As we put together this issue of Essay, an inspiring story emerged.

Last year, our Outdoor Recreation program launched a plan to become carbon-neutral, calculating the amount of carbon its activities produced and planting trees to offset that amount. In this effort and all of its activities, Outdoor Rec is guided by the “Leave No Trace” ethic, which requires that people, whether hiking, camping, or paddling, minimize their impact on the earth—essentially leaving the outdoors as they found them.

But in truth, Outdoor Rec, along with all of our departments, our staff, our students, and the campus and community partners with whom we work, are doing something different. At the University of South Carolina, we’re leaving our community better than we found it.

Our staff and students, as you’ll read, are providing support to elementary students in the Midlands, helping prospective students decide whether they can call Carolina home, training to improve science and math teaching throughout the region, and volunteering in needy communities around the world. And they’re challenging themselves to do even more, interning with organizations to improve their skills and contribute to the local economy and striving to achieve goals they might never have thought possible.

It’s this story—the story of the mark we at the University of South Carolina leave on our community—that I am so proud to share with you.
Employers are increasingly expecting more of students, like field experience, a broad set of skills, and the ability to take on more responsibilities. The service-learning program at Carolina is a great example of how the USC Connect integrative learning initiative—integrating learning within and beyond the classroom—is being put into action.

Director of Student Engagement Jimmie Gahagan said that service-learning is a key component of integrative learning at the University. As he describes it, service-learning is “the integration of community service into academic classes in order to meet an identified community need.”

“Service-learning is woven into the fabric of the University of South Carolina,” Gahagan said. “As the flagship University we are called to make an impact in the state, and through the pedagogy of service-learning we can address specific community needs through our service.”

According to the Office of Student Engagement, the courses are designed to yield benefits for the community and students through the facilitation of critical thinking by providing time for them to reflect on their experiences, “It helps to connect students’ classroom and beyond-the-classroom learning, ” Gahagan said. “It also makes the learning more active as [students] take principles from the classroom and apply them in real-world settings.

During the 2009–10 academic year, 23 departments offered 42 courses. That number represents a 68 percent increase since 2008. In addition, three international service-learning courses were offered in the spring 2010 semester. The focus of all of the courses is integrative learning, community service, collaboration, and evaluation. Assessment results of surveys conducted in fall 2009 showed that students in service-learning courses developed strong connections to academic engagement as well as strong connections between social issues and career aspirations. Students also emerged with a greater sense of connection to the local community, confidence in their personal ability to make a difference, and an enhanced value of community engagement.

The benefits for everyone are numerous, Gahagan said. “Students get the benefit of applying what they are learning in a real-world setting while at the same time impacting the community,” he said. “Faculty can make their teaching come alive as they send students out to serve others and impact the community. The community is able to have their needs met and to build sustainable partnerships with the University.”

And the courses are popular, too. “We have seen a growing number of students interested in participating,” Gahagan said.

Eric Cash is always on the move, whether he is biking 90 miles in a race, working as a resident mentor (RM) or planning the next campus event. “One benefit of being actively involved is learning about time management,” Cash said. “It seems like everything always wants to be done at the same time.”

Indeed, as the vice commissioner of the Homecoming committee, Cash, an accounting and global supply chain operations management major from Greenville, S.C., works with a group that plans for six events to occur in the same week.

“It’s nice to see it all come together,” Cash said. “It really is about the unity of Carolina.”

Now a senior, Cash also has worked as an RM since his sophomore year.

“It’s great getting to hang out with freshman residents and help them learn the ropes their first year here. You never know what you’re going to get with freshmen,” he said.

On top of it all, Cash trains 12 to 15 hours per week for cycling, his biggest passion. Cash worked with Campus Recreation to help found the cycling club in 2009, and by the end of the first year it already had 20 members. Now he’s looking to grow the club further and to succeed in competition.

“We are working on good recruitment with the freshman class for the fall,” Cash said. “I’m hoping that we go to nationals next year.”

As a student leader, Cash enjoys getting to know people and learning how to network on campus. “You get the experiences that most students pass up while they are in college,” he said.

He recommends that all students get involved on campus. “I would say go for it! It’s possible—especially at a university as large and diverse as ours,” Cash said. “In college, students really have the chance to lead the way and make changes.”

by Becky Wiens, graduate assistant for public relations, Student Affairs and Academic Support

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Karen Heid, a professor of art education in the Department of Art at the University of South Carolina, always has been interested in creating collaborations between her students and children in the community. “School is the only place where kids are only with others their own age,” Heid said. “Research has shown that when kids engage in multi-age learning, they excel socially and academically. They are learning in a group that becomes like a family.”

Heid’s research led her to begin brainstorming about a partnership between her students and a local elementary school. After visiting a mosaic garden in Sumter, Heid knew that was what she wanted to accomplish. “I fell in love with the idea,” Heid said.

