

The Crimson White

UA recognized on president's honor roll for community service

By Katy Turnbull
March 10, 2010

The University has been named as one of 115 universities nationwide on the 2009 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction, the highest federal level commendation a college or university can receive for its community service initiatives.

The honor roll, given by the Corporation for National and Community Service, recognizes universities and students whose efforts and dedication aim for the highest standards for community service.

"Our students, faculty and staff are all passionate about helping others, but not just helping through one-time acts of charity," said Heather Christensen, research project coordinator with the UA Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility. "They want to move beyond quick fixes and feel-good service opportunities to analyze underlying community problems and address genuine long-term community needs."

Christensen said some of the most exemplary projects at the University include LITE, a group of graduate students who created a media campaign to recruit volunteers and raise awareness about West Alabama's low literacy rate; the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative, a group of nursing, education, music, and Spanish majors and other student volunteers who work to help ensure pre-K students enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn, and the Beat Auburn Beat Hunger Food Drive.

"I think the UA Community Service Center has done a great job in really motivating students to get involved," said Charlotte Brown, a sophomore majoring in marketing and a center volunteer. "So many of our programs are totally motivated and initiated by students who care about helping the community, and I think that has a lot to do with the connection the center has worked to build between UA and the Tuscaloosa community."

According to the University, more than 17,000 UA students completed more than 685,800 hours of community service in 2008-09, a steep increase from 2007-08 when the University reported around 12,660 students participated in 274,000 hours.

The CNCS evaluates and then compares universities applying for the honor roll. The honorees are then chosen based on the scale of service projects, how effective they have been, the percentage of students who participate in service activities, incentives for service and on what level the school offers service-learning courses in its academic curriculum.

“I think award is really an affirmation of the great work that the UA students, faculty and staff are doing in the Tuscaloosa community and even beyond the Tuscaloosa community,” said Wahnee Sherman, director of the UA Community Service Center. “We definitely try to reach out to all students through the center and encourage them to participate in helping their community.”

The University has been named on the honor roll all four years since the award’s creation in 2006. The University was also added to the Distinction List and acknowledged for the school’s special interest service through its Hurricane Katrina relief efforts in 2006.

The honor roll features three levels of recognition. At the pinnacle there are Presidential Awardees, which is given to only about six schools each year. Next are those listed on the Honor Roll’s Distinction List, as UA was this year, which is given to around 100 schools. The CNCS also names about 600 other schools as Honor Roll Members.

“The Presidential Honor Roll formally recognizes UA’s commitment to teaching students to recognize needs within their communities, inspiring students to speak up, and equipping students with the skills to effect change within their communities,” said Stephen Black, director of the UA Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility.