FROM THE DIRECTOR
Sean Damitz

This past year was a trying time for many people as the COVID-19 pandemic dealt us many unprecedented challenges. The staff, students, faculty, and community partners of the Utah State University Center for Community Engagement (CCE) were not immune from the reach of the pandemic. Many of the programs CCE normally offers were not able to operate due to the close and personal nature of community engagement. However, many more CCE programs were able to adapt, thrive, and better serve the community despite challenging conditions.

Even in the midst of worst public health crisis in a generation, CCE staff, students, faculty, and community partners upheld USU’s community engagement and land-grant mission. This annual report showcases the innovative and collaborative nature of CCE programs through this past year.
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In the spring of 2021, the CCE Student Nutrition Access Center (SNAC) was awarded funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act (CRRSAA) to renovate the SNAC headquarters and fund the new Food Security Program Coordinator position.

The SNAC renovation dramatically improved the existing space for transporting, recovering, sorting, and repackaging food. The area now has hard flooring for easy clean-up, additional freezer, refrigerator and storage space, and desk stations to prepare and organize SNAC operations and education. In addition, SNAC added an industrial sink to rinse produce and wash dishes.

Kara Bachman was hired as the Food Security Coordinator. Kara’s previous experience managing SNAC programs enabled her to hit the ground running. She has implemented a new ordering system that includes photos of available food options and inventory tracking, and she has deepened and expanded partnerships with the Utah Food Bank, Student Money Management Center, local restaurants, and the Utah Health Policy Project. This fall, Kara certified SNAC as an official food establishment through the USDA and began partnering with the PEER project to give community members with disabilities job training experience.

In addition to the SNAC pantry, there are plans in place to expand food security and basic needs initiatives on campus. SNAC plans to assist students applying for government food assistance programs and host educational opportunities about nutrition and food preparation.

Individuals can find information about pantry use, volunteering, and donations at snac.usu.edu.

“The SNAC renovation has enabled us to do even more to address campus food insecurity. It would have been impossible to continue serving the increased number of USU students without our new space.”

— Sarah Moore, Student Co-Director
The program prepares students for international development fieldwork and potential Peace Corps service. To accomplish this, students build four core competencies through interrelated coursework, hands-on experience, and professional development support. The four competencies are as follows:

1. Training and experience in one of six Peace Corps sectors
2. Foreign language skills
3. Intercultural competence
4. Professional and leadership development

The USU PC Prep website explains each of these requirements in detail and includes a guide to map out your PC Prep course of study.

In addition, USU PC Prep students will be given the opportunity to use the Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) Urban Farm as a training site. Here, they can take part in workshops on community gardens, greenhouse construction, organic agriculture practices, and more. PC Prep students serving in AmeriCorps positions at the UCC Urban Farm have the opportunity to develop youth and job training programs that teach critical skills while addressing food insecurity.

USU is home to the largest university AmeriCorps program in the region. PC Prep students will be given opportunities to serve in 300–1700-hour AmeriCorps positions, as well as summer and year-long AmeriCorps VISTA positions with organizations such as the UCC Urban Farm, Cache Refugee Immigrant Connection, Centro de la Familia, and the English Language Center whose missions align with the six Peace Corps sectors.

USU PC Prep students will also be given opportunities to travel internationally and visit a Peace Corps country headquarters and work alongside current Peace Corps volunteers. If international travel is not feasible, PC Prep students can work virtually with a current Peace Corps project.

To learn more, visit www.usu.edu/peace-corps-prep
Or contact Kate Stephens at kate.stephens@usu.edu.
2021 PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Each year, USU recognizes the work of outstanding faculty, staff, students, partners, and alumni that exemplifies collaboration between USU and the greater community and demonstrates ongoing commitment to community engagement and positive social change.

Second Annual Ivory Prize for Excellence Awarded
George Garcia & Melissa Alarlcon

The Ivory Prize for Excellence in Community Engagement, generously funded by the Clark & Christine Ivory Foundation, recognizes extraordinary, influential student accomplishments in community engagement. The prize provides a $2,000 scholarship for the recipient and an additional $10,000 to be invested in a program or effort developed and implemented by the recipients.

