

NOMINATION FORM

CHE SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT COMPETITION

Institution: **Winthrop University**

Title of Project: **The Reading Tent Project**

Director of Project: **Ellin McDonough, Carrie Whiteside, & Gloria Jones**

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Establishment Date of Project: **September 06, 2011**

Unit That Administers Project: **Career and Civic Engagement,
Orientation and New Student Programs,
University College**

Total Number of Students Involved **1,258**

Signature of Institutional President _____

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NOMINATED PROJECT
(Insert your answer after each question.)

- 1. For purposes of this competition, the Commission on Higher Education defines service learning as college student learning at any level and in any situation that is *linked* in a direct, hands-on fashion to the resolution of a problem or concern in a target community outside the institution and is *related* to a college course with some type of reflection activity. Briefly, how does your project meet the parameters of this definition?**

Through Winthrop's first-year seminar course, Academy (ACAD) 101, all first year students participate in "The Reading Tent Project," a shared community service project aimed at increasing reading habits among elementary age children. The goal of Winthrop's ACAD (Academy) 101 course is to provide first year students with the concepts, skills, and resources necessary for successful higher learning and to facilitate the student's adjustment to and engagement in the class and university. As a requirement of the course, students work as a team to plan and implement a community service project- The Reading Tent.

"The Reading Tent Project" was created to provide the basic framework for a shared ACAD project while at the same time addressing a vital community need: childhood literacy. There is a great need in South Carolina to support our early readers. According to 2009 SC Kids Count data, South Carolina ranked in the bottom 10 states on 4th grade reading. In low-income communities, there is only one age-appropriate book per 300 children and statistics show children without access to books are well on their way to becoming one of the 33 percent of fourth graders who cannot read at the basic level. (Reading Is Fundamental; <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/reading-is-fundamental-celebrates-45-years-of-inspiring-young-readers-133144323.html>)

For our project we partner with 8 afterschool programs from Title One elementary schools and community centers. Each ACAD team (56 total) is assigned a date and a community site for their reading tent during the fall semester. Teams are responsible for collecting donated books and for creating unique and engaging activities for the children. Winthrop students provide direct service to youth through literacy activities, individual and group reading, and by distributing free books. During the course, Winthrop students are assigned readings related to global literacy, and reflect on their readings and service experience through critical writing and group discussions.

The Reading Tent Project promotes a love for reading by spreading the message to children that college students read books and that they read for fun. By the end of the fall, participating children from our partner schools have benefited from a six week literacy program and have a personal library of books at home.

- 2. Specifically, which segments of the college/university community does your project involve?**

The Reading Tent Project is supported by multiple segments of our university community. Our entire freshmen class provides direct service to our community. On an administrative level, our freshman seminar course (ACAD) is managed through a partnership between University College and Student Life professionals. Service Learning staff work with the community to identify service needs, and

develop the service requirement of ACAD. Peer Mentor staff train student leaders who facilitate the service component alongside faculty. An advisory board consisting of faculty, staff, and students meet to determine the goals and curriculum for ACAD. Faculty hired to teach ACAD come from all disciplines. There are 56 faculty members that teach ACAD and facilitate their part of the service project. In addition, each ACAD class has a student leader (peer mentor) that assists with the service project. Career and Civic Engagement markets the program to the entire campus community, generating enthusiasm about the project and recruiting additional volunteers. As a result, many organizations and faculty donate books for the project. University Relations staff markets the event to the larger community.

In 2013, the Reading Tent Project involved 56 faculty members, 56 peer mentors (student leaders) and the entire freshmen class- 1,202 students.

Community involvement and support has been critical to the success of our project, and its sustainability. We use the expertise of the Rock Hill School District to determine which schools are served by our project. Rock Hill School district staff selected 7 schools they felt would benefit the most from the program, mainly Title One elementary schools. We also partner with the Emmett Scott Center's CRAVE program, an afterschool program that serves low income elementary age children that live in one of our most distressed communities.

3. How many students (specify degree levels to the extent possible) does the project affect?

In 2013, the Reading Tent Project involved 56 peer mentors (student leaders) and the entire freshmen class- totaling 1,258 students. Next year will be our fourth year of our project. *By the close of fall 2014, every Winthrop student will have participated in the Reading Tent Project.*

4. Describe the target community or communities your project serves.

The Reading Tent Project serves approximately 450 elementary age children. The Rock Hill School district staff selected 7 schools they felt would benefit the most from the program, mainly Title One elementary schools. We also partner with the Emmett Scott Center's CRAVE program, an afterschool program that serves low income elementary age children that live in one of our most distressed communities.

