

# Simmons UNIVERSITY

## Community Engagement 2020-2021 End of Year Report

---



The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of Simmons' engagement in the community. While this academic year 2020-21 was exceptional, it was no exception to Simmons Community Engagement's (SCE's) commitment to our mission "to facilitate and promote community-based learning and develop strategic partnerships to advance learning, promote civic engagement, and enhance community involvement in order to create a more just society." Thanks to the hard work and commitment of Simmons faculty, staff, and students, alongside our community partners, Simmons was able to engage remotely through our student-led programs, service learning, and Jumpstart AmeriCorps this year.

---

# Student-Led Programming

In our signature student-led programs (SLPs), Simmons students collaborate on program planning, integrating key social-emotional and educational goals, and overseeing the operations of their individual programs. We were able to run two SLPs during the 2020-2021 academic year: America Learns and Strong Women, Strong Girls.



America Learns (AL) is an academic mentoring program providing one-on-one support to help K-8 students build a strong foundation in literacy and mathematics. Relying directly on programming within the Boston Public Schools (BPS), AL saw major changes from previous years. Despite the uncertainty of specific mentorship opportunities within BPS, 14 AL academic

*"Honestly this year just getting into the reading rooms has been so amazing! It has been so fun to work with students again!"*  
-America Learns Academic Mentor

mentors made the most of this year, focusing on mentor development in the fall and a new partnership with the Roxbury-based Orchard Gardens K-8 pilot school in the spring. This partnership created two opportunities: the first was daily one-on-one reading rooms with the

first grade students. The second was recording audiobooks from the 2020-2021 Project Lit reading list. Project Lit is a grassroots network of student and teacher-led book groups that seek to combat book deserts by engaging youth with a wide variety of reading material. Recording and posting these books on the Orchard Gardens library website greatly enhanced the school's digital resources for online reading assistance.

## America **Learns** 2020-2021 highlights:

**5**

Audiobooks created from Project Lit's reading list for student use at Orchard Gardens

**32**

Synchronous and asynchronous lesson plans created for America Learns curriculum development

**777**

Hours of synchronous and asynchronous training for academic mentor development

**119**

Hours of one on one reading mentorship with Orchard Gardens first graders



**STRONG WOMEN  
STRONG GIRLS**

Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG) works to counter the social pressures that discourage girls in under-resourced communities by combining multi-generational group mentoring to build a community of strength

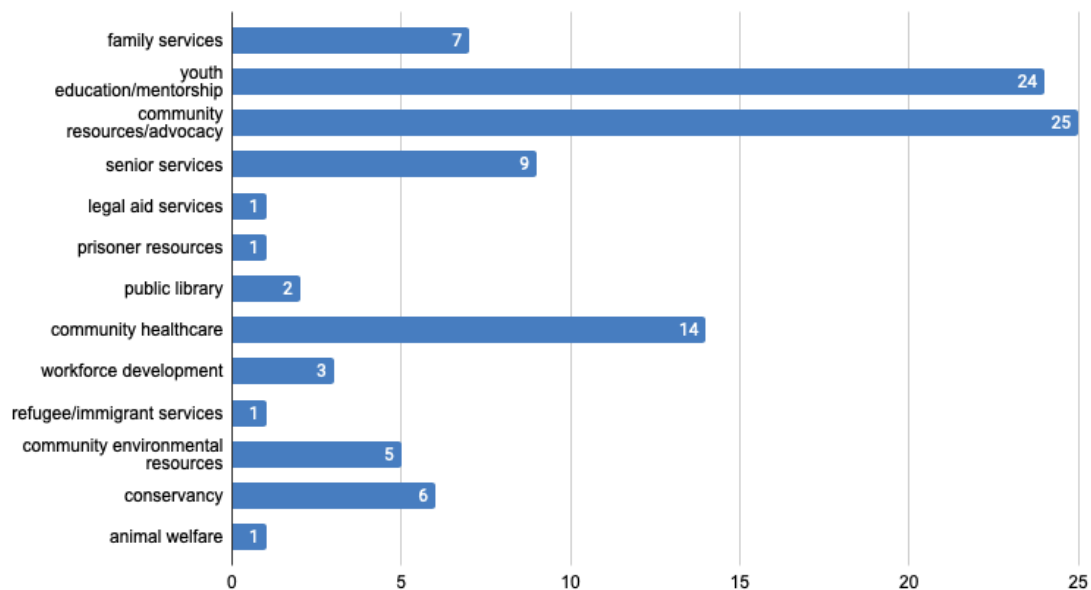
around every girl. Simmons is proud to join six other Boston-based universities in providing strong role models for Boston girls while also promoting connections between college mentors and women who are already leaders in their fields. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 38 Simmons mentors led over 100 remote mentoring sessions with students from 3rd to 5th grade. Mentoring sessions included sign-making workshops where participants made their own protest signs and practiced articulating their message clearly and proudly, and workshops role-playing hard conversations in order to practice responding to negativity.



