



THE CENTER FOR COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Alternative Break

Carla Jensen



With funding and oversight from the Center for College and Community Engagement (3CE), student leaders in Alternative Breaks plan and lead group service programs during college breaks. Alternative Breaks participants completed 3,648 service hours during the 2022-23 academic year. In Fall 2023, the 3CE aligned the fall Alternative Breaks with First Year Seminar community engagement themes, to enhance alignment with community engaged learning.

In December, 36 students, faculty, and staff participated in Alternative Breaks at three sites: Environmental Stewardship, including invasive species removal, in Biscayne and Everglades National Parks in Florida; Disaster Recovery with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance in Fort Myers, Florida; and Child and Youth Wellness with St. Jude's Children's Hospital and Serve 901 in Memphis, Tennessee. Ella Cusack, who participated in the Disaster Assistance break offered the following reflection: "Going to another community really puts our own community into perspective. I have more awareness about what we struggle with and I am on the outlook for existing programs to address those struggles. One of the things we talked about over the break was that Alt Breaks is meant to help you engage more at home, and the more you engage at home with various things, the more skills you will have to be effective volunteering. That really sticks with me. I would like to build on this by continuing Alt Breaks as well as searching for similar work opportunities at home."

Upcoming Alternative Spring Breaks include: Environmental Stewardship at Mammoth Caves National Park, KY; Disability Support with United Cerebral Palsy in Tennessee; and Animal Welfare with Horse Creek Animal Sanctuary in Tennessee.

Upcoming Events

Hope House Dinners

January, February 5:00-7:00 (Every day)

Make a meal at the shelter and eat with the residents. Ingredients provided and cooking instructions if need be.

Student Choreography Concert

February 2 from 7:30-9:30

Alma College Dance students and the Theatre and Dance Department present all-new dance works created and performed by students.

Gratiot County Players Production of Little Women

February 4 from 2:30-4:30 at the Strand Theatre

Black History Month Hall Of Fame Kickoff

February 5 from 12:00-1:00 In TVD Rotunda

Join us for light refreshments as you explore our Hall of Fame.

Recess-Therapy Dog Nights

February 7 from 6:00-8:00

Therapy Dogs are back on campus and ready for your attention in our new Learning Commons.

Mother/Son Dance

February 10 from 3:00-5:00

Located at the Alma Elks Club, 610 Warwick Drive. Hosted by Children's Discovery Academy, all funds matched by United Way. Join us for refreshments, music, and a photo booth! Boys are invited to bring Mom, Aunt, Grandma, or other special female guests. +\$5 for additional family members. Check out their Facebook page for more information/registration and ticket sales.

Black History Month - Soup and Substance

February 12 from 12:00-1:00 (Faculty/Staff)

All faculty and staff are welcome to join us for lunch and conversation about Black History Month.

Valentine's Day

February 14

Alma College Theatre Presents Airness

February 15-18 from 7:30-9:30 in the Alma College Heritage Center

Playwright Chelsea Marcantel introduces us to a wild cast of air guitar competitors!

Alma Chamber Orchestra Winter Concert

February 18 from 3:00-5:00

Spend an afternoon with a live orchestra performing classical masterpieces by master composers.

Alma College Choir Concert

February 22 from 7:30p.m.-9:00p.m.

Enjoy an evening of acappella choral music.

Mom to Mom Sale

February 24 from 9:00a.m.-1:00p.m.

At the first Presbyterian Church. Hosted by Children's Discovery Academy, all funds matched by United Way. \$2/per person admission. Check out their Facebook page for more information on this event.

Students Meet the Arts!

Dr. Sheryle Dixon

When students were placed in their First Year Seminars, they became part of a theme they had not chosen. My students became part of an Arts theme - not necessarily the first choice of a number of my students! From the first year orientation when they toured the Alma Community Art Center, the Strand Theater, and the murals around Alma, to the final assignment, where groups of students presented posters displaying various local arts organizations, the students got involved and were willing to learn about an area that they hadn't been involved in before.



