



# THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Much like the lengthening days and vibrant energy of summer, the Office of Community Engagement has experienced a period of significant growth and achievement this past year.

The Office of Community Engagement connects community and campus resources, transforms student knowledge and awareness through experiential learning opportunities, and inspires civic action to create a more just, inclusive, and equitable world.

While SHU students, faculty, and staff complete over 115,000 hours of community engaged work each year, it would not be possible to do so without the help of tremendous community partners in schools, nonprofits, and churches. Community engagement is at the heart of the university's mission, and we are grateful for the ongoing support of our local community as co-educators.

This year we launched the first phase of our community partner advisory board development initiative. Hosting listening sessions and focus groups of students, faculty, and community stakeholders, we learned what is working well and what adjustments we would like to make, both as an office and institution. We also held our first Community Partners Recognition event this spring, as well as our quarterly newsletter, both initiatives designed to connect resources on and off campus.

Our commitment to our community partners is also evident in our first full-time Coordinator of Community Partnerships role. We welcomed Erin Rederscheid to the team in July 2023 and she has been an invaluable bridge builder with new and existing community partners. If you have not already connected with her, please reach out!

We also continue to support over 500 students in weekly volunteer and work study site placements, supporting organizations across the nonprofit sector, including healthcare, education, social services, arts, and recreation. Our students share their impact on a global scale through Global Service-Learning programs to Colombia, Costa Rica, and Greece, and we look forward to expanding to Dingle, Ireland in 2025!

Our role in living out and promoting the mission of the university begins with our students. It is our hope that you will enjoy reading the following report to learn more about our current programs and initiatives and when your schedule permits, we hope you will stop by our office or reach out and connect with us!

Sincerely,

Annie Johnson, Director

Arlete Perez Paez, Assistant Director

Erin Rederscheid, Coordinator of Community Partnerships







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## GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

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The Office of Community Engagement continues to support over 450 Pioneer Service Grant recipients, nine Community Scholars, 16 work study students, and countless volunteers in numerous student clubs and athletic teams with service requirements by connecting them with volunteer opportunities in Bridgeport.

**PIONEER SERVICE GRANT** – The Pioneer Service Grant is a service-based grant open to first-year students. Grant recipients have exhibited a passion for serving others prior to enrolling at Sacred Heart and intend to participate in service activities during their time at SHU. These students must complete at least 30 hours of community engagement throughout the school year. This program is designed to get students involved in community service projects in the Greater Bridgeport area.

**8,935**  
HOURS LOGGED

**COMMUNITY SCHOLARS** – The Community Scholars Grant is a service & financial aid-based grant available to upperclassmen that requires 100 hours of community service. Recipients are chosen based on prior commitment to service in the community and their intentions to pursue long-term commitment to volunteering.

**930**  
HOURS LOGGED

AVERAGE  
OF WEEKLY  
**25**  
OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED

**COMMUNITY-BASED WORK STUDY** – Students who accept community-based work-study roles support and engage with our community partners while receiving federal funding. They have the opportunity to work with staff at local nonprofits, such as Nourish Bridgeport and LifeBridge. The Office of Community Engagement continues to assist in the implementation of the federal grant "America Reads, America Counts" by coordinating work-study sites at Bridgeport Public School and after-school programs.

**2,136**  
HOURS LOGGED

**\$32,040**  
IN EMPLOYMENT FUNDS



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## MENTORING PROGRAMS

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**ACADEMIC MENTORING PROGRAM** – The Office of Community Engagement celebrated the completion of its twenty-second year implementing the Academic Mentoring Program AMP at John Winthrop School. The program is financed by the Jones Zimmerman Foundation, which funds various trips and activities. The community engagement office successfully applied for and received, \$75,000 from the Marie and John Zimmerman fund for the 2023-2024 academic year. SHU students spent multiple days each week working with their John Winthrop mentees providing both academic and social support. The year was completed with 21 Sacred Heart University mentors working with 38 John Winthrop students in grades 6-8. Both SHU students and their mentees enjoyed hands-on enrichment activities as well as weekend field trips to various locations such as the Maritime Aquarium to view the many animals and ziplining. The program also partnered with SHU Athletics as the Women's rugby conducted a hands-on rugby learning experience.