# Service Learning

Service-learning (SL) connects undergraduate and graduate courses to the surrounding community through projects and direct service. The opportunities ensure high-quality, high-impact learning opportunities for students and also provide services and added resources to the partner organizations. During the 2020-2021 academic year, Simmons students worked in 71 different community organizations across 13 different fields.

2020-2021 Service Learning Partners



8317 hours of community service were devoted over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year. One Simmons student conducted research on the impacts of pandemic-related social isolation on senior citizens at the Rogerson House. Another Simmons student led self-defense classes for young girls and non-binary children. Another student assisted in community organizing in Worcester, supporting the community as they formulated COVID-19 protocols and vaccine campaigns.

*"I just wanted to give a sincere thank you to all the students who came and supported. Their impact was very extensive as it allowed staff to free up and support students in different ways. We also saw a huge jump in client retention in Work Ready and class engagement. Thank you so much for your help!"*  
-Staff at Project Place



## BEYOND THE WALL

One service learning opportunity we would like to highlight is the work with the Neponset River Watershed Association (NRWA). Two Simmons students spent their spring working with the NRWA on their "Beyond the Wall" campaign—an action to remove sections of a

wall separating the communities of Mattapan from the green spaces along the Neponset River. Simmons volunteers worked to increase community awareness and develop tools bolstering the campaign's impact.

*"I felt even though our meetings were virtual, the experience exceeded my expectations. I never thought I would have been able to make that much of an impact through Zoom, and I was amazed at how much the kids learned and I also learned from them."*

*-Simmons Student Mentor*

*"Thank you for this program - I have worked with other colleges but this has by far been my best experience!"*

*-Mystic River Watershed Association*

*"Their organization of material, precise and direct information along with supporting info will be useful for our program on a regular basis. I am looking to utilize this material during our staff summer orientation, junior staff orientation, as this will be helpful for them to utilize when developing and implementing icebreakers with our members."*

*-Boys and Girls Club of Boston*

### Fall 2020 Service Learning Courses

DPT-742-01

Health Promotion, Wellness & Advocacy  
Stacey Maguire

LIS-410-01

Information Services for Diverse Users  
Colin Rhinesmith

MHEO 465

Health Advocacy, Community Organizing & Innovation  
Leigh Haynes

POLS-228-LC

The War on Drugs  
Aaron Rosenthal

SW-101-01

Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare  
Eugenia Kight

SW-101-02

Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare  
Lydia Ogden

SW-101-03

Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare  
Renee Seigel

SW-251-01

Human Behavior in the Social Environment I  
Yudy Muneton-Castano

### Spring 2021 Service Learning Courses

BIO 246 Foundations of Exercise and Health  
Randi Lite

LIS 410 Information Services for Diverse Users  
Colin Rhinesmith

BUS 224 Social Action Leaders  
Teresa Nelson

MHEO 465 Health Advocacy, Community Organizing & Innovation  
Leigh Haynes

Envi 201 (COF) Urban Environment  
Cynthia Williams

SW 252 Human Behavior in the Social Environment II  
K. Huff-Larmond

LCIS-201-08 Health Promotion and Nutrition  
Katherine Robbins and Urshila Sriram

