



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS & SERVICE LEARNING



Annual Report
2020-2021

Overview

The Office of Volunteer Programs & Service Learning is dedicated to fulfilling the University's core values and guiding principles. They define what the University stands for and are, therefore, of intrinsic value to the community.



Flowing from the long tradition of Catholic universities, the University's core values are the following:

- Preservation, transmission and development of the Catholic intellectual and liberal arts traditions.
- Commitment to excellence in all that we do.
- Pursuit of truth and knowledge as intrinsically valuable through teaching and scholarship.
- Promotion of the common good of society.
- Recognition of the dignity and worth of every human being.

Welcome!

Dear Friends,

It has been an "unprecedented" year for the Office of Volunteer Programs & Service Learning! Although this year looked very different as we navigated safety regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the office was still busy with ongoing and new programs. VP&SL was involved in creating the SHU Shares initiative, a student-led program designed to address food insecurity on campus. We also kicked off the first SHU National Summer Service Challenge, engaging students, staff, faculty and alumni in service opportunities in their home communities over the summer months. VP&SL continues to collaborate with numerous offices and departments across campus, including the newly established Multicultural Center.

Community Partnerships

Amid these changes, we remained committed to our communities, on both a local and global level. Our students engaged with the Bridgeport community in various capacities, including collecting donations and mentoring youth in a virtual capacity. They have also had the opportunity to virtually engage in global community service opportunities with our international service-learning programs. Collectively, these programs support the SHU community in accomplishing the goal of providing over 100,000 hours of community engagement work.

Service & Programming

In addition to our community partners, our focus is also directed at the success of our students. We are dedicated to providing them with volunteer opportunities, as well as administering financial awards and work study positions that promote their involvement both on and off-campus. Although students were not able to engage in on-site volunteer work due to COVID-19 safety regulations, all students were provided with the opportunity to serve the community remotely. As a staff, we continue to offer guidance and reflection to students looking to get involved and find their place in the community.

Our role in living out and promoting the mission of the university begins with our students. It is our hope that you will enjoy reading the following report to learn about how the office continued partnerships amid the COVID-19 pandemic and developed new opportunities. When your schedule permits, we hope that you will carve out some time and visit the office

Sincerely,

Annie Wendel, Assistant Director

Arlete Perez Paez, Program Manager



Due to COVID-19 pandemic safety regulations, the following VP&SL programs were offered virtually:

- Community Connections Pre-fall Program (August 2020)
- Volunteer & Work Study Fair (September 2020)
- Thanksgiving Food Drive & Adopt a Family (October 2020)
- C.U.R.T.I.S. Week (January 2021)
- Global Service Learning programs to Italy and Costa Rica (January 2021)
- Academic Mentoring Program (AMP)
- SHU Shares
- SHU National Summer Service Challenge



Pioneer Service Grant

Pioneer Service Grant:

312 Students - 10,145 Hours

The Pioneer Service Grant is a service/financial aid-based grant available for first-year students. Students who receive the grant have shown commitment to service prior to their arrival to Sacred Heart University, and desire to continue these service efforts into their educational career. The Pioneer Service Grant requires recipients to complete 30 hours of service by the end of the academic school year. These hours consist of both social action projects and civic learning projects, both of which are focused on community-based efforts within the greater Bridgeport community.

Community Scholars Grant:

18 Students - 1,476 Hours

The Community Scholars Grant is another service/financial aid-based grant offered within the Volunteer Programs & Service Learning Office. This grant is available for rising upperclassmen only, and students are allowed to reapply each year. Students are selected based on their previous commitment to service, and their desire to pursue a life-long dedication to volunteering.

Community-based Work-study

57 community-based work-study students

Over 9,000 hours dedicated to working with the community

Students who had a community-based work study job had the opportunity to help those in the local community. Our Pioneers virtually tutored students and helped kids from the Bridgeport area navigate what has been a difficult year for all.

One of the sites SHU students worked closely with this year was Urban Impact, an organization that offers youth from the Bridgeport PT Barnum public housing complex educational opportunities through in-school & after-school activities. Many of our work study students also helped out with the Janus Center for Youth in Crisis, which provides middle and high school students in the Bridgeport community with facilities that will aid their learning.