At that point, Heid started to think about ways to involve the community. She decided to apply for a grant to incorporate a mosaic garden project at A.C. Moore Elementary school into her art education course. The work began as soon as class started in January 2010. “I wanted to do ‘ABCD,’ which means arts-based community development,” Heid said. “Instead of just using grants, I wanted to use the assets of our community.”

Indeed, the project grew to involve undergraduate and graduate students, parents, artists in the community, the education department and many more volunteers. Kwame Dawes, the University’s poet-in-residence, wrote a poem about seasons especially for A.C. Moore. Dawes’ poem is featured on the bench around the garden fountain.

There were so many people involved that they had to create a second day for the program, for which graduate students volunteered. “The hours of work that volunteers put into it was truly amazing,” Heid said. The mosaic garden at A.C. Moore is called “Ripples of Hope.” Each child wrote a poem and created a stepping stone with a mosaic design that represented his or her story or poem. The students from Heid’s class each were paired with a child, who they started calling their “buddy” by the end of the semester. To help with the writing, Heid collaborated with Tasha Laman, a professor in the College of Education who also facilitates the poetry program at A.C. Moore.

“One special moment happened when a Carolina student and A.C. Moore’s ‘buddy’ created the globe for the top of the fountain. The third grader found a mosaic tile that was shaped exactly like South Carolina, which now sits at the top. ‘They knew that they had started with a plain old sidewalk and turned it into something beautiful,’ Heid said.

Jimmie Gahagan, director of student engagement, called the mosaic garden project a “win-win.” “The project was special because of the strength of the partnership between the administration of A.C. Moore and the USC faculty,” Gahagan said. “And because the children had a chance to learn about the creative arts from USC students while at the same time building the mosaic garden that will leave a lasting legacy with the community for years to come.”

As for Heid’s students, she feels they really understand what service-learning is all about. “I have so many art education students that tell me they are going to incorporate service-learning into their classes when they become teachers,” Heid said. by Becky Wiens, graduate assistant for public relations, Student Affairs and Academic Support
When Dr. Patrick Hickey became faculty principal of the Capstone Scholars, he knew he wanted to add a special touch to the program. Despite a fear of heights, Hickey has climbed the Seven Summits, most recently Mt. Everest, and he embraces the benefits of setting and achieving difficult goals. For the Capstone Scholars, Hickey wanted a similar benefit—he wanted the students to push themselves out of their comfort zones. The result? Adding a “personal challenge” to the students’ semester requirements.

All Capstone Scholars must complete a set of requirements each semester, including attending a Capstone Conversation, Capstone Cinema, and Capstone social event, as well as completing service hours. The personal challenge requirement gave students the chance to explore ways in which they wanted to push themselves, and the possibilities were endless.

“I firmly believe that when students take on a personal challenge that inevitably takes them outside of their comfort zone,” Dr. Hickey said, “they are in reality improving their ability to take on the bigger challenges that will soon face them in life, such as job interviews, integration into the workforce, and of course, the daily challenges to always be the best that they can be.”

Students’ personal challenges varied from overcoming a fear of heights by climbing the rock wall in the Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center to overcoming a fear of needles by donating blood in the Carolina-Clemson Blood Drive. Academically, students challenged themselves to maintain a 4.0 GPA for the semester or to attend each and every one of their 8 a.m. classes. Some health-conscious students took on the challenge of working out a few times a week to stay healthy, and others made a point of skipping the elevator to take the stairs. Students took on new hobbies by learning everything from how to solve a Rubik’s Cube to how to knit, and some tackled skydiving, camping, and white-water rafting. Others sought out organizations to become involved with, and several even made it their goal to hold a leadership position before the year was over.

The Capstone Scholars Program also recently has taken the initiative to combine leadership development with the personal challenge by taking advantage of Campus Recreation’s new 60-foot climbing tower.

Capstone Scholars Assistant Principal David DeWeil thinks that the climbing tower can benefit students in many ways.

“For a personal challenge, Capstone Scholars can push themselves to overcome their fear of heights by making it to the top, but it will also serve all USC students as a tool to promote leadership and teamwork,” DeWeil said.

The Capstone Scholars Program motto is “Dream Big! Impact the Community. Leave a Legacy.” With innovative ideas and an enthusiastic staff, the Capstone Scholars Program is succeeding in finding ways for students to live out that motto.

by Meg Beacham, former assistant principal, Capstone Scholars Program
Students with an internship or co-op experience have a significant advantage in the job market over students who do not have experience," said Tom Halasz, director of the Career Center. "It is imperative that students get experience before graduation."

One hundred thirteen South Carolina employers and 296 University students were eligible applicants to the Community Internship Program, which offered matching funds that enabled employers to recruit talented interns even in tight economic times.

