In celebration of Dick Ferguson’s service to UD, Dayton, region

by Paul Benson, interim provost

Dick Ferguson, University of Dayton Class of 1973, has been an influential member of, and ambassador for, the UD community for over 41 years. He served key roles in admissions, development and the president’s office before becoming the inaugural executive director of the Fitz Center for Leadership and Community.

Dick is known for his boundless passion for the University, for the city of Dayton and for the University’s many partners throughout Dayton. A creative, committed, adaptive and visionary leader, Dick imaginatively drew upon the core values of Catholic and Marianist education, the presidential legacy of Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., and the insights of Fitz Center team members and community partners when fashioning the central pillars of the Fitz Center’s strategic mission: To build on assets; strengthen social capital; facilitate constructive public conversations; learn how to adapt and lead change; and find a shared vision. Above all, Dick regularly has reminded us that relationships matter.

Among the many significant innovations that emerged through Dick’s work in the Fitz Center is a deepened understanding of the value of empowering and mentoring students as builders of community and the importance of grounding students’ learning and leadership development in the community impact they leave behind. One of Dick’s lasting legacies will be the expansion of the University’s appreciation for the central leadership role that students can and must play if we are to realize UD’s mission.

Dick has received much well-deserved recognition on campus and throughout the Dayton community for his tireless work. The fact that Dick was honored with the 2005 Lackner Award is especially fitting, for, above all, Dick Ferguson has been and will always be a powerful voice for the UD story.

This citation was offered at Ferguson’s retirement ceremony April 25, 2015.
Amongst all of the fall semester buzz about a new University president, the River Stewards were honored to spend a beautiful late summer day on the river with current President Dr. Dan Curran and the President’s Emissaries. Dr. Dan has been a constant supporter of the Rivers Institute since our program’s existence and understands the assets our local rivers and water resources are to the Dayton region, and to the University’s unique advantage as a riverfront campus. The River Stewards have always enjoyed their interactions with Dr. Curran, and he has endlessly supported their stewardship in the community around Dayton’s water resources.

This wasn’t the first time our president has joined us on the river. Dr. Dan and his President’s Council joined us for a paddle several years ago on the Mad River down to RiverScape’s fountains. Since then, Dr. Curran has encouraged the President’s Emissaries to join him in experiencing our local rivers. The Emissaries are similar to the River Stewards in many ways, as they come from different majors and different backgrounds, but all work together on complex issues. Their perspective on the role of the University within the community led to interesting conversations with our stewards, who have also learned a new perspective on Dayton.

Emissary Elizabeth Clarke explains, “The River Stewards were wonderful hosts as they welcomed us to the river, informed us of the safety precautions we needed to take, and accompanied us during our trip down the river. The experience was a great opportunity to go beyond the borders of UD’s campus and engage in the city of Dayton; we were able to build relationships and come together as an organization and with Dr. Curran in a more informal setting, all while learning about one of Dayton’s greatest assets, the river.”

Dr. Dan understands the value of the river and water, and he has encouraged many community partners, elected officials, and campus faculty, staff and students to experience the river firsthand. He has supported the Rivers Institute as we developed the River Summit almost 10 years ago, a conference which continues to be an important conversation about water resources and the river corridor in our region. According to Dr. Curran, “Faculty, staff, and students in the Rivers Institute can be found at the table of every major regional discussion about water.” This is only true due to President Curran’s support throughout the years, and the entire Rivers Institute community is forever grateful for his leadership around our rivers.

The Rivers Institute continues to engage with new leadership on campus, such as taking Dean Jason Pierce of the College of Arts and Sciences and his office down the same stretch of river. Both of these trips have been insightful to the Rivers Institute, and we are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to take Dr. Eric Spina down the river when he joins the University as our new president in July 2016. Until then, we wish Dr. Dan all the best on whatever other rivers he may journey down in the future!
Orientation week for new Dayton Civic Scholars

by Sarah Mescher, graduate assistant, Dayton Civic Scholars

Orientation week is an excellent way for the newest cohort of Dayton Civic Scholars (DCS) to get to know one another while also experiencing the city of Dayton in a new light. Though they have been at UD for a year, there are still many things they have yet to learn about the city itself.

The week started out with icebreakers and discussions of the assigned summer readings about community engagement and service learning, a tour to Carillon Park to learn about Dayton’s exciting history of innovation, ending the day with a combined dinner for all cohorts of DCS and River Stewards to meet and enjoy some great food and conversation. During orientation, it is not only important for the newest cohort to get to know each other, but also vital for them to get to know other student members of Fitz Center program initiatives.

The junior DCS led a bus tour of the city for them. The tour included visiting many community partners that DCS share tremendous ties with such as Mission of Mary Cooperative, East End Community Services and Ruskin Elementary, as well as many other areas in the city. It was extremely helpful for them to see firsthand the wonderful people and organizations that we partner with. The day ended by attending the City of Dayton Commissioners Meeting where they met Mayor Nan Whaley and all of the commissioners. Many expressed their excitement that the city leaders in our community recognized the outstanding contributions of DCS and had many gratifying things to say about the Dayton Civic Scholars program.