This year, the Ivory Prize was awarded to Melissa Alarcón and George Garcia. Through their work with USU Latinos in Action (LIA) and the Latinx Cultural Center, Melissa and George discovered that Latinx students in Logan City schools were experiencing high drop-out rates, and only a small percentage of those who graduated were pursuing higher education.

With the goals of increasing graduation rates among local Latinx students and increasing the number of Latinx students who pursue higher education, Melissa and George are launching a student-driven mentoring program through the Latinx Cultural Center. Chris Gonzalez, the Latinx Cultural Center Director, said, “This program will be a gamechanger for both USU and the Cache Valley community.”

Community-Engaged Faculty Presidential Award
Aurora Hughes
Villa Professional Practice Associate Professor in the College of Education School of Teacher Education and Leadership

Aurora was nominated for her extensive contributions to elementary students, USU students, professional educators, and the public through elementary arts education and public art initiatives. An example of her exemplary community outreach is Art in Transit: From Schools to Community — a program she founded to bring art made by children into public places.

Community-Engaged Alumnus Presidential Award
Samantha MacFarlane
Executive Director of Common Ground Outdoor Adventures

Sammi graduated from USU in 1997. Since then, she has served as the Executive Director of Common Ground for more than 20 years. Under her leadership, the non-profit has seen monumental growth and enabled approximately 8,000 individuals with disabilities to engage in outdoor recreation alongside their friends and family. Through internships, AmeriCorps, and volunteer opportunities, Common Ground has given USU students from all disciplines unique opportunities to apply their education and help develop creative new ways for people with disabilities to access the outdoors.

Committed Community Partner Presidential Award
Peter Taylor
Senior in the Department of Social Work

Peter was nominated for his work with Cache Refugee Immigrant Connection (CRIC). During the COVID-19 pandemic, he single-handedly redesigned Walk-In Hours — a critical program with a measurable impact for New American families navigating complex systems. Beyond his crucial work with Walk-In Hours, he was also recognized for initiating a needs assessment grounded in community-engaged principles.

Committed Student Presidential Award
Hiram Wigant
Hunger Solutions Institute Assistant Coordinator

Hiram was nominated for his leadership in alleviating hunger in our community and the development of Buy Produce for Your Neighbor, a program that enables citizens and farmers to donate surplus food to people in need — which also combats food waste. Hiram is the creator and personality of the Captain Create YouTube channel for Create Better Health Utah (SNAP-Ed), which provides health and nutrition education specific for children.

Committed Staff Presidential Award
Mike Stokes
Volunteer with the Center for Persons with Disabilities Utah Assistive Technology Program

Mike was nominated for his exemplary partnership with the USU Assistive Technology Program (UATP) and his commitment to involving students in designing and building devices that improve lives — not just those with disabilities, but people’s lives in general. In 2020, Mike worked to meet a critical community need by spearheading efforts to create personal protective equipment, or PPE, for health care workers at a time when it was hard to find. He achieved this by bringing in UATP, the College of Engineering, and community partners. The face shields, made with 3D printers, laser cutters, and CNC cutters, ultimately went to rural health care and emergency workers.
Deeqa Hamid’s Story
USU UHEAN
AmeriCorps member

Deeqa Hamid (she/hers) is part of the Student Leaders in Civic Engagement (SLiCE) in the Thayne Center for Student Leadership, Life & Community Engagement. Deeqa served on the 2020 Civic Leadership Conference Committee and helped organize and execute the 2nd Annual conference, all virtually. Deeqa spent many hours preparing the conference for her peers, involving issues from the community and pathways of civic engagement.

“Being part of the AmeriCorps and SLiCE,” Deeqa said, “I am serving my community and accomplishing what I thought I would never accomplish. I am closing a lot of gaps and doubts about myself. I am becoming braver by the minute and taking steps to grow and gain not only knowledge but understanding of my community and myself. I am learning my weak points and my strengths. I am improving my oral communication and my mindset towards my education and community. It was a wonderful blessing to be part of the program and working with the AmeriCorps team at the college was unbelievably engaging.”

Deeqa has also been involved with University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), a University of Utah program that serves as a “convener” to build university-community partnerships focused on resident-identified issues and opportunities.

2020-21 Impact
In 2020-21, 531 students served in AmeriCorps positions through the Utah Higher Ed AmeriCorps Network, or UHEAN.

