

## The EXL Center's Faculty Steering Committee is pleased to announce the 2019-2020 Experiential Learning Awards.

### *Spirit of Experiential Learning Award & Experiential Learning Recognitions*

This category recognizes creative and effective deployment of community-engaged experiential learning as a core component of a credit-bearing course.

#### The Spirit of Experiential Learning Award

Dr. Martha Santos, Juan Contreras, Lenin Guerrero Maldonado, the students in the “Salsa History” unclass, *and* the students in the “Video Production” class, have earned this award for the interdisciplinary, experiential and community-engaged teaching and learning experience that they created last fall under the “Salsa: History in Motion” project.

The students who took the salsa history unclass came from a variety of majors, and very few had any background in dance. In fact, the idea of dancing itself was intimidating for most of them. Yet, by finding inspiration in their dance instructor's high energy and movement and by practicing and performing a salsa routine, they discovered community, new ways of connecting with themselves and with others, and a sense of wonder and joy about the beauty and power of body movement and dance. Through their dance practice of the rhythms that became part of salsa, including the Afro Cuban sacred orichá dances, the rumba, mambo, son, chachacha, Pachanga and the boogaloo, and through reading, discussion and writing, the students analyzed and learned, in their own bodies, how peoples of African descent in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the United States used dance and music to survive, transform, or engage with the experiences of enslavement, racism, migration, segregation, political activism, cultural commodification, and globalization that shaped their lives.

Under the technical and artistic guidance of Juan Contreras, the students in the “Video Production” class interviewed the salsa history students and instructors, collected footage, researched the history of salsa, and produced four news packages, four short documentaries, and a long documentary on “Salsa History in Motion.” These students connected with and investigated how the personal histories of the salsa students and instructors shaped their unclass experiences. Thus, they produced visual materials that do not shy away from the emotional (a side often shunned in academia), as well as the physical and intellectual aspects of the experience. The resulting news packages and documentaries are original, informative, visually interesting, and often poignant works that tell stories of personal and collective transformation and that aestheticize the journeys of the salsa history students and instructors, through dance. (Final Documentary “Salsa: History in Motion,” all students: <https://youtu.be/h304CNrNg5w>)

### Spirit of EXL Learning Recognitions

It was extremely difficult for the committee to select a winner in this category because so many nominations were strong.

Recognition of excellent work in the spirit of experiential learning at UA goes to the following individuals and teams for their creative and effective teaching and efforts promoting community-engaged experiential learning.

- Dr. Lisa Beiswenger and Mr. Andrew Henry for their work this Spring in the *Deep Dumpster Dive Unclass*, and to the OVA Initiatives groups *Circular Economy* and *Food Health and Human Flourishing*, for creating the context within which this extraordinary course could develop. The unclass took up the challenge of describing and measuring the waste stream through the busiest trash-production site at UA, the Student Union, in order to apply findings to improving environmentally sustainable practices on campus.
- Dr. Hillary Nunn for her Artful Akron unclass, and her partnerships with the Summit Count Historical Society and the Downtown Akron Partnership. Dr. Nunn and her students created a virtual and physical walking tour celebrating the history of the city of Akron.
- Dr. Heather Braun, her students, and partners at Akron Public Schools for their work in the Design Your Career unclass. This course involved UA students and younger students deploying design-thinking. One UA student explains: “First, I need to start with “wow.” This class kept me sane throughout a very challenging semester. Not only did it help me to reframe how I look at life and career problems, but it was a touchstone class that continually kept me in a positive mind frame.
- Downtown Akron Partnership. Downtown Akron Partnership’s mission is to build a vibrant and valuable downtown. In addition to their engagement with Dr. Nunn’s unclass and two earlier unclasses, and they have consistently shown support to the Akron Community Internship Program by hosting 6 UA students over the last three years and involving them in this effort. While there, students learn valuable professional skills to enhance their academic experience while helping to promote and support local business in Akron.

### ***Faculty-Community Partnership Award***

This award recognizes collaboration between UA faculty and a community partner that strengthened UA/Community connections and enriched both education and the fabric of the Akron community. The award goes to both the faculty (individual or team) and partner (individual, team, or organization).

Dr. Kathy Feltey, Dr. Rebecca Erickson, Dr. Susie Kushner-Benson, Dr. Gary Holliday, Dr. Elisa Gargarella, their class and unclass students, and the teachers and students of the I Promise School, and the UA student group Zips Precious Plastics (ZPP).

Across a year, an unclass, a regular class, and summer camps, this group transformed recycling practices, introduced ideas about sustainability, and collaborated in novel ways in the classroom, afterschool, and in the community. UA students worked with teachers to develop community-based service learning curriculum in the unclass (Erickson, Feltey, Holliday). In the summer, kids, teachers, and ZPP began the first plastics recycling activity undertaken by the Akron Public Schools. In the Fall, that extra-curricular engagement continued while Dr. Gargarella collaborated with the other faculty to design her Spring course that aligned art education with environmental activism for UA students and their I Promise School kid-partners!

### ***Student-Community Partnership Award***

This award recognizes a collaboration, outside the framework of a course, between UA student(s) and a community partner that strengthened UA/Community connections and enriched both education and the fabric of the Akron community. It goes to both the student (individual or team) and partner (individual, team, or organization).

We have two winners this year.

- **Engineering Service Design Team**  
This team, led by their president Jade Reese, has been very active and creative, working with both community organizations and local residents one-on-one to solve practical problems. For example, using the knowledge they have learned in classes, they built a bicycle stabilizer for a North Canton resident who has Parkinson's so that he can practice riding without falling off. Working with Summit DD, they also helped retrofit sleds for kids with disabilities so that they can ride down the downtown Akron Sled riding hill in the winter.
- **Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC).**  
SAAC partnered with the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 7 Foundation and 6 local school districts to establish a reading program with second grade classrooms. Even though students-athletes from SAAC already have athletic and educational responsibilities vying for their time, the SAAC members gave, in total, over 200 hours of volunteer man hours to distribute and read over 2,000 books to students across the Akron area over the course of the past semester. When COVID-19 pandemic happened, SAAC members took it a step further and reached out to the kids via video and filming. In a few

weeks, they have created over 20 videos to reach the kids and help to spread positivity to them during this difficult time.

### ***EXL Community Champion***

This award recognizes a community partner who has worked with UA to champion the values expressed in EXL's mission.

Nicole Mullet, Executive Director of ArtsNow, is this year's recipient for her steady support helping UA students connect with the wide community of makers, artists and arts organization in our region. One example was her facilitation of internships for UA students with First Serve, ArtsNow, and Summit Education Initiative. These interns helped design and implement educational art installations in public places of under-resourced communities that families with young children there could interact with as they go about their daily activities. Through the internship, three UA students gained experiences in leadership, art design, and community engagement focusing on educational art in North Hill. The initiative was especially successful because the students have genuinely engaged with residents and the leaders of the immigrant communities to collaborate in this creative endeavor.

### ***EXL Faculty Champion***

This award recognizes a faculty member who has worked to champion the values expressed in EXL's mission. There are two winners this year.

- Dr. Julie Cajigas  
In the heart-felt nomination letter, a student said, "Without professor Julie Cajigas, I would have left college as a much less confident and a much less qualified candidate for jobs. It is largely through her efforts and the opportunities she provided that I leave UA with a fantastic portfolio and enough hands-on classroom experience to enable me to give good answers to tough questions about my experience in interviews. Professor Cajigas is truly one of the professors who keeps UA great."
- Dr. Ruel McKenzie  
Noting that he is a renaissance man, Dr. McKenzie's nomination letter notes that, in addition to his polymer science research, teaching, and work raising the level of conversation on campus around circular economy issues, he also "created the first ever Rethinking Race Film Festival, which was nothing short of amazing. This is not his field but his passion for film. The power of film to communicate complex ideas and stimulate important dialogues led him to step up and take leadership in this initiative. He organized students, faculty, community members and UA staff in this endeavor which gained thousands of film submissions. He created a film review process and organized the Film Festival scheduled in August. Although the Festival may not take place as originally planned, this work has already connected people from all parts of campus and linked us all to the UA community, and the much wider community of filmmakers.