More introductions in exploring the city further was planned with a tour of the RTA, 2nd Street Market and Aviation Heritage National Historic Park. They organized a service opportunity with Victory Project, an after-school program mentoring disengaged young men in our city; met some of the boys in the program, prepared dinner for everyone and played games to wrap up the night. This opportunity led some students to volunteer there on a regular basis. Closing out the week, Brother Brandon Paluch, S.M., presented a talk about Marianist values and the connection with the mission of the DCS. The new DCS 2018 cohort expressed that they learned many aspects of the city that they never would have discovered on their own.
While coasting down the Great Miami River in a kayak, I basked in the glow of warm sunshine and good company. On a three-day journey, otherwise known as River Stewards Orientation 2015, I absorbed a massive quantity of information about Dayton’s five rivers and aquifer, and, in particular, their relationship to the Dayton community. Furthermore, I fell in love with my fellow River Stewards as we gathered with a shared vision on the river, around the campfire, in the tents and across the dams. Orientation was a meaningful, epic adventure that enabled me to perceive Dayton with a new lens that accentuated the assets this grand city has to offer.

On a quest for understanding, my fellow 2018 cohort and I spent a significant portion of our first day of orientation in a classroom. Even though PowerPoints were utilized and lectures were given, it did not replicate a usual teacher-driven environment. Professors and community partners provided us with a vat of valuable information in a manner that piqued our interest and stimulated our brains. They acted as mentors by preparing us for the continuation of our adventure. They presented us with the tools and the language, to be able to make sense of our experiential classroom, the Great Miami River, which we would be floating upon and interacting with over the next week.

Despite the experiential and unique aspects of the classroom activities, it was the 18-mile paddle we embarked on that tugged at our hearts, minds and ears. We participated in stream quality monitoring and electro-fish shocking to test the Great Miami’s cleanliness and ability to support life. We crossed several low dams, while learning about the impact and effects they have on our rivers. We observed the substantial, positive impact of our five engineering masterpieces, the dry dams, designed by Arthur Morgan. We immersed ourselves in a natural resource that not only supports the fish and macro invertebrates that occupy the river, but one that also sustains the entire Dayton region. And, we appreciated the beauty of the river both visually and audibly. Overall, we fully integrated ourselves into the river, its surrounding environment and our watershed community.

Throughout the journey, community partners, faculty and staff contributed to our learning community by providing each of their respective expertise. However, this year a particularly clever and inspiring individual, Michael Bashaw, joined us as our sustainability river artist in-residence.

Bashaw challenged us over the two-day, 18-mile paddle to think about our river, community and sustainability in new ways. Bashaw then encouraged us to envision ourselves in the shoes of our ancestors who relied entirely on the river, in a much more direct way, by asking us to construct our own village. Using our imaginations, a lot of bamboo, a few wire baskets, hundreds of zip-ties and some cloth, a village was created in a mere 90 minutes. Awestruck, the River Stewards stared, open-mouthed at the community we built together. And to continue the amazing experience, we gathered in a circle and created music inside our newly constructed village. Bashaw played flute, and the River Stewards used rocks to create a vibrant, colorful, indigenous rhythm as the sun set at Island MetroPark.

Throughout orientation, each day, each turn in the river, each conversation shared, beckoned a new experience and perspective. A passion was stirred in my heart. A spirit has taken shelter in me. It is the river that whispers my name. I want to protect it. I want it to be recognized for its significance in our communities and lives. I want it to be cherished for a long, long time to come. Thankfully, I have three years ahead of me in my River Steward journey to serve and carry out this shared vision to preserve, protect and promote our rivers.
What an exciting year it was for Community Engaged Learning at the Fitz Center! Together we made great strides to strengthen collaborative campus-community partnerships. This past fall, we hosted our first Collaboration Open House, drawing an unprecedented number of the University’s faculty and staff. Participants learned more about individual community organizations. Conversations sparked questions, ideas, challenges, needs and passions regarding partnership, collaboration, teaching and research.

Capitalizing on momentum from the fall, we organized three Collaborative Bus Tours for faculty and staff in the spring. Each bus tour focused on a different social issue facing the Dayton community, including (1) health care and access, (2) immigration and refugees, and (3) food insecurity and urban farming. Groups visited local community organizations that work to address these issues. Participants explored ways to collaborate for building capacity and creating positive change.

Over the year, we also worked with faculty, staff and community organizations to support logistical aspects of community-engaged learning experiences. Six Faculty Exchange Series sessions were offered on related topics. Sessions fostered growth, professional development and enhanced quality of work life. Further, we continued to see a rise in the number of students enrolled in designated community-engaged learning courses. Courses applied classroom knowledge and theory to real-world experiences through authentic and meaningful service. This is illustrative of the steady increase of capacity and utilization of Fitz Center opportunities.