"With students and families that support students experiencing challenging financial times, it was important that these paid opportunities were available," Halasz said. "Not only were students helped by this program, but employers benefited from the skills and experience that students brought to their organizations. Many employers hired our students exclusively from this program, and without the program they would not have hired interns."

All told, 74 Carolina student interns and 44 employers received financial support from the CIP. Some employers were so impressed by the caliber of prospective interns, they made room in their budgets to hire 41 additional students even without the program’s supplementary funds.

Students from the College of Engineering and Computing; College of Arts and Sciences; College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management; College of Mass Communication and Information Studies; School of Law; Arnold School of Public Health; College of Education; School of Music; and Moore School of Business gained essential real-world experience by interning at companies ranging from S.C. Public Health Institute to the Radisson Hotel.

Michelle Wachter, a piano pedagogy major who interned at ETV Radio, produced a show titled “Legacy of Opera.” Describing her first week as an intern, Wachter said she “had never before had one week of such intense learning and such fun.” Wachter also wrote scripts for the hosts of the Chamber Music Series broadcast from the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston.

Senior civil engineering student Johnavon Legette said his favorite part about the internship was “the opportunity to build a great relationship with the company, whether it’s networking or having a great reference for the future.”

Junior chemistry major Ross Wigington nominated his employer, Owen Steel, for the Outstanding CIP Employer award.

"My employer included me in every aspect of their business,” Wigington said. “I have seen the business of steel contracting and fabrication first hand. I have completed projects and worked with many of their highly trained professionals to solve problems.”

A recognition luncheon held in August honored students’ achievements during their summer internships. Sarah Langdon, a senior visual communications major who interned at Microburst Learning, received the Outstanding CIP Intern-Summer 2010 award.

"Since Sarah has joined us, the quality of our videos has leapfrogged over the quality of our past work," said Ann Brown, chief operating officer of Microburst Learning. "Her ability to go into unfamiliar surroundings and capture the essence of what we needed through video or still pictures is phenomenal." Brown said that Microburst has offered Langdon permanent employment.

The program was such a success in its first year that there is funding for both the spring and summer of 2011.

“We received overwhelming positive feedback from students and employers for CIP,” Halasz said. "We know that at least eight students received permanent full-time job offers following their internships and that at least 30 students were asked to continue working as interns with their employer during the fall semester. The continued support from President Pastides and Vice President for Student Affairs Dennis Pruitt has provided the opportunity to continue the CIP this year; we anticipate providing as many as 200 internships in the spring and summer ahead.”

By Julie Hutt, assistant director for experiential education, Career Center
The Honors Residence’s suite-style arrangement and abundance of common space encourage community building and engagement among residents.

The Honors Residence is home to students enrolled in the South Carolina Honors College and in the Magellan Explorers Undergraduate Research and School of Music learning communities.

The University made good on its green promise and paid homage to the residence halls that formerly occupied the space at the corner of Main and Blossom Streets. Recycled bluestone and veil block from the beloved “Towers” are incorporated in the new Honors Residence buildings.

Green features include energy-saving and water-conservation systems, bicycle storage and showers for cyclists, and recycled and low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) building materials.

The Honors Residence celebrated Earth Day 2011 with a LEED (Leadership in Environmental and Engineering Design) Gold rating, the University’s first.

The Honors Residence hosts South Carolina Honors College (SCHC) and University 101 courses in its smart classrooms and conference room and houses SCHC faculty and staff offices.

The Honors Residence’s suite-style arrangement and abundance of common space encourage community building and engagement among residents.

The 191,123-square-foot Honors Residence features 537 beds in 356 rooms. A dining hall and Starbucks on the ground floor are open to the entire Carolina community.
Dominique Lamas is not your average 20-year-old. She is looking to change lives and always strives to put others before herself. Lamas, a junior psychology major who hails from Charlotte, N.C., spent last summer working to start an Impact Movement, a Christian student group, at the University of Memphis in Tennessee. She also served as a camp counselor for Kids Across America (KAA), a sports camp for Christian youth. Lamas, who describes herself as a “big kid at heart,” found the experiences to be life changing. At KAA, she worked mainly with 14-year-old girls, an age group that she found trying at times. Lamas, who describes herself as a “big kid at heart,” found the “You want them to get it; you want their lives to be changed, “Lamas said. “But they are distracted, and sometimes what you are trying to teach them doesn’t register.” Her positive attitude and hard work is exemplified in all of the activities she takes on. Actively involved on campus since her freshman year, Lamas keeps busy. She started as vice president of hall government in Sims, and by the second semester of her freshman year, she was a member of RHA’s executive council. She found that she loved being a mentor, which led her to apply for an orientation leader position. “I wanted to show how much I loved USC to others,” Lamas said, “and reassure them that they chose the right school.” This year, Lamas is a University 101 peer leader, vice president of the Residence Hall Association, a leader of the Impact movement, and campus representative for KAA. As a peer leader, Lamas is sharing all that she has learned with new Carolina students. “I try to give them knowledge that needs to be passed down,” she said.

