



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2024-2025

Aug 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Community Engagement supports Goal 1 of UMW's Strategic Vision, which is to promote the values of service and community and civic engagement at UMW. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for community engagement between UMW and our greater communities, building bridges between students, faculty, staff, and community partners through effective relationships that bring about student learning and positive social change. The 2024-2025 school year was an active year for the Center for Community Engagement (CCE).

On the UMW campus, more and more students are becoming interested in service, community engagement, and volunteer work and are eager to join COAR, Alternative Service Breaks, and UMW Votes. Over the past academic year, the UMW Center for Community Engagement worked with over 100 community partners and UMW students logged over 40,000 hours of community-engaged work, with nearly 20,000 hours of direct service. This year the



Figure 1: Students help mulch trees during a day of service.



average hours spent on community service increased to 15.9 per student. The percent of students who do any community-engaged work at all held steady at 54% this year. In June 2024, UMW was ranked as one of the **20 Best Schools for Making an Impact** by the Princeton Review as part of their review of Best Value Colleges.

This report covers the time period between June 1, 2024 through Aug 20, 2025. The diagram to the left shows the range of programs supported directly by the Center for Community Engagement in the 2024-2025 school year.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING ON CAMPUS

Community-engaged learning is a pedagogical practice that combines academic content and work in a community outside of the classroom in such a way that promotes learning and the common good.

Community-engaged learning is considered a high impact pedagogical strategy, and is being embraced in many universities, across disciplines, for that reason. Community-engaged learning helps students understand real world applications of course material and gives students experience with problem solving, communicating across differences, and working through complexity and ambiguity.

Many faculty offer community-engaged classes, building upon their existing relationships with community partners.



The Center for Community Engagement supports community-engaged learning on the UMW campus in a variety of ways. The CCE maintains a [volunteer webpage](#) that lists a range of volunteer activities. The Honors Service Learning and Psychology Service Learning programs direct their students to this webpage, along with the COAR website, so they can find volunteer sites for their work. CCE also works one-on-one with students in the Honors Service Learning and Psychology Service Learning classes and helps them find placements and introduces them to community partners, if needed. In addition, the CCE links Pre-Health students with a range of health-related volunteer opportunities in the community. The Center for Community Engagement, and COAR, worked with over 100 community partners last year including Big Brothers, Big Sisters; Tree Fredericksburg; Red Cross; Friends of the Rappahannock; Loisanne's Hope House, and many others.



Figure 2: Students attend the Active Citizens Conference.

Staff from the CCE regularly support community-engaged pedagogy to support experiential learning opportunities and meet community needs. The CCE facilitates relationship building between community partners and UMW classes and instructors. Staff from the local SPCA reached out to the CCE, and we were able to connect them with a computer science class. The software development class, taught by Dr. Jennifer Polack, has students build volunteer management systems for a range of community organizations including Gwyneth's Gift, Old Dominion Humane Society, and StepVA.

Dr. Swerzenski also teaches a community-engaged class for the Communications and Digital Studies program titled Media Production for Social Change (DGST306). Each spring, staff from the CCE support his work to connect with community partners to meet community needs and support project-based learning. Last spring, Dr. Swerzenski worked with over five community partners and his student designed digital communications campaigns for Fredericksburg Porch Fest, the Rappahannock Regional Food Bank, and other organizations.

Staff from the CCE also give presentations for community-engaged classes and share information about



Figure 3: Students help with weeding at the community garden.

community-engaged opportunities as they emerge. In the spring the CCE supported 10 students as they attended the Active Citizen's Conference at the College of William and Mary, and both COAR and UMW Votes students presented at the conference.

2024-2025 was the third year of the [Impact Program](#) on campus, and 22 students graduated from the program. A more detailed report on the UMW Impact Program successes can be found on the CCE website. The director of the Center for Community Engagement taught the spring class for the Impact Program.

