Brandon Towns didn’t do a lot of community service growing up. “I remember as a kid going to food pantries or clothing storages for free clothes,” Towns said. “But when I got to Dayton, I suddenly found myself on the other side.”

Towns, a Columbus native entering his senior year at the University of Dayton, is the second of four children born to young parents who started raising a family on welfare and slowly climbed out of poverty. He’s one of 11 students from a variety of majors who participated in the University’s Semester of Service program over the summer, operated by the University’s Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. Now in its eighth year, the program allows students to take a semester to contribute 450 hours of direct service in the Dayton community. Students also participate in a three-credit course that meets once a week to examine urban issues and social justice.

The program embraces one of the tenets of the University’s Catholic, Marianist identity: to learn and lead through service to others. The program is open to all majors but selects only 20 students each year. In 2010, a record-breaking 45 students submitted applications for the winter, summer and fall semesters.

“We’re thrilled the program is taking root,” said Joanne Troha, director of community service learning for the Fitz Center. “The word is out now, and Semester of Service is developing a reputation and a buzz. Students leave saying this is one of the best things they’ve done at the University.”

Towns described his summer work as a humbling process that taught him the importance of commitment, professionalism and self-reflection. In his 10 weeks working with men at the Booth House — helping them with practical needs such as finding a job, managing money, finding housing and earning an education — he discovered that the experience “is one of those things that can change a life.” (continued P. 2)
Students like Towns are not the only ones taking notice of Semester of Service. Local service agencies find the program a great opportunity for additional resources, to educate students and to raise awareness. “The program has been great,” said Maria Zerhusen, programs coordinator at Miami Valley Literacy Council, which has participated in the program the last three summers. “We see an increase in those we serve during the summer, and the student provides an extra pair of hands. And for the student, we do our best to give them a well-rounded experience, immersing them in the culture of the people we work with.” Unfortunately, Miami Valley Literacy Council was forced to close its doors Sept. 30 due to lack of funding.

For Christine Olding, a senior English and philosophy major from Centerville, working at the Miami Valley Literacy Council helped her connect her UD life with her home region. “I saw it as a way to give back to the community I grew up in, and the work I do helps me explore the degree I’m pursing,” she said.

Before participating in Semester of Service, Olding said she was undecided about her future, possibly considering law school. But after this summer, she plans to seek out at least a year of volunteer service with Literacy AmeriCorps.

Such a reaction is not unusual, Troha said. Semester of Service students rarely complete the program without a new perspective on life and their futures. It happened to Towns. As a biology major, he isn’t considering a career as a counselor or social worker, but he can no longer see himself working in a lab all day. His work with Semester of Service has inspired him to incorporate his experiences at the Booth House, his knowledge of biology and passion for faith to advocate for social justice through a career in criminal justice.

“Whatever your passion is, it can be used to create something beautiful,” he said. “You may provide just the right spark or enough water to help a flower grow in a crack in the concrete.”
The Civic Scholars are back in action for another fall semester. After busy summers, all three cohorts returned to campus ready for an exciting year of projects, internships and service in the community.

The 2011 cohort began project meetings in September and has developed a mentoring curriculum working with 10 girls and 10 boys at Cleveland Elementary School. The mentoring program consists of weekly meetings with the students that will incorporate a pen pal program with a University of Dayton student, guest speakers and reflection on their future goals and careers.

The 2012 cohort also has started weekly project meetings to begin creating a concrete project plan for their youth leadership concept that they hope to begin implementing in the spring. The juniors will be working with the Phoenix Project area to design a youth leadership committee that works with local high schools and gives youth a voice in their community and the decisions being made.

While the seniors and juniors are beginning to work on their projects, the sophomore 2013 cohort began their first semester as Civic Scholars. The sophomores are attending an eight-week mini-course that is packed with guest speakers and two off-campus site visits. The students have heard from many community leaders — such as Carrie Scarff, deputy director of Five Rivers MetroParks, and Barbara Stonerock, community relations officer of The Dayton Foundation — and will be traveling to the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and the Downtown Dayton Partnership office.

In addition to working on projects and attending the mini-course, several of our Civic Scholars started exciting new internship placements. Kelsey Loughman, Lauren Maddente, Jeff Schumacher, Lauren Simcic and Michael Veselik are internning in five different departments of the City of Dayton. Nicholette Smith started an internship for the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council. Zachary Hadaway is interning with CityWide Development Corp. Cara O’Grady and Lisa Ramsey are interning at the City of Kettering working with the Partners for Healthy Youth project. The Mathile Family Foundation welcomes intern Katherine Hammaker. Finally, Bernard Jones is an intern with the Fitz Center’s Rubicon House.
FOUR NEW FELLOWS JOIN FITZ CENTER TEAM

by Emily Klein

This fall, the Fitz Center welcomes its newest cohort of Graduate Community Fellows. Four women comprise the incoming cohort. “Each year, we have more applicants than the program can accommodate. They are all qualified and the choice is so difficult. But, the academic accomplishments and service history of these women should lead to great things in the Dayton community over the next two years,” said Don Vermillion, director of the program.