When the University of South Carolina’s Outdoor Recreation office decided to go carbon neutral, they didn’t know that they would be the first outdoor recreation program in the country to make such a commitment, nor did they know that they would be the first campus office to do so. What they did know was that they would be creating a great educational opportunity. “It’s just the next logical step,” said Victoria Kmiec, student sustainability manager for the program. “We already operate under the ‘Leave No Trace’ ethic; now we are just extending that ethic beyond the trail … beyond the river.” The “Leave No Trace” ethic says that in interacting with the trail, river, or mountain, one should leave the area exactly as she found it. By extending that ethic beyond the river, we start to understand how all of our activities have an environmental, social, and economic impact, some of which can be managed by reducing carbon emissions. “Measuring carbon emissions is essentially measuring the amount of embodied fossil fuel energy required to perform a specific task,” Kmiec said. “And every time we do something that requires burning fossil fuels, it has a negative impact. For instance, we see greenhouse gases altering our climate, oil spills destroying our oceans, and coal mining destroying our Appalachian mountains.” And Kmiec, a third-year engineering major from Louisville, is particularly fond of her Kentucky mountains. So how does an office go carbon neutral? In this case, the students audited all aspects of their operation—the amount of energy used in their computers, office lights, and copy machines; their paper use and waste streams; their travel for conferences and recreational trips; even the food they were taking on these trips. Once they had this information, they plugged the numbers into a carbon footprint calculator, which determines a carbon emission equivalent. The final result indicated that the students would need to plant 39 trees to mitigate their annual emissions. “The program actually helps link together all of our efforts,” said Outdoor Recreation Director Katie Coley. “We were already recyling, we were doing river cleanups, we were finding ways to give back to the community, but now we can see the full circle of actions to impacts, because all of these activities have an impact on our bottom-line carbon footprint. Now, when we turn off lights and computers at the end of the day, when we recycle a can or bottle, when we use local food products on our trips, we will see the annual number of trees needing to be planted start to drop.” Michael Koman, director of the university’s Office of Sustainability and consultant for the project, says it is the ideal type of program. “We could have gone to Katie Coley and said that we notice the office lights get left on at night, and we’d like to fix that by putting those lights on a timer” Koman said. “That kind of solution is measurable and easy, and the University would notice some cost savings. However, what those students did instead was incentivize themselves to turn off those lights. That action has the same measurable cost savings, but with all sorts of bonus consequences. For instance, those students are now more likely to turn off their dorm lights, they are more likely to recycle, they are more likely to look for local purchasing options, and although these actions are not as easy to measure, they have very real benefits for the University.” They also have very real benefits for our planet—ones that will leave a trace, but in a positive direction.
Have you ever wondered if there were better ways to package the toilet paper you buy? Knowles Scholar and Dreher High School (Columbia) math teacher Andy McNeice, ’06, posed that question to his geometry class—and he is still talking about the wide range of solutions his students offered.

The classrooms of fellow Knowles Scholars Ashleigh Enlow Lewis, ’05, a math teacher at Brookland-Cayce High School in West Columbia, and Kristi Schleibaum, ’07, a chemistry teacher at James Madison High School in Fairfax, Va., are filled with equally engaging problems and creative students. All three scholars rave about their support from the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation (KSTF), established in 1999 to empower new teachers and cultivate leaders in physical science, biology, and math education.

“I’m setting a huge example for high school students whose attitude toward learning is the longest memory they have,” said Lewis, a math graduate from West Columbia.

Rather than seek only the right answer, Lewis offers students opportunities to grasp concepts and practical applications of algebra and calculus so that they can observe themselves learning. For example, Lewis designed a game to teach her students about factoring. “I could see their holes in understanding as they played and talked and could direct the learning by asking them questions that encouraged them to reflect on how they played the game,” she said.

This synergy of teacher learning from students and students learning from the teacher characterizes the Knowles philosophy. None of these scholars encountered this approach to math as secondary students themselves. Until his senior year in his Concord, N.C., high school, McNeice wasn’t very taken by math. He came to Carolina as a computer science major and two weeks later decided to try math. The knowledge gained from having taken theoretical and applied college math classes and having taught high school Algebra I, geometry, pre-calculus, statistics, and computer science has been “great for teaching because I understand why [math] works and want to transfer that passion for learning to my students,” said McNeice, who earned his bachelor’s degree in math and his master’s degree in teaching.

