



**COMMUNITY
CAMPUS
COALITION**

**2026
Charles J. Ping
Student Service
Award Recipients**

Charles J. Ping Student Service Award 2026

The Charles J. Ping Award was established to recognize and honor undergraduate students' outstanding leadership and contributions to community service on their campus and within their community.

This award is granted annually to undergraduates from Community Campus Coalition member institutions that exhibit outstanding leadership in their community service endeavors both on their campus and within their community.

The award is named in honor of Charles J. Ping, who served as President of Ohio University from 1975 – 1994. An early supporter and Board Member of Ohio Campus Compact, Dr. Ping was a tireless advocate for campus-community partnerships and increased opportunities for students to become active and engaged citizens.

Students must be nominated by the president of their college or university and have met the following criteria:

- 1) Evidence of exemplary community service during the student's undergraduate years should reflect the student's efforts to meet needs in his or her community. The Ping Award recognizes student efforts, from individual commitment to service and community to the ability to create an organization and to involve others.
- 2) Although outstanding community service of any kind will qualify, Community Campus Coalition is especially interested in efforts that have connected service with academic study or designed programs with long-term community involvement.

Each year, Community Campus Coalition awards a \$250 Legacy Award to the top two nominees. This donation is made to a community-based nonprofit organization in the student's name.



Congratulations to the 2026 Charles J. Ping Student Service Award Winners! We applaud your outstanding leadership and many contributions to your campus and your community.

- **Karissa Bowers** — Muskingum University
- **Gracie Cates** — Denison University
- **Isabella Coenen** — The College of Wooster*
- **Christine Erdman** — Bowling Green State University
- **Tobias Hughes** — Kenyon College
- **Elizabeth Keller** — Mount St. Joseph University*
- **Zadria King** — Defiance College
- **Anna Morgione** — Youngstown State University
- **Kaylynn Thomas** — University of Mount Union
- **Ava Wood** — Ohio University

*Legacy Award recipients **Isabella Coenen** of The College of Wooster and **Elizabeth Keller** of Mount St. Joseph University will each receive a \$250 donation made in their honor to a nonprofit organization of their choice, reflecting their continued commitment to service beyond campus.



Karissa Bowers — Muskingum University



I am active in a number of organizations on campus. I am President of both the Active Minds and Psychology clubs on campus. These clubs focus on the important concept of allowing people to be themselves, empowering people to find confidence in themselves and find their voice. Part of this empowerment is based on mental health.

The two clubs promote good mental health, empowerment, and inclusivity in many ways. Active Minds strives to advocate for mental health and awareness, often partnering with campus Counseling services to host events like the IMALIVE Mental Health Fair.

During our meetings we take time to engage in activities that foster connection and empathy, providing a support system where we can uplift all members of the club. During Psychology Club meetings we spend the first five to ten minutes of our meetings writing cards for various groups: nursing homes, first responders, children's hospitals, foster families, etc., allowing us to make connections and strengthen our ties to our broader community.

I am part of the John and Annie Glenn Public Service Fellows (JAGs), a select group of students who focus on civic engagement and public service. Each semester JAGs sponsor multiple service projects, including overseeing our campus Food Pantry and taking part in Walk A Mile In Her Shoes in Zanesville. This semester I am on the project team that is coordinating assembling and delivering Easter baskets to children in foster care in Muskingum County. During fall of '25 I had the opportunity to attend the Propel Ohio conference, which helped me better see how connecting with others makes a difference in our communities.

I am a part of the sorority FAD. As part of our outreach we frequently engage in community service projects, such as food drives and campus clean-ups to improve our community.

Finally, I am an editor for First Circle, the literary magazine on campus. We provide a platform and encourage all students to submit writings that release their thoughts, feelings, and opinions- never holding back. We have published many entries which described the struggles, hopes, and dreams of people across campus as a way for the individuals to feel heard and understand their voice matters.

I believe that acts of service around my community are important because they allow us to strengthen our relationships and create positive change within our community. Acts of service help us do this by serving as a reminder that we are all human beings simply trying to get by in the world. It teaches us compassion and shows that even small actions can make a difference. In a divided world, service allows us to connect with others and build a better future not only for ourselves, but for all.