Sana M., a freshman at SHU, feels like she has already made a difference in our community: “Tutoring these students has showcased the importance of helping those in need and it is very rewarding to be able to see their academic growth overtime. This opportunity has taught me the virtue of perseverance, dedication, and commitment in order to succeed.”

Sarah C., a sophomore, has found out just how impactful she can be: “I really enjoyed my work study this year and felt that it gave me a whole new perspective on the community. I worked one-on-one with high school students in the Bridgeport school system and helped to guide them through the college process or tutor them in subjects they struggled with. This was a great opportunity which helped me work on my interpersonal skills and professional communication. I felt as though I was making a real impact on the lives of the students that I mentored which was incredible.”

Community Connections

In August 2020, the VP&SL Office introduced freshmen students to campus through the Community Connections pre-fall program. This year's week-long program was held virtually and introduced students to a variety of social justice themes, including education and youth development, food and housing insecurity, supporting the marginalized, environmental justice, and diversity, equity and inclusion. Participants had the opportunity reflect with one another, after completing service projects at home, including filming read aloud videos for Bridgeport Public School students, making book and school supply donations for Mercy Learning Center, assembling toiletry kits for Bridgeport Rescue Mission, writing a letter to senior citizens at Northbridge Healthcare Center and participating in outdoor clean-ups in their local communities.

“Partaking in Community Connections was a wonderful experience to commence my college life. Community service has always been something I am truly passionate about and is the reason I was so drawn to SHU. I loved hearing from leaders of local Bridgeport service organizations about different social issues and how to get involved while engaging in service to help each perspective organization. This week allowed me to understand all that is around me and inspired me to lead service projects and get more involved in the community around me!” - Dominique Scerback ‘24



Fall Programs

Adopt a Family

This year's Adopt a Family program was done in October with a twist - the theme was "Christmas in October," as students returned home before the Thanksgiving holiday. Due to COVID-19, students donated gift cards to families in need to purchase gifts for their loved ones for Christmas. Students raised \$10,000 for those in need for the holiday season.

Thanksgiving Food Drive

Once again for this past year's Thanksgiving Food Drive the VP&SL Office partnered with Student Government and were able to donate 400 meals for families in need for Thanksgiving. Other donations were collected, such as canned goods to complete a Thanksgiving meal! The SHU community came together to donate goods for the local Bridgeport community.



Winter Programs

C.U.R.T.I.S. Week

C.U.R.T.I.S. Week was held virtually from January 11-14, 2021. Nineteen students, 4 graduate assistants and staff from the VP&SL, Campus Ministry and Multicultural Affairs participated in the winter break program. Interfaith and community leaders, including Reverend Sara Smith, Multicultural Affairs Director, Rob Johnson, Father Saj Thengumkudiyil, and Rabbi Marcello spoke on various topics throughout the week. Students reflected on what it means to be in community and how we can recognize similarities rather than differences in one another. Additional activities encouraged students to ask themselves, “who am I?” and “what is my life’s purpose?” Students also took part in service projects such as making fleece blankets for youth in foster care, writing advocacy letters for the Write for Rights Campaign, and brainstormed fun enrichment activities for children on the Sioux Tribe Reservation with Simply Smiles.

Students were encouraged to step outside of their comfort zones and reflect on the connection between faith and service: “When first hearing about CURTIS week, I was slightly hesitant to sign up since I myself am not very religious. However, it was so much more than just hearing about a specific religion. Instead other participants and I were able to hear from leaders in a different religious group and how their communities have contributed and helped the community surrounding them. Each speaker contributed in their own unique way and even offered various ways in which Sacred Heart students can become involved regardless of their own faith.” - Mackenzie Surowic, class of 2024



Spring Programs

Global Service Learning Programs:

In January, 18 undergraduate and graduate students joined the VP&SL Office staff and faculty advisors by traveling virtually with the annual Global Service Learning programs.