To continuously improve community-engaged learning experiences for the students, faculty, staff and community organizations that we engage with, we conducted post-event and post-course surveys to solicit their feedback. Here’s a breakdown of our achievement in numbers:

**Look back 2014-15: Community Engaged Learning impact**

*by Lauren Evans, graduate assistant, Community Engaged Learning*

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This semester the Fitz Center’s graduate assistants have taken on some very important projects in support of the Fitz Center staff. The work of the graduate assistant is not only important to the day-to-day work of the Fitz Center, but also is giving this group of graduate students’ extensive experience in program design and management.

Kate Gallup is a graduate assistant on the Community Engaged Learning team. Kate directs much of her work on the Dayton Neighborhood School Centers program, orienting UD students before they arrive at a Dayton school and coordinating UD volunteer activities with the site coordinators at each of the five schools. Kate is from Morenci, Michigan, and received her undergraduate degree in psychology at the University of Dayton. Her graduate program here at UD is in school counseling.

Tricia Klay is part of the Community Engaged Learning team. During the past school year, Tricia worked with the Semester of Service program, and this term she has been assigned to the administration of the Youth Economic Self-Sufficiency Program (YESS), an AmeriCorps program administered by the Fitz Center. Tricia is from Centerville, Ohio, and received her undergraduate psychology degree at Cedarville University. Tricia’s graduate program at UD is in clinical mental health counseling.

Jeff Malik is the Rivers Institute graduate assistant. Jeff comes to the Fitz Center with an extensive background in water programming. Jeff works with the three cohorts of River Stewards and helps oversee the River-Mobile programming. His hometown is Cleveland, Tennessee. Jeff received his undergraduate degree in physical geography at the University of Tennessee and is working on his Master of Public Administration degree here at the University of Dayton.

Sarah Mescher is the Dayton Civic Scholars graduate assistant. Sarah is focusing her work with the sophomore cohort of the DCS program. Sarah organized the orientation for the new civic scholars in August and has been assisting the group in the introduction to the Dayton community. Sarah is from Centerville, Ohio, and received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Bowling Green State University. Her graduate study at the University of Dayton is in the school psychology program.

Lauren Evans is also a member of the Community Engaged Learning team. Lauren focuses on faculty support for community-engaged learning and helps coordinate the community partner tours for the team. Lauren is from Powell, Ohio, and received her undergraduate degree in psychology from the University of Dayton. Lauren is in the school psychology program here at UD.
During October, traffic on the Fitz Center website skyrockets as UD students sign up to volunteer for Trunk or Treat, one of the most anticipated events of the year. Trunk or Treat happens nationwide. It started in our Neighborhood School Centers at Fairview and Cleveland. When the partnership between the Fitz Center and the Neighborhood School Centers was formed in 2006-07, the schools with Trunk or Treat events invited UD students to participate along with parents, clubs, churches, local nonprofits and more. The event gives children the opportunity to participate in a safer alternative to the standard trick-or-treating in their neighborhood, late at night. The number of UD student volunteers increases every year, many coming with their class, club or roommates.

On Oct. 29, Trunk or Treat at Cleveland Elementary had more than 700 students and family members attend. Mummies, fairies and superheroes went trunk-to-trunk getting candy from UD students. Senior Steven Harper came with his fraternity brothers, who dressed up as the Browns football team.

“Dayton Public Schools are not as fortunate as other schools in the area,” Steve said. “As UD students who live so close to these schools, it’s our job to support the work of the school district in both academics and enrichment programs. That means more than just passing out candy; it’s yelling when you see a ‘scary’ zombie or bowing to a beautiful princess walking by.

We’re here to give these kids a night to remember in a safe and fun environment.”

All five Neighborhood School Centers hosted Trunk or Treat this year for their students and the surrounding communities. Some of the schools had additional activities for kids including a popcorn bar, crafts and even a haunted house. More than 350 UD students participated. The site coordinator at Cleveland, Mary Case, said, “We have come to depend on UD students to create a great environment during these community events for our students and families.”

Year after year, the site coordinators express gratitude for UD’s continued commitment and dedication to this event. We are glad that Trunk or Treat has become a UD tradition, and we hope that it continues for many years to come.
Fitz Center student orientation

by Don Vermillion, interim executive director

On Friday, Sept. 11, all of the Fitz Center students met at the University of Dayton River Campus for a beginning of the school year orientation gathering that included presentations to the students by Fitz Center alumni now working in various sectors of the community.

The presenters included Jessica Saunders, director of Dayton Children’s Center for Child Health and Wellness; Ariel Walker, senior policy aide to Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley; Kelly Geers, district director for Congressman Mike Turner; Charlie Bull, assistant principal at DECA Prep School; and Alex Galluzzo, purchasing manager, Heidelberg Distributing. Each of the presenters had served in an undergraduate student or graduate student role in one of the Fitz Center programs, and conveyed to the assembled students how their Fitz Center training had positively impacted their early career success.