Gracie Cates — Denison University



My community service experience at Denison University began the day I stepped on campus, and it has grounded my entire collegiate experience. At the beginning of my freshman year, I attended the Denison Service Orientation, which provided me with the enthusiasm for and knowledge of the service efforts in our community. After a year of attending weekly service events, I began my service leadership journey!

My sophomore year, I began serving as President of Denison's chapter of Habitat for Humanity, Saturday Service Coordinator of the Denison Community Service Association (DCSA), and Head of Community Service for the Denison Pre-Dental Club.

In these roles, I brought service to different corners of campus. For instance, I organized an oral hygiene kit-assembly event for the Pre-Dental Club where we taught Denison students, pre-health and others, about the intersection of oral health and domestic violence. As Saturday Service Coordinator, I organized weekly service opportunities from organizing trash cleanups, to playing soccer with local children with disabilities, and more. I am so grateful for these opportunities to show my fellow students how they can pursue their current passions while serving their communities!

When I became President of Denison Habitat, the club's activity was limited. The club participated in a playhouse build and attended an Alternative Spring Break experience yearly, which were amazing opportunities, but had little connection with our local Habitat affiliate. As President, I reestablished Denison's relationship with Habitat for Humanity MidOhio. Along with the previous events, Habitat Denison now volunteers with the Newark Habitat for Humanity ReStore at least once a month and participates in construction builds each semester. Because of this work, I was honored with a Volunteer Spotlight for Habitat for Humanity MidOhio in 2024!

This academic year, I became one of the Co-Presidents of DCSA. Starting this role, my biggest priority was helping students with different backgrounds see the role that helping their community could play in their lives. I believe my greatest success was my work on Denison's Make a Difference Day celebration, where we brought students from a nearby after-school program onto campus, giving them the opportunity to work with student organizations. Along with my fellow Co-President and staff advisor, I organized eighteen clubs with various interests to host events over four days, giving 345 local students the opportunity to see the value of higher education! This event was the largest collaborative event Denison has had in years and among the largest in Denison's history. I found the opportunity to show Denison students who were a part of these groups that they could pursue their interests while giving back so valuable and fulfilling. I am passionate about bringing strength to my community—something I cannot do alone. By giving the people around me the tools to provide that strength, together, we can do far more than I could ever do individually. I have so much gratitude for Denison and the opportunities I have found here for my growth as a leader, as a community member, and as a person.



Isabella Coenen — The College of Wooster



Four years ago, I failed AP chemistry in high school and left convinced that I had no place in science. I did not begin college imagining a future in biochemistry, let alone one rooted in service. That changed during my first year at The College of Wooster, when I joined a chemistry research lab identifying biomarkers of a rare genetic condition in the local Amish community. For the first time, science was not abstract or intimidating; it became a tool for helping real people. This realization cemented my academic journey in chemistry and my personal commitment to service.

While in that research lab, I began volunteering with the Wooster Volunteer Network as a freshman. What started as occasional participation quickly became a central part of my life and identity.

Over four years, I grew from volunteer to executive board member and ultimately president. In this role, I coordinate campus-wide service events like our annual charity 5k and a program called Soup and Bread, a weekly lunch that raises ~\$24,000 annually for local nonprofits. Soup and Bread is a unique campus event that brings faculty, students, and community members together in a shared demonstration of generosity, creating sustained monetary support for local organizations such as the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, Trinity Church of Christ Free Breakfast Program, and local school-lunch debt relief efforts. Leading this program taught me how consistent and relationship-oriented service can create lasting impacts.

Service also drives my academic pursuits. I chose to design my senior thesis around drug-facilitated sexual assault, applying modern analytical chemistry tools to improve detection of designer 'date-rape' drugs that are commonly missed by forensic labs. This project is deeply meaningful to me and has shaped how I think about the responsibility of scientists to engage with real-world issues. By developing accessible analytical workflows, I hope to empower other women to see chemistry as a practical tool for advocacy, and societal change. As a teaching assistant and intern for the College of Wooster's Chemistry Department and Stem Success Initiative, I put these hopes into practice by mentoring younger students and helping them find their place in science.

