



IN PARTNERSHIP  
With the CCG

INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

# THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

A SERVICE LEARNING & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COURSE





# OVERVIEW

This white paper will detail the planning and implementation of a service learning and community engagement (SLCE) course at Wingate University in an introductory Theology class (REL 330) offered in the Religion and Philosophy Department.

If you want to know what SLCE is, how this course was planned and implemented as well as the benefits and impacts of teaching in this way ... just keep reading!

What did we find? In a nutshell, our community partner, Heart for Monroe (Chalk it Up To Love East Program) was thrilled at the results. Students were surprised and empowered by what they could accomplish together and the data from pre and post surveys demonstrated that they improved their civic engagement and confidence in being able to make a difference. Data also suggests that they also improved efficacy 21st century skills such as team work, communication, and problem solving.



“... before this class I had thoughts about a project on period poverty but never thought I would be able to do it on campus. This time in this class has proven me wrong. We were able to get a campaign going, got boxes set up around campus and got outside donations from talking to others. This overall is a gospel in itself and that's one of the main themes in Chapter 25 (of Martin) “Faith sharing is a fine way of not only sharing with friends God activity in your life but also seeing how God is at work in theirs”. This is my gospel that we were able to get a group of individuals together to work together towards a common goal and achieve. That to me is a blessing in itself. I'm thankful for this class and honestly believe this is a course that should be required like GPS. Chapter 25 is all about finding your spiritual journey and I believe this is the beginning of mine and this class has enhanced it even further. - **Wingate Undergraduate**

# WHAT IS SLCE



## SLCE

### A WAY OF TEACHING & LEARNING

Service Learning and Community Engagement is rooted in reciprocity, community action and autonomy.

Academic Integrity  
(Apply Course Content)



Student Ownership  
(student voice)



Apprentice Citizenship  
(address real issues)

Recent research indicates that the impressive impacts of SLCE include increased student success, increased retention and persistence rates, higher levels of empathy, deepened connectedness to their community, and the development of skills desired by future employers.

SLCE courses have also been found to generate DEI outcomes such as tolerance, knowledge of others, and interactions across differences, which are a cornerstone of the mission of Wingate University.

## WHY THEOLOGY?

### WHY NOT!

Theology is "faith seeking understanding" and SLCE is way of teaching and learning that helps students apply what they learn and understand what it means today. It also is a great introductory course to connect our Bulldogs with opportunities to build a more just world -- right in their own backyard. When students work with gifted, mission oriented religious organizations in our local community they feel that they are really 'doing' theology -- and it sinks in!

# INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY WHY IS SLCE IMPORTANT TO WINGATE? TO YOU?



In a recently published primer (COPIIL 2021, p.04), Executive Director of NC Campus Compact states that **there is an urgency for higher education to cultivate public civic life in three ways.**

- 1) *Contribute to the physical, environmental and economic well-being, educational endeavors and civic health of communities.*
- 2) *Leverage the University's gifts for research, creativity, teaching, service and institutional practices to address the challenges facing society.*
- 3) *Cultivate knowledge of democracies, skills, perspectives and behaviors so all can become responsible local, national and planetary citizens who share a common future.*

*This practical and introductory religion course at Wingate specializes in asking big questions about God, the world and how we live together in this world. This course is an ideal place to cultivate the attitudes, skills and perspectives to cultivate public life and help address some of the challenges facing Wingate University and our neighbors.*

*And these WU Bulldogs in this course did just this in creative and impactful ways*

“My initial thoughts about service learning were really nothing like what my experience with service learning has been. When I first signed up for a service learning course, I was excited because I had never taken one before. However, I was really nervous and confused about how we were going to connect theology to service, **but I feel like this is the best possible class that I could have taken as a service learning course!** I feel like theology can tend to focus too much on doctrine and not be practical, but the service learning component of this course really helped to make it more practical. Through doing the service learning project, I found myself making connections to what we had read and discussed in class through our research and conversations with people impacted by our project and with Ginger and Isabella. The time when I really felt the connection between service learning and theology the most is when I was driving to campus to set out the collection boxes and passed a church sign that read, “Doctrine and duty go together,” and I feel like that perfectly described how I feel about taking theology as a service learning course.” **Wingate Undergraduate**



