

FALL 2026

Service Learning

Learn. Serve. Engage.



Each year, hundreds of Elmhurst University students contribute thousands of hours serving their local, national or global communities. Each semester, students welcome refugee families, mentor first-generation students, provide shelter for abandoned pets, advocate for human rights, promote the protection of our natural world and much, much more.

Joselyn Hernandez + Alexander Martinez–Ladder Up Tax Assistance Program



Joselyn Hernandez, accounting and finance major '26, and Alexander Martinez, finance major '26, combined their academic backgrounds and biliteracy skills to help Chicagoans prepare their state and federal taxes.

Joselyn relied on her coursework to serve the community, saying, “Throughout my time serving as a tax preparer for Ladder Up, I had the opportunity to put the information I’ve learned in the classroom to practice while helping the community.

“Often, taxes are seen as complex and requiring significant effort to file. This, combined with historically lower levels

of financial literacy among low-income communities, creates an environment where tax work is difficult to complete and issues concerning the IRS arise. By providing my assistance in filing tax returns for these communities, I alleviated some of the stress associated with tax filing for the clients at Ladder Up. I realized the financial knowledge I have obtained through my education that allows me to navigate tax returns can be used to help those who do not possess the same resources.”

Alexander used his Spanish skills to help serve the community. “Serving with Ladder Up is a great experience for students in finance, business or accounting. It is one of the best ways to get finance experience for your resume,” he says.

“I am Latino, and I was able to speak Spanish, like a large majority of our clients. Many families that walked in were often very stressed and worried about what was going to happen and had to deal with a language barrier on top of all of that.”



LADDER UP®

Bluejays Connect Service and Academics

Bluejays Connect Service and Academics to Local and Global Social Justice Issues

The Elmhurst University Service Learning Program partners with Exodus World Service year after year, welcoming newly arriving refugees to the Chicago area. ElmU students tutor school-aged children, create community with adults, and prepare living spaces for families.

Leonor Nevarez, Pre-nursing and Spanish Major '28—Tutoring



“Through my service-learning experience working with two sisters through the Exodus program, I have grown in ways that go far beyond academic learning. What started as nerves during my first visit quickly turned into a meaningful routine of connection, teaching and mutual learning. Each session helped me develop personal qualities such as patience, communication skills, adaptability, compassion and confidence.”

“At first, I thought I would only be helping the girls learn English, but I ended up learning as much from them as they did from me. Service allows you to create real relationships, learn about different life perspectives and cultures, and develop skills that aren't learned solely from books.”

Bahome Seraphin, Computer Science Major '26—New Neighbor Program



Bahome (far right) and his Exodus Heidi House friends making s'mores.

“When I first arrived in the United States — as a student and a refugee — people showed up for me. They explained how schools worked. They helped me understand everyday customs. They sat with me when I felt lost, lonely, and afraid. Years later, I found myself on the other side of that same table. As a volunteer with Exodus World Service in Wheaton, I work alongside refugee families every weekend.”

“Every Saturday evening, refugee families, Exodus staff, and volunteers gather at Heidi House in Wheaton, which is a space for English conversation, citizenship preparation and social connection. We do not sit in a hierarchy. No one lectures. We sit together as equals around tables, sharing food, stories, and practical help. I help refugees understand American culture, schools, jobs, and local resources. But just as importantly, I listen to their stories of war and displacement — and share my own.”

While some ElmU students like Leonor and Bahome serve in a local, client-facing capacity, other Bluejays find ways to serve and nurture individuals living across the world.

to Local and Global Social Justice Issues

Sociology Students–Feed My Starving Children and Other Local Nonprofits



Elmhurst students in Dr. Tim Johnson's Social Problems and Intro to Sociology classes served at Feed My Starving Children. The two classes covered back-to-back sessions by packing dried veggies, vitamins, soy and rice into bags to feed more than 100 children for a year. Johnson explains the importance of service in his classes:

"The FMSC experience was one part of the larger focus in the Social Problems class for understanding how to meet the needs of people struggling in the U.S. and around the world. The class covered topics such as poverty, work, education, healthcare and homelessness. Students in groups used their Sociological foundation to compare their FMSC experience to their connections with local civil society organizations. These included: Elmhurst Community Clothing Center, DuPage Pads, and the Elmhurst-Yorkfield Food Pantry. Whether at a global or local level, students realized that the efforts of organizations and volunteers helped people be more secure so they could move forward to becoming full members of society."

"Service Learning not only brings greater understanding of the reasons why people are struggling and the efforts of organizations to meet needs. It also encourages a heart of service and develops a worldview that together... it is possible to make a difference in the world."

Mitchell Westfahl, Finance and Logistics and Supply Chain Management Major '26–Feed My Starving Children

"My experience volunteering at Feed My Starving Children showed me how even small contributions can make a meaningful impact when people work together toward a common goal. Seeing how organized the packaging process was and learning that the meals would be sent to communities facing food insecurity around the world helped me realize that local volunteer efforts can create global change. This experience made me think about how I can use my own skills in operations, organization and teamwork to positively impact communities in the future. As someone interested in supply chain and operations, I was able to see how efficiency and coordination directly affect how many people can be helped."



"During the volunteer session, people of different ages, experiences and backgrounds worked side by side efficiently and respectfully. Seeing everyone contribute in their own way helped me better appreciate how diverse perspectives and experiences can strengthen a team and create a greater impact within both local and global communities."



Samuel Hatungimana, Digital Media and Computer Science Major '27—Plate for Peace

Sam Hatungimana is working with faculty and peers to help alleviate food insecurity for refugees through his organization Plate for Peace.

Plate for Peace was born after realizing how my fellow refugees are facing hunger in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya due to the continuous reduction of food rations and the shutdown of USAID support. I started (Plate for Peace) with the aim of providing food to vulnerable refugees, especially single mothers and orphans. However, I soon realized that I could not do it on my own and needed to seek out other students who would be interested in helping. As of now, Plate for Peace is made up of five students and alumni: Atong Susan Mijok (pre-nursing major '28), Marta Guillen (management major, '26) Josephine Mangati (pre-nursing major '28), myself and Christina Morris (pre-nursing major, '29).



In the long run, my hope is to establish a sustainable model that can help single mothers and orphans become independent and able to feed themselves.



Visit the Plate for Peace Go Fund Me page to help Sam and his team feed hungry children at the Kakuma refugee camp.

The Elmhurst-Yorkfield Food Pantry (EYFP) Helps Locals Put Food on the Table, Regardless of Citizenship Status

Elmhurst University business professor and director of the M.S. in Supply Chain Management program Walter Salek serves as the president of the board of directors for the Elmhurst Yorkfield Food Pantry, a local organization that serves community members in need, including some Elmhurst University students and also hosts Elmhurst University students who want to serve. Professor Salek works with the EYFP team to help put into practice their mission to provide healthy, accessible food and compassionate support to neighbors in need.

We Want to Hear from You!

Tell us about how you are serving and learning in your community or request information about how to get involved with one of the organizations highlighted in this issue. Our goal is to help you combine your interests and passions with community needs and opportunities.

We can also help you fulfill your Integrated Curriculum experiential learning graduation requirement through service. To learn more about how Elmhurst University members are serving their communities, learning about themselves and building their futures, visit elmhurst.edu/Service-Learning.

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