“I enjoy AMP because it allows me the opportunity to give back to our community, but it also allows me to be a good role model to all the mentees. I love being able to get to know all the kids and have fun with them while helping them excel in their classwork.”

Abby Galasso, Class of 2026

“I do mentoring because it offers hands-on experiences with not only just helping the mentees but forming a bond with them. I have known my mentees for two years and we have formed a strong relationship and can talk about both their academic and personal life. Over the past two years, I have watched them grow which has been amazing. It is extremely rewarding and I would recommend this experience to anyone.”

Victoria Grillo, Class of 2026

**THE GERALDINE JOHNSON PROGRAM** – This program continued to run this year as an all-girls mentoring program. There were a total of 14 female students including seven fourth graders, four fifth graders, and three sixth graders, and 8 SHU mentors who attended the program at Geraldine Johnson School. The mentoring program was designed to help students academically and encourage female empowerment through enrichment activities and bonding with their mentors.



## MENTORING PROGRAMS





The Office of Community Engagement sponsored three international service experiences during the spring semester. These week-long Global Service-Learning programs provided students with the opportunity to develop their involvement on a global scale.

**COSTA RICA** - Matthew Shields (Executive Director of Mission Integration, Ministry & Community Engagement), Mark Congdon (Communication Studies), and Annie Johnson (Director of Community Engagement) traveled to the Institute of Technology of Costa Rica in Limon, Costa Rica with six SHU students (five undergraduate and one graduate).

The SHU delegation partnered with students and faculty from Tecnológico de Costa Rica, as well as researchers from the Veragua Foundation, for a week of service in the Veragua Rainforest. The group learned about various endangered species and worked to create frog ponds for reproduction, as well as planting trees to expand areas that were previously deforested for grazing. They also worked on a painting project at a local primary school.

**COLOMBIA** – Arlete Perez Paez (Community Engagement Assistant Director) and Prof. Kate O'Gara (Political Science) traveled to Pereria, Colombia, with eight students (seven undergraduate & one graduate).

In Colombia, SHU students volunteered in a detention center at Foundation Alenu and with a women's entrepreneurial organization. This international immersion provided them with powerful, cultural-exchange opportunities, as well as significant growth and reflection.

**GREECE** – In May 2024, Arlete Perez Paez, accompanied by Jonix Owino (Psychology), led eight students to the Hellenic American University in Athens, Greece. The Acropolis, Parliament, Greek and Roman Agoras, and the first modern Olympic stadium were all within walking distance of the campus.

Students were able to explore important social justice issues, including immigration and refugee resettlement in Greece by serving alongside local nonprofit organizations. They attended lectures provided by Hellenic American University faculty on current social initiatives supporting these causes. Finally, they were given the chance to learn traditional Greek dances, Olive oil tasting at Corinth Canal, and visit landmarks at Corinth such as the Castle of Pamidi.

**FUTURE PROGRAM: DINGLE, IRELAND** - OCE will be expanding global service-learning programs to include a program in Dingle, Ireland in March 2025. Students will participate in a 1-credit elective focusing on community projects related to U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, including education, environmental justice, innovation and infrastructure, and social inclusion. OCE staff members completed a site visit from January 27-February 2 to make connections and build partnerships for this program.







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## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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Alzheimer's Association  
Big Brother Big Sisters of CT  
Books to Basketball: The Walter E. Lockett Jr.  
Foundation, Inc.  
Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders  
Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc.  
Cardinal Shehan Center  
Caroline House  
Catholic Charities of Fairfield County  
Center for Family Justice  
Central CT Coast YMCA  
Circle of Friends  
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and  
Immigrants (CIRI)  
Covenant School of Bridgeport  
Ct Blood Center  
CT Foodshare  
Discovery Magnet Elementary School  
Downsize Managers  
Easton Community Center  
East Side Senior Center  
Filling in the Blanks  
Geraldine Johnson Elementary School  
Golden Hill Methodist Church  
Green Village Initiative  
Groundwork Bridgeport

Habitat for Humanity of Coastal Fairfield  
Hall Neighborhood House  
Homes for the Brave  
Horizons @ SHU  
John Winthrop Elementary School  
LifeBridge Community Services  
McGivney Community Center  
Mercy Learning Center  
Michael Murray's Holiday Angels  
Mosaic Senior Life  
Northbridge Health Center  
nOURish Bridgeport Inc.  
Off the Streets  
Operation Hope  
Real Food CT  
RISE Program  
Sacred Heart University's Discovery Center  
St. Charles Roman Catholic Church  
Stamford Public Education Foundation  
Sterling House Community Center  
Things Matter  
Thomas Merton Center  
United Way of Coastal and Western CT  
Urban Impact  
Wakeman Boys & Girls Club  
Wilbur Cross Elementary School