Rebecca Olinsky is a native Daytonian and a graduate of Bowling Green State University with a degree in early childhood education. She is working at Adventure Central on an assessment of afterschool programming opportunities in Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers. Rebecca is working toward her master’s in higher education administration at the University of Dayton.

Kelsey Ufholz, a graduate of Wittenberg University, was born and raised in Akron, Ohio. She spent the last year on a Fulbright scholarship teaching English as a second language in a German primary school. Kelsey has begun her fellowship working with Samaritan Behavioral Health Inc.’s United Against Violence initiative. Her master’s program is clinical psychology.

Beth Geiger ’10 returns to UD to complete her master’s in community counseling. Beth has been placed with The Dayton Foundation for her two years of service. There, she is working with EDvention and other special projects.

Annie Steel graduated from Miami University with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She continues that work at the University of Dayton through the master’s in clinical psychology program. Annie assumes former Graduate Community Fellow Terri Pelley’s role at Daybreak, a homeless youth shelter in the Miami Valley. Terri graduated from the program in May 2010.

The second-year cohort of Fellows returns this fall for their final year. Angie (Wasserman) Swearingen continues at the Catholic Education Collaborative and Chinenye Ikeme returns to Samaritan Behavioral Health Inc. Erin Anderson and Drew Formentini each began new placements this fall. Erin now works with refugee resettlement at Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley and Drew with the Culture Builds Community program at Cityfolk.

The Graduate Community Fellows are enrolled full time in master’s level programs and work 20 hours per week at one of the Fitz Center’s community partner agencies. Cohorts meet twice each month with Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., Ph.D. to reflect on their classroom and community work.

“The academic accomplishments and service history of these women should lead to great things in the Dayton community.”

–Don Vermillion, director of the Graduate Community Fellows program

Below: Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., Ph.D. (center) meets with the Graduate Community Fellows twice each month to help them reflect on their work. He is pictured with the newest cohort of Graduate Community Fellows.
Danielle Dabbs, the new Edison Neighborhood School Center site coordinator, brings to her role a wealth of experience from the Chicago School System and its community schools initiative. Originally from Cleveland, Danielle attended Brecksville-Broadview Heights High School before leaving Ohio for Northwestern University in the Chicago metropolitan area. She majored in learning and organizational change at Northwestern University’s School of Education and Social Policy. Danielle then completed a master’s at the University of Chicago in the School of Social Service Administration.

After attaining her degrees, Danielle began her work career in Chicago, first with Marquette Elementary School — the oldest of Chicago’s community schools — as part of Chicago’s Community Schools Initiative. This initiative was a high priority of then Chicago school superintendent and now U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. For the past two years, Danielle served as the community school manager for Chicago Public Schools’ Mays Academy. In that role, Danielle worked through the Academy’s community partner, the nonprofit organization Children’s Home + Aid.

Danielle and her husband, Charles Dabbs, returned to Ohio for Charles to begin his medical residency in the Dayton area. As Danielle contemplated the continuation of her career amidst the move, she discovered that Dayton is also a part of the national community school movement through the Neighborhood School Centers program. Concurrently, Edison’s community partner, the Dayton Urban League, promoted then site coordinator Nina Carter to the Comprehensive Neighborhood Initiative to work on improving kindergarten readiness of children in the Edison School neighborhood. This left Dayton Urban League with a vacant site coordinator position. Danielle successfully competed in the League’s search process and began her work in July, just prior to the new school year.

Now that Danielle has served several months in the Urban League’s site coordinator position at Edison Neighborhood School Center, she reflected on her goals for the coming year: “My hope is to develop enhanced afterschool programming in our brand new school building, involving the school in the community and the community in the school. It is encouraging to me how interested parents and community organizations are in partnering with our school, now that the school is back here in its old innerwest Dayton neighborhood.”

The Fitz Center welcomes Danielle Dabbs in her return to Ohio and her commencement with Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers Program.

Above: Danielle Dabbs, new Edison site coordinator, comes to the Neighborhood School Centers with experience in community schools from the Chicago Public Schools.

Below: The new Edison PreK-8 school opened its doors in August. Edison is the fourth new building in the Neighborhood School Centers project.
SUMMER PADDLES
BRING COMMUNITY TO THE RIVER
by Maggie Varga and Leslie King

The Rivers Institute implemented its first successful summer paddling programs, a project that helped realize the Institute’s vision of reuniting Dayton and its rivers. Through 10 separate programs, we were able to physically bring more than 80 people in the UD and Dayton communities to the river. The experience offered a unique opportunity for participants to witness the power of Dayton as a river city. The paddles began as a means for providing service and giving back to the departments and partner organizations that work with the Rivers Institute throughout the year, but they became a way to teach others about the history of our rivers and about the Rivers Institute itself.

