

2023

ACE

AKRON COMMUNITY  
ENGAGED SCHOLAR

DIRECTORY



**THE EX[L]CENTER** for Community Engaged Learning

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# WHO ARE THE ACES?

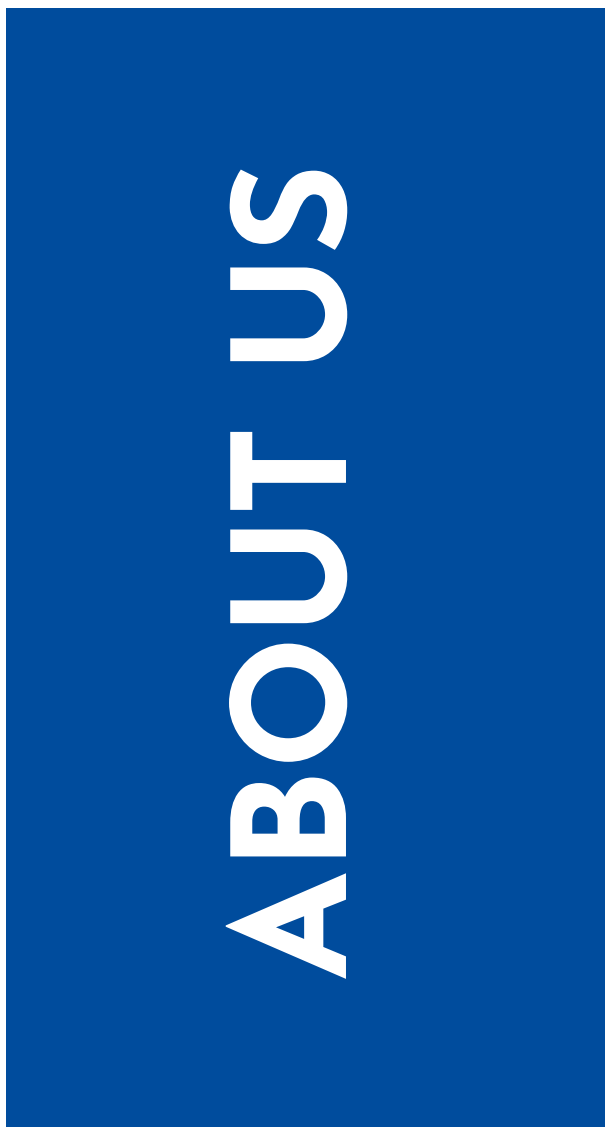
**Akron Community Engaged Scholars** (ACE Scholars or ACES) is a way to formally affiliate with the EX[L] Center for Community Engaged Learning for those full- or part-time faculty who demonstrate a commitment to public impact by connecting campus and community through their teaching, scholarship, and/or significant service.

ACES are mindful of best practices, striving to create partnerships based on mutual benefit, reciprocity, authenticity, trust, and equity. They actively support a culture of engagement on campus and contribute to telling UA's community

engagement story by being active users of the Collaboratory data system. ACE Scholars are connected by a shared passion, and convene for professional development, to share best practices, to mentor others, and to innovate in community engagement.



**Lifetime ACE Scholar** is a title reserved for faculty when they move on from UA. Throughout their career, these ACES were instrumental in building and supporting a strong culture of community engagement through their support of The EX[L] Center and with their teaching and scholarship. **Emerging Scholars** are faculty who are early in their journey who are paired with mentors as they develop their work. Together, the ACES represent some of the very best of UA as we work to fulfill our vision as a public research anchor institution with an unsurpassed commitment to community engagement.



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# OUR ACE SCHOLARS



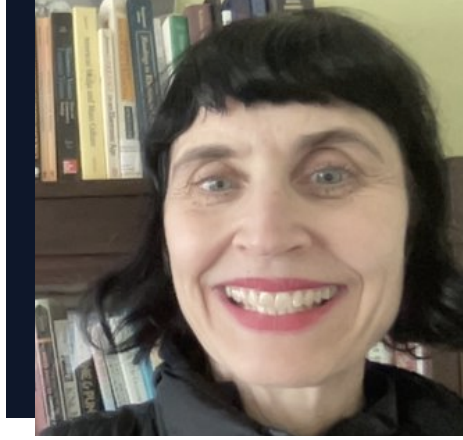
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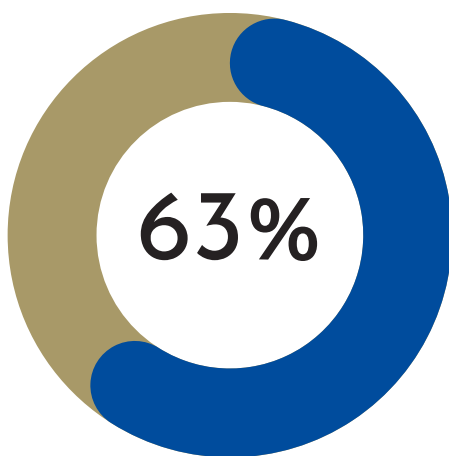


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## DID YOU KNOW?

Of 48 academic units at The University of Akron, **more than half** have at least one ACE Scholar and **every College** is represented. Our cohort includes part-time instructors, non-tenure and tenure-track faculty, staff & contract professionals, and university administrators.



DR. CAROLYN  
BEHRMAN

I am Professor of Anthropology here at the University of Akron. Drawn to the study of urban communities and health, and with a preference for hands-on teaching, I found a home here in Akron focusing on community-based, collaborative research and developing partnerships among students, UA colleagues, city residents, and area organizations. As the first full-time tenure track hire in Anthropology, I was a key player in building and expanding the program from a nascent interdisciplinary program within the Department of Sociology to a well-regarded and independent Department of Anthropology. In my early years, I designed and implemented much of the core anthropology curriculum and forged connections across the College as my colleagues and I imagined what our discipline had to offer the intellectual life of the campus.

I currently serve as a member of the Center for Conflict Management, the Global Studies Program, the UA Press Board, and the EX[L] Faculty Steering Committee. My community commitments include the KaRen Community of Akron's Advisory Board, the board of the Center for Applied Theatre and Active Culture (CATAC), and the executive core team of the Neighborhood Network of Middlebury and University Park, and the residents' environmental justice coalition FACTS. I am a Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology, and a member of the Anthropology in Higher Ed and Medical Anthropology, Social Science and Health TIGs.



During my time at UA, I have helped lead two broad initiatives. The first was the NSF-funded Active Research Methods (ARM) Lab which focused on methods for studying human behavior. Kathy Feltey, Sandra Spickard-Prettyman and I, along with qualitatively and quantitatively oriented colleagues from CBA, College of Ed., the School of Communication, Engineering, and BCAS, opened a space for faculty, students, and community members to align and hone social science data collection and analytical skills and apply those in locally based problem solving and participatory research. The ARM platform and the grants we accrued enabled transformative experiences for undergraduates (students presented at international meetings and published their work which has led to jobs and graduate degrees for them), community partners (some of whom innovated on our shared research designs advancing their own data collection and analysis to guide their activities and programs), and for Akron residents (for example, the creation of an enduring (16 years and counting), multi-partner program addressing food security among children at an elementary school).

The second broad initiative was the EX[L] Center. What began with a listening tour by EX[L] founding Director Jeff Hoffman and Resources Director Ian Schwarber led first to the creation of a Faculty Advisory Council which I served on for several months, then my appointment as Faculty Collaboration Director, and finally, in Fall 2016, to the appointment of Anoo Vyas and myself as Co-Directors of EX[L]. Work at EX[L] was always collaborative and there are too many examples of achievements to fit here. Just a few include working with Bill Lyons and Peter Niewiarowski in the brainstorming that led to the [Un]class concept. (Credit to Peter for the name.) Another was observing mindfulness in action from Matt Lee and community partner Jeremy Lile as they picked up the [Un]class concept and spun golden heads-hearts-and-hands learning experiences with students. Dialogue with Matt, Hillary Nunn, Parizad Dejbord, Martha Santos, Shanon Donnelly, Jodi Kearns and so many other EX[L]-associated faculty, and [Un]class students, led to the founding of the Open-Space Teaching Community of Practice which allowed EX[L] to deepen dialogue about the transformation of university teaching as we move forward into the 21st century.