# FAITH KNOWLEDGE & SERVICE

## PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

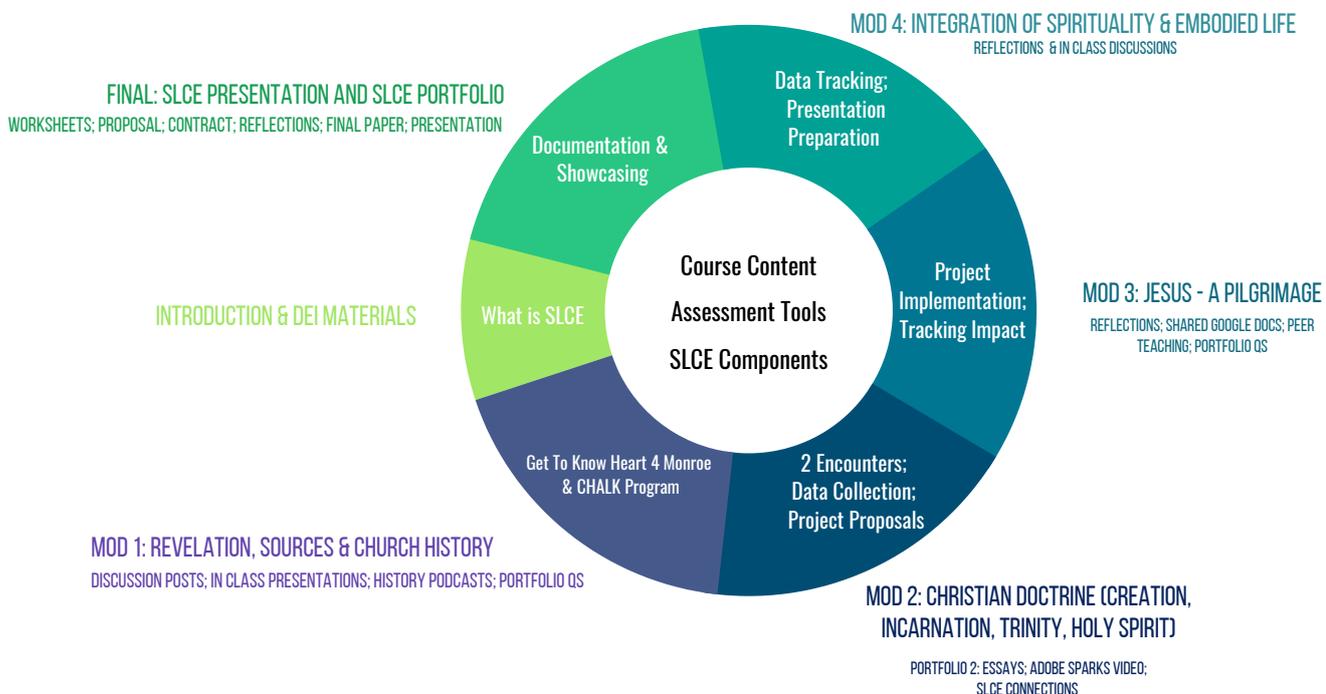
It is reported that young people tend to have a difficult time articulating “what they believe, what it means, and what the implications of their beliefs are for their lives” (Mayrl & Oeur (2009) p. 270)

This course teaches students about what systematic theology is and the rich history of theological ideas, principles, and methods spanning from the classic period to modern day. Students encounter many people who struggle to answer questions like: Who is God? What is God like? Where do we find God revealed? How do people live as “images” of God? How do people make sense of suffering if God is Love? How do we help build the Kingdom of God in the world today?

### Some Target Learning Objectives for this Class:

- recognize significant figures and better understand their contribution to the formation of Christian doctrine
- foster synthetic reflection on many aspects of Christian theology and how they impact Christians today
- creatively connect ancient sources/ideas with our modern context -- and communicate this well
- interact with Christian non-profit(s) who are creating programs and putting their Christian beliefs into practice

In Spring 2021, eight religion majors, in the midst of COVID participated in this semester-long SLCE course and designed two projects in collaboration with a local faith based community partner, Heart for Monroe.



“BOURNE AND ADKINS SPEAK TO THIS EMBODIED THEOLOGY AND FAITH AT LENGTH, CLAIMING THAT “FROM THE MOMENT WHEN MARY AGREES TO GIVE BIRTH TO A SPECIAL CHILD, BODIES BECOME SITES OF REVELATION AND REDEMPTIVE ACTION,” (B & A, 61)... IN THIS WAY, WE ARE ALSO TRYING TO SHOW THE LOVE OF GOD THROUGH “JESUS WHO TOUCHED THE UNTOUCHABLE,” BY PROVIDING FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS AND FOCUSING ON A “TABOO” SUBJECT (B & A, 61).”  
**WINGATE UNDERGRADUATE**



## STUDENT OWNERSHIP

While learning about theology in class, students were also learning about our community's assets and needs by engaging with clients being served by Heart for Monroe at the Closet and by meeting with Isabella Walle, CCG student intern running the CHALK-East Program (providing school supplies for local teachers). They learned that students in five Title 1 schools in close proximity to Wingate lacked access to school supplies (which teachers had to pay for out of their own pockets) and feminine hygiene products – both are important for student success and human dignity.



