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# Teaching selfless service

## Students aid their communities

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Publishing a book about the homeless and making a video about hurricane safety may not sound like typical activities for middle and high school classrooms. However, UCF students are playing a role in changing that.

This semester, education majors worked with Orange County Public Schools' teachers to engage middle and high school students through a method known as service-learning. Their efforts were part of a research project coordinated in part by education assistant professor, Trae Stewart, who was awarded a Learn & Serve Special Initiatives Grant from the Learn & Serve America Corporation.

The ultimate goal of the project is "to increase novice K-12 teachers' use of service-learning," Stewart said.

"Service-learning is a teaching method where students address a genuine need in the community through meaningful volunteer activities," he said. The method is "explicitly connected to the academic curriculum being learned in their class. The key here is the reciprocity between education and community."

History and education double-major Anthony Martin spent two months of his semester helping a class from Maynard Evans High School, in Orlando, prepare a book about their experiences with the homeless for publication.

"Earlier in the year, about 20 students visited the Coalition for the Homeless located here in Orlando," Martin said. "The students conducted interviews that questioned some of the individuals that were staying at the Coalition. The students asked them to talk a little about their past and how they ended up in a homeless situation. They also asked if there was any advice they could give to them about life or school or anything."

The impact of the project on the students was significant, Martin said.

"Most, if not all, of the students expressed that the responses they received from some of the homeless changed their way of looking at life forever," he said. "They all commented that they had previous stereotypes about the homeless before their experiences that were erased because of the project."

Stewart said the service-learning projects are important for his education students, as well as those they are teaching. "It is unique because they get to simultaneously practice service-learning as they

learn about it," he said.

Math education major, Valerie Ryerson, who worked with students from Glenridge Middle School in Orlando, said she learned valuable lessons through her experience.

"I've learned that when you use service-learning, instead of having the students sit in class and just listen to the teacher talk, the students are more willing to get involved and learn more," Ryerson said.

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Ryerson helped students gather information about hurricanes and put together a video on hurricane safety, which will be shared with other schools.

"Also, service-learning can incorporate a lot of subjects and teach them [students] basic skills as well," she said. "For this project, the students used science, math, history, English, organizational skills, how to meet deadlines and so much more."

Ryerson said working with the Glenridge students on their service-learning project affected the way she will teach in the future.

"Math is a very tough subject for students to enjoy," she said. "This experience has encouraged me to use real-life situations when teaching math. This way the students will be able to see that they are learning for a reason."

Service-learning projects such as those mentioned above are not new to Orange County Public Schools, yet through the coordinated efforts of UCF and local schools, they can be more common.

"As educators, we know that these kinds of learning activities are much more beneficial to the students' learning processes compared to simply completing worksheets, taking multiple-choice tests and writing essays," Martin said. "It is a kind of learning that will stick with these kids and myself forever."

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