



## NEWS

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### SC COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION PRESENTS 2016 SERVICE LEARNING AWARDS

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – The fifteenth annual Service Learning Awards were presented at the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education meeting on Thursday, May 5, 2016. This year, fourteen programs from public and independent colleges and universities were nominated for the award.

Presented since 2001, this award recognizes the exemplary contributions made by the service learning efforts of South Carolina colleges and universities and their students. Service learning is a meaningful opportunity for students to apply acquired knowledge and skills in solving real-world problems in their communities. The annual competition recognizes three of the most commendable service learning projects from those nominated; one award is presented to a public four-year college or university, one to a public two-year college, and one to an independent college or university.

The criteria used to select the winners include the ability to resolve community concerns or address community issues; the degree to which the project enhances students' learning; the impact of the project on campus; and the integration of the project's activities into academics. While presenting the awards, Commissioner Dianne Kuhl, who led this year's selection committee, stated that the Commission received several outstanding applications and that the committee was "very impressed with the quality of the nominations, so it was difficult to select the winners." She also expressed her gratitude for "the wonderful service South Carolina students provide to their communities." The Commission congratulated each of the winners as they were presented plaques in recognition of their efforts.

For public four-year institutions, **the College of Charleston** received the award for **Unified Theatre, a Special Needs Theatre in Partnership with City of Charleston Therapeutic Recreational Services** directed by Laura Turner. The Unified Theatre program provided hands-on educational theatre experience for College of Charleston students while also providing special needs citizens in the City of Charleston an opportunity for an artistic experience. Students enrolled in the Theatre for Youth concentration within the BA in Theatre and graduate students in the Theatre Concentration within the Masters of Arts in Teaching the Performing Arts applied the knowledge and skills they learned to teach acting, direct, adapt material for different ages and skill sets, produce, market shows on little to no budgets, and design and build the sets to accompany their shows. These productions gave the participants who have disabilities the chance to sing, act and dance as part of the therapeutic recreation program. According to the application, "the joy that this program has brought to this population and to their families getting to see them be stars instead of sidelined in artistic experiences is immeasurable." Dr. Brian McGee, College of Charleston Provost, stated that "this award honors the extraordinary work of Professor Laura Turner and her students in serving the Charleston

community. The artistic experiences provided by Unified Theatre have provided a critical new dimension to therapeutic services for adults with Down Syndrome, autism, and physical disabilities. Each day, College of Charleston students, faculty, and staff have a positive and transformational impact on our state and community. President McConnell and I are proud of Unified Theatre and all those who have participated in this impressive project.”

For public two-year institutions, **Tri-County Technical College** received the award for **MENTOR (Meeting Early Needs through Oral Reading)** directed by Meredith McClure. For this service learning project, students enrolled in the Early Childhood Development program were partnered with kindergarten students at LaFrance Elementary School who needed additional support in reading and writing to help them develop these skills. The college students applied the knowledge and skills they learned to create or select appropriate activities to engage these kindergarten students to develop listening, reading, and writing skills. These activities also addressed National Association for the Education of Young Children Standards. Dr. Ronnie L. Booth, President of Tri-County Technical College, stated that “This service learning initiative is a win-win for our students at Tri-County Technical College and the elementary school children they assist through the MENTOR program. Our students gain valuable experience and have the opportunity to practice their skills in a school setting. The children benefit from one-on-one assistance, as well as the relationships they develop with caring, helpful college students. We are proud of Meredith McClure and the whole Early Childhood Development team and look forward to building on our successes with this program.”

For independent institutions, **Benedict College** received the award for the **B.C. Cares Flood Relief Project** directed by Tondaleya Jackson. For this service learning project, college students, faculty, and staff united to contribute to the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the historic October 2015 flood. College students and staff of the Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program consulted with partnering community organizations to better understand the needs of Midlands’ residents. As a result of these discussions, students collected and organized cleaning supplies, household goods, clothing, and other items because such items were not priorities to many agencies that mostly addressed the most basic needs for food and shelter. The students then planned and advertised an event to distribute these items to community members on October 16, 2015, at the Benedict College Charlie W. Johnson Stadium. The relief project served a total of 650 community members throughout the Midlands. Dr. Jackson stated that “The Benedict College Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program is committed to fostering the service component of the College’s mission. We take great pride in connecting students with civic engagement opportunities to empower them to be a power for good in society and to create a better world. Benedict College’s receipt of the Commendation of Excellence in Service-Learning award is an honor that reinforces this value and serves to further champion the strides made by institutions, like Benedict College, in its commitment to helping students strengthen their skills through service to the surrounding community.”

The Commission congratulates these outstanding educators and their students for their excellent service learning projects and thanks them for their invaluable contributions to the state.