Current data demonstrates the interdependence between colleges and PK-12 education. Currently, only 62.2% of South Carolina youth graduate from high school, a major factor in higher education attainment. South Carolina falls behind the curve on the higher education attainment goal. According to U.S. Census data, the South Carolina attainment rate is declining- this year the rate was 34.2%. Institutional partnerships with K-12 schools and community organizations focused on boosting academic skills and aspirations for college are valuable for preparing future students and supporting students already in college (Shorr and Parks, 2000). In 2010 the American Association of State Colleges and Universities charged a task force with studying college readiness and making recommendations to institutions. *It was recommended that AASCU institutions can make a significant contribution to readiness by working with local schools to ensure that students are able to read at grade level by the time they are in third grade. (AASCU, 2012)*

5. Describe your project's effectiveness in helping to solve the problems or concerns in the target community.

In Fall of 2013, over 450 children benefitted from the Reading Tent program. Winthrop students gave out over 3,000 free books. Beyond creating access for children to get free books, Winthrop students

were able to have an ongoing conversation with children about life in college, and the importance of reading. An additional 500 books from the project were distributed to Rock Hill Schools, to be delivered to children in need.

The Reading Tent has given Winthrop University structure to provide similar, sustainable efforts year-round. We have seen an increase in student volunteer participation in other literacy outreach programs: SCOPE and the Homework Clinic. Winthrop students hosted “Reading Tents” at community centers on MLK Day of Service. The Literacy Intervention Team, a new reading tutor program that began Spring 2014, is an outcome of our partnerships with Rosewood and Ebenezer—two of our participating schools.

As a result of our partnership and project, Winthrop has become an important member of Rock Hill Reads, an initiative and collaboration between the City of Rock Hill, York County library, Rock Hill Schools and other non-profit agencies to improve literacy rates in York County. Currently, Rock Hill Reads, led by Winthrop University, is hosting a community-university children’s book drive, called Book-A-Rama, with a goal of raising 5,000 books for children in need. This project will result in greater access to print materials in children's homes and provide supplemental reading material for upcoming programs to prevent reading loss during the summer months. For this effort, we have secured over 40 business partner locations and 4 middle schools to participate in the book drive. On March 27th, students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members are invited to an “Inaugural Day of Service” in which we will sort and distribute donated books, and host a reading tent for preschool children on campus. This Day of Service is part of Winthrop’s Inauguration Week celebration of Dr. Comstock as 10th president. Comstock is widely known for her focus on access to quality higher education and attainment of a degree as the best way to create an educated workforce, prepare individuals for democratic citizenship, and promote upward mobility. "But the path to college starts with successful early learning strategies. That is why I am proud to have our day of service during Inauguration week designed around Book-a-Rama," Comstock said. "This broad community effort to benefit children is consistent with Winthrop's core values and my own commitment to education the blends liberal arts, professional programs, and civic engagement."

6. Describe the degree to which your project enhances student learning while providing specific examples of the service learning activities the students engage in. Also explain how the service learning activities reinforce or apply what the students learn in the classroom.

The goal of Winthrop’s ACAD (Academy) 101 course is to provide first year students with the concepts, skills, and resources necessary for successful higher learning and to facilitate the student’s adjustment to and engagement in the class and university. The project’s specific learning outcomes include “understanding support services and learning opportunities”, “developing a sense of community and connection to the university”, and “connecting personal and social responsibility to their own academic efforts”.

Further, the project addresses Winthrop’s core commitment: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility. “As a community of learners, we are committed to these dimensions of personal and social responsibility: • Achieving Excellence • Cultivating Personal and Academic Integrity • Contributing to a Larger Community • Taking Seriously the Perspectives of Others • Refining Ethical and Moral Reasoning”.

Through their participation in ACAD, Winthrop students and faculty learn more about their community, literacy, and many times break out of their comfort zones. We hope that our freshmen

continue to support the program throughout their college career by volunteering outside of their ACAD experience. Student reflection is included in the program. Feedback thus far is very positive, with many students stating they would be interested in repeating their service experience.

Additional learning takes place with our 56 Peer Mentors. Peer Mentors (student leaders selected to co-teach ACAD) are in charge of facilitating their team's service project. Peer Mentors take a mandatory LEAD 120 course: Theory and Practice of Peer Mentor Leadership. The purpose of the course is to provide student leaders an opportunity to understand Relational Leadership as a model for leadership within the Winthrop University environment (specifically through the Peer Mentor Program) and in the global community. Facilitating the Reading Tent Project is an integral part of the course, providing the student with an opportunity to put theory to practice while under the direction and guidance of a supervisor and with peer support.

7. Is there academic credit associated with the project (not necessary for submission)? If so, please explain the particulars.

Yes, all project participants receive academic credit through ACAD 101 course. Additionally, student leaders (peer mentors) receive academic credit through their LEAD 120 course.

8. If funding is required, how is the project funded and what is the approximate annual budget for the project?

Yes, funding is required to purchase supplemental educational supplies and packaging materials. Our annual budget for the project is approximately 1,500.

9. Feel free to add any other comments you may have about your project.

We are committed to this project for five years. Below are some pictures of our students!