During their application process, Lewis, McNeice, and Schleibaum were supported by Dr. Ed Dickey, professor in the department of teacher instruction and education and the Knowles faculty advisor; and the Office of Fellowships and Scholar Programs, the on-campus team that supports students applying for national fellowships. Once named Knowles Scholars, KSTF supports the graduate students financially and with yearly meetings with Knowles cohorts, professional development seminars, monthly regional meetings, mentor and program officer support, online discussions, summer stipends, and grants to purchase materials to foster classroom inquiry. The scholars agree that the respect shown by their Knowles cohorts makes them feel like professionals and motivates the young teachers to grow along with their high school communities.

Schleibaum, a chemistry graduate from Burke, Va., acknowledges the complementary nature of her USC and Knowles experiences. At USC she received American Chemical Society certification, learned “how science is done,” and got teaching experience as a Supplemental Instruction leader; as a Knowles Scholar her learning continues. Last summer, she attended a Knowles-sponsored “Backwards Planning” seminar to refine her ability to define the vision of her lesson plan, decide how students will provide evidence of their learning, and then design instructional activities to help students be successful. And for students who need a bit more time to master a topic, “retesting” is always a possibility: a low grade on a test only indicates that the student “didn’t get it yet,” Schleibaum said.

In the summer of 2010, Lewis attended a Knowles-sponsored workshop, preparing her to teach advanced placement calculus. Moving into her last year of official Knowles support, she is already looking for future challenges such as National Board Certification, which will continue to augment her technical knowledge as well as her teaching insights.

McNeice has two more years of Knowles support. “I love people observing my class and my observing their classrooms because these experiences help me become a better teacher,” McNeice said. “Evaluations are useful for learning how we improve—we all have areas where we can improve.”

The last two summers he has been involved with a National Science Foundation grant at USC for teaching teachers about learning through inquiry and data analysis. “Every teacher has something valuable to contribute,” he said.
for many of us, January 12, 2010 went on just as any other day would. But for the people of Haiti, this date serves as a grim reminder of devastation, tragedy, and shock.
On Tuesday, Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince, was struck by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake that was followed by at least 52 aftershocks. The earthquake destroyed buildings, wiped out nearby towns, and left thousands of people homeless, missing, or dead. In a country that was already severely poverty-stricken, millions of Haitians were further harmed by the earthquake and its aftermath.

By Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2010, Dr. Mike McKenzie, Student Health Services medical director, and a small group of people were already on their way to aid in the relief efforts for the Haitian people. Accompanied by two ministers; a church member; another medical doctor, Dr. Bruce Cope; a Haitian friend and interpreter; and a couple from Charleston, McKenzie left for Haiti on Wednesday and arrived on Thursday. Although the group only stayed until Sunday, Jan. 24, 2010, McKenzie believed that even if they could help only one person, the trip was still worth making.

"When we arrived, the total devastation was overwhelming," McKenzie said, "[This was a country] that was already in need of basically everything … so [the earthquake] was insult on top of injury."

In an effort to maximize their time, the group began work quickly. Although warned of the possible danger, they split up into two groups and attempted to help as many as 4,000 to 5,000 people living among hundreds of makeshift “tent cities.” McKenzie, along with his minister and interpreter, set up medical clinics and began treating people immediately.

"We set up medical clinics in two different locations and saw about 500 patients, the majority of which were children," he said.

The children were treated for injuries and chronic sicknesses and received first aid. The clinics operated for several days, and the groups worked from about 9 a.m. until dark. Although he was exhausted by the work, McKenzie continued treating people, knowing that while he could leave in three days, the Haitian people would have to endure the devastation of the earthquake long after his departure.

In the short term, McKenzie and his fellow volunteers were able to treat hundreds of people who otherwise might not have received the medical attention they needed. In the long-term, McKenzie is planning to partner with a minister living in Haiti to establish a non-profit organization to sponsor a group home to house 24 children.

"It is our hope that by helping raise the children now, we will help create community leaders who will then teach others and begin to make changes for the good," McKenzie said.

By Kayla Hildreth, graduate assistant for public relations, Student Health Services
The Dobson Volunteer Service Program at the University of South Carolina provides funding for students, faculty, and staff members to engage in service locally and abroad. Established during the University’s Bicentennial Campaign 11 years ago with a $1 million endowment from retired Greenville tax lawyer Robert A. Dobson III, ‘60, ‘62 law, the program provides about $50,000 a year to defray expenses of volunteer work.

“I’m thrilled with how well the program is working,” said Dobson, who believes the experience deepens the faith and spiritual life of the participants by “getting them out of their comfort zone and stretching them.” Dobson has established a similar program at Limestone College in Gaffney, S.C., and encourages friends and colleagues to join him in making these opportunities available to more S.C. college students.