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## COMMUNITY PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

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**Covenant School of Bridgeport** is a private tuition-free middle school that educates boys of different races, ethnic groups, and religions, from families of limited economic means. Our SHU students support weekly programming by volunteering during school hours, and assisting with the after school tutoring and enrichment activities. In partnership, we hope to empower Covenant School's students to become agents of transformation in their families, communities, and society.

**East Side Senior Center** is located on the East side of Bridgeport where seniors can come engage in a variety of activities including dominoes, bingo, arts and crafts, and so much more. Students help with daily program facilitation, and engage with the members during various activities. Some of SHU students' favorite activities with the seniors are learning how to salsa dance, helping out in the computer room and having meaningful conversations with the seniors.

**Real Food CT** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded on the belief that everyone deserves access to healthy food. Since 2019, they have been connecting local farms and hunger relief organizations in our region to eliminate hunger. In supporting their mission, SHU students visit Real Food CT's farm weekly during the academic year to help maintain and process harvest for locals in need of deliveries.

**United Way of Coastal and Western CT** is committed to building our community into a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. They serve more than 25 percent of the state's population across 27 communities within Fairfield and Southern Litchfield Counties, and currently partner with the Office of Community Engagement to help educate our student body through their ALICE simulation event and other advocacy programming.







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## EVENTS OF 2023-2024

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### SHU NATIONAL SUMMER SERVICE CHALLENGE (JUNE 1- AUGUST 15, 2023)

The Office of Community Engagement completed the third annual SHU Summer Service Challenge which engaged over 210 students, faculty, staff, and alumni participants over 11 weeks (June 1-August 15, 2023). Together participants logged over 1,500 hours of community work for their local community. Participants explored themes like environmental justice, mental health awareness, food insecurity and youth empowerment and education, while having the opportunity to volunteer in Greater Bridgeport and their home communities

### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PRE-FALL PROGRAM (AUGUST 2023)

The Office of Community Engagement hosted 32 first-year participants, as well as 16 student leaders and three graduate assistants for the annual pre-fall Community Connections program during the week of August 19-24, 2023. Student volunteers served at various worksites throughout the City of Bridgeport, including Habitat for Humanity, Hall Neighborhood House, Thomas Merton Center, and SHU's Discovery Science Center. Participants engaged in reflection each evening, discussing important social justice issues, including poverty, food insecurity, identity, power, and privilege.

### VOLUNTEER FAIR (SEPTEMBER 2023)

The Office of Community Engagement hosted the annual Volunteer & Work Study Fair on September 12 for over 30 nonprofit community partners to connect and recruit SHU student volunteers, work study students, and interns. The fair is one of the many opportunities available during SHU's 'First 50 Days' events, and its success continues to build long-term partnerships between Sacred Heart and the surrounding community.

### SHU SHARES CAMPAIGNS (OCTOBER 2023 & FEBRUARY 2024)

After its initial introduction in 2021, the Office of Community Engagement hosted its fourth annual SHU Shares Campaign. SHU Shares was founded to address and raise awareness about the food insecurity concerns of the Sacred Heart University community.

The SHU Shares program, in conjunction with Student Government, raised 1,772 swipes from 282 student participants in 2023-24 to be donated to students in need of financial assistance. Over the course of the academic year, students made roughly 400 requests to use this service.



### THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE (NOVEMBER 2023)

The annual Thanksgiving Food Drive once again provided nonperishable food donations for Bridgeport community members, which were distributed at St. Charles Parish on November 21, 2023. OCE worked collaboratively with Student Government, Athletics, and SHU Dining to provide 500 turkeys and nonperishable food items for the community.

### ADOPT-A-FAMILY (DECEMBER 2023)

The Office of Community Engagement sponsored its annual holiday "Adopt a Family" fundraiser, in which the SHU community provided gifts and food for Christmas dinner to 50 families in Bridgeport. In addition, the Office of Community Engagement raised over \$2540 and SHU Athletics contributed greatly to this initiative.