One of the most important things EX[L] has done is create a space and opportunities for students to pursue their passions or tackle challenging issues they care deeply about in transdisciplinary teams. EX[L]-affiliated Student-Driven Initiatives have included Zips Precious Plastics (led by engineers and CBA students), the annual UASIS student interdisciplinary symposium, a food justice event (led by anthropology, sociology, and dietetics students), and so many more. Kudos to the amazing students who have worked with and for EX[L] as Assistants, members of the Student Advisory Council, and as individuals or groups who used EX[L] to further their good goals. (I would love to list all the names of those students here along with their accomplishments, but I really can't keep hogging the space and most are on the EX[L] website!)

Another collaborative achievement arose at a point when our university community was suffering following the firing of a great many people and, at the same time, we were all drawn to consider how higher education needed to transform to fit our changing world. Faculty and staff came together hoping to find our own way through those times by asking what we care about - what our shared passions are and then asking what challenging issues we might tackle together in transdisciplinary teams. The OVA (Our Vision for Akron) Initiative was the result. With special funding support from the interim President of the University, John Green, four teams evolved, each focused on a different aspect of sustainability (food and waste, water, circular economy, and narratives that sustain us).

Co-directing EX[L] first with Anoo Vyas and then with Anoo and Christin Seher involved managing change. Our goal in leadership transition was to continue to be a vital resource for pedagogical innovation and community-engagement but to adapt as well. Serving EX[L] now as a member of Faculty Steering Committee, ably led by Amber Ferris, I am impressed with and excited by the evolution of the Center. In my own academic work, I have co-taught [Un]classes and taught my regular classes with an emphasis on community engagement. Some of the outcomes have included publications and awards from Ohio Campus Compact, the University, and BCAS. With colleagues and students in Anthropology, and community partners I am co-editing a volume, *What Remains*, about marginalization and its consequences in Akron's early industrial history.

One of the most important forces shaping my teaching, writing, and life as a scholar has been the spirit of collaboration among my colleagues across disciplinary and institutional borders in this wonderful place. I am very glad to have been able to participate in this work with all of you.



# DR. PARIZAD DEJBORD-SAWAN

Parizad Dejbord Sawan, Ph.D., is Professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages at UA. Originally from Spain, she received her Ph.D. in Latin American literature from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. As the department's only Latin Americanist, she was hired almost 30 years ago to teach graduate and undergraduate courses in Latin American literature.

As an educator, she has been recognized for her teaching excellence by the department of Modern Languages, the college of Arts and Sciences, and the University of Akron as the recipient of three Outstanding Teaching awards. She is the founder and director of the Certificate of Advanced Spanish for the Health Professions and First Responders (2013-present) and the Certificate of Beginning Medical Spanish (2014-present), and currently serves as a member of the Academic Policies Committee, the Center for Conflict Management, and the EX[L] Center.

Her affiliation with the EX[L] Center dates back to its early days when she was invited by founder Jeff Hoffman and by Ian Schwarber to engage in meaningful conversations with other colleagues about what entrepreneurship and experiential learning could look like at UA. She served on the inaugural Faculty Advisory Committee in 2015, was chair of the Faculty Steering Committee in 2017, and has been a continuing member of FSC until the present.

Since 2013, Parizad has led her department in a new direction towards experiential learning and community engagement. Her research and scholarship, program building and teaching, and her community engagement initiatives have been focused towards addressing the lack of proper health care for vulnerable members of local Hispanic communities of limited English. Language and cultural interaction are the means by which patients access the health care delivery system and make decisions about treatments. Failure to acquire language and respectful cross-cultural relationship-building skills hinders the establishment of a trusting therapeutic alliance and quality health care.