Natalie Clawson’s Story
USU UHEAN
AmeriCorps member

“I think one of the biggest lessons I have learned during my time at my AmeriCorps site is that many students face unique challenges in this local low-income elementary school. Many of my students have begun to express the challenges they go through with their home and family life, and it is anything but ideal. It has been insightful to learn and allow them to express their difficulties as it helps me better understand their behavior. I have grown in empathy and patience as I get to know these kids better, and together we have been able to make greater progress toward their goals.”
Many conservation-service organizations were put on hold during 2020 due to the pandemic, especially with national park and public land closures, but the Utah Conservation Corps’ alignment with the Utah State University’s Center for Community Engagement provided “a great advantage,” according to Sean Damitz, UCC’s co-founder and director. “Having a solid backbone infrastructure has allowed us to concentrate on adapting safely to our new challenges.”

While other organizations were forced to furlough employees, UCC was able to pivot and incorporate best practices suggested by state and federal health guidelines into place while “putting boots on the ground” and preserving Utah’s public lands. UCC formed a COVID-19 Task Force to protect crew members and the community, such as with policies pertaining to quarantining and training new AmeriCorps crew members, reduced capacity, and other safety and hygiene protocols. Since it was formed in 2001, more than 1,400 UCC AmeriCorps members have served over one million hours creating or maintaining 3,442 miles of trail and 425 miles of fence, restoring 41,653 acres of public land, and reaching 332,250 students with environmental education. In 2020, workers were able to serve Utah in an unprecedented year of health and environmental challenges.
“One of the biggest challenges I have faced in my AmeriCorps position has been learning how to respond and continue moving forward during a global pandemic. My key role in my position is making individual relationships and connections with the faculty, staff, and students I serve. Having to adjust my interpersonal communication to a digital realm hasn’t been easy. My focus has shifted to reaching out to my community while collectively understanding we are all going through this together. We need to make collective efforts to connect and remember to check in personally and emotionally with people more frequently!”

The Corps Center of Excellence, a subsidiary of The Corps Network – the national association of Service and Conservation Corps, has granted accreditation to Utah State University’s Utah Conservation Corps following a rigorous review process. This accreditation follows an in-depth evaluation of internal operations, financial management practices, risk management practices, governance standards and youth programming operations.

Kyia Hill’s Story

UCC AmeriCorps Intern with Weber State University’s Energy and Sustainability Office. Utah Society for Environmental Educators “Beehive Under 25 Awardee”

194 AmeriCorps members served more than 143,000 hours to:

- Create or maintain 223 miles of trail.
- Maintain 8 miles of fence.
- Restore and reduce fuels on 4,005 acres of public land.
- Reach 4,685 students with environmental education.
- Recruit 2,240 volunteers that served 4,506 hours.

AmeriCorps Disaster Response Team (A-DRT) crews responded to Hurricanes Laura and Sally in Louisiana and Florida respectively to:

- Assess 41 homes.
- Remove 689 cubic yards of debris from 37 homes.
- Remove 108 hazard trees.

TFNU Weed and Trail Crew

UCC AmeriCorps Individual Placement members served with Trails Foundation of Northern Utah to remove non-native weeds and maintain and construct multi-use trails.

2020-21 Impact

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During the fall semester of 1970, a handful of students and their advisor organized a leaf-raking activity in Logan, and the organization now known as the Val R. Christensen Service Center was born. Over the course of 50 years, students have had the opportunity to participate in service and become leaders in service by connecting to the Service Center. Early student-led programs included a Special Olympics team, a 24-hour crisis hotline, and traditional holiday food drives. Over the last decade, Service Center Aggies have made impacts in the Cache Valley community, across the state, and throughout the region.

While COVID-19 put a damper on many of the celebratory activities that Service Center staff had planned for this milestone, the legacy of Val R. Christensen lived on through the events that did happen. The Service Center invited groups across the Logan campus to report about their service events and then featured them on a webpage, aiming to record 50 acts of service. Service Center directors sported limited edition anniversary t-shirts at their activities. Museum Studies certificate student Michele Hoferitz, assisted by Dr. Molly Cannon and Paul Cox, designed three exhibit panels detailing the story of the Service Center. These panels debuted during the Center for Community Engagement’s annual Community Engagement Celebration. A new service database, AggiePulse, rolled out, ready to be populated with engagement opportunities and recorded impacts that students make.

