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Newsletter: Community Connections

Fitz Center for Leadership in Community

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3-2022

## **Community Connections, March 2022**

University of Dayton. Fitz Center for Leadership in Community

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University of Dayton

Fitz Center for Leadership  
in Community

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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### Fitz Center Announcements

**IMAGINING**  
SHAPING A MORE EQUITABLE DAYTON  
**COMMUNITY**

**FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

THIS SYMPOSIUM IS A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO COME TOGETHER WITH THE GOAL OF EXPLORING THE HISTORY, LEGACY, AND IMPACT ON DAYTON'S RACIAL SEGREGATION, AND HOW TO MOVE TOWARD A MORE JUST, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE DAYTON

**IMAGINING COMMUNITY (IC) IS LED BY**  
University of Dayton Roesch Chair in the Social Sciences, Office of Diversity & Inclusion,  
Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, and The ETHOS Center

  
**THURSDAY, APRIL 7**  
**FRIDAY, APRIL 8**  
**2022**

  
**DAYTON ARCADE ROTUNDA**  
**35 WEST 4TH STREET**  
**DAYTON, OH 45402**

**REGISTRATION FOR  
THE SYMPOSIUM  
IS FREE AND OPEN  
TO THE PUBLIC**



**SCAN TO REGISTER**  
or visit: [udayton.co/S2U/](https://udayton.co/S2U/)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, EMAIL  
[LESLIE.PICCA@UDAYTON.EDU](mailto:LESLIE.PICCA@UDAYTON.EDU)

  University of Dayton  SINCLAIR COLLEGE 

# Announcing Fitz Center Practice Pods

Gathering and relational work are at the foundation of the Fitz Center mission. As we continue moving toward more in-person activities, the Fitz Center will begin hosting "Practice Pods." Practice Pods are topic driven, informal groups through which professional relationships can be developed and learning, knowledge sharing, and practice are built within the group. Each Practice Pod determines where and how often it meets and what sort of practice it wants to engage in. For example, Practice Pods can be outcome and change-driven or they could focus on knowledge sharing and learning or they could combine these. In addition to their own meeting times, all Practice Pods will come together twice a year in-person at the Fitz Center to talk about the collaborations.

The Fitz Center would like to know what topics you'd be interested in for a Practice Pod. Topics should focus on themes relevant to our region and/or to collaborative, community-driven work. For example, someone could propose a Practice Pod on rivers and parks or on housing insecurity. There are many possibilities. If you'd like to propose a Practice Pod topic, please email Nancy McHugh at [nmchugh1@udayton.edu](mailto:nmchugh1@udayton.edu) by April 15, 2022.

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## Accepting Applications for our Student Programs

### UD Community Corps

UD Community Corps is an AmeriCorps program through ServeOhio and the University of Dayton's Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. AmeriCorps members serve in Dayton Neighborhood School Centers and Dayton Metro Libraries. They provide out-of-school educational and social-emotional support for Dayton children and families. Members receive living allowances, weekly training, and are eligible for a Segal Education Award. **Email Anne Taube at [taubea2@udayton.edu](mailto:taubea2@udayton.edu) for more information and [apply](#) as soon as possible for this summer.**

### Ethics and Leadership Certificate

This student certificate program provides a foundation and a framework that both directly helps cultivate Ethics and Leadership, as well as indirectly aids students in learning these lessons in their other courses and lives more broadly. Traditional courses and mini-courses allow for intimate and focused peer discussion, while students receive individual mentorship and complete a capstone project. **Email Professor Christa Johnson at [cjohnson7@udayton.edu](mailto:cjohnson7@udayton.edu) for more information and and learn more [here](#).**

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## Student Highlights

# Athena Xidis



**By: Grace Pigman**

Athena Xidis is a senior International Studies major. She is currently involved in Semester of Service and is serving with our community partner the Collaboratory. At the Collaboratory, she has worked on numerous initiatives. One program she has been especially excited to be a part of is the Another Chance Project. This program focuses on empowering women within the prison system who are on their way out to embrace their potential and help guide them down a path to personal, professional, and community success. Another program she has helped with is Dayton Porch Fest, which is a free music festival that celebrates the diversity of the Dayton community.

