Nature and Nurture Go Hand in Hand
Each year, MCC hosts the annual Peace and Dignity Ceremony to recognize the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In honor of the 25th anniversary of the Peace and Dignity Ceremony, the Center for Teaching and Learning coordinated a Campus Beautification Day to reflect on the symbols of the ceremony connected to the natural world. With gloves and garden tools at the ready, MCC faculty, staff and students teamed up with students from Mott Middle College to give nature a helping hand. Volunteers raked and cleaned the garden beds in the Charles R. Donnelly Courtyard which is located at the center of the Mott Memorial Building. They also planted perennial bulbs outside of the Curtice-Mott Building in anticipation for a beautiful spring bloom of hyacinths, daffodils and tulips. “The Campus Beautification day was a great opportunity to meet more of our college community, while making a positive impact on the campus,” says Michael Blackwell, Mott Middle College instructor who helped recruit MMC student volunteers. Mott Middle College students expressed their enjoyment of being a part of a campus-wide effort. “I enjoyed volunteering and making the campus more beautiful,” one student states. All the participants expressed an interest in making this an annual event.
Giving a “Hand Up”

MCC nail technician instructor, Karyn Jensen-Brock is committed to making a difference beyond the classroom through service learning. “As a faculty member I feel like we make a difference in what we teach our students but how do we make a difference in things past that. That is why I find service learning to be important,” says Jensen-Brock. Through service learning, Jensen-Brock’s students provide nail care services, such as manicures and polishes, for patrons who otherwise could not afford or access the services. “They are providing a service that they are currently learning which is then teaching them to give back to others,” states Jensen-Brock.

This year, clients from the Salvation Army Pathway of Hope program were the recipients of these services at the MCC Transitions Nail Salon. This is an innovative program helping families to get out of a crisis mode by giving them a “hand up” rather than a hand out. Lydia Sanchez-Roat, Volunteer and Events Coordinator from the Salvation Army, partnered with Jensen-Brock for this project. “These students were so gracious to help our Pathway of Hope participants,” states Sanchez-Roat.

Nail Technician student, Jarielle Nettles, has been committed to giving back to her community since high school and believes that service learning can make a difference. “If you’re involved, if we know what is going on in our community, we can do something about it. It doesn’t have to be anything major. We can start somewhere just by being informed,” says Nettles.

Learning for Life

Dental Assisting Faculty Coordinator, Denise Polk, and her students are making a difference in dental health to last a lifetime. By coordinating a hands-on service project at the Sloan Museum, second graders from Brownell Elementary learned about the importance of good dental care. “We had it in conjunction with the “Clifford” exhibit at Sloan,” says Polk. “The focus is to teach children about dental education so they can have good dental health habits throughout their lives”.

Students created hands-on learning stations for the children to visit. “My service project is about mouth guards and teaching kids how to protect their teeth,” states Dental Assisting student Sara Young. When second graders rolled a bowling ball into a giant display of Clifford’s “bowling pin” teeth, students recognized the importance of mouth guards. “This is going to stick with them more than any kind of book learning when they say ‘Oh, Oh, that’s why we wear mouth guards,’ says Young. “I know it’s going to stick with them into their teens when they’re playing sports and even beyond that.”

In another display, student Alyssa Demeyers taught her participants about the difference between amalgam and composite fillings using giant teeth made out of paper mache. She explains, “I gave one silver playdough for amalgam filling and then white playdough for composite filling.” Jo Macek, Assistant Curator at Sloan states “Each Brownell student was able to participate in all the exhibits” including the “Clifford” Exhibit where they encountered a 9-foot tall Clifford, a giant dog bowl, and other hands-on displays that emphasized how the actions they choose make a difference to themselves and others. This was a collaborative community effort with many positive outcomes. “We have so many challenges in the dental community,” says Polk. “By learning and giving back to that community we help people maintain their health throughout their lives.”
The impact of a story is evident whether we read it in a novel or see it on the screen, but when stories are shared face-to-face with emotional expressions of voice and body, they have the power to overcome our differences. English composition students had the opportunity to share the power of storytelling as an authentic human experience through a cross-generational service project. Dr. Christy Rishoi, English Professor, coordinated the project using the theme of the American Dream. Students heard life stories from the perspectives of two different generations in the greater Flint area: Senior patrons at Genesys PACE, a center that provides services for the elderly, and Motherly Intercession, an agency that provides services to children of incarcerated parents.

Using picture books with themes on the human experience, the students read to these patrons who may otherwise find it difficult to read themselves. One student states, “I am very grateful this class offered an experience like this. I have never had the opportunity to take a class where I was able to enjoy something so little as to read to those in need.” The students used the stories as springboards to solicit the personal stories of the patrons. “The service learning projects my students did were the most engaged I saw them all semester.” says Dr. Rishoi. The smiles on my student’s faces at the end of their time in the agencies told the story of how much they enjoyed it,” says Dr. Rishoi.

The students then completed a reflective writing where the power of storytelling was evident to contemplate the “American Dream” through new perspectives. One student states, “I had never thought about the children of incarcerated parents before, which I should have; my brother was incarcerated and he had a daughter at the time.” Another student says, “The impact the women I interviewed had on me was amazing, almost explainable. It is beautiful to hear such stories, and almost have the same vivid experiences from those older than you.”
The Department of Media Arts and Entertainment Technology (MAET) has always been at the forefront of providing experiential learning opportunities for students to have real-world experiences. In addition to internships, service-learning projects are available to students; some are offered as part of a course and others are offered to any student in the program. "This really gives them something to put into their credentials," states Dave Rembiesa, MAET coordinator. "It builds real experiences. Instead of saying I worked on a student film, this is real!"