THE RESULT OF THESE ENCOUNTERS?

2 PROJECTS



1

**Period Poverty:** Students planned a project for the CHALK program that would both educate about period poverty and host a drive to provide period products to teachers at the 5 Title 1 schools in eastern Union County. Students created social media posts to circulate to the campus and community with data about period poverty. They also created a dozen boxes decorated with posters teaching people about period poverty that were situated in high traffic areas on campus.

2

**Supporting Students:** Students planned a donation campaign to generate school supplies, gently used clothing and perishable food products for students at our local Title 1 schools. They created short videos and social media campaign to generate funds and materials for the CHALK program.

# BENEFITS

## FAITH KNOWLEDGE & SERVICE

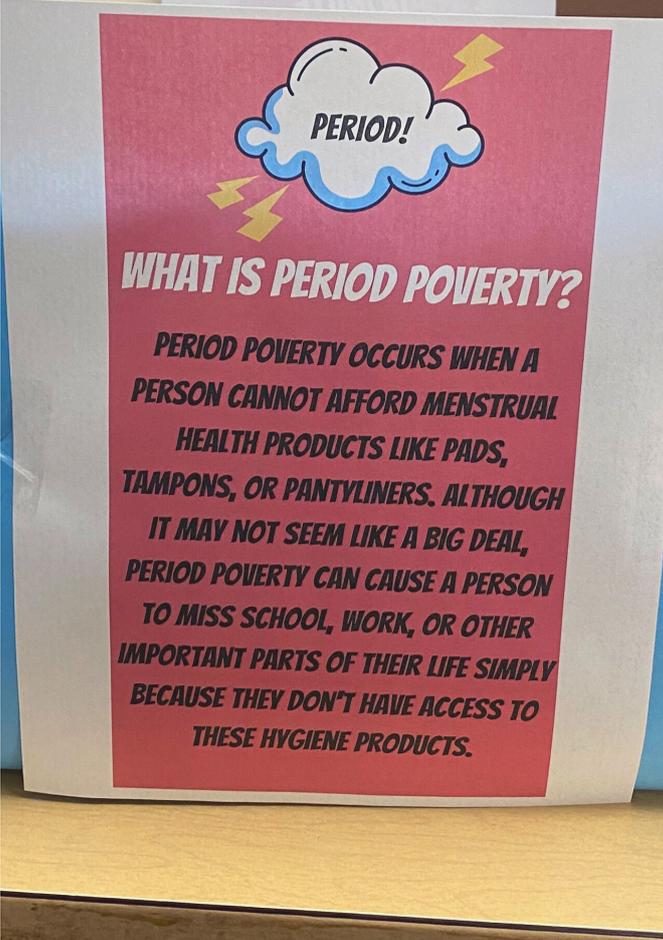
DESPITE A GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND AN ONLINE CLASS FORMAT, THESE STUDENTS WERE SURPRISED AND EMPOWERED BY WHAT THEY ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER AND SOME INDICATED THAT THEY WISHED THESE TOOK THIS COURSE EARLIER IN THEIR WU CAREER. IN POST SURVEYS MOST STUDENTS STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY ENJOYED THE CLASS, THAT IT WAS BENEFICIAL AND THEY WOULD TAKE ANOTHER SLCE CLASS

Quantitative analysis of the pre and post surveys demonstrates two areas of statistically significant growth during the REL 330 course despite the smaller sample size

- Civic Efficacy (confidence that they can make a difference!)
- 21st century skills (skills and attitudes that help them navigate the world successfully)

Students also reported growth in a few other areas ...