The CCE supported the following community-engaged initiatives last year:

- **[Bragg Hill Community Garden](#):** Working with Dr. Eric Bonds and an AmeriCorps VISTA, the CCE supported the work of the Bragg Hill Community Garden. The garden has been used by Dr. Bonds for community-based pedagogy; he participated in the [Summer Social Sciences Institute](#) in 2023, and supports a student garden club. The garden is an important community engagement project and meets community needs by providing access to green space, fresh food, and outdoor recreation. The AmeriCorps VISTA has been writing successful grants to support the work of the garden and help with volunteer recruitment and management. Dr. Eric Bonds will be using the garden for a community engaged class in fall 2025.
- Working with [Campus Compact](#), the CCE also nominates a student for the [Newman Civic Fellowship](#) every year, and sponsors an [AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer](#) on campus each year that provides support for the Bragg Hill Community Garden and the [Gwen Hale Resource Center](#).



Figure 4: Students from the 2024 Summer Enrichment Program make sandwiches for bag lunches that will be donated to the Micah Homeless Hospitality Center.

The AmeriCorps VISTA in 2024-2025 was a recent UMW graduate who was receiving a stipend to build the capacity of several programs, including the Bragg Hill Community Garden and the Gwen Hale Resource Center. She was in the second and last year of her VISTA posting. Two new AmeriCorps VISTAs were recruited in summer 2025.

CCE staff offered two community-engaged workshops for students during the Summer Enrichment Program in summer 2025, and Worked with City as Text (the Honors early arrival program) and NEST on service projects in August 2025.

The Community Outreach and Resources (COAR) and UMW Votes programs also provide opportunities for community-engaged learning, and more details on these programs are provided below.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

UMW serves as the one of the primary contacts for community organizations seeking volunteers or looking to collaborate with UMW on a community-related project. CCE staff receive, assess, collate, and distribute information about volunteer opportunities with community partners, put information on the volunteer websites as needed, and publicize through other channels such as social media or sharing with faculty and staff. The CCE has a multi-faceted, ongoing relationship with Fredericksburg City Public Schools. The CCE supports the Start on Success program, which provides paid internships to high school seniors at James Monroe High School. The VCU Center on Transition Innovations, which supports the program, funded by the Virginia Department of Education, [produced a video](#) about one of the earlier graduates of the program, Daniel Curry. In this inspiring video, we follow Daniel Curry's journey from James Monroe High School to working full-time in the electrical shop at the University of Mary Washington. Through Virginia's Start on Success (SOS) program, Daniel explored hands-on trades, overcame self-doubt, and discovered his passion and talent for electrical work. Now, he's employed at UMW, working toward his journeyman's license—and mentoring new students to believe in their own potential. More details about our partnership with [Fredericksburg City Public Schools](#) can be found on the CCE website.



STUDENT FACING PROGRAMS

The Center for Community Engagement supports several student facing programs that provide experiential learning opportunities for students and help inspire members of our UMW community to pursue things greater than self. Through these opportunities and experiences, these programs help equip students to address society's complex challenges and to be active citizens in our pluralistic liberal democracy. By following their interests and challenging themselves in real-world environments, UMW students develop the knowledge, skills, and capacity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them.

I. Community Outreach and Resources (COAR)



Figure 5: Students work on a mural at the Gwen Hale Resource Center during NEST Day of Service.

COAR supported several community-focused projects during the 2024-2025 school year. COAR is a student-run service program consisting of a diverse group of students serving community needs through an active exchange of service and learning. In addition, COAR students use their service to educate themselves while continually striving to find solutions to problems that challenge the community. Last year, six students were employed to lead COAR's activities as student staff, with one serving as the COAR staff director. COAR helped coordinate several service activities over the course of the school year:

1. **NEST Day of Service:** On August 20th, 2024, COAR and CCE helped support the NEST (*New Experiences for Students Transitioning*) Day of Service where UMW students participated in a range of projects serving the UMW community. We worked with the Office of New Student Programs to support volunteer opportunities for over 92 students. Among other service projects, NEST students made 100 bag lunches for Micah Homeless Hospitality Center; 20 hygiene kits with soap, shampoo, and deodorant, weeded the on-campus pollinator garden, and visited the Bragg Hill Community Garden.
2. **Into the Streets:** On Saturday, September 21st, 2024 128 UMW students met on campus to carry out volunteer activities. This is usually COAR's biggest event, and students worked with a variety of Fredericksburg nonprofits including the Fredericksburg Area Museum, Tree Fredericksburg, Downtown Greens, the Bragg Hill Community Garden, the local Habitat for Humanity ReStore, and more.
3. **Pay it Forward Day:** On Saturday, October 19th, 2024, 66 students met on campus and carried out community service projects. Students picked up trash on city streets, wrote cards for seniors in local nursing homes, pulled ivy at Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop, volunteered with Downtown Greens, and completed other activities in the Fredericksburg area.

4. **Fall 2024 Gift Box Drive:** During Fall 2024, COAR publicized the Gift Box Drive, purchased boxes, and facilitated a gift box pick-up and delivery. 83 students participated in a Gift Box Wrapping Party on Nov. 8th. Students, faculty, and staff all picked up gift boxes and filled them with art supplies, books, winter gear, and toys. Approximately 425 gift boxes were collected by early December and distributed to youth in the Head Start Programs in Spotsylvania County Schools and Fredericksburg City Public Schools. Students delivered the gift boxes in person at FCPS.



Figure 6: Students participating in MLK Day of Service in January 2025.

5. **MLK Day of Service:** Coordinating with the staff of the Center for Community Engagement and the James Farmer Multicultural Center, COAR students assisted in the planning, publicizing, and execution of this year's MLK Day of Service. Held on Saturday, January 25th, 2025, 71 UMW students volunteered on projects such as letter writing, t-shirt bag making, stocking shelves at the Gwen Hale Resource Center, bagging lunches for Micah Ministries, and assembling hygiene kits.
6. **Good Neighbor Day:** Held on Saturday, March 15th, 2025, 59 students worked between ten neighbor's homes and three community partners to give back to UMW's neighbors. Students volunteered with yardwork, painting, raking, and more. Through Good Neighbor Day, students were able to show their appreciation for the local Fredericksburg community while building relationships with their neighbors.
7. **Engage With the Earth:** On Saturday, April 19th, 2025, 48 students participated in a variety of environmentally-focused service projects. Students engaged with the community by completing projects at the Bragg Hill Community Garden, clearing invasive species at Downtown Green's Belman Road property, picking up litter in the Fredericksburg community, and mulching trees with Tree Fredericksburg. This event was in partnership with UMW's ASPIRE week, representing the "Engagement" portion of ASPIRE.
8. **COAR Weekly Volunteer Programs:** The COAR program also supports the COAR Council, which is made up of the student leaders of weekly volunteer programs. Currently, COAR Council sends volunteers on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to the following nonprofit organizations: Downtown Greens, Loisanne's Hope House, Stafford Junction, Charter Senior Living, and Fredericksburg SPCA. Students also work with Bigs in Schools (a program of Big Brothers, Big Sisters), and deliver food to local homeless shelters through a partnership with UMW Dining and the national Food Recovery Network program. Finally, students picked up litter from city streets every other Saturday in coordination with Friends of the Rappahannock. This year, four new volunteer programs came online – The Green Crew (working with UMW Landscape and Grounds to remove invasive species), Helping Hands (indoor, accessible projects such as making cards or fleece blankets to donate), Charter Senior Living (socializing with seniors), and composting (working with Four Five coffee to compost coffee grounds in a site near the pollinator garden).
9. **COAR Council:** COAR staff would not be able to keep the vast array of weekly programs that we have running without our amazing COAR Council. The council, made up of 24 student volunteers, facilitates our weekly programs through independent leadership. Last year, COAR Council kept their weekly programs running through constant contact with community partners and service work.