“I’d like to see more donors make gifts for programs like this one,” he said. “When you give to a charity or a ministry, you have hope that the money will be used wisely and well. With this program at Carolina, I know it is. I can see the impact, I have talked with the participants, and I can see the difference it is making in their lives. This is the best money I have ever spent.”

The experiences change participants’ perspectives “from inward to outward” said Dobson, who sits on a board that reviews and approves proposed projects by volunteers. “I’ve heard many students come back from projects and say they have decided to become missionaries or social workers, or, in the case of someone going into a medical career, to serve in a charitable capacity overseas.”

Just how much the Dobson Volunteer Service program impacted those students, as well as faculty, was evident in a recent survey conducted by the Department of Student Life. In the survey, participants described their service activities, which were planned based on the communities’ needs and ranged from heavy construction work in primitive conditions to teaching English and organizing playgroups for children in orphanages. Participants cited benefits accrued from participating in Dobson Program-sponsored service, including cultural enrichment, spiritual growth and development, and deepening of relationships among group participants. Students also reported that they increased their language proficiency, gained skills and knowledge applicable to their academic programs, and had their vocational direction influenced by participating in service.

The program underwrites up to 50 percent of approved expenses for individuals and groups. Applicants are selected based on how their intended service will be of help to the population served, how it will complement the applicant’s academic program, and the impact it might have on their individual spiritual development. In academic year 2009-10, the Dobson Program funded 74 students, three faculty, and two staff service trips. Charity Pippin, a junior management major from Myrtle Beach, who participated in a service trip to Peru in Spring 2008.

“Without Dobson, I would not have been able to have the experiences that I did,” Zito said. “We were able to work alongside people that we never thought we would meet, and it provided an incredibly humbling and enlightening experience. I will forever be thankful to the Dobson organization for giving me the chance to have these experiences and to offer my service.”

Edited by Polly Laffitte, Student Affairs and Academic Support development director
The University of South Carolina’s Visitor Center, which started as a class project, has evolved into one of the key components in recruiting each new class of first-year students.

In the early 1990s, a group of senior students working on a class project developed a positive way to tell the story of Carolina—a visitor center. In collaboration with them, the Class of 1941 agreed to financially support the development of a visitor center.

“It’s a wonderful story of two groups of students bridging half a century—one that had the vision and some that had the resources to help develop the original Visitor Center,” said Denise Wellman, director of the Visitor Center.

The Visitor Center opened in April 1994, around the same time as the unveiling of the University’s official logo, which is still used. The unveiling ceremony was held at the Visitor Center, then located at the old Carolina Plaza hotel on Assembly Street, as a way to kick off the idea that the University is a destination point for visitors.

Over the years, the focus turned almost completely to student recruitment. Campus tours for prospective students began in the spring of 1999, and as the numbers of high school students and their families wanting to explore the campus as part of their college-search process kept increasing, the need for a new home for the Visitor Center arose.

In May 2004, the Visitor Center moved to its current home in the first floor of McKissick at the head of the historic Horseshoe. The campus visit program has grown exponentially at this location: In 2009-10, the Visitor Center served more than 59,000 people on campus tours alone, a number that has more than doubled from five years ago.

Scott Verzyl, associate vice president for enrollment management and director of undergraduate admissions, said that the positive visit experience provided by the Visitor Center is critical for today’s students and their parents who are considering recruiting each new class of first-year students. To do that, Wellman and her staff

of six full-time professionals rely on the expertise of 80 student peer leaders, known as University Ambassadors.

“I think what is particularly unique about what we do here is that we want families to tell us what it is they want to accomplish while they’re here,” Wellman said. “Give us your day and we’re sort of like cruise directors. We’ll put together a special visit to help you get the information you need to make an informed decision.”

The campus visit format developed as high school students began exploring more and more options as they sought to find the perfect fit for their college experience.

“We had students looking at more than one school and beyond their home city or state to go to college, so it was clear that people were beginning to invest more and more money in their visits,” Wellman said. “Now, we spend more time individualizing the experience with them, interacting with them, and sharing the experience of the University with the family.”

No two University Ambassador tour guides give the same tour. While they all receive the same training and learn a wealth of information about the University, each student tour guide develops his or her own story to tell on the tour. The facts are the same, but the stories they tell along with the facts are distinct to each tour guide.

“I look for anything on campus that I can include that’s personal,” said Ellie Lewis, a junior advertising major and University Ambassador from Round Hill, Va. “I think

Presidential Ambassadors
Some ambassadors, usually more experienced juniors and seniors, also serve as Presidential Ambassadors to support the needs of the University’s president and first lady. Presidential Ambassadors, who have undergone an additional selection process, help at events at the President’s House and in the president’s box at Williams-Brice Stadium. Wellman’s goal is for them to become the “expert ambassadors who are able to respond to diverse audiences and a variety of needs.”