Her Beginning Medical Spanish program directly addresses this problem by reaching out to hospital health care professionals and staff from Akron Children's Hospital and other area hospitals. The program is designed to help them develop their oral proficiency levels in Spanish and their practices of cultural humility in order to build meaningful relationships with their Hispanic families and patients. On campus, the Advanced Spanish for the Health Professions program offers health profession majors a variety of opportunities to apply knowledge and abilities through community engagements and hands-on learning. Their work at St. Bernard's Health Fair, AxessPointe Community Health Centers, Hartville Migrant Clinic, Faithful Servants Care Center, Metro Health, and Hope and Healing Survivor Center help address and mitigate some of the linguistic and cultural barriers that local Hispanic communities suffer and prepares them for successful future careers as linguistically and culturally humble health care providers.

In her areas of research and scholarship in this field, Parizad has presented at the Ohio Latino Education and Health Summits and has been a member of their Steering Committee Board for consecutive terms. She has been a language and culture researcher for PICORI's (Patient Outcome Research Institute) funded awards and has presented papers and published articles with the AAL (The American Applied Linguistics Association) and with the Journal of Applied Linguistics on issues of testimonial justice and language in health care. She is also the author of Beginning Medical Spanish: Oral Proficiency and Cultural Humility which is currently used at hospitals around the country and in Europe to teach medical staff and professionals how to bridge communicative and cultural barriers with their Hispanic families.

As a Hispanic who had been living in the US since 1975, Parizad has felt the need to give back to her community, not only through a broadening of her outreach, educational engagements, and areas of research at UA, but also through her volunteer work. As an advocate for vulnerable populations in the Hispanic community (children, migrant workers, and family members of detainees), she has volunteered with OCALI (Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence), Hartville Migrant Clinic, and ICE detention. As a member of the National Medical Spanish Taskforce, she conducts scope reviews of medical Spanish textbooks and research literature to add to the national cultural resource bank.

Parizad is very grateful to the EX[L] Center, to Christin Seher, and to the Faculty Steering Committee for honoring her with this award. Her work would not have been possible without the many meaningful and inspiring conversations with EX[L] colleagues Carolyn Behrman, Bill Lyons, Matt Lee, and Anoo Vyas and their support and encouragement throughout all these years.



DR. KATHRYN  
FELTEY

Kathryn Feltey is an Emeritus Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Akron. During her 32 years at UA, she conducted community-based research; co-founded a community group for lesbian mothers and organized a conference on lesbian families at UA; designed and taught community-oriented undergraduate classes; taught [Un]classes through the EX[L] Center; showcased undergraduate research at the EX[L] Center; and contributed to a multi-disciplinary Public Safety research project for the city of Akron. In addition, she co-facilitated mindfulness and meditation classes at public libraries in the community.

In early research, Kathy focused on the community problems of homelessness and domestic violence and worked with homeless women and abuse survivors, local shelters, and emergency support systems to identify the challenges and pathways to a secure and safe home life. Based on the relationships developed with service providers in the community and networking with local businesses and city officials, Kathy, and a multi-disciplinary research team organized focus group conversations to promote coalition-building and ground-up problem-solving.

One community approach to the problem of homelessness, transitional housing, was the focus of a series of studies Kathy spearheaded with Dr. Metzger from Anthropology. All of these projects involved undergraduate and graduate students and resulted in numerous conference papers, several educational videos, three masters' theses, and one doctoral dissertation. For her community-focused work, Kathy received the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences Chairs' Award for Outstanding Achievement in Professional and Community Service in 2000.

In other work, Kathy collaborated with Dr. Cheryl King from Public Administration in an extensive study of citizen participation in community-level decision making in northeast Ohio. Using focus groups and in-depth interviews with citizens and community leaders, they developed a new model of authentic citizen participation in community-level change. This resulted in an award-winning article, co-authored with a student. With community member, Janet Black, Kathy co-founded an educational support group for lesbian mothers in Akron, MotherWit. The group raised money to organize a conference, "Lesbian Families: Outlaws in Love", attended by students, community members, and out-of-state guests.