SW-253-01 Human Behavior in the Social Environment  
Katherine Nolan

LCIS-201-09 Health Promotion and Nutrition  
S. Desmond and Urshila Sriram

SW-253-02 Human Behavior in the Social Environment  
Eugenia Knight

LCIS-201-10 Health Promotion and Nutrition  
S. Desmond and Urshila Sriram

SW-253-03 Human Behavior in the Social Environment  
J. Swartz

LCIS-201-11 Health Promotion and Nutrition  
Katherine Robbins and Z. Atlas

LDR-101-07 Youth Leadership for Social Justice  
Meghan Doran



*"In this time where everything seems stagnant,  
Jumpstart is helping me move forward with not just  
my career goals but my personal ones as well."*

*-2nd year member*

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working toward the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

Partnered with AmeriCorps, Jumpstart

Corps Members have the unique opportunity to inspire young children to learn, serve in a local community, work on a team, and build professional skills.

Simmons is an affiliate program of Jumpstart, meaning that Simmons applies annually for an AmeriCorps grant from Jumpstart to operate with its own site staff, preschool partners, budget, and operation funds (\$84,328 for Sept. 1, 2020 - Aug. 31, 2021). As a result of the AmeriCorps

grant, participating students are eligible to receive the Segal Education Award at the end of service - a monetary scholarship used solely for educational expenses (\$33,035 awarded to students this year).

With the pandemic requiring students to be remote from campus & restricting access to preschools, Jumpstart at Simmons piloted a virtual program during the 2020-2021 academic year. 30 students served 5,236 hours as Jumpstart AmeriCorps Members. Working in teams, students translated Jumpstart's session plans (designed for in-classroom interactions) into engaging video activities that were sent weekly to families at our two long-standing preschool partners in Jamaica Plain: ABCD Jamaica Plain Head Start and Nurtury Learning Lab. Here are a few highlights of their impact (in addition to a [highlights reel](#) of their created content):

**1016**

Educational  
videos  
created

**165**

Hours (almost 7 days!) of  
educational video content  
filmed

**126**

Children and families  
received content weekly  
from Corps members

*"My service has shown me the beauty of community during a time where it is difficult to make new relationships. It has shown me that there are always people who will go the extra mile to inspire others and foster knowledge."*





---

# Reflection, Dialogue & Action



The 2020-2021 Simmons University Community Read was *How to Be an Antiracist* by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi. Dr. Kendi's work is a blend of social commentary and memoir in which he explores the reality that there are no nonracists, only racists and antiracists. Expanding on ideas introduced in his award-winning book *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi examines the construction of his own racist ideas and the evolution of antiracism and activism. In conjunction with the Community Read, SCE held three virtual events:

- **Boston in Action: Putting Antiracism into Practice** - Local community leaders joined us for a panel discussion on the ways that racism surfaces in the city and in their work and how they put antiracism into everyday practice.
- **Reflection, Dialogue, and Action Student Series** - SCE hosted multiple opportunities for students to engage in reflection and dialogue around community engagement and the work of antiracism. Students participated in





individual and group-based reflections, critical thinking activities, and action planning based on experiences in community-engaged learning, using *How to be an Antiracist* as foundational text.

- **Faculty Community of Practice** - Using both *How to be an Antiracist* and "Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Whiteness" by Tania D. Mitchell, David M. Donahue & Courtney Young-Law, Simmons faculty met over several sessions to reflect on antiracism in and outside of the classroom and developed a set of suggestions for incorporating antiracism in our service-learning practice.