A Big Commitment
University Ambassadors volunteer three hours each week in the Visitor Center, and they give one tour per week. According to Wellman, they helped nearly one million people last year on the phone, in person, or through social networking applications. On top of that, they participate in training that totals 30-40 hours per year, handle campus tours for athletics recruiting, University open houses, and tours for visitors including church and school groups and donors. They also give ghost tours and historical tours during special events.

Selection and training
“We try really hard to get a good cross-section of students—in-state, out-of-state, men, women, and a variety of different races, religions, and ethnic backgrounds,” Wellman said. “This is considered a professional internship. It’s not just volunteering.” Each fall, nearly 200 students apply for the coveted spots. Students who earn the title of University Ambassador complete an application process, two interviews, 20-30 hours of training, and a skill test before they lead their first solo tour.

The Big Scary Ambassador Test
The Big Scary Ambassador Test, as the ambassadors call it, or BSAT for short, ensures that ambassadors know everything there is to know about Carolina—average SAT scores, average class size, dates of important events like Homecoming and Parents Weekend, and much more. Each year, all ambassadors are required to take the BSAT, which includes a written test; an oral exam in which ambassadors show that they can be “positively honest” when answering difficult questions; a critique of the introduction and conclusion to their tours, videotaped for the test; and, finally, a map challenge, in which the ambassadors must display their prowess in giving directions to any location on campus, as well as notable sites around the city.
fun facts

Ellie Lewis (EL) and Kwade Channell (KC) share some fun facts about being a University Ambassador, in their own words.

Why I applied to be a University Ambassador

EL: I knew I wanted to apply because my freshman year, when I saw a family walking around campus, I would position myself so they could ask me a question because I was so excited about being a student here that I wanted to share that with them. So, I thought joining this organization would be perfect to be able to share my excitement about the school.

KC: Initially, I remember my tour guide, and he was just so enthusiastic and really, really convinced me that Carolina is a good school. When I got here, I was happy, and I thought everything he said was true, and I really wanted to convey that to other prospective students.

Favorite place to show on my tour

EL: I really like stopping on Greene Street because it’s so busy. People really get a feel for what student life is like on Greene Street and in the Russell House. I like to talk about how different organizations can reserve space on Greene Street, like when Dance Marathon did a fundraiser and had professors locked up in cages. Cocky is out there every now and then, and he goes straight to the tour groups when he sees them. Everyone in my group [takes] a picture with him.

KC: My favorite place is the library because I spend so much time there. It’s my second home. I just think the Thomas Cooper Library is fascinating—all the floors, the mezzanine level, the special collections library that was just added on, and all the resources down there—the technology labs, the individual and group study rooms, the fact that we have LexisNexis here and it’s free for student use. I just think it’s cool. I guess that’s one of my nerd-like tendencies, but it’s where I really perk up on the tour.

Special place people ask about or want to see

EL: The Honeycombs (nickname given to the Towers, which were torn down in 2007). A lot of alumni ask about the Honeycombs and what’s changed. I start all my tours by asking what are you most looking for on this tour and going to college. Everyone wants to see residence halls, dorm rooms… that’s the most popular question.

KC: When I stayed on campus my first two years, they asked, “are we going to see your room?” I said, “My room is not tour appropriate.” They laughed. I told them my room is not as neat as these rooms (that we show them). My room is just in a natural state.

Favorite part about being a University Ambassador

EL: I am finally feeling now the impact that I do have on students when they come through. I remember going on tours and being in awe of the tour guide. I had a girl come up to me, who is a student here now, and she said, “You’re the reason I came here.” Yay! I’m now realizing the effect that it has on students.
Dr. Dennis Pruitt, vice president for student affairs, dean of students and vice provost at the University of South Carolina, has been recognized as one of the nation’s top student-affairs officers. Pruitt was honored for outstanding service by NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education at the organization’s annual meeting March 15 in Philadelphia. The award is Pruitt’s fourth from NASPA.

“I am honored and humbled by this recognition,” Pruitt said. “Truly, this award and the many other honors our division has received over the years are a testament to our outstanding and dedicated staff and the marvelously talented, caring and enthusiastic Carolina students we are so fortunate to serve.”

Pruitt, who has led the university’s Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support since 1983, received the Scott Goodnight Award for Outstanding Service as a Dean. It is NASPA’s highest honor for chief student-affairs officers and recognizes commitment to student-affairs administration and innovation in responding to students’ needs.

“This is an outstanding and well-deserved honor,” USC President Harris Pastides said. “In addition to being a wonderful manager, supervisor and mentor to students, faculty and staff, Dennis is a very caring person. He constantly strives to ‘not let one student fall through the cracks.’ This motto inspires our campus community to provide the needed support for our students to achieve their maximum academic and personal goals.”