In addition to my work in the Wooster Volunteer Network, I have served as the service chair and treasurer of my sorority, balancing financial responsibility with community-focused leadership. Additionally, I have spent three years as an intern in the College's Community Engagement office, where I built and maintained relationships between the College and local non-profit organizations.

This fall, four years after failing my first chemistry course, I will begin my PhD program in analytical chemistry at Vanderbilt University. I am proud to begin this journey supported by the values instilled in me by Wooster, knowing that leadership, service, and scholarship are strongest when they work together. I entered college unsure of my place in the world and am leaving with a clear purpose and intention to use science as a tool for justice, change, and community impact.



Christine Erdman — Bowling Green State University



Bowling Green State University's motto is "A Public University for the Public Good." I chose BGSU because I wanted a place that would grow my academics and athletics, but also my character. As a student-athlete, I'm challenged to lead by example in competition, in the classroom, and in the community—but I also knew I wanted an identity beyond "student-athlete."

From my first year, I got involved with the Student Construction Management Association (SCMA) and Purple Hard Hats (PHH). I've served as SCMA's freshman ambassador and PHH's secretary because I wanted to play a role in welcoming new members and building my leadership skills. Both groups are major-focused, but

they also reach beyond campus. SCMA helps students learn from upperclassmen, connect classroom content to the field, and build relationships. PHH brings together women in architecture, construction management, and interior design to support one another and navigate a male-dominated industry; it has helped me build confidence in my future career.

Service has been a constant through these organizations and beyond. SCMA and PHH host Make-It Take-It, where anyone from campus or the community can build a birdhouse alongside our members. We also volunteer through Adopt-A-Family, making blankets for children in need, and writing Valentine's Day cards for a local nursing home. Outside of those events, I've served with Feed My Starving Children, Brookdale Senior Living (Christmas caroling), Hinsdale Community Library, the Wood County Humane Society, and BGSU men's and women's soccer camps.

These experiences mean more to me than a list. At Feed My Starving Children, seeing how many kids lack reliable access to food was eye-opening and pushed me to show up with gratitude and purpose. At the soccer camps, I've learned how much being present matters. This past winter, I worked closely with a little boy with disabilities who was struggling to fit in. I kept inviting him into drills and encouraging him until he felt comfortable with the group. At the end, he and his mom thanked me and told me they hoped I'd be back.

One of my biggest passions is the Wood County Humane Society. Through Doggie Day Out, I take dogs out for the day, capture photos and videos, and share them on social media to support adoption. Returning them is the hardest part but seeing them find a home makes it worth it. These moments reminded me that real impact isn't defined by statistics; it's defined by helping someone feel included.

Overall, volunteering has taught me that service isn't about recognition; it's about showing up so others feel valued. I'm proud to represent BGSU not only as a student-athlete, but as someone committed to serving the public good with purpose.



Tobias Hughes — Kenyon College



Before I write about my efforts for community building, I feel I must explain how I approach this work.

While community service is a great thing, it has limitations. The problems created by systematic injustices like poverty, food insecurity, and lack of public welfare cannot be solved by service alone. Service must be done with broader goals of organizing and community building to have a chance at facilitating long-term community prosperity.

I believe organizing necessitates two things: stubbornness and quick learning. Stubbornness helps you realize that you must push hard to start something. You must find places where you and others can make an impact, and try to create that impact with unwavering stubbornness.

Keep texting, emailing, calling, and talking, connecting people with opportunities to help their community.

The accomplishment I treasure most this year is setting up a volunteering program with Center of Hope, a food pantry near my school. I met with their CEO over the summer, and started a volunteer program that fall, sending students out three days a week. The extra hands have reduced some workdays from 7-5 to 7-2. I have taken care to connect underclassmen with the CEO to ensure we can continue supporting our community long into the future. This program was set up through stubbornness. Noticing a place where we weren't helping, and stubbornly organizing until we were.