As the Service Center looks forward to the next fifty years, it is poised to meet the needs of our growing communities because of the foundational work Dr. Val R. Christensen and his students have done over the years.
When it became clear that “business as usual” wasn’t going to cut it in the Student Nutrition Access Center (SNAC) pantry last year, student leaders and AmeriCorps members went into innovation mode. Starting in summer 2020, the pantry — which normally allowed any Aggie who faced difficulty accessing enough nutritious food to come browse the shelves once a week — switched to an online order and curbside pickup system. Throughout summer, volunteers personally filled and delivered 1,392 food orders down three flights of stairs to Aggies affected by the pandemic.

The curbside model wasn’t a sustainable option once the fall 2020 semester started, so student leaders again adapted a contactless pickup system outside the pantry doors. Thanks to a successful AggieFunded campaign the previous spring, the SNAC Pantry was able to hire and rely on the consistent help of three AmeriCorps members, as well as fund two student work-study positions and purchase fresh produce and meat from local sources to supplement staple shelf items.

When asked what the best thing is about working in the SNAC pantry, student director Amria Farnsworth said, “Definitely the people. I really love working with the other AmeriCorps members and working together to fight campus food insecurity. We like to call ourselves the Food Team and it’s been a pleasure working with them. Our amazing volunteers have also been wonderful! With COVID, I was worried that we wouldn’t be able to have any volunteers at all.”

Campus Kitchen Co-director Steph Aristizabal said, “Working with SNAC and Campus Kitchen is very rewarding because you know you’re making a positive impact: addressing food insecurity by providing a free food pantry and not letting leftover food be thrown away. Also, I love meeting new people and working with volunteers at SNAC or Campus Kitchen.”

Thanks to federal funding granted to SNAC, plans to remodel the space are underway. This funding also made a full-time, one-year Food Security Coordinator staff position possible. Pandemic or not, SNAC is ready to keep fighting food waste and food insecurity at USU and in the wider community.
My time with the Student Sustainability Office (SSO) was one of my best experiences at USU. As the marketing intern, I gained experience managing social media accounts, designing marketing materials, and assisting with website design. This internship exposed me to so many people who are doing good, and it inspired me to do good as well.

Through my internship, I developed a deeper level of commitment to environmental stewardship and making a positive impact. Because of my time with the SSO, I decided that I want to specialize in sustainability within my Landscape Architecture degree. I was recently accepted into the Sustainable Urban Design Program at Lund University in Sweden, one of the top urban design programs in Europe, and it all started with the SSO.

I’m so grateful for this experience and I can’t wait to see where my next journey across the world takes me!
Charles Miller’s Story

“Working as the Cache Community Gleaning Coordinator for a 6-month AmeriCorps term last year was a wonderful experience and a privilege. In a pandemic year, it gave me a rare chance to slow down and appreciate everything from the grand mountains to the stem of an apple. I discovered a community I otherwise would not have known, made lifelong friendships, and gained leadership and project management skills that helped me get my current job.

Before the gleaning internship, I thought I wanted to work with conservation non-profits, but this position exposed me to a different set of community needs. I learned about food waste, natural and local food systems, and sustainability in general. I learned that food insecurity is more common than I thought, especially on college campuses. Perhaps what I loved most about my experience this year was giving students the opportunity to exercise their service muscles when it was difficult to find other opportunities. The gleaning internship and the opportunity AmeriCorps afforded me to try new things and engage meaningfully with the community is something I’ll always be thankful for!”

Macro Grants

- LAEP Solar Installation - $7,500
- USU Farmers Market - $4,425
- Gleaning - $8,321
- Pen & Art Recycling - $1,000
- Keep Logan Clear - $1,126

Micro Grants

- February Film Fest Soup - $54
- Solar Kiosk Tablet Housing - $279
- SNAC & Dining Services Recycling - $629
- Earth Week Trail Clean Up Kits - $400
- The SSO Food Recovery Network recovered 11,642 lbs. of food for the SNAC pantry
- 10,529 lbs. of fruit and produce were gleaned for the SNAC pantry and local community.
- Nine grants totaling $23,734 awarded.
“A bicycle is a freedom machine.” There is something magical about going places on two wheels, under your own power, that can’t be beat. However, that magic doesn’t last forever without some maintenance, and freedom machines often don’t come cheap. The purpose of Aggie Blue Bikes is to keep that magic alive and make freedom available to as many people as possible.