Within these programs, she has been quite the helping hand! From sitting in on important meetings, learning about all of the laboratory's past and current initiatives, to even helping out with their social media, Athena has definitely taken full advantage of her opportunity to serve.

Athena has really enjoyed her experience so far and is so grateful to have a much closer look at the Dayton Community. One of her favorite parts about the opportunity is that she gets to do something new everyday. This has been such a great learning experience, and she is so happy to have gotten the chance to do this.

Please join us in celebrating and thanking both Athena and the Collabortory for all of their hard work, dedication, and amazing contributions to the Dayton community!

## **Featured Partner**

**Peter Benkendorf**



**By: Ashley Wright**

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*Peter Benkendorf is the founder of The Collaboratory, a hub dedicated to collaborative community efforts, located on 114 West First Street. His 33 years of community advocacy include the non-profit organization Involvement Advocacy, from which the first initiative "Sister Neighborhoods" was born. One of his most notable contributions was the resident-run Voices of Cabrini, which for its four years of publication was the only community newspaper in Chicago public housing.*

*Peter is just one of the many community partners we want to highlight. Below you will find our brief conversation about his work within the community and how he envisions his partnership with University of Dayton.*

*What is The Collaboratory?*

The Collaboratory is one part community research and development lab, one part social enterprise incubator-accelerator, one part action tank and one part community convener. We are where Dayton's dreamers and doers gather to

move innovative ideas to transformational action. Overall, we're a hub of action, impact and change..

*What is your vision for The Collaboratory?*

My vision is really to unleash Dayton's potential. We're really all about helping people live their life's purpose as it relates to the impact that they want to have in the community while engaging collaboratively to create a community of well-being. Ultimately, we want to help create the conditions in Dayton where everybody has the opportunity to thrive and Dayton will thrive when everybody is realizing their full potential. We want to be a part of that.

So, Reimagining America, an initiative of The Collaboratory, got started as a response to Frontline pro publica documentary called left behind America, which featured Dayton and as a prime example of what has happened to too many great American cities as a result of our current socio economic model. Since then, we've started to have dozens of community conscious conversations around the idea of well being. During The Re-Imaginathon in November, we collaborated on ways to improve the healthcare system, education, environment, the economy, housing, transportation, media and the justice system.

*Can you talk about a current project you are working on?*

Right now we are working with the City of Dayton to build a "do it yourself" skate park in Claridge Park, in the McCook Field neighborhood. We have repurposed two unused tennis courts into an asset that will breathe new life into the park and surrounding neighborhood. We are also co-creating Another Chance Project, which is going to be working with incarcerated women pre- and post-release. Something else we're really excited about is a new initiative called Dayton Homecoming, which is a peer-to-peer talent attraction initiative, which we are looking to aggregate and coalesce individuals who have recently moved back to Dayton, or are trying to convince others to move to Dayton. Lastly, there is Silver is Gold ([silverisgold.org](http://silverisgold.org)) which facilitates talent connections between businesses and organizations with immediate needs and actively engaged retired professionals with the focused expertise and experience to meet those needs. Those are just a few that are on the front burner.

*When did you know you were meant to be a community engaged leader?*

I don't know if it was a distinct calling. It was probably always in me. I was raised in a really progressive household with immigrant parents who had a worldview that was perhaps different than a lot of folks, but they just instilled in me values that had me focusing on community. In 1990, I quit my job in the sporting goods industry in Chicago and went to Washington DC for a couple months, but I found Washington very discouraged. So I came back to Chicago in May of '90 to set up a



nonprofit organization working with people in Cabrini Green, which is still the same legal entity.

My first project, Sister Neighborhoods, got started in October of 1992. This really put me on the path that I'm still on today. Just that experience of working with people from two very different life experiences and backgrounds was so profound and eye-opening for me. I'm planning to bring in Henrietta Thompson and Cynthia Geary from Sister Neighborhoods together for UD's Imagining Community symposium on April 8 at The Arcade. It will be the first time they have seen each other in about 28 years.

