OACS January Newsletter

Each month the Active Citizenship & Service Newsletter will feature upcoming service events, immersion programs, trans-institutional partnerships, and learning opportunities from our office, our student organizations, and our community partners. Stay tuned in to OACS as your resource for community service at Vanderbilt!

Welcome Back Students!

The Office of Active Citizenship & Service welcomes back our student body as we enter 2015. Good luck with all your service projects as we head into spring. Let's make it the best semester yet!
Featured Organization: Alternative Winter Break

Alternative Winter Break has completed another successful year of meaningful service with community partners across the United States and in Puerto Rico! AWB is a great opportunity for students to learn about social and environmental justice issues and how local partners are working towards making change in their communities. Each trip consists of a dozen students involved in a particular issue, such as animal welfare, environmental sustainability, homelessness, health care, poverty, or education. The ultimate goal of AWB is to promote social action, interaction with local communities, and critical thinking about the experience. The organization seeks to develop awareness and promote solutions for societal issues that affect us all.

Leading up to AWB, each participant learns about his/her site and gets to know the group in weekly pre-trip meetings. During AWB, participants are immersed in their focus issue through direct service. Alongside their service work, members participate in unique group activities that are designed to create an atmosphere conducive to establishing bonds of friendship. As part of a diverse group of Vanderbilt students, they learn from and become friends with people from an array of backgrounds. In addition to promoting teamwork, the group’s activities foster personal reflection and self-discovery. This year, each service trip offered an informative week-long experience that challenged students to think critically. Highlights include:

"Abilities First's mission is true to its name, as it advocates, enhances and positively impacts the lives of individuals with disabilities in Springfield, MO."
AWB aided the organization throughout the week while learning about disabilities and the beauty found in differences. -Rebecca Luterman

-In addition to rebuilding homes, Youth Rebuilding New Orleans is also building up the community. The NOLA AWB group worked on homes that will be sold at a discounted rate to teachers who come to New Orleans to work in inner city schools. This ensures community development and stability in the rebuilt neighborhood. -Kara Wilson

-From entertaining patients to sorting toy donations to assisting in quality improvement studies, the Little Rock AWB group worked to spread joy to families at the Arkansas Children’s Hospital. They also partnered with VSVS to bring hands-on science lessons to long-term patients and local elementary school students, inspiring these young minds to pursue higher education. -Anna Zhao

-The AWB Everglades group, working with Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve, removed invasive species on land and in water. They spotted manatees, befriended alligators, and learned what real camping is all about: friendship. And s’mores. -Kat Dodge

After participants return home, they reflect on their experiences, carry new perspectives, share knowledge, and get involved in new activities. Thus, their service has an influence beyond the direct impact on the communities served. The service varies from site to site, but no matter where a participant goes, he or she will have an experience that is unforgettable.
This month, OACS Administrative Assistant Holly Jones (above right) had the opportunity to sit down with OACS Program Coordinator Erika Larson to ask her questions about her work and her life outside the office.

Erika, can you tell me a little about yourself?

I grew up in Golden, Colorado. I have big family, including four older sisters, three nieces and a nephew, and a niece on the way. My parents were both teachers. My mom taught children with vision impairments and my father taught in special education classes. That's probably why I find myself in education.

I went to the University of Colorado at Boulder for my undergrad where I studied Political Science and the Study and Practice of Leadership as it relates to social and environmental justice. My first service-learning experience was an intensive two year community leadership program that included course work, non-profit internships and month long service-learning immersion experiences. My favorite courses were Facilitating Peaceful Community Change and Non-Violent Social Movements. By the time I graduated, I knew that I wanted some sort of career where I could combine my knowledge of political science with engaging in every day decisions that can have the largest impact on people and the earth.

I graduated from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College with a Master's in International Education Policy and Management. I've always been interested in service-learning, especially in an international context. I have found a home here at OACS as I am able to work alongside students who are passionate and driven to make meaningful change both locally and globally. I love asking questions and I find the students that I advise to be equally curious and determined to find alternative solutions to social and
environmental justice issues.

What all do you do in the OACS office?

OACS is a fast-paced office with never a dull moment. Everything is a team effort and the collaborative environment is inspiring. I spearhead a few of our programs including the OACS Student Advisory Board and the OACS Global Service Program in South Africa. I also manage and help coordinate the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and the Stigma of HIV-AIDS Program to South Africa. I am able to advise student groups. We each advise anywhere between 12-16 student groups. The day goes by quickly and I often leave wishing I had more time.

Tell me a little bit about the service organization Alternative Winter Break.

AWB is a very powerful organization, in that it provides a space for students to explore community development in communities outside of Nashville, and then apply their knowledge back in Nashville when they return. I work directly with their leadership board who has performed beyond expectations. The organization of the 12 service experiences takes a lot of detailed work and it is inspiring to see students succeed in coordinating this while excelling in their coursework and additional extra-curricular activities. The Vanderbilt Alternative Winter Break student group is actually one part of a larger student movement. Break Away is the national non-profit that fosters growth and support of Alternative Break programs across the nation. Each chapter is centered on their Active Citizen Continuum where students develop through direct service and reflection from a member of a community to an active citizen that consciously and intentionally seeks change.

What are looking forward to this year?

The spring semester is filled with so much excitement. To name a few, I’m most looking forward to the MLK Weekend of Service, The Global Service Program Seminars, VIEW and all the student service groups that have exciting programming starting as early as the first week back.