For a handful of students, they will be able to add the multi-national technology company "Google" to their list of credentials. Google coordinated a service project with Mott's MAET department for its "Google Talks" series, which features artists, entrepreneurs and entertainers as a means of promoting innovative ideas. Some of the subjects for the films included comedian Brian Regen, the alternative rock band called The Pixies, and Rebecca LaMalva from the reality competition show "Top Chef." "This opportunity gets students out in the field with innovative businesses," says Rembiesa.

MAET student, Samantha Kholhurst, who graduates this spring, is one of those students. "The Google project seemed like a big opportunity," recalls Kholhurst. "I was in charge of the equipment, setting all the cameras up and taking them down as well as running the cameras." The experience posed real-world challenges. "We had to film The Pixies as they played and we had to capture them at different angles and zooms." In addition, Kholhurst recalls learning how to prevent future mistakes from past errors when the mics she tested had good sound quality during the test shoot but did not have the quality during the actual filming.

MAET student, Aleyah Rhodes, learned about the "Google Talks" opportunity, and although she expressed being nervous, she states, "I was also excited because Dave (Rembiesa) always talks about going out there and really doing the job." Rhodes recommends that students take advantage of service learning even if they are not required for a course like this one. "Working in a professional setting, there is a lot of pressure. It was intimidating but it helped me to feel more comfortable. MAET students worked well as a team because we asked for help from each other."
Dental Hygiene Instructor Jennifer Walker is a pioneer service learning at Mott. Her commitment to real-world experiences mirrors her commitment to the Dental Hygiene oath to “promote high standards of quality care.” Walker stresses quality care to her students not only in the classroom and in the profession, but in the community as well. “I had actually never volunteered until I started working at Mott,” says Walker. “My first experience was a CTL Service Saturday at the North End Soup Kitchen. It was an eye-opening experience.”

This prompted Walker to start a Service Saturday program for her Dental Hygiene students as a way of giving back to the community. She took her students to the North End Soup Kitchen for their first Service Saturday experience. Since that time, she and her colleague, Cheryl Doyle, have taken students to serve at community agencies across the greater Flint area. Walker also began a “Happy Teeth” program in which Dental Hygiene students presented age-appropriate activities for pre-school children to learn about good dental care.

As Walker looked for ways to incorporate more skills into service, she partnered with Valley Area Agency on Aging. “The work with VAAA incorporated everything the students were learning into a service project.” In partnership with VAAA, students gave presentations at local senior centers to educate seniors about dental care and aging. “The students learned there are other demographics they have not had any experience with,” says Walker. “In addition, sometimes we are really short on patients at the Dental Clinic. The VAAA partnership provided a pool of additional patients to help meet the needs of our students.” Walker encourages others to engage in service learning. “Just throw out an idea and see where it lands,” she says, “even a small idea is a good place to start.”

Students have very busy schedules and must juggle a lot. So when students find time to give back to their community through service, it does not go unnoticed. In this interview, Dental Hygiene student Samantha Helies explains why she makes service learning and volunteerism a regular part of her life.

What are some projects you have participated in at Mott? I have served at Clio’s Foster Closet, North End Soup Kitchen, Project Linus, and the Food Bank.

Which project has been the most rewarding to you? I would say the Clio Foster Closet because I am the mother of a four-year-old and it is so hard to see children go without. To be able to organize items to let foster kids have belongings they can call their own is just so meaningful.

How do you see service learning benefitting you personally and professionally? I’ve always been engaged in my community with volunteer work. It is just a lifestyle that you have to adapt to give back to your community because your community gives to you. Professionally, I would like to be able to help others. That’s why I chose the dental hygiene career field.

How do you see service learning benefitting your community? When you go out and represent your school via service learning, the community is very thankful for what we do. To give back to them is just a simple way to contribute back to society. Take the North End Soup Kitchen for example. If it’s just a hot meal that makes somebody’s day, it really hits home because it’s something that you take for granted.

What would you say to other students to get them more involved in service learning opportunities? If you do something that interests you, it will be more meaningful to you. Helping people who feel neglected by society and giving back to them has given me opportunities to serve others, a skill which I can bring to my future career as a dental hygienist.
Across the country, MLK day is marked as a day of service to commemorate the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The MLK Day of Service is the only Federal holiday observed as a national day of service and is often referred to as “a day on” rather than “a day off”.

Mott is proud to be a contributor to this “day on” through the collaborative teamwork of the Mott chapter of Phi Theta Kappa and the Office of Experiential Learning. For the 6th consecutive year, Mott students, faculty, staff, family, and friends have joined together to make no-sew blankets for Project Linus, a non-profit agency with a mission to console traumatized, ill and needy children.

This year members of Alpha Kappa at U- of-M Flint also volunteered their time making it an inter-collegiate collaboration. A total of 70 volunteers worked as a team and in just two hours, they made 70 blankets that were donated to local charities.

With a lot of upbeat music and a pizza lunch added to the day, there was no shortage of fun. Faculty member, Lisa Banks, states, “What an awesome experience! My niece really enjoyed it.” Debra Gibes, Faculty Director of Experiential Learning concurs with this perception. “It never feels like I gave up a day off when I have the “day on” to facilitate the MLK day of Service. I look forward to it every year.”