville middle school to develop language skills as well as cultural competencies. Another course partnered with Westerville Area Resource Ministries (W. A. R. M.) to build family and youth literacy skills by producing a directory of resources for immigrant family clients.

**Developing Healthy Relationships**

The “It’s Abuse” campaign, in partnership with the Center for Family Safety and Healing, raised awareness among middle school students about the warning signs of physical, verbal, and emotional relationship abuse. A series of programs, specifically designed for teens, educated students about maintaining healthy relationships now, and throughout their adults lives.
Ending Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness

Otterbein works with many agencies to help meet the needs of families living in poverty without homes and challenged daily with hunger.

Feeding the City
We partner with Mid-Ohio Food Bank, Ohio Benefit Bank, Holy Family Soup Kitchen, Westerville Area Resource Ministries (W. A. R. M.), and the annual CropWalk. Otterbein students serve meals at the soup kitchens, work in the food pantries, organize fundraisers and can drives, and decorate grocery bags for area families.

Building Affordable Housing
Otterbein students, faculty, and staff work with Habitat for Humanity in community groups to hammer away at new or old houses constructed by and for lower income families, both locally and across the country. We have partnered with Phoenix of New Orleans to aid in disaster relief and neighborhood revitalization efforts on an Alternative Break trip to New Orleans.

Taking Citizenship Seriously

Through volunteer efforts and service-learning courses Otterbein promotes student awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship and the obligations of freedom. Our programs focus on both the ethical implications of one’s behavior and the role of a socially responsible person. Students develop (1) an understanding of the root causes of social problems, (2) an appreciation for a social change model of leadership and the role of citizen groups, and (3) cross-cultural communication and advocacy skills.

Serving the Civic City
Students in service-learning courses prepare voter education workshops for schools, churches, and other community programs. Our students serve as poll workers, run voter registration drives, and canvas the city with voter information. The Cardinal Corps also provides our community with a one-stop “answer the call” service, bringing twenty student citizens to assist at moment’s notice with a community problem.

Raising their Voices
Otterbein students take part in the national Raise Your Voice and Rock the Vote campaigns to engage students in dialogues about current issues. Students gather for Town Halls and Coffee Hours to address civic and social justice issues and plan a course of community action. Student chapters of Rotaract and Circle K work with local Westerville civic associations on programs to strengthen the community.

“Working with Otterbein students . . . it lessens our burden”. – Children’s Hunger Alliance

- Every day in Ohio, one in six children are hungry or at risk of hunger.
- 14.2% of our children are living in poverty.
- Over 21,000 families in Franklin County are living in poverty housing.
Building Healthier Communities

Students in service-learning courses across campus are addressing the health needs of our communities through direct service with OhioHealth, the Columbus AIDS Task Force and other wellness programs.

Engaging with our Senior Citizens
Grandma’s House brings students and seniors together at Friendship Village, a senior living community, to document the personal histories of the residents. The program fosters intergenerational understanding when students and their senior mentors participate in recreational activities, themed parties, and bingo games.

Expanding Knowledge and Partnerships
The Otterbein Health Summit brings community partners, faculty, staff and students together to explore critical health and wellness issues in the community. Panel members discussed the importance of internships and service-learning experiences in the health care profession and promoted student partnerships with health organizations throughout the community.

Nursing in the Neighborhood
Otterbein offers service-learning courses through the Nursing department where students practice health assessments, surgical skills, child-bearing nursing skills, and community health care in clinical and community settings throughout the Columbus metro area, in Mexico, Appalachia, Honduras, and Alaska.

Cultivating a Green Future
The Otterbein University Community Garden is an educational resource for the community and provides produce to Westerville Area Resource Ministries (W.A.R.M). Service-learning students work with the Westerville City Parks, Keep Franklin County Beautiful, and Columbus Parks and Recreation to ensure a clean and usable landscape for community residents. Plan-It Earth is a weekly program focused on campus recycling, environmental awareness, and area clean-ups. This student-led organization partners with Otterbein Lake to preserve this local natural habitat. The Otterbein Animal Coalition students care for abandoned animals at the Franklin County Dog Shelter.

Join Otterbein University in service today!