In the years prior to the establishment of the EX[L] Center, Kathy developed courses that took students into the community to work with local organizations on issues such as hunger, homelessness, low-income housing, eldercare, and mental health. Teaching an [Un]class shifted the focus to the campus community as students learned how to conduct research on the experiences of commuter students. In this first [Un]class endeavor, Kathy was grateful to have the mentorship of Dr. Matt Lee to work through the challenges of the [Un]class model. In her second [Un]class experience, Kathy had the good fortune to partner with Dr. Gary Holliday and Dr. Becky Erickson to hold a think tank with UA students at the I Promise School with the goal of developing a service-learning initiative for I Promise students.

In an ongoing relationship with EX[L], Kathy arranged for her upper-level Sociology of Sex & Gender classes to present their independent research in poster sessions at the Center. With the support of Dr. Carolyn Behrman and the student EX[L] staff, these sessions provided professional development for the student researchers as well as extending their research beyond the classroom.

When the Akron Community Foundation (ACF) (in collaboration with Katie Fry from Round River Consulting), contacted the EX[L] Center for potential student involvement in analyzing qualitative data gathered from the "On The Table Greater Akron" initiative, Kathy mentored the selected student, Sociology major Zachary Eldred. The Akron initiative brought together more than 6,500 area residents to discuss ways to strengthen the Akron community, yielding over 100 qualitative accounts. Zachary learned to transcribe, code, and analyze the data using a computer software program, and wrote the final report for the ACF.

As one of the founding members, with Dr. Joann Xi and Dr. Matthew Lee, of the Center for Health, Happiness, and Chan (CHHC), Kathy helped facilitate free classes at local libraries for community members interested in exploring contemplative practices such as breathing meditation and mindfulness. At UA, she conducted in-depth interviews with undergraduate students who participated in an experimental study on the effect of mindfulness meditation with Dr. Joann Xi (study Principal Investigator) and graduate student, Marcella Mulhollem.

During her last semester before retirement, Kathy developed and taught a community-based research class for sociology and criminal justice majors. With support from Dr. Christin Seher, co-director of the EX[L] Center, the class worked with a community partner, Summit Family & Children First Council (SFCFC), to identify gaps in their wrap-around services. Students were to conduct interviews and focus groups with agency representatives working with SFCFC, and to code and analyze secondary data using SCFC records on youth clients and families. A final report written by the students was submitted to SFCFC, although the planned in-person presentation was canceled due to COVID.

After retiring from UA, Kathy volunteered to work with the Reimagining Public Safety project, a collaborative research project with Akron City Council and a team of UA faculty and students, led by Dr. Becky Erickson. The purpose of the project was to research community views, concerns, and recommendations on safety, policing, and the future of Akron through "town hall" conversations conducted virtually due to COVID. Kathy helped train students from Communication, Anthropology, and Sociology to facilitate the online focus groups, and code and analyze data. She provided support in writing the final report for the project.

Throughout her career, Kathy has valued relationships and the shared human longing to create a better world. Helping students to connect with one another in acquiring new bodies of knowledge has been her approach in the classroom. Taking students beyond the classroom to participate in broader communities, to see themselves as agents of change, has always been a goal. The EX[L] Center provided a place, resources, and support to put this into practice on a regular basis and for that she is deeply grateful.



DR. MATTHEW  
LEE

Matthew T. Lee, Ph.D., is Professor of the Social Sciences and Humanities at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University. He is also Research Associate and Founding Director of the Flourishing Network at the Human Flourishing Program in the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University, where he previously served as Senior Research Scientist, Director of Empirical Research, and Lecturer on Sociology. He is a Co-Investigator on the Global Flourishing Study, a \$43M, five-year panel study with annual data collection on approximately 240,000 people from around the world. This study is a joint project of Baylor, Harvard, Gallup, and the Center for Open Science. He is also Co-Principal Investigator on the \$1.9M grant, "The Construct and Assessment of Interpersonal Love."