Last year, NASPA Southeast Region honored Pruitt with its John Jones Award for Outstanding Performance as a Senior Student Affairs Officer.

Jerry Brewer, associate vice president for student life, said he knew Pruitt would make an indelible mark in higher education and the lives of students when they were both graduate students together at Carolina. He has been working alongside Pruitt ever since.

“Each of the past 30 years, Dennis has been awarded increased responsibilities at the University of South Carolina,” Brewer said. “His leadership and influence shape policies and decisions to make Carolina a wonderful learning, teaching and nurturing environment for students. He is a superb leader and administrator.”

In addition to having three majors in the international business program and gearing up to spend a year abroad in Hong Kong, David Filipczak spent his sophomore year serving as president of BGLSA. The student group provides support and social interaction for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and their allies, and it educates the University community about related topics, no small task.

“It was a huge undertaking. I didn’t realize how big it was” said Filipczak.

Indeed, from planning the club’s Pride event from home in Charlotte, N.C., over the summer to appointing executive board members after everyone resigned and no one ran for the positions, Filipczak had his share of obstacles to overcome.

“But the work is rewarding,” Filipczak said. “The more things I have to do, the better I do them.”

Filipczak feels that campus should be a place where people feel comfortable exploring who they are to the fullest extent.

“College is about finding yourself and becoming an adult,” he said.

As president of BGLSA, Filipczak has learned about leading, following, and working in a team toward a common goal. Even though he is leaving to spend his junior year studying in China, his vision for BGLSA is that it will continue to make an impact not only at the University, but in the community as well.

“I’m proud about what has been done on campus and being allied with such a powerful organization,” Filipczak said. “Our members are passionate about who they are and what they are fighting for.”

by Becky Wiens, graduate assistant for public relations, Student Affairs and Academic Support
university again honored for community service, service learning

The University of South Carolina’s Columbia campus has been named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service learning, and civic engagement.

The honor marks the fourth consecutive year that the University has been recognized by the Corporation for National and Community Service for offering innovative programs and projects that meet community needs. Selection criteria include the scope and creativity of projects, student participation, and service-learning course opportunities.

During the academic year 2009–10, 23,436 students, faculty, and staff members participated in volunteer work totaling 346,678 service hours. The economic impact of that service is estimated at $5.6 million.

Courtesy of Media Relations

academic centers for excellence among nation’s best academic-support programs

The University of South Carolina’s Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE) won a bronze 2010 Excellence Award from NASPA, the national organization for student-affairs administrators in higher education. The annual NASPA awards honor excellence, innovation, and effectiveness in student-affairs programs at colleges and universities across the United States.

“I am so pleased that NASPA continues to recognize the outstanding programs and services we offer to help Carolina students derive maximum value from their college experience,” said Dennis Pruitt, vice president for student affairs and vice provost. “ACE offers students personalized, one-on-one coaching to help in identifying and applying their strengths, creating academic plans, and in many cases, getting back on the path to achieving their goals. It’s a remarkable program, and it’s one of many that we offer to enhance students’ progress and persistence to their degrees.”

ACE won the bronze Excellence Award in the “Careers, Academic Support, Service-Learning, Community Service and related” category. This is the University’s third NASPA Excellence Award in just two years.
If there isn’t enough time in the day, Shannon Schoultz makes time. She’s involved in everything from her sorority to working for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, being chair of her step team, and serving as a Minority Assistance Peer Program mentor—all while studying sports management.

So how does she manage to fit it all in?

“I’m the type of person where if I’m idle, I don’t get things done,” Schoultz said. “If I’m on the move, it pushes me. I have to stay busy.”

Schoultz says she loves being involved in campus organizations because of the friendships.

“Of course, you have to get the business done first, but afterwards we’re always laughing and having a good time,” Schoultz said.

Being a student leader has helped her learn how to prioritize, manage her time, and be open-minded. Schoultz says that she loves being a part of Delta Sigma Theta, a public service sorority. She also enjoys working with freshmen in the Minority Assistance Peer Program and serving as secretary for SAVVY, a multicultural female student group.

“At USC, everyone doesn’t look the same, and I love it because that’s what the world looks like. Diversity is key,” Schoultz said.

Born and raised in Beech Island, S.C., Schoultz came to Carolina because of the great scholarships she received. On top of the Life Scholarship and Abney Foundation grant, Schoultz is also a Gamecock Guarantee recipient.

She recently served on a college panel at her former high school. Of the panel members, she was the only person who had never transferred colleges.

“I’ll tell anyone and everyone, I love being at Carolina,” Schoultz said. “It was the best decision I’ve made in my life so far.”

by Becky Wiens, graduate student for public relations, Student Affairs and Academic Support
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