Here at Aggie Blue Bikes, we maintain a fleet of “custom built” bikes that we loan out to students. We also offer access to tools and workstations and training to students and the community. When I started at Blue Bikes, I had a vague idea of what I would be doing. Through my experience here, I’ve come to understand the tremendous impact old bikes and some helping hands can have on a community.

I remember clocking into the shop one morning to find one of my co-workers helping a man with his bicycle who had just pedaled his way here from Denver and was headed for Boise. We got him up and running, helped him find his next stop, and sent him smiling on his way. I met a man from Argentina who explained to me how he and his wife rely on their bike to get to and from work and school, because they can’t drive here in the states yet.

Countless other students from all over the world have expressed their gratitude for the services we offer. I love to hear the satisfying click of gears shifting, and the thump of crisp brake pads, as we finish helping someone bring new life into an old forgotten bicycle. These sounds are the precursors to many fun miles on the trails and years of emissions-free commuting. Just like any good bike ride, my time at Aggie Blue Bikes has had ups and downs, rocky patches, and smooth gravel. We’ve helped and been helped, fixed things, broken them, and fixed them again. However, just like a great bike ride, the further I go, the better it gets!
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

Community-Engaged Learning is a central component of Roslynn McCann’s ENVS 4700: Communicating Sustainability course. The course spends some classroom time on current research and practices with climate change and sustainable living, and the bulk of the semester centers around marketing and community engagement techniques that move people from thought to action. The students learn how to speak the language of different stakeholders, the essential elements in an effective behavior change campaign, but most importantly, they apply those techniques in the real-world through working with a local organization to help improve their environmental footprint. In the Spring 2021 semester, 45 students engaged in 13 Community Engaged Learning projects with nine different community partners. The projects ranged from decreasing water-intensive turf on campus through implementation of campus rain gardens to waste reduction with local food businesses. One student enrolled in ENVS 4700 during spring 2021 shared that “so many of my classes so far have taught me the stats, science, and urgency behind the importance of becoming a more sustainable world, but this class taught me what to do with these ‘stats’ and how to communicate (or not communicate) them in order to facilitate change. After taking this class I feel less hopeless, and less stuck in place in the battle for fighting climate change.”

For a deeper dive into the impacts of Community-Engaged Learning, Roslynn McCann co-wrote Assessing Community-Engaged Learning Impacts using Ripple Effects Mapping, with a student. McCann said “as we look ahead, I wish our university better incentivized and celebrated applied interdisciplinary teaching; that’s a paradigm shift that needs to happen.”
Karli Ludwig’s Story
Community-Engaged Scholar, Designed a CEL component within her spring 2021 course

Karli worked to provide young students with an opportunity to learn dance, yoga, and exercise-based skills in the after-school programs in Logan and Cache County. Her purpose was to educate them on the benefits of these various forms of movement while giving them exposure to activities they may not otherwise have had the chance to experience. Through this engagement, Karli hoped this would help foster confidence, expression, social skills, communication, collaboration, and fun to those willing to participate. She wanted to give students the opportunity to learn about the things she was learning in school, and to introduce them to her passions.

More specifically, Karli’s work included the planning, development, and implementation of a 10-week curriculum that included movement and mindfulness practices offered through yoga asanas (poses), meditation practices, and breathwork.

Karli was enrolled in a course titled Yoga Teaching Methodology which allowed her to apply her academic coursework to her work within the community. The curriculum was designed for the students in the after-school clubs offered at Logan and Cache County School districts. The 10-week plan provided easy-to-follow instruction and progression suitable for children ages 5-12. Karli worked with 15-20 students each day, and she hopes that students walked away with a greater appreciation for their body, movement, breathwork, and all the benefits yoga can have.