II. UMW Votes



UMW Votes is a nonpartisan program dedicated to educating the community about all aspects of the voting process. The UMW Votes mission is to create civically-engaged students passionate about participating in our democracy. UMW Votes works with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Students Learn Students Vote, Virginia21, and Campus Vote Project to increase voter registration and education among UMW students. In 2025 UMW received the Voter Friendly Campus designation for 2024-2025, and UMW's ALL IN report can be found on the [website for ALL IN](#). The Voter Friendly Campus designation program was started through a partnership between Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project and NASPA's LEAD Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. The LEAD Initiative is a network of NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) member colleges and universities committed to encouraging and highlighting the work of making civic learning and democratic engagement a part of every student's college education. This partnership was formed as a tool to support higher education institutions fulfilling the requirements of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which necessitates that institutions distribute voter registration forms to their students. In fall 2024, UMW Votes helped register over 200 students to vote. In the 2024-2025 school year, UMW Votes had 11 regular student volunteers in the fall and 9 in the spring that participated in weekly meetings. In addition, UMW Votes worked with over 25 total volunteers each semester, and accounted for over 420 volunteer hours last year.



Figure 7: Alternative Service Break students in Williston, VT

III. Alternative Service Breaks

The Center for Community Engagement offers Alternative Service Break (ASB) trips to students as a community engagement opportunity. ASB encourages community involvement and inspires personal growth through reflection. Students learn about the community where they work, issues related to homeownership, and help build and repair homes in partnership with local Habitat for Humanity chapters. Students are challenged to apply academic concepts to real-world experiences, and to think beyond themselves to gain a new perspective and grow their appreciation for the impact of service.

In fall 2024, CCE staff recruited student leaders for two Alternative Service Break programs that would run in spring 2025. During the spring semester, students held several fundraising events and participated in leadership development. During Spring Break 2025, 9 students traveled to South Carolina to work with [Habitat for Humanity of Berkeley County](#) in Goose Creek, SC. In May 2025, 8 students travelled to Williston, Vermont to work with [Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity](#).

IV. Work with Student Affairs

The CCE works directly with the Division of Student Affairs in many ways. In addition to helping with NEST Day of Service, partnering with the James Farmer Multicultural Center, and helping service clubs and organizations, CCE staff also provided community-engaged activity stations during new student orientation and worked all the admission and orientation events throughout the year. In addition, we provided presentations to FSEM Peer Mentors, NEST leaders, and RAs over the summer. The CCE also actively supports the Red Cross Club.

CONCLUSION

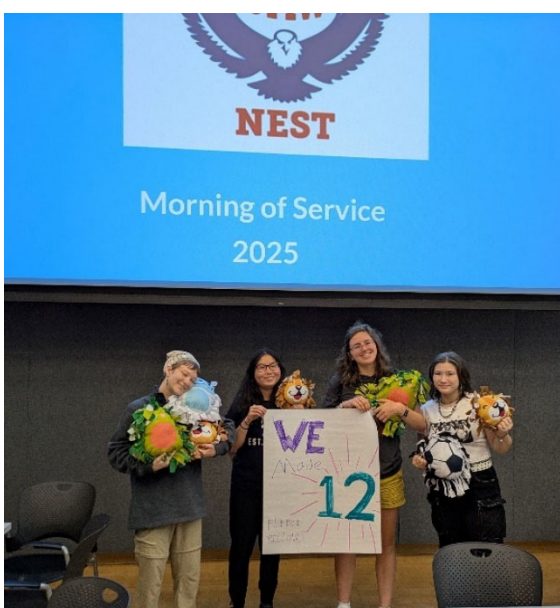


Figure 8: Students participating in NEST Morning of Service

UMW is a member of Campus Compact, a national organization with a mission to advance the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility. Campus Compact urges universities to embrace our responsibilities as place-based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically. Campus Compact works to “build democracy through civic engagement” and support “...students as they develop leadership skills, strategies for engagement, public applications of academic knowledge, and increased civic participation.” The work of the UMW Center for Community Engagement continues to support this mission and uplift the goals of the 2022 UMW Strategic Vision, ensuring that UMW students

have the knowledge, skills, and capacity to improve their lives, their communities, and the world around them.

The UMW Center for Community Engagement is located in Suite 320 in the Cedric Rucker University Center. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for community engagement between UMW and our greater communities, building bridges between students, faculty, staff, and community partners through effective relationships that bring about student learning and positive social change.

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