- Civic Engagement (a desire to work to make their community better)
- Civic Skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication (e.g., skills and attitudes that made them better at engaging within their community)



**PERIOD!**

**WHAT IS PERIOD POVERTY?**

**PERIOD POVERTY OCCURS WHEN A PERSON CANNOT AFFORD MENSTRUAL HEALTH PRODUCTS LIKE PADS, TAMPONS, OR PANTYLINERS. ALTHOUGH IT MAY NOT SEEM LIKE A BIG DEAL, PERIOD POVERTY CAN CAUSE A PERSON TO MISS SCHOOL, WORK, OR OTHER IMPORTANT PARTS OF THEIR LIFE SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THESE HYGIENE PRODUCTS.**

"Stereotypes concerning period products are largely based around the idea that period products are gross, taboo, or something that shouldn't be talked about out loud. This is why so many menstruating persons struggle with period poverty right before our eyes - our society has made them embarrassed to express their needs for these necessary supplies! I have reconceptualized these stereotypes by learning more about period poverty in America. Before completing this project, I was unaware that 1 in 5 teens admit to being unable to afford or access period products, causing them to miss school, work, and other important activities. This statistic, along with a lot of other research, helped me understand that this issue is probably affecting people around me (in my hometown, at my school, at my church), and is something that I can make a difference in."

**Wingate Undergraduate**



STUDENTS  
RAISED \$3,112  
FOR THE CHALK  
PROGRAM AT  
ODOD EVENT  
APRIL 15TH,  
2021

Approximately 88  
teachers benefit from  
every CHALK distribution  
day and this translates  
into support for  
approximately 1,760 local  
students

20 grade 1 teachers  
received an emergency  
bag of school supplies  
May 14th at Wingate  
Elementary

Wingate Elementary  
Marshville Elementary  
Union Elementary  
East Union Middle  
Forest Hills High School

Title 1 schools that benefit  
from these SLCE projects



# IMPACT

## DONATED ITEMS

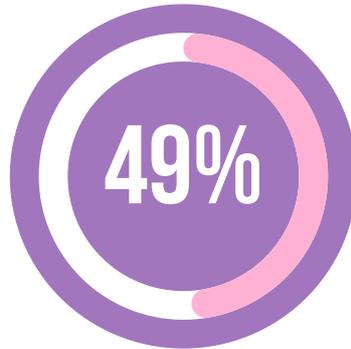
### PERIOD PRODUCTS

Including tampons  
and pads



### SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Including paper,  
binders, pens, pencils,  
glue sticks, kleenex



### OTHER DONATIONS

Including gently-used  
clothes, prom dresses,  
and non-perishable  
food



# BENEFITS

## FAITH KNOWLEDGE & SERVICE

In addition to quantitative data, student reflections and papers also suggested that students became better at...

- **Empathy:** Students in this class reported high feelings of concern for people experiencing hardship in our community and farther away. This suggests that learning theology using SLCE pedagogy may increase empathy and the ability to express their values constructively.
- **Connection to Others and Religious Commitments:** Many students felt a deeper connection to each other, to their religious tradition and to those they encountered in our local community
- **Academic Engagement:** Students seemed to be more interested in theological concepts and learning course content when they connected it to what they were doing in their SLCE projects.

“The biggest similarity between myself and the people my SLCE is serving is the fact that we both are people who use period products. I know how stressful it is to need a period product in the middle of the school day, or out in public, and not have any around, so I can only imagine the stress and hardship people who have no access at all to these products must feel. Every, single, month! Because of this connection, I hope that I am perceived by those that I am serving as an equal, one who wants to use my privilege to give others the resources, dignity, and love that I know they need and deserve... I am passionate about my SLCE because I love those who are in need, and the fact that our collection boxes could give dignity to someone (even if it is just one person in need of period products) is enough to fill my heart with joy!” **Wingate Undergraduate**

“Before we began this project, I thought that period poverty was something that occurred in third-world countries and did not affect American lives. However, I quickly learned that this was not true and that many American teens are in need of help obtaining these products. I also became more empathetic towards this issue” **Wingate Undergraduate**

“...the concept of having faith that God will come through has been reinforced through my group’s work. Before we actually put everything into motion, I never expected to end up raising \$3,000 in donations to help title one schools and people lacking period products. But my group put their best feet forward and God worked his magic. It reminds me of the story in Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus is sleeping on the boat while he is out with his disciples. When a storm begins the disciples, as any person would, started panicking and worrying. Jesus woke up and calmed the storm reprimanding them for their lack of faith. As it applies to the SLCE project, the storm represents the challenge of collecting donations and I represent the disciples who didn’t understand that Jesus had them taken care of. And just like in the story, Jesus was with us in our project and allowed us to bring in \$3,000. Through this project my trust in his work has grown.” **Wingate Undergraduate**



# INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## STUDENT VOICES & ARTIFACTS



“I think that this project has helped me develop communication skills. I am not a people person and hate group projects, but this project has forced me to work a lot with others and has taught me skills to take with me in the future. Communication skills are vital moving forward because I want to continue to serve people on a personal level. ... This project has really challenged me to get out of my comfort zone.”