### ***EXL Student Champion***

This award recognizes a student who has worked to champion the values expressed in EXL's mission.

Geosciences student, Gavin DeMali is this year's recipient. Gavin has embodied the values of civic-engagement through community-based, problem-centered learning while completing his degree. In addition to excelling in the classroom, Gavin completed an honors project in which he designed, tested, and deployed a methane sensor on a drone with goal of developing an inexpensive tool for community use. He also led an effort to bring together several of the blossoming efforts towards sustainability on UA's campus.

### ***EXL Administrative Champion***

This award recognizes an administrator at UA who has championed the values expressed in EXL's mission in their college or across the university.

The EXL Administrative Champion goes to Dr. Linda Subich, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Linda Subich was nominated by the EXL Leadership. They stated in their letter, "Dr. Subich has been a steady, smart, administrator who has asked us challenging questions that have helped us shape what we do in what that maximize the likelihood of success in the shifting landscape of the institution. Her dedication to supporting faculty is strong and her commitment to students is even stronger. She "got" what EXL was trying to do right from the start of our work with her. It is due in no small part to her guidance that EXL has succeeded so far."

### ***EXL Staff Champion***

This award recognizes member of the UA staff who has lent significant support and thereby championed the values expressed in EXL's mission.

The EXL Staff Champion goes to Mr. Andrew Henry. In her nomination letter, Dr. Lisa Beiswenger said, "Andy was my co-instructor for the Deep Dumpster Dive Unclass, and his contributions to the course are innumerable. He coordinated a visit to Tri-County Waste Management for the class, mobilized his facilities team to assist with the waste audit, and invited experts from Rubber City Reuse and Akron ReWorks to speak in the class. He even extended his workday multiple times to ensure that the waste audit was executed flawlessly. When rain threatened to derail the waste audit, he came to campus early, secured a second location for the sorting, and moved all of the waste to the new location. He is not only a champion for experiential learning, he is a role model. He was never hesitant to get his hands dirty during the waste audit, and I believe that made the task more palatable to the students. Through his effort, we were able to create a hands-on, team-based, problem-centered course that will precipitate change at the university."

### ***EXL Award for Excellence in Learning-landscape Transformation***

Community-engaged, hands-on, problem-centered learning activities were dramatically challenged with the arrival of the coronavirus this Spring. All students, faculty, and community partners who had devised such learning experiences this Spring had to radically transform them to achieve their goals. This award is intended to highlight these efforts and recognized one especially effective adaptation.

The inaugural Award for Excellence in Learning-landscape Transformation goes to the Myers School of Art's 2020 graduating graphic design seniors and their art director, Kimberly Wengerd.

COVID-19 hit the US when the 2020 graduating graphic design seniors were preparing to showcase a culmination of 4 years of education at a portfolio exhibition which brings over 500 visitors to the Emily Davis Gallery each year. COVID-19 was tough. While they lost the classroom and the gallery space, they didn't lose each other. Together, they realized that this situation is the perfect challenge for designers—just another problem to solve. Their vision had to adapt. The class of 2020 is proud to continue the senior show tradition in a virtual platform entitled "Augment". AUGMENT has transformed into an entirely digital show with an innovative virtual gallery displaying all of the student's artwork, a sleek website programmed to showcase individuals' unique talents and styles, an area for professionals to schedule interviews/meetings and a stream of social media posts created to introduce each designer and their personally. They now have a greater reach than ever before and a permanent virtual presence that will carry on for years to come.

Under the art direction of Kimberly Wengerd—who developed the look and feel of the original exhibition—the team of students listed to the left, lead this charge. Each taking on a specific role while gathering the entire 31 seniors together to develop the vision. They challenged solutions to create stronger outcomes. They looked at every angle to gain a presence in the professional world and the community. The virtual gallery space, developed with a company out of Germany, allows visitors to walk through and engage in work as if in a physical room. They developed social media by utilizing the pre-existing Myers School of Art and Emily Davis Gallery platforms to reach those who typically attend and then expanded to reach over 20,000 more—raising awareness of their story, their talents and the strong program within The University of Akron. They are leaving this school with an educational experience that will take them way further than before COVID-19. They are innovators and will truly AUGMENT any team they enter.