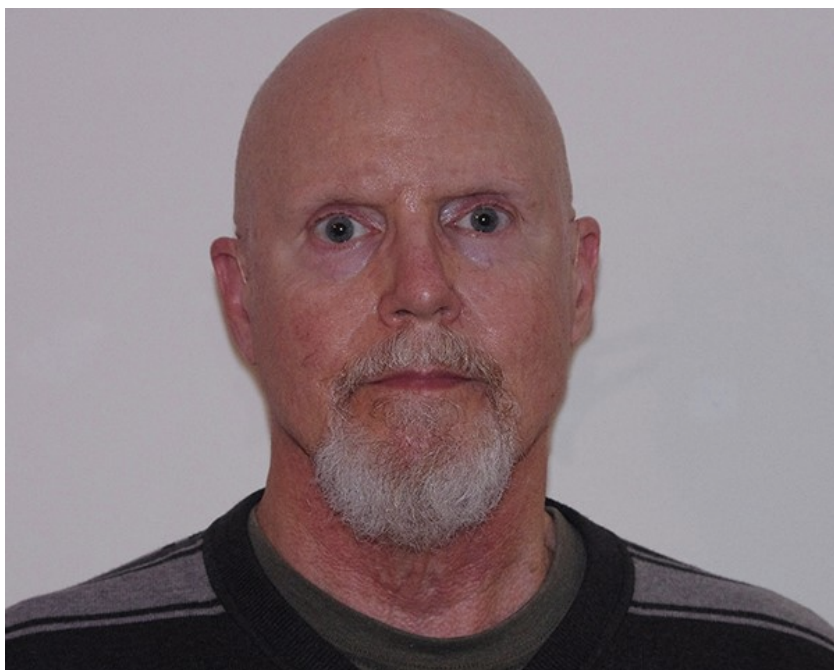
Matthew is a Distinguished Visiting Scholar of Health, Flourishing, and Positive Psychology at Stony Brook University's Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics, as well as a Visiting Scholar at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. He is lead editor of *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities* (2021, Oxford University Press) and co-editor, with UA PhD graduate Marci Cottingham and UA Professor Rebecca Erickson, of *Transcending Crisis: Carework, Emotions, and Human Flourishing* (release date: June 5, 2023, Routledge).

At the EX[L] Center, Matthew served on the inaugural Faculty Advisor Committee in 2015 and chaired the inaugural Faculty Steering Committee in 2016. He was designated as a Faculty Fellow by the Center's founding director, Jeff Hoffman, was awarded a Center grant with Rebecca Erickson ("Right Message, Right Messengers: The Currency of Compassion," \$32,140), and he received the Center's Faculty Innovation Award in 2016. He served as a consultant for the development of two [Un]classes "Skills for Community Engagement" and "Civil Dialogues, Civil Communities: An [Un]class in Civil Engagement." He taught several [Un]classes, the most memorable being "The Meaning of Life" for the Honors College and "Organizations, Community, and Social Action" for the Sociology Department, both in collaboration with UA Professor Carolyn Behrman and with Jeremy Lile, Heart to Heart Leadership's Executive Director. Matthew co-founded the "Open-Space Teaching Community of Practice," an interdisciplinary and inter-college group of faculty, which was nominated for EX[L]'s "Spirit of Experiential Learning Award" in the spring of 2018.

Along with three former UA students, Matthew published an article in 2021 in the *Journal of Transformative Education* titled, "Open Space, Transformative Education, and the Pursuit of Flourishing." This article placed his [Un]classes and other community-engaged courses in the broader context of educating for flourishing, or "complete well-being." As stated in the article, he continued to intentionally "blur the boundary between the university classroom and the community" by hosting class meetings in the community and by supporting student collaborations with community organizations. He invited students to engage in contemplative practices, especially journaling, in order to bring greater clarity to the meaning of their experiences and related academic content, the value of their work to the community members that they served, and to the discovery of a deeper sense of vocation.