If you could meet any historical figure, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

Oh my goodness, such a good question. I have a few, of course. I think I would want to meet Frida Kahlo or Paulo Freire. Can I meet them both? Separately though, as I would have different questions for each. They have both influenced me in different ways. Freire has had a large impact on my education and the value I place on participatory education and reflection. Kahlo as an individual and in her art has impacted me personally, and I appreciate her passion and ability to express herself.
Erika, thank you for the giving our readers a chance to get to know you a little better. You are so passionate about service-leaning and such a wonderful asset to the OACS office! Thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview you.

MLK Weekend of Service, Jan. 16-19

OACS is excited to begin a new year of outreach in the Nashville community! Join us for our annual MLK Weekend of Service on January 16-19th. We invite you to set up a service project now for your organization! The deadline is Wednesday, January 7, 2015. Please visit the OACS website for more details!

Redefine – Still Accepting Applications

OACS is proud to launch the Redefine Program in collaboration with ISSS. In this program, American and international students will immerse themselves in the conceptualization of community service as it relates to U.S.
communities and how or if the same idea of service translates across cultures. Participants will engage in three seminars led by experts in service-learning, community development and international student engagement. Each seminar will be complemented with a community service opportunity at the Martha O’Bryan Center. International and U.S. students are encouraged to sign up and benefit from a cross-cultural dialogue and experience centered on community development. Applications are being accepted now! Please visit Redefine’s main webpage for more information or contact Dave Brown at david.brown@vanderbilt.edu with additional questions.

Synergy – Mentors Needed

Looking to increase your involvement, gain experience in the classroom, or make a difference in the Nashville community? Synergy, an undergraduate tutoring organization, invites you to join us in mentoring students this semester! We will be visiting Glencliff High School on Thursdays to assist their credit-recovery program, and we’ll volunteer at our Corinthian Baptist Church site (K-12) on Wednesdays. Please contact Caley at caley.e.caito@vanderbilt.edu with any questions.
Volunteers Around the World – Accepting Applications

VAW at Vanderbilt is going to the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC! The Medical Outreach Trip is 2 weeks long and consists of six days of mobile clinics, one education day, and free days. Dates for the trip are May 11-25 (tentative).

International Trip Participant and Site Leader Applications are due January 16 at 11:59 pm. Please visit our website for more information about our international trip and costs. The Site Leader Form can be found here. The Trip Participant Form can be found here. For more information contact Oluwasijibomi at oluwasijibomi.e.oluwadara@vanderbilt.edu

VSVS – Middle School Lesson Instructors Needed

Love kids? Love science? Want to inspire young minds? Sign up for Vanderbilt Student Volunteers for Science – individually or with friends! What do VSVS members do? Each team of about four volunteers teaches
four different one-hour lessons in the same metro middle school classroom throughout the semester. Training, materials, and transportation are provided. Sign up here by January 15.

Thank you to the 480+ students who volunteered last semester! We reached 123 classrooms and 3,444 kids. Join us in our 20th year of making an impact.

Save the date: MLK Weekend of Service event - prepare kits for rural schools on January 17, 1-3pm in the VSVS lab.

 Relay for Life – Accepting Board Applications

Relay For Life is happy to announce that we are accepting board applications for 2015. This past year we raised over $109,000 for the American Cancer Society, which was the most successful Relay in Vanderbilt history. If you are passionate about finding a cure for cancer and want to join one of the largest charitable organizations on campus, consider applying! Applications can be found here and are due on Sunday, January 11 at 11:59pm. Please contact Zach (zachary.l.gentry@vanderbilt.edu) or Brenda (brenda.abreu.molnar@vanderbilt.edu) if you have any questions!
Alpha Phi Omega

Alpha Phi Omega had a successful fall semester. Our service fraternity completed over 770 hours of community service and we hope to increase hours in the spring. During the Fall Weekend of Service, Alpha Phi Omega created and assembled goodie bags for the Children’s Hospital to distribute on Halloween. We held social events and strengthened our family system to build camaraderie among brothers. Our retreat this fall was to Chattanooga and brothers had a great time bonding with one another. We look forward to expanding our brotherhood with new members this semester!
UNICEF – Interest Meetings in January

YOU can help UNICEF in their quest to put Children First. College students have a vital role to play in helping the world’s children survive. Please stop by one of our interest meetings to learn more about the UNICEF Campus Initiative at Vanderbilt. Free cookies will be provided!

Interest Meetings:

Thursday, January 8 at 7pm in Buttrick 301

Tuesday, January 13 at 7pm in Buttrick 301
Tennessee Conference on Volunteerism & Service-Learning

The Tennessee Conference on Volunteerism and Service-Learning is now accepting proposals for workshops and showcase exhibits for our upcoming conference, March 8-10, in Franklin, TN. Workshop sessions last 1 hour and 15 minutes, and include a directed focus on selected topics with interaction and reflection among participants. Showcase exhibits focus on particular programs and projects, will be displayed in the exhibit hall, and are staffed during showcase hours at the conference.

Proposals are due Monday, January 12. Please submit your completed proposal to volunteer.tennessee@tn.gov. The proposal application can be found here. Have questions? Contact volunteer.tennessee@tn.gov for more information about submitting your proposal.

Vanderbilt Summer Academy

Vanderbilt Summer Academy is seeking a team of proctors for our 2015 summer program. All interested students should head to our website and fill out an application by February 2.
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