*How do you envision your organization's partnership with UD and other organizations?*

We're called the Collaboratory for a reason, and you know, we partner with people from all different walks of life, all different kinds of organizations. I think the way most people are trained to think and articulate relationships often gets put into organizational terms, but at the end of the day, our relationship is with people like you or Leslie King or with Nancy McHugh at The Fitz Center. Beyond UD, we've worked with everybody from the Montgomery County Office of Re-entry to the Air Force Research Lab, and numerous arts organizations. Each project defines the kinds of partners that we're looking for, along with other organizations we want to engage with to build successful initiatives.

As for UD, we have worked with the School of Engineering, The Human Rights Center, The Fitz Center, College of Arts and Sciences, School of Engineering and iACT.. We worked closely with Larry Burnley before he left around diversity, equity inclusion issues. I'm also one of the judges for *Flyer Pitch*, which is with the School of Business. I mean, we just love working with folks from UD because, generally, the outlook is about being engaged in the community. It's not just about teaching and research, but there's a common thread with everybody that we encounter with UD.

## **Featured Faculty**

**Sharon Gratto**





*Dr. Sharon Gratto is a Professor of Music, Graul Endowed Chair in Arts and Languages, and Director of the World Music Choir. She is also responsible for spearheading the Arts Certificate Program at The University of Dayton. Dr. Gratto has spent the last 14 years cultivating a program that marries the arts with community engagement. I was able to talk with her about this program and some of her very exciting endeavors. You will find this conversation below.*

*What inspired you to create the Arts Certificate Program?*

The certificate program was proposed before I started the chair position, and it was approved afterward. There were students still expressing an interest in pursuing professional work in arts management and related fields, so I came up with this idea to address or create a certificate program that was more aligned with the values and the philosophy of the university. It's a program that's cross-listed with theater, dance, performance technology, music and arts and sciences. It is also extended to communications.

*How does the program align with your work within the community?*

I really work across disciplines very well and that's been my research area in my practice. I have done a lot of work here in the Dayton community. I was the founding trustee of the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance. I'm on the board of

Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. And I've been active in a lot of areas in the community. Right now I sit on the DPA Education Committee.

My goal has always been to get our students and faculty into the community—especially the African American community. I also want to get the African American community to come to UD, and not be hesitant about doing so. The Culture Works grant helps to facilitate that. My roots are strong in making these kinds of connections. I didn't just want to do arts administration. This is not to be a program where a student is simply interested in arts administration. The music students, for example, go down to the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance and they work in the office for their internship. I really wanted it to be something more than that, where they would contribute. I also think that there are situations where students can learn how to help a community organization that's not an arts organization by infusing or including something from the arts that might help with what they do.

*Can you describe your Community Engagement and the Arts Certificate program?*

Yes. There are only two required courses. The Introduction to Community Arts Engagement, which I'm going to offer for the first time in the fall. That turns into an internship for Community Arts Engagement. You can take that first course without doing the certificate or without taking any other courses, but if you want the certificate, you have to complete the electives and take the final seminar, internship. The program would begin on the introductory level with looking at knowing The Dayton community geographically. Then, you would find out where and how the arts are actually being used. You would then identify an art project? For example, we have a big music therapy program here. Those students go into the community, prisons and treatment centers all the time to facilitate music therapy workshops and experiences. This certificate is available to Music, Theater, Art Design and Communications majors. Really, the classes are available to anybody to take. We have several courses.

*Can you talk about the importance of engaging the community with the arts?*

I think that you can reach the community through the arts and with the arts in ways that you might not otherwise be able to do. Maurice Howard, for example, is a prime example. He's connecting incarcerated youth to art, and having them express themselves. There are things that they prepare for him that communicate their feelings to him—even the ones that won't talk. They express their feelings and their mood. That is one example of how our performing arts organizations can help with creative thinking.

One of our ventures is the art classes that are in the new Arcade. The art education students go down there and teach their lessons. So that's another perfect example of how bringing the arts into that building has had an impact on

the community in a variety of different ways. Ultimately, bringing the arts into community settings helps to enrich the lives of the people that are there.

*What is the most important aspect of community engagement to you?*

Making connections. Connecting with people and providing opportunities for the people to connect with arts resources that we have here at the university. In addition to this, I want to prepare these students to be able to go and make connections in any community.



University of Dayton  
Fitz Center for  
Leadership in  
Community

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