### C.U.R.T.I.S WEEK (JANUARY 2024)

In January 2024, the Community Engagement and Campus Ministry offices hosted six student participants for a local week of immersion. Students had the opportunity to engage in community service projects throughout the Greater Bridgeport region as well as attend interfaith celebrations and meals from a variety of cultures. The students engaged in this five-day program that offered experiences from several of the Campus Ministry chaplains including those of Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian faiths. Service sites included CT Foodshare, nOURish Bridgeport, Wilbur Cross Elementary School, and more. In the evenings, the Campus Ministry staff lead students in reflection on the relationship between faith and service.







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“Every penny that we raised goes directly to the association to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer’s research, patient care and support,”- Professor Rui Liu, Assistant Professor in the College of Health Professions

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The Office of Community Engagement is constantly working to strengthen ties across campus, particularly with departments and programs that share similar passions.

**Walk To End Alzheimer’s-** The Office of Community Engagement and the **College of Health Professions** co-hosted SHU's second annual Walk to End Alzheimer's. On October 14, 2023, over 330 Sacred Heart University students, staff, and faculty walked around the Chapel Quad. The SHU community raised \$17,318 for research, patient care, and support. This exceeded our goal of \$10,000 by over 73%.

The **Alzheimer's Association** sponsored Walk to End Alzheimer's event is hosted annually not only at SHU but in more than 600 neighborhoods around the country. It is the world's largest fundraiser to combat the disease.

SHU students, faculty, and staff, as well as their families and friends, were all encouraged to participate and donate to the cause. Members of various SHU clubs, organizations, programs, and athletic teams were among those who took part.



**Service-Learning Faculty Fellows Program** The Office of Community Engagement hosted the service-learning faculty fellows program for the third year, which runs from September to May. The program assists a cohort of faculty members in developing new or transforming an existing course by integrating service-learning pedagogy.

**Service-Learning Designated Courses | Service-learning** is a course-based experiential learning strategy that engages students in meaningful and relevant service with a community partner while employing ongoing reflection to draw connections between the service activity and course content. When implemented according to the standards of best practice, service-learning can enhance academic learning, promote civic responsiveness, and strengthen communities.

**Current Service-Learning Courses** Offered PS 299: Cultural Psychology, MPH 554: Health Communication, MPH 550: Community Health Development, CM 258: Social Media Strategy, CM 227A: Advertising & PR Writing. CM 356A: Advertising & PR Campaign, HS 304: Community & Public Health, and EX 358: Exercise & Aging

**Pedagogy Support-** The Office of Community Engagement staff participated in and presented service-learning best practices and resources at the Equity at the Heart of Teaching symposium, hosted by the Center for Teaching and Learning on October 20, 2024.

### Service-Learning Faculty Cohort 2023-2024



TODD MATTHEWS, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor and Chair,  
Sociology, Criminology &  
Criminal Justice



ERIKA PICHARDO, Ph.D.  
Lecturer, Sociology, Criminology  
& Criminal Justice



JAIMEE HEGGE, OTD,  
OTR/L, CKTP  
Clinical Assistant Professor,  
Occupational Therapy





OFFICE OF  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
Sacred Heart University

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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[www.sacredheart.edu/volunteer](http://www.sacredheart.edu/volunteer)



@shu\_service



Sacred Heart University Volunteer Programs & Service Learning

Main Academic Building, Humanities Center, 109







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Sacred Heart University

## STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

*Are you interested in the Faculty Fellows Program, service-learning courses, department collaboration, SHU Shares and/or mentoring programs?*

**Contact Annie Johnson!**

Director

☎ 203-365-4833

✉ johnsona21@sacredheart.edu



*Are you interested in our Global Service Learning Program, Pre-Fall Program, attending the Volunteer Fair, and/or helping out with the Thanksgiving Food Drive or Adopt a Family?*

**Contact Arlete Perez Paez!**

Assistant Director

203-396-8421 ☎

perezpaeza@sacredheart.edu ✉

*Interested in the Pioneer Service Grant, Community Scholars, weekly volunteer opportunities, Community Partner collaboration/outreach or the Summer Service Challenge?*

**Contact Erin Rederscheid!**

Coordinator of Community Partnerships

☎ 203-371-7841

✉ rederscheide@sacredheart.edu