Summer paddlers met the Rivers Institute on campus and headed out to Eastwood MetroPark for icebreakers, an introduction to the watershed and its assets, and kayak instruction. Most groups then paddled down the Mad River to its confluence with the Great Miami River at RiverScape downtown. The aquifer-fed fountains always provide a cool and refreshing way to play and end each paddle. Other groups spent the day on the lagoon at Eastwood learning kayak skills and participating in leadership and team-building activities. With each group, the desired outcome for the day was different. Some programs sought teamwork and group-bonding activities while others hoped to gain a better historical, scientific or aesthetic perspective of the river. The Rivers Institute aimed to cater to specific needs while preserving the overarching goal to develop a stronger sense of place in our community.

For one of the groups, the Blue Sky artists in residence, a day on the river proved to be a fitting orientation to the city and the inspiration for one of their performances. Musician Shaw Pong Liu and choreographer Rodney Veal created the performance Of a River exploring the power and majesty of water by combining silk, music and dance. Another group, the Dayton Development Coalition’s Water Roundtable, gathered on the river for one of its monthly meetings, which allowed participants to experience firsthand the valuable water resources they work to promote. Finally, the site coordinators of the Neighborhood School Centers and several students spent their day on the lake as an incentive for their students’ hard work.

Overall, the Rivers Institute’s first summer on the water was rewarding and hugely successful. The summer programs built opportunities for the Dayton community to see our rivers as a strategic natural resource central to the communal, economic, aesthetic and ecological vitality of the region. They fostered appreciation, stewardship and respect for our rivers and pride in our city. The Institute looks forward to expanding the programs next summer and sharing this experience with more members of the community.
TESTING THE WATERS TO BUILD LEADERSHIP

by Sarah Peterson

“This class is great! It is very different than other classes I have taken, which is the best part,” reflects one student from the ASI 345 River Leadership course offered for the first time this fall. “I feel invested in the class as they continually ask for my opinion and I can’t wait for the field trips.”

Students enrolled in River Leadership participate throughout the semester in a learning community. Thus far, students have heard presentations on the common good, Dayton’s aquifer, Dayton’s rivers, urbanization trends, and practical things each of us can do to help preserve the river’s health.

The course began with an experiential lesson on the Fort Ancient Indians, the first settlers in Dayton. Students traveled to SunWatch Indian Village to hear from archeologist Andy Sawyer about the Native Americans’ relationship to the river and the archaeological park itself. During the second class, students developed their own definition of sustainability using the nominal group technique facilitated by Emily Klein, graduate assistant in the Fitz Center. The third class combined two presentations and a hands-on demonstration. First, UD biology professor Eric Benbow introduced the biology of a river and shared stories of his travels around the world during which he conducted research on waterborne illnesses. Sarah Hippensteel Hall, executive director of the Greater Dayton Partners for the Environment and a program development specialist for the Miami Conservancy District, presented on conserving Dayton’s greatest assets, its rivers. She talked about her work helping communities live more sustainably, as well as personal impacts on rivers. Finally, geology faculty member Katie Schoenberger explained Dayton’s aquifer system with the use of a model, which showed the students how water and contaminants travel through the aquifer and land.

Students record their experiences in the course through journal assignments and online threaded discussions. Students have quickly begun to make connections between the different disciplines and perspectives they have heard. By the end of the semester, students will complete a project proposal pertaining to the rivers and the community of Dayton which will be presented in the second semester of the curriculum to a student audience which will have the opportunity to select a project to put into action.

Experiential learning continues throughout the course. Upcoming activities include a kayak trip down the Mad River including water quality monitoring, a trip to Five Rivers Metroparks’ Outdoor Recreation Department and a presentation by the City of Dayton Water Department that includes a lesson on its monitoring techniques. Weekly blog postings of the course can be found at http://riverstews.blogspot.com.
FITZ CENTER WELCOMES NEW GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

In August, the Fitz Center team welcomed two new graduate assistants. Sacha Ramirez Francis commutes from Greenville, Ohio, where she is a member of the local League of Women Voters. Sacha is a proud alumna of Antioch College ’01 and she holds an Ohio teacher’s license. Sacha earned a certificate in dialogue and deliberation from Fielding Graduate University and is now enrolled in UD’s master’s in public administration program. Sacha is working on an assessment of the impact of the Fitz Center’s student engagement programs and will begin working with the Neighborhood School Centers initiative next semester.

Mike Bennett, a 2008 UD graduate, returns this after 21 months of service work with Nazareth Farm, a small nonprofit organization in rural West Virginia. Mike now pursues a master’s in pastoral ministry and works alongside Joanne Troha with the Fitz Center’s Community Service Learning initiative. Mike spends much of his time recruiting and placing undergraduate volunteers with the five Neighborhood School Centers. He helps manage student-school partner agreements and will be assisting with the evolution of a Neighborhood School Centers website and social media presence.

Sacha Ramirez Francis and Mike Bennett join the Fitz Center team.