After moving on from UA, Matthew built on the lessons he learned with colleagues at EX[L] when he started teaching the course "Conflict, Justice, and Healing" for the Sociology Department at Harvard. In the fall of 2019, one student captured the "[Un]class-like" spirit of co-creation that prevailed in these courses by explaining in a formal course evaluation that, "I pretty much approach every relationship and conflict in my life differently now, as well as hold a reborn hope that this world can get better and we can heal each other, and that systemic violence can be fought against by community.... The friendships I have made and the wisdom I have gained will transcend [that] classroom [and extend to] the rest of my life." In effect, students had adopted the motto of Cowell College at UC Santa Cruz—"The pursuit of truth in the company of friends"—which is also an apt description of collaborations at EX[L].

Matthew received the Harvard University Certificate of Teaching Excellence in 2020 and in 2021, which he attributes to the generosity of students and faculty at UA—and especially at the EX[L] Center—who helped him climb a steep learning curve during his first tentative experiments with engaged learning.



## DR. RICHARD STEINER

Richard "Dick" Steiner is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Statistics. He attended Grove City College, graduating with a B.S degree in Biology and teaching certification in Biology and General Science. Dick's first teaching job was at Portersville Christian School, where he taught all of the secondary-level science courses. Later, he pursued graduate studies at Clarion University of Pennsylvania (M.S. Biology), and the University of Michigan, where he earned M.P.H and Ph.D. degrees in Biostatistics.

Dick joined The University of Akron in 1983, teaching Statistics for 35 years—first in the Department of Mathematical Sciences, then in the newly formed Department of Statistics in 1998.

Since retiring, Dick has been teaching the graduate-level Statistics for the Life Sciences course, moving the course to an online format. One of the course requirements is for each student to create a project from developing a research question and selecting appropriate statistical methods through data analysis and reporting and interpreting results. Students may use data from their own research, data they find online, or data they collect specifically for the project.



In 1999, The University of Akron and other area educational institutions joined to form what is now called the Consortium of Eastern Ohio Master of Public Health (CEOMPH) Program. The CEOMPH program is a nontraditional degree program designed for working professionals who are interested in improving community health. Dick participated in the development of the program and served as course director for the Biostatistics in Public Health course. He also served as chair of the Faculty Appointments and Development Committee.

Dick contributed service to the community as a member of the Summit County Combined Health District's Data and Statistics Committee and was awarded the Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences Community Service Award for his work with CEOMPH and the Summit County Combined Health District.

Two marvelous communities of engaged scholars in which Dick has been privileged to participate are the EX[L] Center and the Active Research Methods (ARM) Consortium and Lab. Dick was a member of the EX[L] Center Faculty Steering Committee and was a charter member of the ARM consortium and enjoyed assisting with projects at the lab. Dick sends special thanks to Carolyn Behrman for including him in these rewarding endeavors.

During his tenure as a Faculty Fellow in the Office of the Provost, Dick was a member of the team that planned the Bierce Library Learning Commons and was part of the UA leadership team for the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning project focusing on undergraduate research.

Dick is grateful to so many colleagues and friends for enriching his career and making so many wonderful memories.





# ANOO VYAS

Anoo Vyas serves as the Co-Director of the EX[L] Center for Community Engaged Learning at the University of Akron.

At EX[L], he helped create the Akron Community Internship Program, Akron Community Connectors, and ran several pitch competitions focused both on for-profit businesses as well as community enterprises.

He previously served as Visiting Assistant Professor of Clinical Law at the University of Akron School of Law, where he taught Business Planning Law, Internet Law, and the Small Entrepreneur and Economic Development (SEED) Legal Clinic. He is the founder and past president of PechaKucha Akron, a series of quarterly talks featuring local creatives. He is a former member of Torchbearers and Leadership Akron Class 34 and served on the executive committee for the board of Akron Roundtable.

Anoo received his master's degree in education policy & Management from Harvard University, a J.D. from The University of Cincinnati, an LL.M. from The University of Akron, and a B.S. from The Ohio State University.

# GET IN TOUCH



All of UA's ACE Scholars have consented to sharing their interests and contact information. Feel free to reach out to them directly, or you can contact [Dr. Christin Seher](#) to facilitate an introduction at:

## THE EX[L] CENTER



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