One of the activities the students were involved in was, in groups of four, interviewing representatives from Alma Community Art Center, Gratiot County Players, Pine River Arts Council, Keep Alma Beautiful, the City of Alma, and Art Reach of Mid Michigan. Using the information they gleaned from these interviews, the students created posters where they shared the histories of these organizations, the benefits they provide for the residents of Gratiot, the challenges they face, and how Alma College can get involved in meeting these challenges! Members of the arts organization expressed their delight in the interviews they had with our students - a successful engagement by both the college and the community!

Promoting Our Community

Dr. Benjamin Peterson

In Gratiot County we are blessed with a vibrant community of businesses and non-profits. While collaborating with the Chamber of Commerce, Greater Gratiot Development, and the Gratiot Community Foundation, a group of Alma College students in their First Year Seminar imagined and realized innovative ways to share this vibrancy with others. Student's projects ranged from cartoons featuring an adorable dog who explores Alma's downtown area, to short documentaries about our historical businesses. From this experience our students provided some new ideas about how we can tell the story of our community while learning critical and job-ready skills that will serve them in college and beyond. Perhaps most importantly, the students developed a real appreciation of and connection to our community. As each of these students write their own story at Alma College, this sense of connection grounds them not only in their dorms and classrooms, but in Gratiot County.

Child and Youth Advocacy

Dr. Elizabeth Cameron & Dr. Prathim-
Maya Dora-Laskey

Students in Dr. Elizabeth Cameron and Dr. Prathim-Maya Dora-Laskey's First Year Seminar classes worked on the theme of child and youth advocacy with community partners from Alma Public Schools, Child Advocacy of Gratiot County, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Mid-Michigan.

Before the start of the Fall term, students undertook a tour of the Alma Public Schools district on a school bus with Superintendent Stacey Criner; a tour of Child Advocacy with President Jennifer Stambaugh and Event Coordinator Staci Bigelow; and met Executive Director Jeff Calhoun of Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Mid-Michigan. The classes hosted several members from all three agencies for an interview and Q&A in October 2023 to learn about their missions, goals, and challenges. Once students understood the significant literacy and resource challenges many children and youth face in our community, they decided to establish a book drive and personal hygiene drive for each of the agencies.



Initially, students put up flyers announcing the drives and placed donation boxes around campus. Unfortunately, they received very few donations. After a week of this, each group did some quick thinking and problem-solved by appealing to their social media and family, setting up Venmo accounts, hanging new flyers, and calling on other community institutions such as Masonic Home, Alma College Chapel, and Mid-Michigan Health for donations. The groups' new campaigns were exceedingly successful and their final contributions to the three agencies were approximately 60 personal hygiene bundles (over 600 items) and over 250 books with cards and personal notes to encourage readers.

The students learned about their Alma community and the needs of the community in which they live; they also gained valuable skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and active listening skills, learning to pivot and augment their plans when necessary. They gained a deep appreciation for the value of service and the difference they could make in the lives of others, claiming they "felt amazing" and that the experience was "very fulfilling."



Housing & Disaster Relief

Dr. Phillip Andre

In the Fall of 2023, all First Year Seminar sections had the opportunity to engage with local community partners to better learn of their initiatives and the greater issues impacting our friends and neighbors. Our section was fortunate to meet with leaders from Gratiot County Hope House, Gratiot Emergency Housing, and the Salvation Army. Through a series of tours, panel discussions, and interviews, students focused on the current challenges involving housing insecurity and the connections and impacts it has throughout Gratiot County. Leaders also highlighted to students the multi-faceted nature of the issue and outlined current efforts to help. The experience made a lasting impression in that students began forging relationships within their new community and better appreciated the barrier and challenges many community members face on a daily basis. Lastly, student left feeling inspired to get involved, help others, and take on great roles within their new community.