Costa Rica

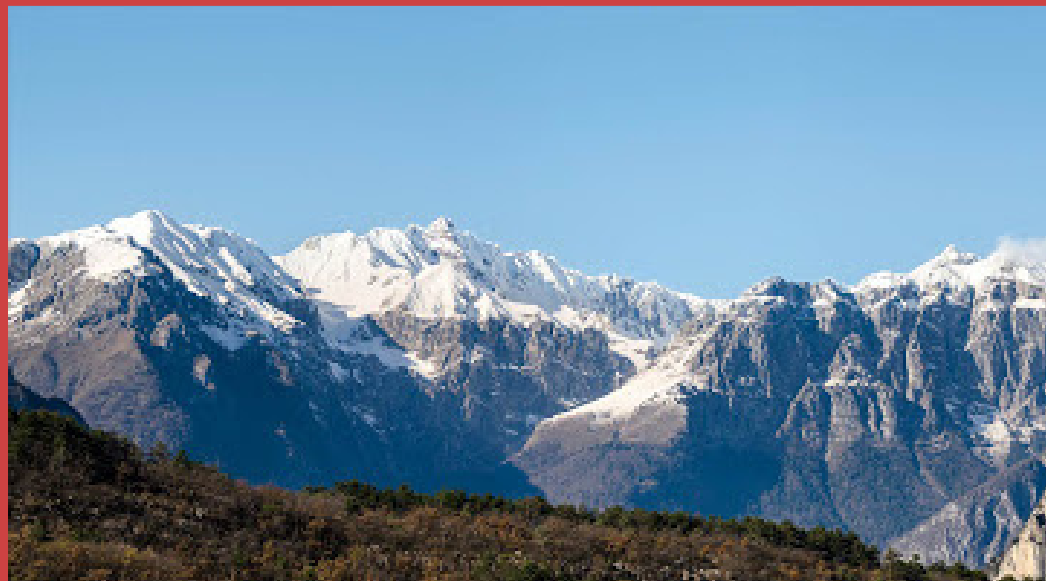
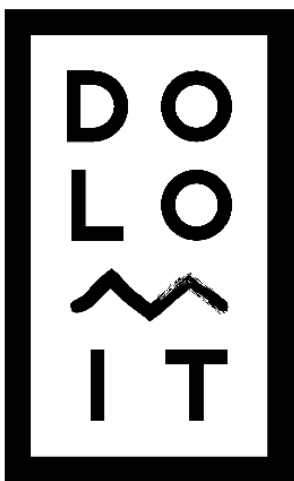
VP&SL Office Manager, Arlete Perez Paez, along with faculty advisor, Professor Carrie McCracken (Social Work) led students through a virtual experience in Costa Rica, exploring human rights topics with international partner, Viva Nicaragua. Student participants learned about culture and society, including language, food, and traditions, discussed social justice and human rights issues such as health, migration, and gender equality, and gained a better understanding of marginalization, oppression, privilege, and power and challenged biases on issues related to diversity and social justice. “This pandemic has limited us on the ways that we are able to volunteer in person, but I am proud to say that 10 Sacred Heart students did their best to volunteer, learn, and open their hearts to new experiences and to new people. That is a wonderful new way to continue to build our international relationships and to continue to demonstrate to the world that we truly do have a heart,” said VP&SL Office Manager, Arlete Perez Paez.

Students reflected on the impact of the program and how they choose to continue their involvement: “My experience with the virtual Costa Rica service-learning program was unforgettable and opened me up to so many new opportunities as well as a new mindset about the world around me. Considering I am minoring in Spanish, I have always been eager to immerse myself in the culture of Spanish speaking countries, and this program allowed me to do just that. Though it was virtual, I was able to talk to such inspiring people about social issues in Costa Rica, as well as witness the beauty of the Costa Rican culture. Because of this program, I now teach the children of Ortega English lessons every Friday. I am forever grateful for how life-changing this week-long program was,” said first year student, Cara Grill.

Italy.