**Wingate Undergraduate**



“My time of service through our SLCE project has been such a blessing in gaining real life experience of creating an idea into a working, provision making mission. This reminds me of entrepreneur skills which many people who major in Business strive to learn to obtain. In the real world many are building their dreams and are in need of people who can bring the skills of communication, creativity, organization, and leadership to help them create their projects. It could even be my own ideas I may need to get started one day and I could proudly say my skills were refined in my Rel 330 class.”

**Wingate Undergraduate**



“As a result of my participation in this group service-learning project, I’ve learned that I have the power to inform people about community issues and the ability to raise money or increase involvement to help uplift my community. It’s not really a power that I have within myself, but it is a power that I am given when I am connected and have access to a wide range of people looking to seek God’s will, the common good of the community or both...”

**Wingate Undergraduate**

Wish List Items	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plastic Pencil Boxes</li> <li>• 1” Ring Binders</li> <li>• Cow Print Notebooks</li> <li>• Subject Dividers</li> <li>• 24 ct. Crayons</li> <li>• #2 Yellow Pencils</li> <li>• Glue Sticks</li> <li>• Plain Pocket Folders</li> <li>• Chunk Pink Erasers</li> <li>• 12 ct Colored Pencils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry Erase Markers</li> <li>• 3x3 Post-Its</li> <li>• Ear Buds</li> <li>• Headphones</li> <li>• Crayola Washable Markers</li> <li>• Wipe &amp; Thin Tip</li> <li>• Zip Top Bags, all sizes</li> <li>• Cap Erasers</li> <li>• Tissues/Kleenex – Large Boxes</li> <li>• Paper Towels</li> <li>• Pencil Pouches</li> <li>• Spiral Notebooks</li> <li>• Highlighters</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharpie Markers</li> <li>• Pens, Black &amp; Blue</li> <li>• 2” Ring Binders</li> <li>• Backpacks, large &amp; small</li> </ul>	<p>DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMIC THEOLOGY</p>

