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The REAL Dayton

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When the University of Dayton begins its mid-term break after classes end Wednesday, Oct. 6, more than 50 students will trade their vacations for a weekend of experiencing the "real" Dayton.

Now in its second year, REAL Dayton enables students to Reach out, Enrich themselves, Act for others and Learn about the city their University calls home. Students who participated last year said the program helped them experience life outside of the college "bubble," said Kelly Bohrer, the University's coordinator of community outreach. It challenged their stereotypes and assumptions and turned them into advocates for people visiting the city and becoming more involved in the greater Dayton community, she said.

"It's a weekend to really put the University's mission of learn, lead, serve into practice," Bohrer said. "It's a great opportunity for students to find out who their Dayton neighbors are, lend a helping hand, get to know fellow students and continue to grow as leaders and team players."

REAL Dayton begins with dinner on campus Wednesday, Oct. 6, and ends with dinner off campus Saturday, Oct. 9. Students will be divided into six groups, and each group will take a tour of Dayton neighborhoods and community partners with the University's Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, tour cultural sites around Dayton and do four community service projects with 14 community agencies.

Students will also have the chance to eat local food, interact with people who live within Dayton's city limits and experience a simulation of world power and wealth distribution. In the evenings, students will reflect on the day's events and engage with local community members and activists during a panel presentation.

The intent is to help University of Dayton students feel more connected to and more concerned about the greater Dayton community, Bohrer said.

"We didn't want this to be just a service weekend or just a retreat or just an immersion into Dayton," she said. "We wanted elements from all three of these types of programs, so there are service projects, educational activities, guest speakers, tours, cultural site visits and reflections — both on the service done and on deeper issues of social justice."

Groups of students will also travel to Chicago; Camden, N.J.; New Orleans; and rural Salyersville, Ky., to participate in service projects called Breakouts. At these locations, students have an opportunity to learn about urban and rural poverty and volunteer in a variety of service programs in schools, meal kitchens, health centers and housing construction.

"People are looking for something different to do than a typical vacation, and these breakouts fill up very quickly," said Mary Niebler, coordinator of cross-cultural immersion for the Center for Social Concern. "We provide both a learning experience and have them spend time doing service."

The Center for Social Concern offers annual BreakOuts for students during the fall semester mid-term break, spring break and after classes end in May.

REAL Dayton students will serve at traditional human service agencies such as House of Bread, St. Vincent de Paul shelter and the Good Neighbor House, as well as educational and recreational agencies such as Five Rives MetroParks and the "Voyage on the Parkway" festival at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery. As part of their orientation to Dayton, students will also visit the Dayton International Peace Museum, the Missing Peace Art Space and Garden Station at the intersection of Fourth Street and Wayne Avenue.

For more information, contact Cameron Fullam, assistant director of media relations, at 937-229-3256 or fullam@udayton.edu.