Karli credits her connections to Todd Milovich, Program Coordinator for Education Outreach at USU, who assisted in setting up partnerships with various elementary schools interested in this program. In addition, Emily Perry, the Director of Yoga Studies and a professor at USU, supported Karli as she designed and implemented this new initiative.
Mckenna Nobis’ Story
Communication and Deaf Education Major/
Community-Engaged Scholar Graduate

Mckenna, Communication Disorder and Deaf Education major, developed a take-home library at South Mesa Elementary School in St. George, Utah. The school was in the process of being built when the COVID-19 pandemic forced budgeted money to be spent in other places. This left South Mesa Elementary no books to send home with students. As a future speech-language pathologist, Mckenna understood the impact that books have in a child’s home, specifically on literacy and language. With this identified community need, Mckenna worked with the elementary school to find a solution. She went to other schools in the area to ask for books that they were no longer using and then worked with a reading interventionist to learn how to level the 3,000 titles collected. Finally, Mckenna organized the books into magazine holders and created leveled book lists. The library has been in use for one year, and the aides at the school work to distribute books and put the books away. The library is in great shape and South Mesa School principal, Steve Gregoire, said “the library will be used for several years to come!”

When asked about her CE scholar experience, Mckenna said “being a Community-Engaged Scholar changed my education at Utah State for the better. I was able to apply what I was learning in class, but I was also grounded in my studies from the people I met and experiences I had. While I have been at Utah State, I have learned how to be a lifelong learner. Through community involvement, I learned what it means to be a lifelong Aggie and community member. Our world has so much potential, but we need to tap into the needs of individuals in order to change the world at large. Being a Community-Engaged Scholar taught me that we each have the power to change lives, the question is if you are brave enough to step in to act. My advice to other Aggies is to be brave, step outside of yourself, apply for involvement positions, and look for ways to be involved in your communities. You have more power for change than you realize.”
It has brought me much sadness to leave my job with America Reads working as a tutor and supervisor at Fast Forward Charter High School. I have worked at Fast Forward through the America Reads program for 3 years now and have loved it! With each year, I was personally able to grow and serve my community. The things I have learned, the kids I have been able to help, and the knowledge I have gained will always be something I will carry with me as I move forward in my psychology career.

Throughout the time working at Fast Forward, I have been able to help so many kids that otherwise may not have had support. Each kid I worked with had a unique story and set of challenges. Some kids were on Individual Education Plans, or IEPs, others had attendance problems, others had mental illnesses, and others came from hard upbringings and hard home lives. It brought me so much pride to see these kids work to graduate step by step and possibly even go on to post-secondary schooling or licensure. My students were often the first in their families to graduate from high school or go to college. Often the kids didn’t believe they could do it and we would have low points, but if they were willing to put in the effort, I always tried to be someone who stood by them and encouraged them to see it through. One of my favorite things was to just tell the kids I was proud of them. I could always see in their faces how much that meant to them. I loved working with Todd Milovich, my student team, and faculty to help any kids who were struggling. With each new year came the opportunity to love, serve, get to know and support a new group of kids.

I played many different roles at the school, including tutor, leader, guide, faculty, friend, data analyzer, lunch lady, event organizer, even basketball coach, but nothing can beat the effect that those kids, and this program had on my life. Not only could I afford college because of this work-study job and the AmeriCorps scholarship, I also developed my psychology skills, and my heart grew bigger than I thought possible.

Thank you for the opportunity for this personal growth, job experience, and life experience that I will always cherish and never forget.

“I learned the value of listening to children and striving to understand where they are coming from.”

-Kylie Corbett
America Reads
96 America Reads tutors served 27,322 hours in 14 schools, working with an average of 911 students per day, and earned $270,396 in work study wages.

AmeriCorps
Through the UHEAN AmeriCorps program 85 USU students served 32,550 hours in Education, Dietetics, Equine Science, America Reads, and Community Service, and earned $126,849 in education awards. The 85 AmeriCorps members also recruited 425 additional volunteers who served at least one hour at their sites.

ArtCore
Led by AmeriCorps VISTA Daniel Bialkowski, ArtCore recruited 58 volunteers who served 236 hours in our America Reads After School Programs providing art education activities to 893 students. ArtCore received cash and in-kind donations valued at $2735.

2020-21 Impact

“It has been wonderful to see the feeling spread, to help others who needed to be lifted up.”

–Elizabeth DeWall
2020-2021 Annual Report

Center for Community Engagement

usu.edu/community-engagement
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