



THE CENTER FOR COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

First Year Seminar Program introduces new students to local community



FYS participants in downtown Alma

Students come to Alma College from all over the state, the nation, and the world. In their First Year Seminar (FYS) course, new students will be introduced not only to college-readiness and transition skills, but also to the local community, through collaboration with more than 25 local nonprofit and civic organizations and local businesses. Going into its third year, the community-engaged first year seminar program matches students with 2-4 community organizations engaged around a community engagement theme (e.g. housing, food, art, or youth, etc.).

In addition to an academic project related to their theme, students complete 5 hours of independent community engagement as part of the course. This could include volunteer service with a local nonprofit, attending a public meeting, participating in community recreational programs, or participating in a class or training with a local organization. Through this engagement, students are invited to participate in the life of the community, and to see themselves as active members, not only of the college, but mid-Michigan communities as well.

In 2024-25, FYS students reported 1,326 hours of community engagement and an increased sense of belonging and welcome in the local community. Thank you to the community partners who are critical to this collaboration, and to everyone who helps Alma College students feel welcome.

Important Dates

Wednesday, August 20: New student move in and orientation begins

Friday, August 22: *Gateway to Gratiot and Beyond* orientation program introduces new students to the community

August 23-24: Returning student move in

Monday, August 25: Fall semester begins

Wednesday, August 27: **Campus & Community Organization Fair** - if your organization is interested in participating, sign up here by August 15:
<https://app.suitable.co/form-submit/4qfZCGPfmKmuNV1>

October 3-5: Alma College Homecoming

October 11-14: Fall Recess

November 26-28: Thanksgiving Recess

December 5: End of Fall Term



Thank you to Shana Dancer, Interim Director of the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, for helping welcome new students and families during Becoming A Scot Days!

Community Engaged Courses

Learning extended beyond the classroom during Alma College's Spring Term in May. This year, in addition to courses that traveled the world, 3CE faculty fellows offered newly developed courses that engaged students with the local community. Prof. Lee Vander Kooi's *DesignLab* spring term course visited the Alma Community Art Center to participate in their "Art with Friends" program. Dr. Janelle Blazek and Kevin Kingsland taught the interdisciplinary seminar (IDS) *How Children Think About Nature*. This class included field trips and collaborations with the Mount Pleasant Discovery Museum, Chippewa Nature Center, and Kalamazoo Nature Center, to consider and re-imagine environmental education.



DesignLab Spring Term class at Alma Community Art Center

Looking ahead, the 3CE awarded grants for the development of new engaged courses. Faculty fellows for 2025-26 will include Dr. Khanssaa El Alami Canning (World Languages and Cultures) and Victoria Walker (Music), whose IDS seminar *Identity, Resistance, Arts* will use analysis of visual arts, music, comics, and street art within communities in Michigan and North Africa. Catherine Macmaster (Dance) and Justin Rito (Music) will design the seminar *Collaboration and Composition*, in which students will make original performance works involving original choreography and musical accompaniment. This will require collaboration between dancers and musicians as well as between students and community collaborators – culminating in a public performance.

If your organization has an interest in collaborating with a class on an academic project, please contact the 3CE at ccce@alma.edu.

Alternative Breaks Year in Review

In 2024-24, 247 students participated in Alternative Breaks, completing 2,085 hours of service engagement. The 11 student-led group service trips included out-of-state as well as local volunteer projects.

Mid-Michigan service sites included Forest Hill Nature Area, Karma Kat Café, Children's Discovery Academy and the Isabella County Soup Kitchen. Thank you to all the local organizations who hosted college volunteers.

If your organization is interested in having an Alternative Break group serve with your organization, please contact the 3CE at ccce@alma.edu.



2025 Alma Community Engagement Scholars

ACE Scholars

Nineteen students from eight high schools in Gratiot, Montcalm and Isabella counties were the winners of the Alma College Community Engagement (ACE) Scholarship Program award this year. The ACE program recognizes students for their active volunteer service, community engagement, and leadership in their schools and local communities.

Students who won ACE scholarships receive full-tuition scholarships to attend Alma College, beginning in fall 2025. This year's recipients represent the eighth class of ACE Scholars, bringing the total number of recipients to 95 students.

Community engagement is the major component of the ACE Scholars Program. During their time at Alma College, the scholars will work with diverse community partners on everything from helping serve food to designing and implementing social media campaigns. Last year the ACE Scholars collectively provided more than 2,700 hours of support to local communities and organizations.

Nonprofit organizations in Gratiot, Isabella, and Montcalm counties with an interest in hosting an ACE Scholar volunteer for approximately 30 hours per semester should fill out this interest form by August 15, 2025:

<https://forms.office.com/r/XYnKG7Ket2>