VP&SL Office Assistant Director, Annie Wendel, collaborated with Dr. Mark Congdon (Communications) in partnering with Amizade and Dolomit, community partners serving the local community in Trentino, Italy. Student participants interacted with guest speakers and Italian residents who spoke about issues such as sustainable housing, carbon footprint, tourism and local entrepreneurial projects. By the end of the virtual week long trip, participants interviewed stakeholders and created business memos for Dolomit to use in their post-pandemic marketing strategy.

Even though the GSL program was done virtually, it was still a priority for students to participate in the program: “In signing up for this class, I was sad that in person global service learning was unavailable this spring. Yet, traveling and cross-cultural exploration was extremely important to me, and I couldn’t miss another opportunity to do just that, even over Zoom,” said Jenna Calebreae, class of 2021. “I found great purpose in my previous travel experiences, and I wanted to expand on that with the Trentino service learning program. Increasing local and visitor knowledge of environmental justice is crucial to tending to the beautiful landscapes and increasing the region’s attraction.”



Mentoring Programs

Academic Mentoring Program (AMP)

The VP&SL Office celebrated the completion of its nineteenth year of implementing the Academic Mentoring Program (AMP) at John Winthrop Middle School. While Covid-19 restrictions changed the platform of AMP from in-person to online, SHU students navigated these challenges and adapted the program to ensure AMP's continued success! The program wrapped up with 21 Sacred Heart University mentors working with 28 John Winthrop student mentees in grades 6-8. Funded by the Jones-Zimmermann Foundation, mentors provide daily academic and social support, in addition to offering enrichment activities, inducing career professionals as guest speakers, homework and study skills, and goal-setting techniques. These activities help to promote life skills like teambuilding and communication. This year, AMP mentees enjoyed enrichment activities such as a yoga session by a certified yoga instructor and a DIY mason jar cheesecake cooking activity. Additionally, many of SHU's athletic teams came to speak on their experiences, such as players from the following teams: Football, Lacrosse, Basketball, Baseball, Dance, Soccer, Color Guard. While AMP was conducted virtually, mentees were still able to experience academic support and engaging enrichment activities with their peers and SHU mentors.



Mentor Testimonials

"The AMP program has been a great program to be a part of. This year is my first year of AMP and I was quite nervous about how it was going to go. I didn't know if I would be able to make a difference or be able to connect with my mentee but all my fears went away with the first day of AMP. I am the mentor to Mentee A, and he is a bright and funny student. He's always willing to put in the work each session and always finds moments to make it fun. It's been a blessing to be a part of this program. "

- Sydney Worthen-Jenkins '23

"It has been such a pleasure working with the students of John Winthrop because they have brought so much joy to these tough times. This is my first year being a mentor so I have not had the chance to experience AMP in the "normal way." This would normally be disappointing however, I have had the chance to meet so many amazing kids and despite being online, we all still have amazing connections. I can't wait to continue working with these kids!"