Learning is necessary both in an individual and community sense. I am lucky to be surrounded by other organizers who continually inspire and teach me about community building. This learning doesn't come from lecture; it comes from attentiveness in meetings and frequent conversations. Learning from each other in community is how we both identify areas of need, and find people to fill those needs. Center of Hope holds an annual holiday food distribution where they give out a month worth of food in four days. I coordinated 28 volunteer signups to help out through the week, and organized rideshares to assist people without cars. I was only able to do this because I had been learning from my experience coordinating the smaller weekly volunteering.

Most recently, I am co-heading a community engagement collective—a group of club leaders and campus organizers who are trying to overhaul how our school engages with the community. We will accomplish this by creating a single page to centralize all clubs' engagement opportunities, making them more accessible through advertising and rideshares, and by pushing these opportunities to our own organizations. Our hope is that we can build a culture of engagement with the community at a school that is currently not well integrated with the people that surround us. This is not possible as individual organizers. By coming together, we hope to fundamentally change our school's culture of engagement, rather than patch holes through occasional volunteering. A connected community is a community that can actually identify its own needs, and help each other meaningfully.

All these accomplishments have been made as a community of organizers, not just by myself.



Elizabeth Keller — Mount St. Joseph University



During my time at Mount St. Joseph University, my most meaningful experience has been leading the Lions Cupboard, the on-campus food pantry that supports students facing food insecurity. Although this initiative was not part of a class or service-learning requirement, it grew from my studies in financial economics and criminology, allowing me to combine academic research with community service to create a measurable impact. I viewed the pantry as a living extension of my coursework, applying research methods and data analysis to a social challenge that directly affected my peers.

A major part of my leadership focused on expanding the Cupboard's reach while reducing the stigma associated with it. Many students hesitated to use the pantry out of embarrassment, fear of judgment, or the belief that

someone else needed help more. To better understand these barriers, I employed research practices from my coursework, including data tracking and literature reviews on food insecurity and social stigma. The findings showed that language and visibility strongly shaped perceptions of need. With this knowledge, I developed outreach events and campaigns that reframed food insecurity as a shared campus issue rather than a personal failing. By combining research-based understanding with empathy-driven messaging, I helped reduce stigma and promote a sense of belonging. These initiatives increased pantry usage by 80% from the previous year and strengthened trust and visibility across campus.

I also organized care bags filled with food and hygiene products for students remaining on campus over Thanksgiving, winter, and spring breaks. Rather than waiting for students to request assistance, I brought the Lion's Cupboard to them, showing that support was accessible and judgment-free. This effort expanded the pantry's mission beyond emergency aid to prevention and connection. It also normalized the Cupboard's presence by serving everyone, not just those facing hardship, and turned it into a reflection of our community's shared responsibility.

Through my criminology studies, I explored how economic hardship influences decision-making and risk-taking behaviors. That perspective deepened my understanding of why consistent, low-barrier support systems matter. My independent work with the Lion's Cupboard became a real-world case study of those theories, demonstrating how early, dignified intervention can alleviate financial stress before it escalates into greater challenges. By helping relocate the Cupboard to a larger, more visible space, I made that perspective tangible, improving operations while affirming dignity and accessibility as core values.

This experience reshaped my perspective as much as it helped others. For the community, it built a stronger culture of mutual support. For the university, it showed how student research and leadership can advance institutional mission. As for myself, it bridged the gap between academic inquiry and human connection. I learned that research does more than inform: it transforms understanding into action. Through the Lion's Cupboard, I discovered that lasting change begins locally, when data, compassion, and collaboration come together to meet real human needs.

Zadria King — Defiance College



Service is not something I added to my life in college; it is the foundation on which my life was built upon. My family has deep ties to the Amvets Auxiliary Post in my hometown, and I grew up volunteering at community events and fundraisers. I was surrounded by strong women who led by example and demonstrated that service is at the core of an honest life. That service-first mindset is one of the primary reasons I chose to pursue a career as a physician assistant. I want to aid individuals in their most vulnerable moments, listen to their stories, and provide compassionate, patient-centered care. Healthcare felt like a natural extension of the values that shaped me.