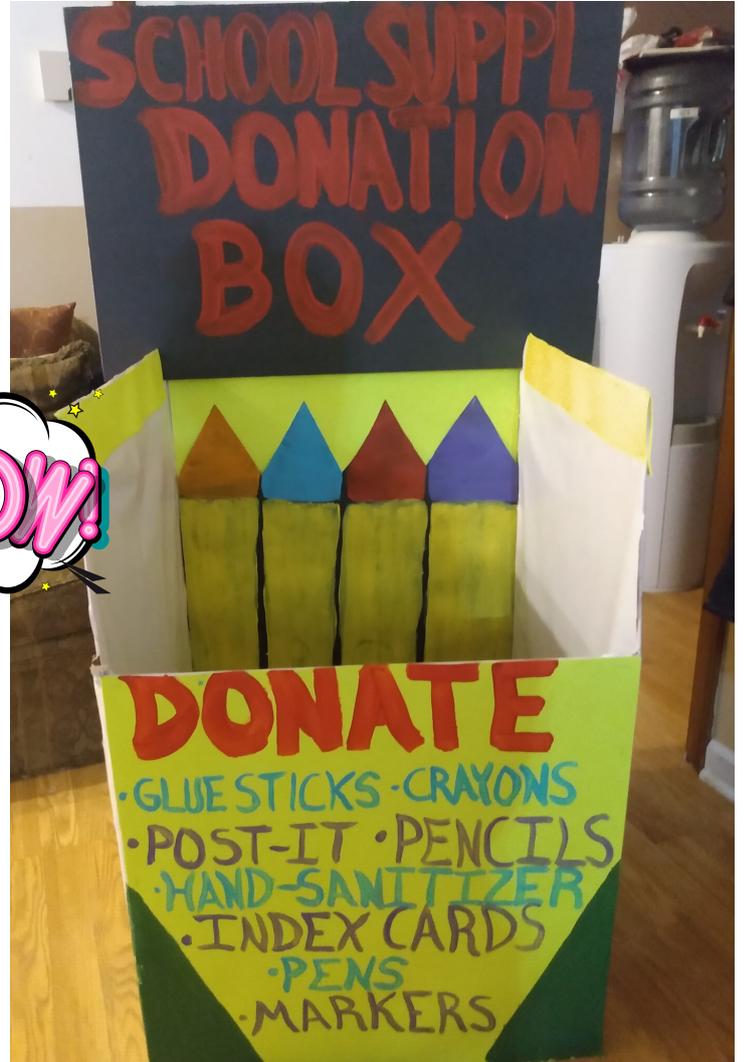


“As a result of this project, I learned that I am capable of giving and doing far more than I ever thought. When we first embarked on this project I was very nervous and apprehensive, I felt I had nothing meaningful to contribute. I didn’t fully get resolution to this until we started our study through the Jesus Pilgrimage and I read chapter fifteen in which Martin writes, “But Jesus accepts what we give, blesses it, breaks it open, and magnifies it” (Martin, 269). It doesn’t matter what I perceive as good enough, if I give everything I have towards a service, Jesus will bless my efforts and “magnify” them in a great way. Jesus saw we had faith and that we dedicated ourselves to this mission and he has already blessed it in a mighty way with the donations we have received, and we aren’t done yet.” **Wingate Undergraduate**

# INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY STUDENT VOICES & ARTIFACTS



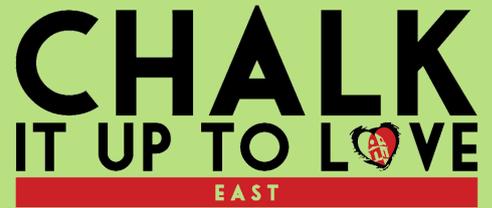
Wow!



Results of their hard work! Plus +\$1100 in the CHALK Account



“When I signed up for this course, I didn’t expect to be encouraged to actually go out into the community and be the hands and feet of God. I just expect to learn about the concepts service and communion. I wish that I would have taken this course prior to my final semester of college so I could have been more involved in the project.” **Wingate Undergraduate**



# THOUGHTS FROM OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

"I had high expectations for the service-learning students, especially after meeting with a group of them to discuss their project. They seemed passionate about their work and really wanted to make a difference in their community, and this translated into the work they accomplished throughout the semester."

"Honestly, I really enjoyed the passion the students exhibited about their specific project, especially since their project was centered around an issue that is also close to my own heart. The students' project has allowed Chalk It Up To Love - East to have the ability to address a need beyond just school supplies. Chalk strives to support the education of students by providing teachers with the means to better educate them; in the same vein, Chalk can now support the education of young girls by providing them with menstrual products so they do not have to miss school because of their menstrual period."

## Impact

- Serve five Title I schools in the eastern portion of Union County
- Filled over 170 orders since September 2019
- Approximately 350 volunteer hours to date
- Now includes partnerships with Atrium, local churches, community organizations, and nonprofits



Clockwise from top left: teachers selecting books for their classroom libraries; volunteers packing orders; teachers holding filled order bags on distribution day; teacher holding new backpacks for her students as well as her filled order



"We were extremely excited to see how students would creatively address the needs of our community ... [And] students exceeded expectations!"

"We strongly agree that the service learning project was a true collaboration [and] that the community is a better place because of our student's service."

"I would recommend that other organizations get involved with service-learning at Wingate University."



## FINAL THOUGHTS

This paper demonstrates that students show interest and excitement in engaging in a service-learning and community engagement approach to learning theology. I suggest that this way of teaching has the potential to help our Bulldogs speak about what they believe, what it means, and how it is relevant in their lives.

Further, community partners are also open and excited to have Wingate students work with them and they found this interaction mutually beneficial and a true partnership. Having a Wingate junior overseeing the CHALK program (Isabella Walle) was an added bonus and she helped inspire the REL 330 students to reach for the stars! Her leadership in the community modelled to them what was possible and in return, Isabella indicated that she learned more about faith connections to the work she is undertaking.

Importantly, the preliminary data adds to the significant body of literature which already demonstrates that SLCE is an impactful pedagogical tool that empowers students, improves learning, and improves our local community. It is my hope that more specialized theology courses can also be re-imagined into SLCE courses to attract more Religion majors and minors and connect WU Religion Department with the many vibrant faith-based organizations right in our own backyard.



IT IS REPORTED THAT YOUNG PEOPLE TEND TO HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME ARTICULATING “WHAT THEY BELIEVE, WHAT IT MEANS, AND WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR BELIEFS ARE FOR THEIR LIVES”  
(MAYRL & OEUR (2009) P. 270)



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# WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE COURSE?

CONTACT DR. CATHERINE WRIGHT AT  
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