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Opening Doors : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Monday June 3, 2019

Opening Doors

By Eric F. Spina

Rachel Carr '20 traveled 1,200 miles from home to attend a university in Texas because she wanted to open up her world.

Only her world, she discovered, is actually right here in her hometown on the University of Dayton's campus.

"When people in Texas would ask me where I was from, I would tell them about Centerville, Dayton, and the rivers. I would tell my Texas friends about UD's River Stewards, a program that brings together an interdisciplinary group of students to learn about community by building engagement with the river," she told some of UD's most faithful supporters at this spring's John Stuart Society dinner. "Their response was always the same: Why wasn't I at UD?"

Thankfully, she came back home, and her story about her student experience over the last two years at UD is powerful — and has changed her life.

As a River Steward, Rachel builds awareness and appreciation for the Dayton region's rivers and waterways. Through the Center for International Programs, she studied sustainability and energy policy in Berlin. Last spring, she traveled to El Paso, Texas, with 14 other students to capture from-the-heart stories of people living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border for the Moral Courage Project's "America the Borderland" experience, which has resulted in a [video](#), [interactive website](#), [podcasts](#), and a traveling exhibit.

Last summer, she lived with a group of UD students in Washington, D.C., where she interned in the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice. This summer, she's interning in the state of Ohio's Office of Budget and Management — an opportunity that developed through UD's Statehouse Civic Scholars Program, whose groundwork was laid by UD political science professors and former Ohio Governor Bob Taft.

"Beyond opening doors to places I knew I wanted to go, UD has opened doors to places I didn't know existed," Rachel told a room full of donors.

Her story is not an anomaly. This is a university where students learn best by doing. And by doing well. Students help researchers try to discover a cure for Alzheimer's Disease, develop a peer ministry program in the student neighborhood, offer business consulting services to local non-profits, recruit other students to prepare hundreds of meals on Sundays for delivery to the homeless and the hungry...and so much more.

As we move into the future, we are striving to offer these types of deep, hands-on learning opportunities to *every* student. Learning beyond the classroom leads to personal discovery and helps students develop leadership capacity, teamwork skills, and the ability to respect and collaborate with people with diverse viewpoints and experiences. This, I believe, differentiates a UD grad from other degree-holders.

Our John Stuart Society members — those who have generously invested more than \$100,000 in UD over their lifetimes — heard and appreciated Rachel's message that night. And I deeply appreciate their support.

"It is your generosity and continued support of the University that allows me to become something more," Rachel said. "Each of the programs I have taken part in has not only impacted me but hundreds of students — and for the better.

"Thank you for opening my world."

(For photos and a video from the 2019 John Stuart Society celebration, click [here](#).)