At Defiance College, I deepened that commitment. Through the Service Leaders Organization, I completed over 350 hours of service addressing a bridge between campus life and the broader community.

needs within both the campus and surrounding community. Over four years, I built relationships with local organizations and community members, strengthening the connection between the college and the town. Service became more than volunteer hours; it became

My commitment expanded beyond Defiance through academic service-learning initiatives. Through the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity, I participated in projects in Ireland and Nepal focused on community engagement and global connection. In Nepal, I built relationships with students and strengthened cross-cultural ties, recognizing that sustainable service begins with mutual understanding. Through the Ireland Project, I engaged in community-based initiatives emphasizing collaboration and civic responsibility. Most recently, my involvement in the Rome Project has focused on examining healthcare accessibility among refugee populations, with fundraising and plans to visit refugee centers to better understand living conditions and barriers to care. These experiences challenged me to think critically about service in a global context and reinforced that meaningful impact requires cultural humility.

I have remained a dedicated volunteer with the Amvets Auxiliary, assisting with fundraisers and community events supporting veterans. Giving back to those who have sacrificed so much has deepened my understanding of gratitude and civic responsibility. With Children's Lantern, I help organize fundraising events supporting foster children and families.

In addition, I serve as a Resident Assistant, further shaping my leadership and service mindset. Many freshmen are living away from home for the first time while navigating academic and personal challenges. Being a steady presence during that transition reinforced the importance of empathy and accountability. My work as a CRLA-certified tutor and my Mental Health First Aid certification have strengthened my ability to recognize when others need support and respond effectively.

Service has shaped me into an empathetic leader, an engaged student, and a future healthcare provider grounded in compassion. Defiance College has challenged me to lead with purpose beyond the classroom. Wherever my career takes me, I will continue to measure success not by titles earned, but by the lives I have been able to serve.



Anna Morgione — Youngstown State University



The YSU Sokolov Honors College has helped me to find my passion of volunteering and giving back to the Youngstown community. I have volunteered alongside the United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley these past four years and have learned ways in which the needs of my community can be best addressed. I learned how to support children within schools, to fill the gap of lack of transportation for groceries, and how to act quickly in times of emergency. Through serving as United Way's Community Fellow, I have connected countless YSU students with volunteer events, fostering community engagement throughout the Sokolov Honors College.

I have promoted YSU volunteerism throughout my four years and have created open volunteer hours at United Way's volunteer resource center each week. When I am at the warehouse, I post shifts on Penguin Pulse for students to come and volunteer with me. Many of the students have never seen United Way's resource warehouse before, so these events I host help to spread knowledge about the work United Way does.

When I am helping at the Volunteer Center, I organize shipments and prepare food and hygiene products to be sent out to local schools. United Way has Care Closets present in 29 local schools, further proving the large presence they hold in the Youngstown community. The initiative of weekly YSU help at the warehouse will continue in the future through my successor. I have laid the framework to make this a new constant program. Every month, I participate at Saturday of Caring and deliver groceries to 7-8 families on the East Side of Youngstown. I interact with the same families each month, and I am a constant in their lives that they can count on.

The work I have done has impacted students and helped to connect them with a local community partner, but it has affected me most of all. I have found a passion of mine through volunteering that would otherwise have remained unknown. I have learned time and time again what I can do to help meet community needs. The connection I have made with United Way will last longer than my time here at Youngstown State, and I will continue to drive and deliver groceries to families each month. I plan to remain a supporter of United Way and hope to give back to them through my continued service in years to come. I have made a connection with people in my community, working united toward one common goal.

Kaylynn Thomas — University of Mount Union



Throughout my life, service has not been simply an extracurricular activity, but a defining part of my upbringing and the foundation of my education. As an Exercise Science major from a medically underserved area, I have intentionally pursued opportunities that connect classroom knowledge to meaningful community impact rather than limiting my involvement to program requirements.

As a Canton Regional AHEC Scholar, I have engaged in workforce development and service-learning initiatives focused on addressing healthcare disparities in underserved communities. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and experiential learning, I have explored barriers to care, health literacy, and access limitations that

directly affect populations like the one in which I was raised. This experience complemented my coursework by reinforcing that evidence-based practice must also be community-informed practice.

