

# Experiential Learning Ignites Psych Major's Passion for Service

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What comes to mind when a student thinks about experiential learning? Internships? Applied projects? Yes, all great ways to get experience, but what if a student's campus was a great place to look for those opportunities?

One such student sought out one of those very opportunities. Mikaila Bayers, senior [psychology major](#), worked with the Walk a Mile in a Veteran's Boot Fundraiser in November — a campaign that raises money for Liberty House through the purchase of paper boots that students may dedicate to veterans — through her work within an independent study and the [Student Leadership Academy](#) (SLA).

The Boots campaign, hosted by the Student Veteran Advocacy Team, was implemented to continue to extend the campus' urban mission.

“The Boots campaign became a way to celebrate and recognize our own military students, but also to make aware community members of homelessness in

Manchester," said Regina McCarthy, assistant dean of student services. "Veteran homelessness in particular, and one specific group that was working to help."

Originally, Bayers signed up for a community service class that was offered, but that class was then cancelled and left Bayers wondering what to do next.

"It was a class that I was not only interested in taking, but it also fulfilled a requirement for the [Student] Leadership Academy," Bayers said.

To fulfill her requirements for SLA and to continue the theme of community service, Bayers sought out an advisor, [Annie Donahue](#), library director and interim executive director for experiential learning, for an independent study and turned to McCarthy to support her through the Student Leadership Academy portion. Both her advisors aided her throughout her experiential learning experience.

McCarthy sees experiential learning as a connection between education and experience with each influencing the other. She said that what students gains within that real-world experience will then circle back and "inform the next level of learning" within the classroom.

"On the one hand, students will learn in the classroom and that classroom knowledge informs a real-world, active, engaged experience," McCarthy said.

Donahue said the term experiential learning is a "rather broad brush," and there are many different ways experiential learning can occur on campus. There are internships, but there are also study away opportunities, program-specific opportunities and others within various offices, including the Office of Student Development and Involvement.

"That all applies back to their course work and helps make real world applications that can then deepen the learning and strengthen their resume as they move beyond the university," Donahue said.

Bayers took on an experiential learning project with the Boots campaign. Teaming up with the Student Veteran Advocacy Team, Bayers helped plan, coordinate and implement the drive during the month of November. She looked to change the dynamic of the drive's table, taking away some faculty and adding students.

"I know in the past it was mainly faculty members who sat at the table, but I wanted to get more students involved with it because students asking students or educating other students I think works," Bayers said.

Along with the campaign, Bayers interviewed several veterans at Liberty House and brought their stories to the table during the drive. Bayers sees the stories she gathered as human components to her project.

"Being able to add a human component to anything helps break those walls," Bayers said. "I think that being able to interact with veterans and then give pieces of their stories to the drive helped this year."

McCarthy reflected on her time working with Bayers and the Boots campaign, and said that her time can be summed up in "aha! and serendipitous moments."

"It brought back for me how compelling it is for students to construct knowledge based on experiences, and how much I enjoy working with students," McCarthy said.

Donahue has seen the experience as influencing Bayers in many positive ways, which she added was a rewarding experience for her as Bayers' advisor.

"Meeting with her and reading her reflective responses helped me to see that growth in her and see how the work we did together helped move us towards the final outcome," Donahue said.

Bayers hopes to embark on more projects in the spring semester and continue to cultivate her passion for service.

"I think that working on this helped me gain more confidence to volunteer more and figure out what causes I want to work with," Bayers said.

- WRITTEN BY:  
[Kristin Boelzner '16](#) | UNH Manchester Student Perspectives blog

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