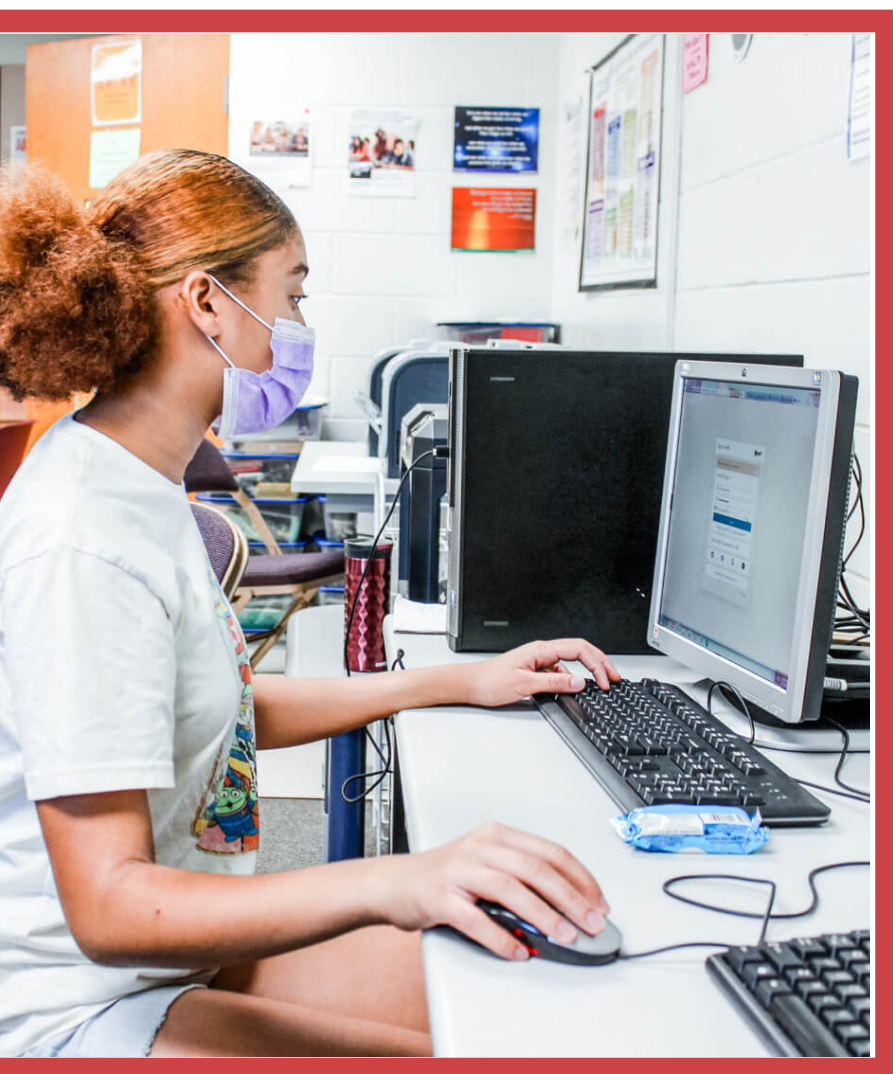
- Sara Webel '22

"This is my second year as a mentor for AMP, and even though we are virtual, it is still such an amazing program to be a part of. My mentee is so much fun to talk to each week, and we have created a strong bond over the past year. He has grown so much as a student, and he pushes himself each week to do the best that he can with his schoolwork. Joining AMP was the best decision I have made, and I wish I began as a freshman."

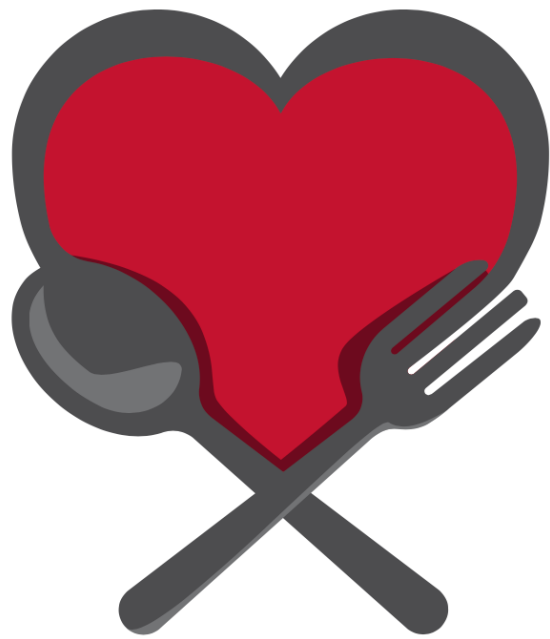
-Megan Hartnett '21

L.E.A.D. - Learn. Evolve. Aspire. Dream.

Led by SHU student mentors, LEAD focuses on college preparation and activities for high schools students in the Hall House Post-Secondary Prep Program. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Hall House students met virtually with SHU mentors to work on college applications, resume building and job interview skills.



SHU student mentors highlight the benefits of this program: “L.E.A.D. is a great experience that I am so glad I did this year. Working with these driven high school students, even though it is virtual, is so refreshing and rewarding. They are so excited to learn and are so hopeful for their futures,” said **Courtney Cardona '21.**



**SHU
SHARES**

SHU Shares

We are extremely proud of our new student-led initiative, SHU Shares! SHU Shares works to address and bring awareness to the food insecurity needs within our Sacred Heart University community. Studies have found that 30-40% of college students nationwide experience some sort of food insecurity.

Through SHU Shares, contactless donations can be made to students in need, who can make confidential requests online. SHU Shares strives toward inclusivity on our campus and helps to remove the stigma associated with food insecurity. Established in 2021, the program works to address long-term needs through a community-based approach in collaboration with student leadership, University staff, SHU dining, alumni and donors.

Student-to-student support is something that we look forward to continuing as a university. Student leaders joined us for weekly virtual meetings to plan the roll-out of SHU Shares. In our pilot year, we are proud to announce that over 1,000 meal swipes were donated by students, for students. Not only did we see an outpouring of support by the current students, we also received over \$26,000 in donations from Sacred Heart alumni, staff and members of the Board of Trustees.

Important Campus Collaborators Include

- Student Life
- Dining Services
- Volunteer Programs and Service Learning
- Department of Marketing and Communications
 - Alumni Relations
 - IT and Technology
 - Board of Trustees
 - Student Services
- Graduate, International, and Veteran Affairs
 - Academic Affairs



Community Partner Highlights

During such a challenging time, keeping our students and Bridgeport community safe is our biggest priority. We've maintained our relationships with our community by supporting a variety of initiatives. Although service looked a little different this year, our students have remained dedicated to providing important community-based service. Whether the service was donation-based or virtual, we were able to make a difference in our community.

Colombia Partnership

The VP&SL graduate assistants had the opportunity to engage virtually with other university students from Uniminuto in Bogota, Colombia. During these virtual sessions, Colombian participants shared parts of their culture, including the most popular dishes in Colombia, as well as food from the U.S. they have tried or heard about. Our SHU graduate assistants also had an opportunity to share their experiences of what it is like to grow up in the U.S. They even got to practice some of their Spanish! The VP&SL Office is looking forward to continuing our partnership with Uniminuto and other universities around the world.



The Women Warrior Project

Center for Family Justice

The VP&SL Office partnered with Student Government to create a feminine product drive to assist The Center for Family Justice located in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Due to the incredible support from the Sacred Heart University community, we were able to collect over 60 bags worth of items that will be given directly to those in need.

Mother's Day Drive

United Congressional Church

From March 2021 to April 2021, the VP&SL Office asked students to bring donations to help with the United Congressional Church's Mother's Day Donation Drive. With the help of student involvement, we were able to assist 400 families! Students shared their enthusiasm for participating: "Taking part in the Mother's Day Drive was one of my favorite experiences that I have taken part in for the SHU PSG grant. Giving back to our local community members in need through a food pantry service is one amazing opportunity that I am very thankful to have taken part in."

- **Kayla Campisi, Class of 2024**

Clinton Avenue Community Garden Clean Up

During the spring semester, SHU students were able to volunteer in-person at the Clinton Avenue Community Garden, while promoting the goals of the organization, including direct action to physically create, occupy land and teach gardening opportunities for and by Bridgeport people who desire to grow their own food by creating more and better community gardens. This garden provides healthy, sustainable dietary options to residents, while positively impacting their community.

Discovery Museum

Following CDC guidelines, the Discovery Museum opened their doors to volunteers in spring 2021, Students were able to assist with the Discovery Museum's STEM literacy learning programs by preparing materials for special programming and helping with the maintenance and supervision for scientific demonstrations and activities.

ENGIN International Student Language Buddy

ENGIN is a nonprofit initiative providing free, high-quality speaking practice for English learners in Ukraine while offering English speakers all over the world a flexible and rewarding volunteer opportunity. Many Sacred Heart University students are involved in this program and have found success and enjoyment out of their weekly sessions. Students enjoyed the cultural experience: “The ENGIN program is a great way to make global connections with students in Ukraine who need additional assistance practicing their English-speaking skills. It is such an easy and fun way to help others out and you learn a lot about the cultural differences and similarities between you and the student.”

- **Sana Mohammad '24**





Connect with us!

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