Beyond academics, my leadership as President of Alpha Phi Omega transformed service from participation into sustainable action. During my presidency, our chapter experienced a 40% increase in membership and maintained a 93% retention rate. I implemented structured officer transitions, innovative leadership workshops, and intentional programming that blended leadership, fellowship, and service to ensure continuity beyond a single executive board. Under this strengthened structure, our chapter completed more than 4,000 collective service hours. Further, recurring initiatives reached unprecedented success, with one such event raising more than \$2,000 and collecting 400 pounds of food. These efforts earned consistent sectional and regional recognition for excellence in service and leadership, along with national recognition for outstanding membership programming, a distinction reached only once before since the chapter's chartering.

As a student employee at the Regula Center for Public Service and Civic Engagement, I took initiative in designing a campus-wide drive supporting local veterans, with proceeds contributing to efforts that help them transition back into stable housing and employment. Beyond this project, I assist in coordinating service events, prepare and serve weekly community meals, and help maintain our campus food pantry to address student food insecurity. Serving as a liaison between Mount Union and community organizations in this capacity has shown me that sustainable impact depends on collaboration and consistent follow-through.

Personally, my experiences have shaped my understanding of servant leadership beyond what I previously thought possible and taught me that meaningful leadership is rooted in empathy, diverse perspective, and intentional action, values I will carry with me into my career and beyond. Now, through service-learning, research exposure, and direct community engagement, I am preparing to return to underserved populations not only as a clinician, but as an advocate. My time at Mount Union has taught me that meaningful impact is not measured by hours logged, but by relationships built and systems strengthened for the future.



Ava Wood — Ohio University



During my first semester at Ohio University, I joined Student Senate's Environmental Affairs Commission and learned about what sustainability looked like on campus and around Athens. That experience gave me a clear understanding of what programs existed and where they fell short. It set the trajectory for my time at OHIO and marked when I first began to understand what it means to be a servant leader.

As Vice President of Philanthropy and Service for Sigma Kappa, I organized and executed multiple fundraising initiatives that raised \$14,000 for the Alzheimer's Association, mobilizing 100+ members to participate in donation drives and philanthropic events. I also expanded our philanthropic work to focus on service by coordinating volunteer visits to Laurel's nursing home and organizing campus clean-ups.

Stepping into the role of Panhellenic Vice President of Philanthropy and Service, my focus shifted to issues of access and equity, alongside waste diversion. I directed Sisterhood of the Traveling Dresses, overseeing the collection, cleaning, and sorting of 500+ donated dresses and distributing 102 formalwear items free of charge to high school students across surrounding counties. For many students, this meant attending prom without financial strain. Because I once received a prom dress through a similar program, this initiative was deeply personal to me. The program, which will continue after I graduate, not only eliminates barriers for students but also gives new life to donated garments, keeping textile waste out of landfills.

As a Voinovich Undergraduate Research Scholar on the Zero-Waste Team, I continued to pursue waste diversion. This time, I did so by addressing structural barriers. I surveyed 141 Panhellenic members about waste habits and identified clear gaps in infrastructure availability and education. In response to these results, I launched Ohio University's first Greek Life Recycling Competition. I secured grant funding to purchase permanent recycling bins for chapter facilities and produced an educational video to improve recycling knowledge. In one-week, participating chapters recycled over 60 pounds of waste. The infrastructure remains in place today, and I was able to help make these sustainable practices last.

I currently serve as Ohio University Student Trustee, Panhellenic President, Presidential Ambassador, Voinovich Scholar, and member of three additional executive boards. In these roles, I am continuing work to streamline access to zero-waste event planning for college deans, organize cross-chapter clothing swaps within Panhellenic, and advocate for student perspectives at the highest levels of university leadership.

The passion I have developed for community-based service and sustainability has led me to pursue law school and a career in environmental law. By engaging in these service initiatives, my commitment to this path has been reaffirmed and I have found motivation in my experience and belief that access to environmentally friendly systems should never be limited by existing institutional structures. In every role I hold, I identify systemic gaps, build collaborative solutions, and work to ensure my impact endures beyond my tenure. To me, service and leadership mean actively choosing to leave the systems we inherit better than we found them.





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